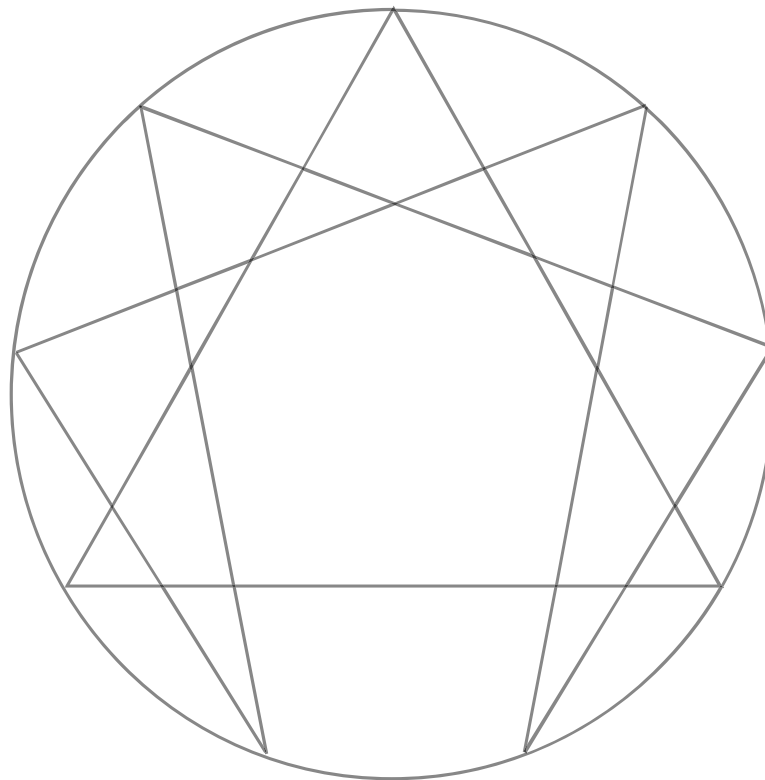


# The Enneagram in Brief

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## Introduction

The enneagram is a geometric symbol that depicts nine points arranged around a circle. The points are connected by lines that represent the way the energy flows between different points on the circle.

The history of the enneagram is shrouded in mystery. The mystic G.I. Gurdjieff is known to have introduced it to his students in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was later adopted by Oscar Ichazo and his successors as a tool for understanding the nine possible motivational themes that underlie human behavior.

Most people who work with the enneagram today understand it as a way to help them better understand themselves, especially their personality. I take the same general approach, but find it useful to think of each of the points around the circle more as a unique vantage point on life than as a personality type. I consider each point of view to be an energy center which is home of a particular set of challenges in life, along with particular gifts that can be developed.

Probably the most basic assumption in the enneagram system is that each of us has one and only one of these points of view as “home base,” although we deal with the issues represented by all nine points. So the first step in working with the enneagram is usually to identify our own home base or point of view.

Another important idea is that each point of view represents a specific impetus or motivation that colors our behavior. So when we know our point of view, we begin to understand the reasons why we act the way we do. It's this understanding that becomes a starting point for change.

## Nine Points in a Process

Before describing in brief the motives and attributes associated with each point of view, I'd like to share a way of thinking about the enneagram that explains not just *what* the motives and attributes are, but *why* they are the way they are—why Point 1 has a different motivation from Point 2 (etc.).

The way we can do this is by looking at the enneagram points not just as locations in space (as points on a circle), but as points in time (as stages in a process or project). We can further divide our process into three stages:

**First Stage (Point 1 – 3): Initiating.** At Point 1, we have to decide what we're doing and where we want to go, even though we have little experience to help us make this decision. So our energy is oriented toward defining terms, organizing ideas, and developing criteria for evaluating ideas. By Point 2, something is developing, but it's still in the early stages of development. Our immature idea needs more development and support. By Point 3, the idea is pretty fleshed out but is still just an idea. It needs to be subjected to “reality testing” to see whether it really works the way we think it will.

