

The Enneagram of Devotion

by Susan Rhodes

*If there is devotion,
Then if we mispronounce
God's Name,
He does not mind.*

*If there is no devotion,
Then no matter how correctly
And how perfectly
We pronounce God's Name,
He is not satisfied.*

— Sri Chinmoy

Sufi mystic Irina Tweedie was fond of saying that people have two basic instincts: the will to survive and the will to worship. Most modern Americans would accept the idea that the will to survive is basic. This idea fits right in with the secularist, “survival of the fittest” philosophy that is widely accepted in scientific circles (and often presented as literal truth by the mainstream media). But the idea that the will to worship is just as fundamental as the will to survive? This idea sounds strange to modern ears—old-fashioned, outdated, even embarrassing. Even many people with spiritual leanings find themselves averse to the very idea of worship.¹

Why is this? There are a number of reasons. For starters, it presupposes that there is something or someone to worship, and that it's more powerful than us. If this is true, it means there's something that we will never be able to control. [I would find the thought that I could control anything with my puny limitations even more frightening—a tremendous responsibility of being a super-grownup...] And this is a frightening thought, especially if we anthropomorphize the Deity in such a way that it has foibles similar to our own. Then we have to contend with a God that is bigger than us, but not better than us. It's like having a parent that we fear but don't trust.

Also, the idea that there is a God to worship means that there is an authority figure that may make demands upon us. What if we can't meet those demands? How will this make us feel? The prospect of failure can keep us from wanting to think that worship should be part of spiritual life. [I suppose that worship for a head type is often non-personal and not directed at an entity but at an idea. Say for example “the order of the Universe” where the idea of intelligent design is so striking that we are in awe and reverence towards it, then it can be the mere fact that there is “order” as opposed to chaos.] Last, worship is traditionally associated with religion, especially organized religion.[continuing previous comment, instead of religion, for me it would be Faith or Trust in the existence of the perfect order which can very well be formless] And popular American culture is not all that friendly to organized religion. For better or worse, many people no longer look to organized religion to meet their spiritual needs. So if worship is mostly associated with organized religion, when religion goes out the window, so does the idea of worship.

But Irina Tweedie understood the will to worship as something independent of religion. For her, it was both more basic and more tangible than any precept, tenet, belief, or wish. It was a living reality that

permeated every moment of every day. Her conviction that the will to worship is basic to life arose out of both mystical experience and the wisdom gained from a long life of service. [sounds like Worship could be also called Gratitude. One requires an object the other does not. I can conceivably feel exhilarated with a sense of “joi de vivre” and nothing further. Each time when discovering a new connection or law, marvel in awe at the its existence]

The Yin-Yang Nature of Life

Why are there just two basic instincts? Because of the yin-yang nature of life. It’s not hard to recognize the will to survive as the masculine drive and the will to worship as its feminine counterpart; the masculine helps us lead and control [will to rule, i.e. take charge, i.e. Mr. Fix it] while the feminine shows us how to surrender and give. Unfortunately, the feminine or submissive role is [was, rather, and thus got further invalidated by the feminist movement that instead of pointing out the need for and nobility of that path, adamantly condemned it as indeed inferior] no longer widely-esteemed, because it’s become associated with unfairness in general and the exploitation of women in particular.

Nevertheless, both roles are necessary for a balanced life. While it’s true that submission can invite exploitation, it’s not submission itself that is the problem—it’s our lack of discrimination about when to submit and to what (or to whom).

For my article on Cesar Millan, the “Dog Whisperer,” (see *EM*, Dec. 2007****), I researched Cesar’s philosophy of life, and much of it relies on knowing how to work with masculine and feminine energy. In one of his TV shows, Cesar comments that, “submission is when the mind is open. When the mind is open, you allow other people to tell you things.”

Similarly, all Twelve-Step programs ask their participants to acknowledge their powerlessness against their addiction and ask them to acknowledge the presence of a Higher Power in their lives. It’s not that their organizers are trying to convert their participants to some religion—it’s that they understand that the only way that people are ever going to gain control over their lives is by first letting go of a false sense of control. And this is possible only when we look at

ourselves in a realistic way—when we realize that we are actually a small fish in a very big pond.

