
Chapter 1: The one thing

If Only One Thing Matters, Everything Matters
– recent documentary title

FIVE YEARS AGO, I had a dream:

I was enrolled in a girl's high school. Our work was to clean books. When I looked at the books I was assigned to clean, I realized that I didn't have to clean them all to the same degree. Most needed to get a grade of "C" or perhaps a "B." Surprisingly, some only needed a "D"! But a very small number required an "A." The cleaning on those books had to be meticulous, and this shocked and frightened me.

I woke up from the dream with a start, my head swimming with its energy. It was numinous—charged with meaning—so I knew it was important. But what did it signify?

“It’s interesting,” I thought, “that we’re cleaning books, not reading them. Could it be that real learning is about refining our understanding of things we already know?” Okay, that made sense. I could grasp the idea that learning is about seeing things from a “cleaner” (finer and more subtle) perspective.

“But why don’t we have to clean all the books well?” I wondered. “Is it really okay that some of the books only need to be cleaned well enough to get a barely passing grade? Don’t we have to do pretty well in everything, at least average or a little above?”

Apparently not. It was a new idea for me to think that there were areas in life that just didn’t matter that much—at least as far as my personal destiny was concerned. But here was the catch:

I had to get an A in some areas; a B would not do. The shock this realization produced (even when dreaming) told me that the dream was challenging a deeply-held conviction. What could it be?

It took me a while to figure it out, but I slowly realized that I held the belief that it was possible to go through life without excelling very much as long as I stayed more or less in the average range. I could duck out on big plans and dreams (which were scary) so long as I didn't really screw up in a big way. Using that approach, I thought that I could stay safe and not hurt other people. But the dream was telling me otherwise. Clearly, if I did not excel in the areas that required excellence, all my other efforts would matter very little.

This dream reminded me of an intriguing Rumi passage:

One thing must not be forgotten. Forget all else, but remember this, and you will have no regrets. Remember everything else, but ignore this one thing, and you will have done nothing. It is as if a king sent you on a mission to a foreign land to perform one special task for him. If you do a hundred things, but not this appointed task, what have you accomplished? Human beings come into this world for a particular purpose, and if they forget it they would have done nothing at all.

This passage conveys the message that we each have a unique destiny. This destiny involves the completion of some task that is quite specific to each individual. It's up to us to discover the nature of the task and to make sure that it gets done. If we can do this, we'll have no regrets.

Living without regret. What a wonderful idea—and a worthy goal. But is it really possible? Both my dream and Rumi say the answer is “yes,” but neither tells us exactly how to do it. This is something we have to discover for ourselves. It's we who have to figure out which books to clean—which acts to perform. That's the “plot” of our lives, its *Cliff Notes* story line. But more basic than plot is *theme*: the archetypal thread that runs through our lives, subtly bending them to its hidden purposes. Theme is less obvious than plot, but it's what gives our life meaning and purpose.

It's when we begin to discern the themes that shape our lives that we begin to get an inkling of what Rumi's “One Thing” is all about. We begin to get a sense of our life's purpose, *dharma*,

vocation, calling, or destiny—to make out the shape of the inner principle that governs our lives.

But this inner principle is a subtle thing that hides its face from the light of day. No scientific experiment can be done to prove its existence; no meditation, affirmation, or magic spell can force it to reveal itself to us in the absence of understanding. Nonetheless, it's always there, like the air we breathe, a subtle blueprint whose outlines gradually emerge as we move from childhood into young adulthood and beyond. When we look directly at it, it tends to disappear. (That's one reason that many self-help books are limited in their ability to tangibly help us. It's because they try to help too much. They try to boil things down into a simple formula, complete with exercises, questionnaires, and checklists for completion. In so doing, they lose touch with the very thing they're trying to explain.)