**Middle Stage (Points 4 – 6): Commitment.** At Point 4, we're getting to the point where the idea is ready for deeper development—the kind of development that's only possible if we're willing to immerse ourselves deeply in the creative process, allowing the idea to lead us where it will. By Point 5, we're so firmly committed to our idea that we identify with it. We will definitely bring it to fruition, but we're becoming increasingly sensitive to what will happen if we put the idea out into the world prematurely. This makes us cautious, and we seek to collect as much information as possible before taking action. At Point 6, we're poised on the brink of action. We have to cross a line, but we can only cross safely at just the right moment. Our action is irrevocable, and it will change everything in an irreversible fashion. Our focus shifts from rational thinking into intuitive anticipation. As we make final preparations for the coming shift, we cultivate the receptivity needed for a safe transition. We especially appreciate the benefits of a stable foundation.

**Last Stage (Points 7 – 9): Action.** At Point 7, things happen! We've somehow crossed over into a new world, a world full of interesting possibilities. There's a freedom and lightness, but also very little ballast! It's all too easy to lose focus and get distracted, to go too fast and pursue too many possibilities. Trying to collect ourselves and remember our original plan can be a challenge. By Point 8, we've collected our energy and have the strength and focus to implement our original idea on a grand scale. Will we become a tyrannical autocrat or a beneficent steward? We have to remember that the strength and unity we experience at this stage isn't our personal property. It's the foundation we need to assist others. At Point 9, the responsibilities of leadership give way to a time for rest and relaxation. We learn how to let go of the Big Idea and simply enjoy the act of being (instead of doing). We can let ourselves to go into “neutral gear” for a while, in order to replenish ourselves for the next spiral of activity. The challenge here is to let go without completely losing ourselves in the process.

\* \* \*

It's worth mentioning here that presenting the points as steps in a process doesn't imply that someone at Point 9 is more evolved than someone at Point 1. The process described above exists on many levels of evolution, so knowing someone's enneagram point of view tells us nothing about their position on this spiral.

## Nine Points of View

Looking at the points of view as steps in a process enables us to see that the descriptions of each point below aren't arbitrary. The nature of the energy of each point of view is directly related to the nature of the work that's taking place at that stage in the process.

Below are bolded keywords that try to convey the focus of each point of view and a brief explanation of the motivations, attributes, and archetypes most associated with that point of view.

**Point 1—Definition.** Civilizing, self-critical, precise & ennobling. Attention is on fairness, honor, hard work, & doing things correctly. The challenge is to relax, unwind, have fun, & be able to see the perfection in things as they are. The gift is the ability to work toward a worthwhile goal with great care, precision, and integrity. Possible archetypes: *Pilgrim, Puritan, Pioneer, Settler, Craftsman, Ascetic, Nun, Priest, Monk Renunciate, Evangelist, Judge, Lawgiver, Hierophant, Social Arbiter, Whistleblower.*

**Point 2—Nurturing.** Warm, sociable, outgoing, & gregarious. Attention is on people, relationships, sharing, & engaging. The challenge is learning to share freely, without expectation of a reward for giving of sense of personal entitlement. The gift is an emotional sensitivity to the needs of other people. Possible archetypes: *Mother, Nurturer, Caretaker, Giver, Best Friend, Lover, Seducer, Devotee, Saint, Sacrificer, Social Networker, Ambassador, Power Behind the Throne.*

**Point 3—Aspiration.** Assertive, outgoing, ambitious, & adaptable. Attention goes to achieving, succeeding, impressing, & self-testing. The challenge is learning how to do for the sake of doing, to take time for relationships, and to relax and just be without needing to do anything. The gift is the ability to respond readily to changing situations and challenges. Possible archetypes: *High Achiever, Great Adaptor, Model Student, Go-getter, Head of the Class, Super Star, Shining Aspirant, Fashion Model, Politician, Rhetorician, First Among Equals.*

**Point 4—Originating.** Deep, reflective, restless, & resonant. Attention is on depth, authenticity, originality, & individuality. The challenge is to experience the heights or the depths without getting lost in them and cultivating the ability to feel joy in the ordinary pleasures of daily life. The gift is a deep emotional resonance with intense states and emotions. Possible archetypes: *Individualist, Bohemian, Gypsy, Artisan, Originator, Writer, Wordsmith, Dramatist, Tragedian, Jealous Lover, Pundit, Critic, Mudraker.*