The Power of Surrender

Surrender opens us to our own vulnerability, and we can no longer pretend to be something we are not. Our self-image collides with the reality of who we really are[what two worlds?] —and our defenses collapse. And we suddenly experience the terrifying and dizzying sensation of feeling fully present in the moment. Or perhaps it happens more gradually (but no less ruthlessly)—our illusions slowly slip away, one by one, until we are eventually left with only ourselves for company. However we arrive at this moment, it’s a stark experience. Everything has been stripped away. We are like a newborn foundling, naked and alone.

But we are also receptive—we are, as Cesar notes, ready to listen. And it is in this state of “listening silence” that we begin to hear the voice of the inner heart. [what if listening could be to our own sense of beauty (gut), feeling (heart) and values/thoughts (head) according to which happens to be the main center, the support and/or the repressed one] It speaks to us and sings to us, sweet songs of love. It awakens in us a sense that there is something missing [that’s pretty Fourish, isn’t it?] from the world, some un-lived potential, and that this potential is ours alone. And it fills us with inspiration, gradually igniting the inner flame of devotion [we still don’t know TO what] out of which true conviction [or OF what?]is born.

Implicit here is the notion that Life is not an abstract idea, but something full of energy and animation, something marvelous and sublime. Moreover, it is something that is capable of responding to our call, although Sufis often say it is Life that calls to us first, not the other way around. [that evokes a sense that that which responds is outside/elsewhere and may come to us after we call it] It is because Life is responsive that it’s actually possible to surrender completely—because Life is always there to support us, whether we know it or not. If we’re able to see Life in this light, it’s possible to come to the surprising conclusion that the will to survive and the will to worship are not actually in conflict. Both enable us to prosper, albeit in different ways. The will to survive helps us care for the physical body and appreciate the individual self

while the will to worship enables us to appreciate our relationship with others and with Life itself. When we embrace both, we truly embrace Life. And then Life is able to embrace *us*.

This embrace lifts us up. It opens us and sets our creative juices to flowing. We become full of ideas and the energy to complete them, because we're no longer blocking the channels through which our creative impulse flows. It dances in our hearts, making us giddy, silly, and heedless of care, like a lover in Spring.

Devotional poetry is brimming over with this creative energy, which is why it inspires us. I include some of my favorite poems here (see insets) because they're designed to help people to listen with their hearts, not just their minds.

Coming to Terms with Limits

We need help in order to listen with our hearts, because modern life does not encourage it. It is so fast and furious! Just slowing down is a major accomplishment for many of us.

In the past, it may have been easier to listen with our hearts. Life was slower, and it imposed more limits than it does now. We were forced to come to terms with those limits, like it or not. When the Industrial Revolution came along, people in industrialized nations got the idea that we could overcome life's limits, once and for all. We didn't need God, we didn't need Life, we didn't need anybody except ourselves (and our own marvelous ingenuity).

Now, almost 200 years later, we've come to the place where we collectively realize that science and technology can't provide the cures for all of life's ills. We still have to find a way to live in harmony with nature instead of trying to control and dominate it.

But we've sort of forgotten how to do this—or at least how to do it properly. We think that living in harmony in nature means rescuing it instead of exploiting [is that too harsh a word? Knees will jerk. How about enjoying it, or reaping its bounty, or availing ourselves of it] it (hence, the current popularity of eco-friendly activities like recycling or conservation). But when we place ourselves in the role of rescuer, what exactly are we doing? Are we changing the environment or just making ourselves feel like good, caring people? (Hint: If you have a hard time understanding what's

I'm getting at, consider the Shadow side of Type 2 humanitarianism.)

We might think that nature rescuers and nature exploiters are diametrically opposed, but both groups share one key assumption: the idea that *we are in charge*—that we human beings are the ones with the power to decide the fate of the natural world. But to truly live in harmony in nature, we'd have to learn a different way of understanding nature. We'd have to approach nature with humility, in the tradition of indigenous peoples or ancient shamans, who revered Mother Nature and saw Her as the Soul of the World. We'd have to *ask* what to do, rather than assuming we already know.

