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Conversation with Helen Palmer

Jack Labanauskas: It is with great interest and delight that I read your and Virginia Wiltse’s research on the origins of the Enneagram. I’m very happy to be able to present it to our readership.

Helen Palmer: I was inspired to send you the paper because of an article on Evagrius by your two friends [Frederic and Bernadette Schmitt, *EM* #215]. I also put together a slideshow presentation for *Hidden In Plain Sight* for the 2013 IEA Conference in Denver Colorado. It started with “Who taught Evagrius”?

JL: Perfect timing, we are making giant strides towards exposing the roots of the system. We talked about the need to go beyond the purely historic context for the sake of accuracy alone. As the connections to traditional wisdom of the East and West are revealed, we discover that we have been using the “tip of the iceberg” albeit with good results, but there is so much more to this system that is

yet to be uncovered.

HP: The enneagram community has embraced Evagrius, making it seem like the Diagram originated in the 4th century Egyptian desert. I just couldn’t accept that because it sure looked like Evagrius was working from prior models, rather than having to figure out the types from clumsy random observations. For over a dozen years, Ginny and I doggedly followed the clues. We wanted to locate the Enneagram in a universal setting where the Desert tradition played a huge role, but was not the only group at work on the obstacles to meditation and prayer.

We have to remember that direct spiritual experience has always sent a dangerous message to both political and religious hierarchy and here were a bunch of misfits sitting in a wasteland trying to develop their personal connection to higher orders of consciousness. So very near the end of his life Evagrius tried to evade a mounting coalition between local secular authori- ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Hidden in Plain Sight: Observations on the Origins of the Enneagram

The search for Enneagram origins has produced many insights but few substantial answers. Where did the diagram come from? Why just nine Types? Why a nine-pointed star with a gap at the bottom? And why this specific order of the types around the star? This article will contend that answering these questions requires following a trail that leads backwards to a time before the life of the fourth-century monk Evagrius of Pontus and the Christian desert tradition. The authors will use clues left in the work of Evagrius to piece together a puzzle that crosses cultures and centuries to reveal both the diagram and the template of archetypal personalities that illuminate the nine types. While we do not yet have all the answers we seek, the authors conclude that Evagrius has hidden in plain sight the information we need to further our search

Virginia Wiltse, Ph.D., and Helen Palmer, M.A.



for the source of modern Enneagram studies.

Introduction

The Egyptian desert to which Evagrius of Pontus committed himself in the fourth century of the Common Era was not far from Alexandria, the central hub of scholarly learning for the entire ancient world at that time. The trade network known as the “Silk Road” had connected the Far East to the lands of the Mediterranean for centuries, fostering the exchange of culture at the port city of Alexandria as well as the exchange

of commodities. The Mouseion, the precursor to the modern university, and its extraordinary library were founded there. For Ptolemy, the general of Alexander the Great to whom the north of Egypt was ceded following Alexander’s death, the library became a personal mission. He—and ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

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ties and developing Christian hierarchy. The pressure became so intense that he finally transmitted the Diagram to at least 3 of his students in a biblical code that was easily memorized.

JL: Not an easy task in those days he had to protect himself from being accused of heresy...not a trivial thing at that time.

HP: Indeed. Immediately following the death of Evagrius, the desert enclave where men and women had lived in solitude was scattered. But Melania, an older woman and a sponsor of the desert monastics, along with Rufinus and Cassien who were young, bright and steeped in the teachings, each in their own way moved the Evagrian corpus back to Rome, where the code of obstacles have survived the test of time as 7 deadly sins now taught in worldwide catechism classes. In the end Cassien wound up claiming the code of obstacles for himself, probably to evade the accusation of heresy that sidelined Evagrius. The post mortem heresy conviction simply dropped him out of the record.

JL: Sure Cassian had to do it this way to protect the material, any mention that it was from Evagrius would not only put him in trouble, but would get the material thrown out.

HP: Probably so. And through him, even the surviving 7 out of 9 obstacles are now understood as a crux of both psychological and spiritual distress. But for me the desert tradition only posed more questions. Why only 7 of 9? And what about Gurdjieff's model of human consciousness?

And most of all Who Taught Evagrius?