**Point 5—Knowing.** Cool, dry, detached, measured, & analytical. Attention is on logic, thinking, rationality, & self-protection via withdrawal from people and situations. The challenge is to learn how to allow a free flow of energy to freshen and revitalize the self instead of minimizing emotional and physical needs and withdrawing to conserve energy. The gift is a genius for apprehending complex systems and deep knowledge. Possible archetypes: *Recluse, Hermit, Genius, Wizard, Sleuth, Spy, Absent-minded Professor, Philosopher, Magician, Alchemist, Shaman, Iconoclast.*

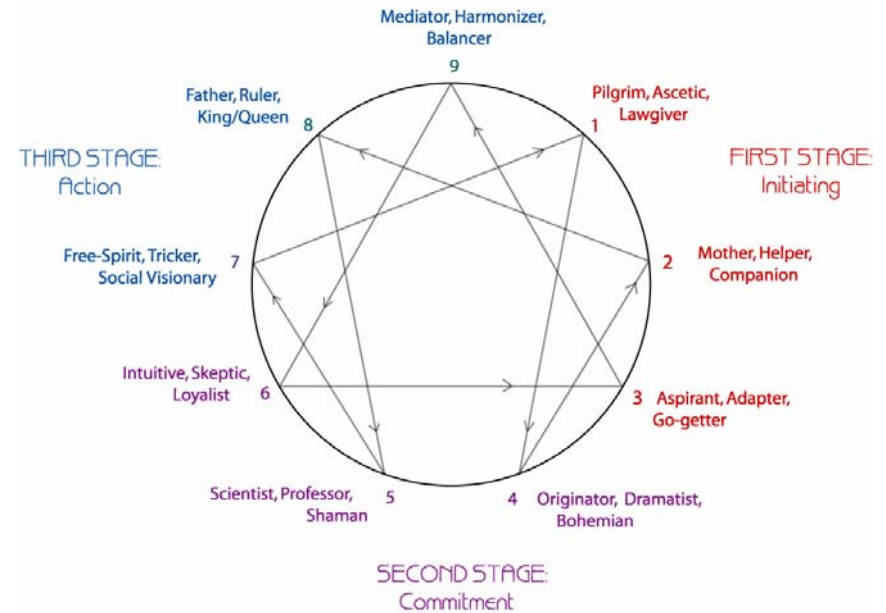
**Point 6—Intuiting.** Sharp-eyed, caring, sensitive, & aware. Attention is on the environment, keeping watch, sharpening awareness. The challenge is to transform fear-based hypersensitivity and the potential to overreact into a sense of basic trust arising from intuitive awareness that there is really nothing to fear. The gift is a keen and even psychic attunement to people and situations. Possible archetypes: *Family Loyalist, Faithful Friend, Underdog Scrapper, Tender*

*Defender, Vigilante, Warrior, Psychic, Intuitive, Keeper of the Flame, True Believer, Community Cornerstone.*

**Point 7—Diversity.** Quick, witty, high-energy, & innovative. Attention is on ideas, multitasking, freedom & excitement, and fun-seeking. The challenge is to get grounded, steady, & focused, being willing to make an emotional commitment to long-term projects & relationships. The gift is a lightning-fast ability to link ideas in visionary ways. Possible archetypes: *Messenger of the Gods, Bon Vivant, Free Spirit, Trickster, Drifter, Dance-away Lover, Magical Child, Storyteller, Idealist, Aquarian Visionary, Trendsetter, Jet-setter, One of the Beautiful People.*

**Point 8—Unity.** Fortright, direct, grounded, & powerful. Attention is on establishing one's position, taking charge, personal honor & boundaries. The challenge is to cultivate inner sensitivity, receptivity, flexibility, and subtlety. The gift is the unwavering upholding of a personal ideal of justice and honor. Possible archetypes: *Father, Monarch, Ruler, CEO, Empire Builder, Power Broker, Mafia Don, Chivalrous Knight, Protector, Champion, Natural Leader.*

**Point 9—Universalization.** Practical, matter-of-fact, unassuming & potentially mystical. Attention is on ordinary life, keeping the peace, other people, & finding joy in small pleasures. The challenge is to become more self-aware and more assertive in self-expression. The gift is a listening heart. Possible archetypes: *Server, Listener, Tabula Rasa, Receiver, Follower, Peasant, Appreciator, Counselor, Peacekeeper, Mediator, Meditator, Blender, Balancer, Harmonizer.*



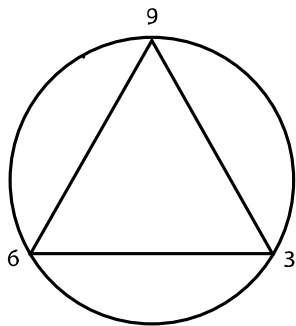
## The Wings

Once we know our point of view, we can take a look at the two points of view on either sides, called the *wing points* or *wings*. Both wings can offer additional clues about understanding what's likely to influence our motivations & behavior.