Sufi master Radha Mohan Lal likened the enigmatic nature of our path in life to that of the birds in flight. “Look at the birds in the sky. Can you trace the path of their flight?” One of his successors, Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee, said that those who seek this path “gradually we realize that this pathless path is none other than our own inner being calling out to ourself.”¹

How do we find this pathless path? How do we discern our invisible blueprint? There's no simple answer to this question. No matter how many self-help books we read, workshops we attend, or counselors we consult, nobody can hand us this answer on a platter. But there are tools we can use to become more attuned to its purposes, some of which (like yoga, meditation, prayer, introspection, breath work, and shamanism) have been practiced for millennia. Occasionally, new techniques are either invented or revealed; the scientific method is an example, because it gave us an entirely new way to look at ourselves and at life. Another is depth psychology, especially the Jungian and archetypal varieties. An even more recent addition is the enneagram, which is only now becoming widely-known as a tool for self-discovery. It's a powerful tool, especially when we use it for exploring individual differences in temperament, motivation, and orientation.

¹ Source: www.goldensufi.org.

The enneagram is said to have ancient roots. But its teachings were never revealed until the last century, when mystic G. I. Gurdjieff taught the enneagram as a system for describing nine steps in a transformational process. Later, Oscar Ichazo adapted it as a tool for discerning nine core motivations that give rise to personality differences. But Ichazo saw those differences as problematic, characterizing them as nine kinds of distorted thinking (cognitive fixations) that block spiritual transformation. Ichazo's student Claudio Naranjo, whose teachings have become widely dispersed, saw them as psychological pathologies driven by instinctual passions. The result is that the enneagram is now best known as a tool for describing how personality serves as a barrier to higher consciousness.

But that's not the only way to view the nine types. Because the enneagram is a universal system, I think it makes more sense to view the types as positive energy constellations—a point I've made in numerous *Enneagram Monthly* articles and in my book, *The Positive Enneagram*.² While it's possible to misuse the energy of the types, there's no reason to think of them as inherently fixated or pathological.³

The geometry of the enneagram points us to the transformational nature of the nine types, because they're depicted as nine small circles (points) within a larger circle of wholeness (Fig. 1-1). The geometry also shows us the transformational role of each type (which can be discerned by looking at its position on the circle),⁴ as well as its relationship with the other eight types, especially its wing points and connecting points—relationships that reveal additional transformational possibilities.⁵

The geometry also reveals something else: that we are not just our personalities, but part of something larger than ourselves (the larger circle)—something inherently whole and complete. We don't have to leave the small "circle of type" in order to participate in the larger circle of life.

² Available from Geranium Press at Amazon.com.

³ See my book, *The Positive Enneagram: A New Approach to the Nine Types* (2009) for details (available from Amazon.com).

⁴ See Chapter 7.

⁵ See Chapters 8 and 10.

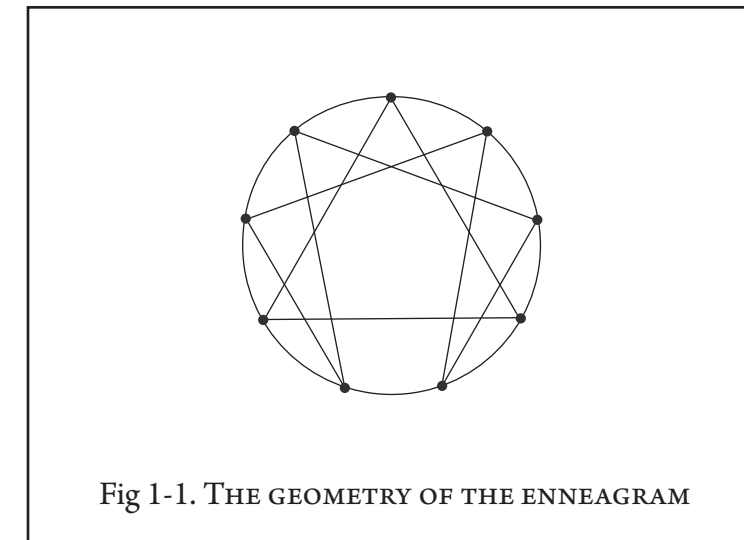


Fig 1-1. THE GEOMETRY OF THE ENNEAGRAM

This last point is especially important because of the widespread belief in the enneagram community that ego is the enemy of essence, where *ego* = *our enneagram type* and *essence* = *the wholeness we are said to possess in the absence of ego*. If we think of ego as the small circle and essence as the larger circle, we can see that ego can never obscure essence (or vice-versa); both are always present. And neither is superior to the other.