Making such a shift doesn't require us to [I don't get it, need example]revert to tribalism, stop recycling, or give up the benefits of living in a comfortable environment. But it does require us to realize that we have limited control over many of the most critical and intimate aspects of our lives—like the circumstances of our birth, the family we are born into, the genetic blueprint that determines our health and looks, the culture where we're raised, our opportunities for intimacy, and our time of passing. While we can certainly work with the circumstances of our lives and even shape them in significant ways, we can't make them happen through an act of will. We have to work with what we've been given. Whatever our looks, talent, luck, or resources, they are ultimately limited in scope:

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains: round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.²*

As this poem relates, even the most powerful among us is not powerful enough to defeat the passing away of everything we think we control. That control is, at best, temporary. That's the "bad news." And it's terrifying to that not-so-grownup part of us that thinks it's in charge. The good news is that when we let go of the false sense of control, we discover that we don't need so much control to be content. In fact, just the opposite. We find that nature really does support and nurture us, if we allow it. But it can only happen when we stop trying to boss it around! [example: Somewhere in Africa natives were poor because the tsetse fly was keeping their herds thin. DDT was used to knock out the tsetse. The herds multiplied and the natives were thrilled until the herds ate more grass than could be replenished and what grasslands there were before, now turned into a dustbowl. The herds starved leaving the natives with less than they had when they shared with the tsetse...

On the other hand, a well placed dam and irrigation system achieved good results]

The problem is that many of us are completely terrified by this prospect, especially in highly technological cultures. We rely so heavily on science and technology in daily life that we've forgotten that these are not our only sources of support. Nor are they the most powerful sources of support. In times of real trouble—like the aftermath of 9/11 or the Pacific tsunami—people drop the pretense of control, because they can no longer maintain it. We ask for help, and it comes; it *always* comes when we aren't too proud to ask. And often, the help has a quality about it that inspires and elevates us.

Acceptance and Devotion

Help comes once we come to a place of acceptance. In that acceptance, we gain perspective. We discern what is really important in life.

This idea was poignantly brought home to me recently when I watched a TV program on lottery winners. One of the people interviewed for the show was the daughter of a woman who won several million

dollars. The daughter was pleased for the win, but not nearly as excited as you would expect. She quietly observed, "Well, yes, it's nice. Of course, it's not like having good health." It turns out that her mom had recently been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

It may seem strange to think that acknowledging our limitations is a starting point for a more harmonious way of life. But it's not really. In Twelve-Step programs, everybody rejoices when a newcomer is able to admit their powerlessness over the circumstances of their life. This is the moment when we become *dis-illusioned*, when we finally see our false ideals, destructive emotions, and spiritual illusions for what they are. This willingness to see what is false in ourselves becomes our first step toward recovery.

And just what is it that we are recovering? It's our innocence—our "inner sense." Regaining our innocence is what happens when we let go of self-defeating illusions. This results in the realignment of the masculine and feminine sides of our being, so that we become balanced human beings. The outcome is threefold: mentally, we acquire discernment; ontologically, we experience a zest for life; and emotionally, we feel quietly happy.

[this sounds oddly transsexual. I believe that within the relative the masculine and feminine has to persist to the end. Balance would then be different for males and females. To become balanced would be harmonizing those properties but maintaining the hierarchy among them. Males will still have a spatial engineering edge over women who'd keep their communication/empathizing edge.]Of course, these are eventual outcomes; they don't happen right away. And the process is seldom painless. That's why it's usually a "one step forward, two steps back" sort of scenario for most of us. But it's easier to persevere if we see that, in a very real sense, Life is on our side—it wants us to win, not lose. It's supporting our efforts and cheering our successes. Maybe not in the way we want, but certainly in the way we need.

When life doesn't tell us what we want to hear, it can be difficult to stay open to the process. But staying

open is important. Staying open enables us to receive the life energy we need at each stage in our journey. Staying open also enables us to expand our horizons, so we grow in understanding. And it enables us to cultivate the kind of intimate relationship with life that awakens feelings of joy and gratitude—feelings that become the basis for a devotional way of life.

Devotion in Daily Life

It's not so easy to cultivate a devotional way of life, because we live in a world that seems to have relegated virtues like acceptance, devotion, and innocence to the same junk heap where we've tossed other discarded virtues like purity, honor, and courage. As a result, it's easy to lose the sense that there's a place for devotion in daily life.

I became aware of this all too clearly one day when I was watching a TV interview with Mitch Snyder, a fiery advocate of the homeless in the 1980s who was completely devoted to their welfare and to bringing their plight to public awareness. After listening to Mitch explain his work at great length, the female reporter—looking every inch the image of well-groomed modernity—got a puzzled look on her face, paused, and then asked the ultimate question: “But what exactly do *you* get out of all this?”

Mitch didn't really know how to answer. But I'll bet he was thinking, “Wasn't she listening to anything I said?”

Here was a guy whose work was his life. He wasn't in it for the money, the prestige, or the career advancement. He was following his heart. And she wasn't getting it, not even a little bit. Like Mother Teresa, Mitch had found a task worth doing. And he wasn't just doing it, he was living it.