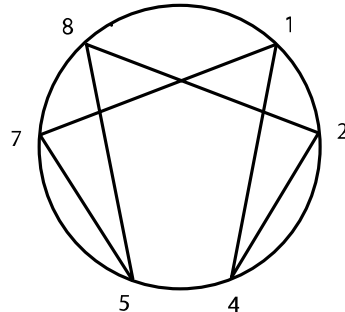
Although both wings exert some influence, people typically report that one exerts more influence than the other. So it is common to speak of being “a Four with a Five wing,” or a “One with a Nine wing.” A Four with a Five wing would typically be more intellectual or withdrawn while a Four with a Three wing might be more ambitious or attuned to social trends.

## The Circle, the Triangle and the Hexad

The enneagram has three key geometric figures: an inner triangle, an outer hexad, and an encompassing circle. The inner triangle is created by linking Points 3, 6, and 9, while the outer hexad is created by linking Points 1, 4, 2, 8, 5, and 7:



The Inner Triangle



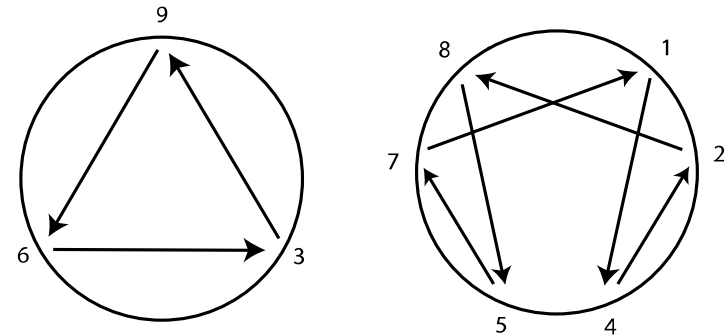
The Outer Hexad

Each geometric figure symbolizes some key aspect of life:

- The **circle** represents oneness or wholeness.
- The **inner triangle** shows the balancing of three great forces: an affirming force, a denying force, and a reconciling force. The affirming and denying forces create polarities and deadlocks in human problem solving. But the existence of a third (often hidden) reconciling force means that there is always a way out of any dualistic deadlock.
- The **outer hexad** represents the dynamic potential we have for change or growth. It is derived by dividing 1 by 7, which yields the repeating decimal .142857.

## The Arrows

We can also look at the lines that form the figures as energy flows between the points. Each point on the enneagram is connected to two other points. These are often called our **stress point** and **security point**. The stress point is found by following the direction of the arrows and the security point by going in the reverse direction. The idea is that we tend to take on the characteristics of the stress point when we're under pressure and the characteristics of the security point when feeling especially good, although this seems to be more true for some people than for others. On the enneagram figures below, the stress point for Point 9 is 6 and the security point is 3; for Point 1, the stress point is 4 and the security point is 7.



Moving with the Arrows

But the names of stress point and security point, while common, don't always capture everybody's experience in stress or security. Some people say they move to their stress point when they feel good and their security point they don't. A more neutral way of looking at these connections is simply as points that have a natural affinity with the point that is “home base.”

(By the way, we often speak of “moving” to the stress or security point. This doesn't mean literally abandoning our home base for a new point of view. It just means being especially sensitive to the influence of the stress or security point.)

## Further Exploring the Enneagram

To find out more about the enneagram, try the following websites:

[www.9types.com](http://www.9types.com), [www.enneagramworldwide.com](http://www.enneagramworldwide.com), [www.enneagraminstitute.com](http://www.enneagraminstitute.com), [www.enneagram.net](http://www.enneagram.net). Some of my favorite books include *The Enneagram* by Maria Beesing et al., *The Essential Enneagram* by David Daniels, *The Enneagram in Love and Work* by Helen Palmer, and *The Enneagram Made Easy* by Renee Barron & Elizabeth Wagele.