But the “ego-versus-essence” paradigm is the basis for a lot of the work done in the field. It's a dualistic approach, because it relies on *either/or* thinking, which requires us to make a forced choice between two irreconcilable positions (either we chose ego or essence, not both). The alternative is *both/and* thinking, which says that we don't have to choose: we can embody ego and essence simultaneously. The geometry of the enneagram supports the *both/and* idea, freeing us up to see unity and diversity as complements, not opposites—and enabling us to see the enneagram, the types, and the subtypes in a more positive light.

The enneagram subtypes are the main focus of this book. They're the 27 personality profiles that we can generate by looking at how each of the nine types behaves in three diverse arenas of life: the personal (self-preservation) arena, the sexual (creative) arena, and the social

arena. For a given individual, one of these arenas will usually be more dominant than the other two. To discover which one, we can ask ourselves, “Which of the following most attracts my interest?”:

- ▶ My private world (*home, garden, family, solitary/personal pursuits*)?
- ▶ My intimate, creative, or spiritual life (*love affairs, dramas, intense experiences, transcendent spirituality, intense encounters*)?
- ▶ My role in social activities as either a leader or participant (*event planning, parties, charity work, causes, politics, fund-raising*)?”

The answer we choose will tell us our dominant subtype arena. Once we know both our type and subtype arena, we can figure out our dominant subtype.⁶

I didn’t invent the idea of the subtypes; it’s part of the corpus of original teachings on the personality enneagram as developed by Oscar Ichazo. However, my approach is quite different than that of most enneagram writers, because I view the subtypes the same way I view the types: from the “both/and” perspective mentioned earlier, not as instinctual drives contaminated by distorted ego passions and fixations.⁷ In addition, I see the subtypes as pointers towards *dharma*, because they help us see the link between core motivation and the activities of real life—particularly when we use the framework of Jungian and archetypal psychology as the basis for our explorations. This is because archetypal psychology is the psychology of *soul*, and it’s *soul* that leads us deep into the heart of life.

I base my ideas on the work of a variety of innovators, among them Carl Jung, James Hillman, Margaret Wheatley, Thomas Moore, Mark Epstein, Matthew Fox, Rupert Sheldrake, Arthur Koestler, Robert Johnson, Ken Wilber, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Martin Seligman, and Stephen Nachmanovich.

My approach rests on three key premises. The first is that *personality is a good thing*; it’s not something that separates us from our essential nature. This is why Carl Jung sees personality

⁶ For the sake of brevity, I often abbreviate the arenas as follows: self-preservation arena = SP arena, sexual arena = SX arena, and social arena = SOC arena. I often refer to specific subtypes as SP Ones, SX Ones, SOC Ones, SP Twos, etc.

⁷ By the way, one of the more confusing things in this kind of discussion is the different ways that people use the word *ego*. When I use it, I’m trying to describe psychic functioning on the level of everyday consciousness, not narcissistic (egocentric) thinking.

development as a key part of the individuation process: because it’s by developing, refining, and stabilizing our personality that we transform ourselves.⁸

The second is that *there’s nothing about the psyche that is inherently unlovable*. According to Jung, even its darkest shadows are the *prima materia* for transformation. James Hillman goes further, saying that our unintegrated inner personas are of value for what they already are, not just what they can become.

The third is that *there are three different realms of consciousness* (spirit, ego, and *soul*) and that all three require nurturing if we are to live a fulfilling life. Secular culture favors the ego realm while religious culture favors the realm of spirit. But where does that leave the realm of *soul*—the realm of depth, feeling, imagination, and mystery— which is neither fish nor foul? In modern life, *soul* has become almost entirely invisible and thus devalued (although people like Jung, Hillman, and Joseph Campbell have been trying to revive our interest). So part of my purpose here is to contribute to that effort by introducing a three-realm approach to enneagram work.⁹

Part I (Chapters 1 – 5) introduces the world of archetypal psychology, a world in which life has meaning and we each play a particular role in the act of creation. The idea of introducing Rumi’s One Thing is to raise the question that everybody wants to answer: *Why am I here?* Raising this question is the first step on a journey—a journey where we explore the nature of a path, what it means to be in the moment, the mystique of *soul*, and the power of myth. None of these explorations is designed to give a pat answer to the “Why-am-I-here?” question, but all provide clues about fruitful places to look for further answers.