Stay tuned, continued in next issue...

From the Editor

The origins of the Enneagram have always been a bone of contention. Was it really an ancient system, perfectly hidden for many centuries, then half discovered? Was it partially intuited by Gurdjieff or Ichazo? Or, did Gurdjieff find a process enneagram among Sufis and Ichazo, a passion enneagram by studying, finding an ancient grimoire, or by a revelation or a vision of all 108 enneagrams?

What most of us are familiar with derived from what Ichazo taught to Claudio Naranjo, who taught it in Berkeley to his SAT (seekers after truth) group, who then passed it on. And when Helen Palmer, Don Riso, soon followed by other authors had the first bestsellers, the enneagram movement was born and going at a break-neck speed. In all this excitement, thrilled with the effectiveness of the system, the priority was on applying it rather than wondering about the origins.

Depending on which school, author or teacher you learned from, the origins were usually attributed to seers somewhere in ancient Babylonia, Greece, India or Egypt...In the last couple or three decades a lot of research was done and we see the missing pieces coming together and filling the gaps in the enneagram's history.

In this Issue:

"Conversation with Helen Palmer" gives us the story behind the line of inquiry pursued for a good decade by Helen Palmer and Virginia Wiltse. Fully aware of the magnitude of the enneagram, Helen could immediately see a number of correlations with concepts found in traditions that make up the perennial wisdom or scriptures that guided humanity since time immemorial. The underlying principles of the enneagram were well known since the dawn of mankind and certainly since before the first scriptures (for example Hinduism's Rigveda, is presumed to be between 3500 or 5000+ years old and currently still in use). Of course scripture was preceded by millenarian oral traditions based on memorization in form of verses that were meticulously protected and transmitted.

Imagine what amused and occupied our ancestors during long nights, without electronic gadgets, light bulbs, TV, radio or internet....they watched the lights in the sky. Being finely in tune with nature, over time, they noticed correlations between the movements of this giant clock in the sky and patterns or events down on the ground.

So much in life is cyclical. Heart beat, in and out breath, day and night, the seasons, youth followed by old age...

Observations were passed on for generation after generation. Each one standing on the shoulders of previous ancestral wisdom and adding additional insights for their posterity...

It was over time, looooots of time, before repetitive patterns were noticed, memorized, cataloged, and eventually linked to events that seemed to have corresponding cyclical appearances.

Of course there were expectations, speculations, predictions and errors made, but also genuine patterns isolated and verified. No different than our current principles of science based on observations, and testing for eventual verification (or rejection).

Our ancestors had the advantage of being attuned to their environment. For example, there is no scientific explanation but lots of anecdotal evidence that animals may have been able to predict tsunamis, earthquakes, storms etc. Maybe observations made by people finely tuned to nature are at a higher level than we can imagine. After all, it's been many generations that we have been weaned off living with the seasons, close to nature. Just think of processed food, electronic noise and anything that is not synthetic?

"Hidden in Plain Sight, Observations on the Origins of the Enneagram" by **Virginia Wiltse** and **Helen Palmer** relies on the principle that *none of us is as smart as all of us* and they correctly assumed that the principles at the core of the enneagram must have been known since time immemorial and that it should be possible to follow the bread crumbs of history backwards. The first part (of three) of their research takes us to the desert and Evagrius Ponticus.

Evagrius was thoroughly familiar with the information highway of the time, the "silk road." For about 500 years before his time, since the Han Dynasty it was via the silk road that China connected with the Mediterranean and everything in between. It was a highway for sharing cultures, exchanging merchandise, technology and when needed, project military might.

Greek was a popular language, the English of those days, and Evagrius was fluent in it and also versed in Pythagorean math and theories. Which will bring us to his sources, but that's for the next issue

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ABOUT

Michael Damian is a spiritual teacher and clinical psychologist. After many years of intensive self-inquiry, studying with teachers such as Adyashanti and Eckhart Tolle, Michael awakened to the timeless truth of consciousness, the unity in which there is no separate self. This realization brought immense grace, clarity, and silence. Michael holds meetings in North America & Europe to help people discover authentic awakening and wisdom in their own lives.

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For subscription and advertising rates see back cover.