Wouldn't it be great if all of us could care about our work as much as he did? I don't think this is impossible. It just requires the ability to be receptive to the little voice within, so we give the devotional side of our nature the chance to emerge. [this reads like the object of devotion is already our focus, just not enough. Should the devotional side first seek out what it is that truly makes us WANT to embrace it?]

Our caring need not be expressed in an obvious way (for instance, through an outward show of emotion). Nor does it need to involve some kind of unusual or dramatic activity (like feeding the starving or rescuing victims in a fire). For many of us, it can be expressed in the way we live our ordinary lives and care for the people we love. Whatever we do, when devotion is present, we feel at peace. We understand what Joseph Campbell meant when he talked about “finding your bliss.”

It sounds wonderful, doesn't it, to find our bliss? Very peaceful and fulfilling. But just how do we do it? How do we find what moves us? And how do we bring that inward devotion out into life? For some people, they just know. For others, it can be a lifelong search.

Devotion and the Enneagram

The enneagram can be a wonderful guide to our devotional nature. This is because devotion is intimately connected with caring and commitment, and so is our enneagram type. Does this surprise you? It shouldn't, because—just think about it—it's our type that dictates what matters most to us: intimacy (Type 2), diversity (Type 7), authenticity (Type 4), etc. We often assume that the values associated with each type aren't really values, but traps or defenses. And perhaps they can be, if we don't know how to properly channel our energy.

But I find it hard to see fixation as inevitable. To me, it makes more sense to see the energy of the type as a natural set of tendencies that reflect something essential about inner self. From this perspective, knowing our type helps us come closer to mapping out what we may call our dharma, purpose, or life path. This is why discovering our type is a good way to “find our bliss.”³ Recognizing our core motivation helps us see what we value in life and what we notice most easily (our *perceptual tendency*). This in turn helps us determine how we might optimally respond to what we notice (what I would call our *devotional response*).

The table on the next page shows how I would break this down by type.

TYPE	CORE MOTIVATION	PERCEPTUAL TENDENCY & DEVOTIONAL RESPONSE
Type 1	To perfect	<i>To notice small imperfections & tenderly correct them</i>
Type 2	To nurture	<i>To notice gaps in emotional support & lovingly bridge them</i>
Type 3	To aspire	<i>To notice opportunities to excel & joyfully seize them</i>
Type 4	To authenticate	<i>To notice emotional incongruities & tactfully remedy them</i>
Type 5	To teach	<i>To notice knowledge gaps & patiently fill them</i>
Type 6	To serve	<i>To notice where service is needed & confidently provide it</i>
Type 7	To link	<i>To notice potential connections & steadfastly make them</i>
Type 8	To lead	<i>To notice where leadership is needed & chivalrously provide it</i>
Type 9	To be present	<i>To notice the energy of the situation & consciously balance it</i>

The descriptions of core motivation and perceptual tendency will be familiar to anyone who knows the enneagram. However, what I call the devotional tendency might sound like a stretch. You could easily ask, “How many Sixes act with confidence and how many Sevens are steadfast in their follow-through?”

Well, while it’s true that a devotional response *is* a stretch. But a stretch is a stretch—it’s not an impossible dream. And that’s the whole point: that the energy of the type gives us special attentional gifts but then challenges us to use those gifts in a way that really does them justice.

Of course, it’s not a snap—it’s a challenge. Take the example of Type 1. We know that it’s easy for Ones to notice imperfections (even little ones). But how easy is it for Ones to tenderly correct them? Not very! Correction is easy—it’s the *tender* part that can be trying. Tenderness does not come naturally, because the same sharpness which makes Ones so good at noticing details also gives them the tendency to be sharp in their responses. But when we see a One who’s really in touch with the devotional side of his nature, the sharp edges aren’t so evident. He’s less tense and more relaxed. The focus of attention is broader and the feedback he gives is a lot more diplomatic. It’s important to realize that he hasn’t lost anything—like

his razor-sharp attentiveness to detail. He has simply gained the ability to respond in a way that allows his gifts to shine.

