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From Idolatry to Reality

From Worshipping the Idols of Our Personality to Following the Ideals of Our Real Self

I'm intrigued by the parallels among the Bible story of the Israelites turning away from the true God and fashioning a *false idol* in the form of a golden calf; George Gurdjieff's statements about the *personality* compensating for our essence; Karen Horney's description of an *idealized self image* substituting for the real self; and the Enneagram showing how this replacement plays out in nine personality styles.

After wandering around in the desert for 40 years, the Israelites were feeling a little hopeless that Yahweh was ever going to get them out of the desert and into the promised land (something like Chicagoans waiting for the Cubs to lead them to a pennant.) So they decided to turn away from their true God and fashion a false idol in the form of a golden calf. It's not clear if this golden idol wore White Sox. Hopefully their idol would lead them to security and happiness since Yahweh didn't seem up to the task.

It is the nature of idols to promise everything and produce little and they don't do this for nothing (something like investment advisors.) To get results from idols you have to promise to do what they tell you. You must follow their advice otherwise everything you are afraid of will happen to you. Idols are not above threats.

In addition you have to bring them sacrifices – some flowers, fruits, animals, your first-born child – whatever is important to you. But these are minor offerings compared to the safety and glory idols promise.

Bringing this socio-cultural story closer to the psyche, George Gurdjieff, the Armenian teacher of esoteric wisdom, speaks about the personality or false self compensating or substituting for our essence or true self. If we abandon and lose faith in our real self, then we need to fashion a false self to mimic and stand in for the real deal.

Karen Horney, a neo-psychoanalyst, writes about the *idealized self image* replacing the real self. She believed each individual is born with a healthy real self. By aligning ourselves with our real self, we will realize our full potential and live in

Jerry Wagner, Ph.D.



harmony with other people (the humanist version of the promised land.)

When children are loved unconditionally for themselves and when they have their biological, emotional, and social needs satisfied, they remain connected to their real selves for they have no reason to be other than who they are.

On the other hand, when children's needs are frustrated and unmet by their caretakers' indifference, rejection, or hostility (what Horney labels "basic evil"), they then develop a view of themselves as lowly and despicable. There must be something wrong with them to deserve such treatment and deprivation. So they fashion an idealized self to compensate for and escape from their real self which has morphed into their despised self. A conflict then develops between the real and idealized self which has become crystallized into an idealized self image.

Our idealized self-image is how we think of ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, and how we want others to think of us. In the Enneagram system, the nine self-images have been labeled "prides". We are proud of being right, loving, successful, deeply feeling, insightful, loyal, upbeat, powerful, and easy going. But as Horney notes there is a certain arrogance involved in that we appropriate to ourselves more than actually may be there. When our prides are not noticed, minimized, or somehow stepped on, we overreact with anger, guilt, embarrassment, or other negative feelings.

From the Enneagram perspective, *personality* is an exaggeration of our authentic *personal* qualities. Similarly Horney observed that the idealized image is based partially on the person's genuine self.

Personality masquerades as our essential self and tricks us into identifying with and believing that an inflated dimension of our self is our whole self. We collaborate in this deception as a way of defending our true self from anxiety-provoking vulnerabilities and as a way of compensating for certain imagined shortfalls in our real self.

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Since dharma and Integral are the hot topics in the last issue and this one, I'm tempted to add another wrinkle to the discourse. We speak mostly of personality type as the result of past karmas, DNA, constitutional peculiarities, formative influences such as encouragement/wounding, or defense stances we adopted because it worked for us. All of these factors, to a degree or another, will have played a role.

Rarely mentioned are the possible long term consequences affecting our worldviews born from the earliest understandings that helped form our fundamental beliefs. First among such beliefs is the explanation we find most plausible to the question, "Where does the world and life come from?"

The answer we have chosen to accept will henceforth influence our belief about the origin and purpose of life, which in turn colors how we think the world works. This question has plagued people in all cultures and times, and while most questions can have nuanced responses, this one boils down to only one choice between two possible answers:

A. The universe and intelligent life is the result of what some have called intelligent design—by which I mean that life has been purposely created in a manner that embodies a purposeful intention, rather than a random process. Given the exalted and awe-evoking nature of the created Cosmos we can't possibly know why or how this process works (at least not in its entirety).

B. The universe including life is the result of random processes such as the accidental interaction between molecules that combined over an unimaginable period of time to produce ever more complex combinations of carbon, amino acids, cells and complex organisms that over time evolved into highly intelligent life forms such as ourselves.

This is not to start a new debate whether A or B is right. Brilliant minds have embraced both alternatives. Let's assume for the purpose of this discussion that both positions are possible.

My point is that a belief in "A" versus "B" tells us a lot about our general orientation to life. If we believe life is purposeful ("A"), the idea of dharma makes sense; if we believe life is randomly-ordered, then it does not ("B").

As far as I can determine, such beliefs have nothing to do with enneagram type; there are people of all types who embrace both positions. My own experience points in the direction of "A"—but it is not always so easy to see the patterns that give life its innate order (which is why it can seem so random). But if life is truly ordered, than our individual lives are, as well. And this might mean that we have our types for a specific reason. In the end, each of us must discover whether this is really true (and if it is, what this reason might be).