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that deals with time and the number nine.

Jennifer Schneider and **Ron Corn** take a look at the “Detective-Detective, Six-Six Couple.” It is not uncommon for two of the same type to enjoy each other’s company and feel they are on the same wave length. But then, there is also a law in nature that suggests that opposites attract... Maybe that’s why same type relationships are not more common.

Phobic Sixes usually get with counter-phobic Sixes and that way there is still an element of “opposites” that provides enough contrast to allow for attraction.

However, Sixes have an advantage over most others due to their highly developed sense of loyalty. Loyalty in a relationship is a glue that can help patch up after a fight or crisis.

A caveat for head types in general and Sixes in particular is they are likely to have a head-centered relationship and intellectualize everything. They may burn themselves out, with constant thinking, talking, and analyzing every facet of their relationship and their lives. In some situations, they may get so caught up in arguments and counter-activity that neither will take action.

P.V.R.Narasimha Rao is deeply steeped in classical Vedic wisdom, studied the scriptures and has also gone through Western scientific training for his degrees and work. A man of two worlds, as it were, he can blend the spiritual with the practical in concise and clear ways. “Comments on Common Spiritual Questions” addresses questions that are universal in nature and familiar to practitioners of most traditions..

Narasimha keeps some terminology in Sanskrit as there is no good translation in English or any other Indo-European language available. Comments in square brackets are mine to clarify terms not usually found in enneagram literature.

In this issue, he comments on *Reading thoughts, A Kundalini Experience*, on *Attachment to Detachment*, *How to Recognize an Enlightened Guru*, and *Spiritual Beings are really Sweet, Nice and Loving???*



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Revisiting “Contradiction” by **Ann Kirby**, we are reminded of the thought pattern(s) of the Six. Type Six is notorious for thoroughly examining all possible sides of an argument (over and over) searching to eliminate contradictions, and, if successful, as I heard a Six muse once while taking an inventory of his progress: “I used to be uncertain, now I’m not so sure any more”

Belinda Price Brent’s conclusion of “Personality Patterns: *Part 4* A Quantitative and Descriptive Study of Distinct and Self-Consistent Attentional Styles and their Relation to Enneagram Typology.” Is a summary and discussion of the general considerations about evaluations of methodologies. Mainly, how to determine if the Enneagram theory can be supported empirically by creating an inventory organized by attentional styles.

A group of 27 experts who have been studying, teaching or working with the enneagram participated in the design of a dynamic multidimensional perspective. In other words, how different placements of attention are operating within each Enneagram type, and that any inventory designed to measure personality must keep this in mind.

“Further Validation of *Brent Attentional Style Inventory* (BASI) Now Trademarked *Personality Patterns Inventory*” by **Belinda Brent** and **Jerry Solfvin** aims at correcting the conditions why the Enneagram system of personality typology has largely been ignored by personality theorists in academia, and, it must be said, Enneagram enthusiasts and promoters have largely ignored the methods of academic personality theorists as well.

First it was necessary to establish why we could assume that there were exactly nine types, and whether, if the methods of Western empirical science were applied, this could be substantiated.

Among Enneagram enthusiasts from different schools there seemed to be different descriptions of the characteristics of the nine types, so their validity had to be established. The existing Enneagram tests had not been evaluated psycho-metrically in the way that Western psychologists would demand. Belinda’s aim was to substantiate the nine types model, but the nine types she turned up were somewhat different from the nine predicted by theory, but that was to be expected.

Mel Madden was hired to do “An Enneagram Based Intervention.” Two high ranking employees, a type Eight and a Three had a hard time getting along. The boss of that company had seen Mel deal with interpersonal problems very successfully using the enneagram.

As it turned out, the enneagram was an excellent tool for accurate, nonjudgmental, understandable interventions, allowing an entirely new frame of reference to the employees. Using the personality issues born of type presented a perspective that carried with it very few of the stinging accusations often associated with constructive criticism. It improved understanding and both parties volunteered to implement constructive changes in themselves and showed more tolerance towards the perspective of the other.

We do not have many step by step reports of enneagram interventions. To know type is essential, of course, but so is also the ability to design a program or structure suitable for the situation at hand.