So it is with all the types. When devotion is present, it gives people more flexibility in the way they respond to a given situation. Type 2 notices when others need help or social support, but is able to give to them without feeling as though she is denying her own needs. Type 3 sees how to excel at what he does without focusing so much on getting approval or other external rewards. Type 4 notices emotional inhibition in others, but is better able to accept it; as a result, she’s able to tactfully encourage (but not force) people to talk about their true feelings. Type 5 notices how ideas are linked and teaches other people according to the actual need and interest of the student (not according to the Five’s need to be overly comprehensive or abstruse). Type 6 notices how it’s possible to be of service and renders that service out of a place of assurance, not the desire to please, show loyalty, or otherwise maintain a defensive posture. Type 7 sees all the possibilities in a situation without getting lost in them (and is thus able to follow one or more through to completion). Type 8 is aware of the power dynamics in a situation and exercises her natural ability to lead in a way that helps others to meet their goals (rather than exploiting the

leadership position). Type 9 allows himself to be fully present to the situation, so that he brings balance to the situation based on his inner knowing (not his desire for peace at any price).

Do these scenarios sound like a pipedream? I hope not! I can think of people of each type who fit these descriptions, people who have found a way to let devotion into their lives in a way that opens, heals, and transforms. They are not doormats, because their receptivity is tempered by discernment. They know what their gifts are and how to use them with care.

This knowledge is available to each of us. We can each cultivate the kind of receptivity that gives us access to our own special enneagrammatic gifts. When we tap into those gifts, we're able to do a lot more than just physically survive—we're able to stay attentive to life and discover what it really means to live in the moment.

Expanding Our Vision

In a sometimes cynical age, it's easy to think of worship as something we can do without. Certainly there are enough people around whose attitudes are not exactly devotional. But what happens when we as a culture banish devotion from our daily lives? What remains? Without devotion, where is love? Where is joy? Where is hope?

While it's obvious that human beings need the will to survive. But what about the will to *thrive*? What about the will to drink deeply from the waters of life? This, I think, is what devotional worship is all about. It's about caring so deeply—whatever our object of devotion—that while we retain our sense of self, we lose our sense of separation from life.

I think this is what happens when we accept the energy of our enneagram type with gratitude instead of resistance. (When we make gratitude and devotion part of our daily life, how long can the energy of our type remain a fixation?)

The will to survive fulfills an important function: to keep us physical fit and attuned to the requirements of living in physical reality. But it does not ensure our mental, emotional, or spiritual well-being. For these requirements, we have another kind of will: the will to worship. It's our will to worship that gives life its meaning—not to mention its sweetness and delight.

Endnotes

1 In a recent Ken Wilber discussion group I attend, many of the participants were talking about the difficulty they had in relating to God or Spirit in the second person, that is, the "I/Thou" relationship. They could relate to the idea that "I am God" or that "We are God," (that Spirit is indwelling), but the idea of devotional relationship with the Divine was hard for them to swallow, even when they were sincerely trying to be open to it (because it's a recent addition to Ken Wilber's cosmology—see *Integral Spirituality*, 2006, for more).

2 *Ozymandias*, composed by Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1818. As noted in *Wikipedia*, "The central theme of *Ozymandias* is mankind's hubris. In fourteen short lines, Shelley condenses the history of not only *Ozymandias*' rise, peak, and fall, but also that of an entire civilization. Without directly stating it, Shelley shows that all works of humankind—including power structures and governments—eventually must pass into history, no matter how permanent they may seem at the apex of their influence. *Ozymandias*' short-sighted pride seems amusing at first—until the reader realizes that the lessons conveyed are equally applicable today. All things must pass.

3 In his chapter entitled, "Breaking the Tyranny of the Ego," an interview from 1971, (in *Interviews with Oscar Ichazo*, 1982), Oscar Ichazo also talks about the qualities that each type values, but refers to them as *traps*, with the idea that these preferences arise from the ego and "trap" the attention of an individual, so that he is distracted from focusing on what really matters. But many the descriptors he lists for the nine traps (e.g., justice for Type 8, authenticity for Type 4, or perfection for Type 1) don't look like distractions to me—they look like legitimate and reasonable ethical values, given the nature of the type in question. I would agree that these values can certainly become a problem if they are embraced without discrimination or restraint, but then this is true of all virtues—they become vices when practiced in excess. (I should also note here that Ichazo has a very curious passage in another book about the "traps": "We must also be aware of nine 'ways of self-realization' that we call the 'traps', which really take us to a way. Each door has a trap and each trap leads to a way of self-realization," p. 108, *Between Metaphysics and Protoanalysis*, 1982. Doesn't this sound like exactly the opposite of what he said about the traps in the 1971 interview?)