In this issue:

Jerry Wagner takes us "From Idolatry to Reality: From Worshipping the Idols of Our Personality to Following the Ideas of Our Real Self." Apparently idol worship has been around for a long, long time and

From the Editor

even the Israelites felt a need for one after the deprivations under the Pharaoh's rule, they went for broke and collected what they had. Idols promise a lot but demand a lot in return too. (A Holy Cow may have worked better, but they only had enough gold for a smaller calf.)



Jerry says that from the Enneagram perspective, *personality* is an exaggeration of our authentic *personal* qualities and only partially based on the person's genuine self. And in his inimitable style, of humor and true mastery, Jerry nails every type's number, blocks their escape routes, while putting a smile on the reader's face.

Susan Rhodes concludes "The Integral Enneagram: A Dharma-Oriented Approach, Part 2," by describing more about the nature of dharma as described in the Hindu classic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, how



it shows up in real life, and how we embrace the dharma in a way that embodies a real sense of personal responsibility for ourselves and our actions in life.

Jennifer Schneider and **Ron Corn** take on "The Giver/Detective (Two-Six) Couple" and explore relationship issues that arise between these two types. A general overview of their dynamic is spiced up with quotes from protagonists who live in these combina-

tions. If there is one area where everyone seems to agree that the enneagram is doing stellar work, it's in the camp of how we come to learn about and better appreciate the qualities of other types that dance to a different tune than ourselves.

"An Integral White Paper" started out as a letter to the editor addressing questions relevant to the next IEA conference in Denver that uses *Integral* as a core theme coming July/August. In preparation for the conference, **Carl Marsak** decided to read up on Ken Wilber. As a result, he came up with some interesting and provocative questions that those of us who work with the enneagram might want to ask ourselves, given the growing relationship between Integral and the enneagram communities. He can see several areas of mutual benefits and also some tricky places that require attention and maybe even caution. Carl forwarded his astute questions to the IEA and **Mario Sikora** offered "A Response." And his response is every bit as astute as the questions were. In a very cogent and clear way Mario addresses all questions with an eye on readers who may be new to the Integral ideas or can use a plain and clear refresher.

Integral is an outgrowth of Transpersonal Psychology and Ken Wilber is considered by many as the main theoretician and certainly the most prolific writer on the subject. Transpersonal Psychology/Integral acquired broader visibility at about the same time as the the enneagram. And for the past few decades both systems were developing independently. Only in recent years did we see a growing interest in the many correlations that can enhance the understanding of each system and take it deeper.

Mona Coates and **Judith Searle** conclude "Sex, Love and Your Personality: *Love That Lasts*" A great ending of a fabulous book that should be on every enneagram enthusiasts shelf (or bedside table). It's amazing how much good advice can be packed in so few pages and how many heartaches could be soothed or avoided if we could only implement half or less of the wisdom acquired from thousands of therapy sessions with couples in dire straits. Enough said. Just do it. (I mean, read the book, of course!)

Anne Griffin a type Four, writes "About my Country of Origin & Enneagram Point." Anne paints a vivid picture of the background of her beloved Ireland and how it provided the conditions for incubating the commonalities of character and wounding the Irish share. It's a touching image of how I imagine a Social type thinks and sees life — always in the context of full awareness of the whole environment placing oneself into an observer's position, almost as an incidental witness rather than as a central protagonist.

For contrast **Helena Karchere** a type Eight, writes "About Me." My inkling is that she is not a Social type. And yet in a 180 degree different way from Anne, Helena too places herself "outside" as it were, but outside of herself describing her inner environment where she is both a bold protagonist and the one reporting on what she feels/thinks. •

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Intuition and the Interior Landscape: History, Type and Spiritual Practice *with Helen Palmer and Virginia Wiltse*

CHICAGO May 4 & 5, 2013 Sat. 9:00–4:30 Sun. 10:15–4:45

The contemplative life is both a way of praying and a way of living - two different states of mind that challenge the modern seeker. Can we maintain a centered inner state when life at home seems as problematic as ever? Can we relax type resistance instead of letting it run?

Through the lens of history we find evidence of teachings that mirror current Enneagram theory used as the basis of contemplative practice in the fourth-century desert monasteries of Egypt. More than a thousand years later, in the sixteenth

century, we also find references that clearly mirror the Enneagram in the work of the Spanish Carmelite Saint John of the Cross.

This workshop draws on the legacy of contemplative masters Evagrius of Pontus and John of the Cross along with recent MRI research in neuroscience and psychology. Brain mapping illuminates the interior landscape of conditioned patterns that unseat spiritual states. These are the same patterns that Evagrius and John recognized as obstacles to prayer.



Helen Palmer, is an international bestselling author, a teacher of psychology and intuition and subject of a PBS documentary *Breaking Out of the Box*.

Her books on the Enneagram topic are translated in 28 languages and form the basis of her work with *Enneagram Studies in the Narrative Tradition*. She leads trainings and courses in many countries. Her U.S. and foreign schedules are posted at www.Enneagram.com and www.EnneagramWorldwide.com

Virginia Wiltse, Ph.D., did her doctoral research centered on the work of John of the Cross as it applies to personality type and spiritual challenges of modern-day contemplatives. She completed her Enneagram Professional Training with Helen Palmer and David Daniels in 1997 and worked with Helen on research projects on the history of the Enneagram. She has served as the Director of *Caring Response Madagascar Foundation* since 2001.

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