More significantly, they “prime the pump” for our discussion on the enneagram in Part II.¹⁰ It’s necessary to start with a little pump-priming, because the enneagram is seldom if ever taught from a truly Jungian perspective. The current approach is instead based on Freudian

⁸ I’m using the word *personality* in the same way that Jung uses it: to describe individuality at the level of everyday life. For his comments on personality and individuation, see Chapter 7 in *The Development of Personality* (1981), p. 169.

⁹ See Chapters 4 and 7.

¹⁰ If you’re the impatient type, you can skip right to Part II; it can stand on its own. It’s just that Part I provides the context for my critique of enneagram theory in Part II.

psychology as amended by the kill-the-ego fervor of the 1960s. Chapter 6 explains how this works and where this approach originated; Chapter 7 focuses on ways we can link the personality enneagram with Gurdjieff's process enneagram, because this is the first step towards seeing the types from a transformational perspective. Then there's a brief introduction to wing points, connecting points, and energy centers (Chapter 8), followed by a discussion of the theory that currently informs our understanding of the subtypes (Chapter 9). At the end of the chapter, I introduce an alternative framework for subtype work (and more broadly, enneagram work) that's simpler, more integrative, and more logically consistent than the current ego-versus-essence model. There's also a brief overview of the 27 subtypes.

Part III is where we explore the enneagram from an archetypal perspective, focusing on the archetypal roles we play in life and the archetypal themes that run like threads through the fabric of our lives. Each chapter focuses on one type and its three subtypes, using examples from life, film, and TV to bring them to life. After a brief epilogue, there are reference lists to books and films, along with a test for determining your type and subtype. (The test consists of short descriptions, so it's designed not so much to "nail" the type and subtype as to provide food for thought.)

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At the beginning of her innovative book on living systems, *Leadership and the New Science* (1999), business consultant Margaret Wheatley remarks that "this book attempts to be true to...[a] new vision of reality, where ideas and information are but half of what is required to evoke reality. The creative possibilities of the ideas represented here depend on your engagement with them" (p. 9).

I would also like to be true to a new vision of reality that engages the reader. I hope to portray the types and subtypes in a way that's vivid enough to be both memorable and inspiring. I'd also like to leave some room for you, the reader, to walk into the world of the archetypes in your own way, so can imagine what they're like and reflect on the ways that they show up in your life.

Although this excursion is playful, it has a serious side. Archetypal energy is powerful. Its themes are powerful, which is why they're the stuff of great films and literature. While some archetypal images seem inspiring (the Social Idealist, Guardian Angel, or Horatio Alger), others may disturb us (the Dark Queen, Addict, or Vigilante). Yet other archetypes may seem disappointingly prosaic or trivial (the Loyalist, Fashion Plate, or Organizer).

Whatever their nature, they're all familiar to us. So they all belong in any exploration into the motivations behind human thought and action. But it's not always easy to look these archetypes squarely in the face, because they can evoke strong emotional reactions. Even positive images can arouse resistance if they make us feel that we're not living up to our potential.

Even so, I see advantages in working with all the archetypes. Inspirational archetypes give us goals towards which to strive. Shadow archetypes alert us to those areas of life that need our attention. And trivial archetypes often serve a not-so-trivial purpose: to help us ground the extraordinary in ordinary life by treating the trivial details of life as if they really matter.

And of course, they really *do* matter, just as *we* really matter. We don't live in a random world lacking any sort of overarching principle. Our lives mean something, and they're part of a larger context that also means something, although that meaning can become obscured by the busyness of modern life.

But every once and a while, we have an experience that cuts through that busyness and grabs our attention, often unexpectedly: Life becomes *It* and comes to find us, "ready or not." Something happens, and we're shocked into remembering—even if only for a moment—that life is a place of awe and wonder. There's a perfection about such moments, a "just so" quality, that enables us to stop and simply *be*—without trying to resist, exploit, or explain what is happening. In these "just so" moments, we see the world from a different perspective: the perspective of *soul*. I hope to breathe some *soul* into the pages of this book, because *soul* has the power to lead us into worlds we never knew were there and along paths that we never expected to travel.