

The Transformational Process

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Who are you?

At the beginning of our transformational work, it is easy to feel frustrated and overwhelmed. It is also easy to begin to see the personality as an enemy that must be defeated since it is, after all, the repository and residue of so much "baggage" from our past, with all of its hurts, damage, and disappointments. When we are tempted to think this way, it is good to realize that the personality is not separate from us - in fact, it is an important and legitimate part of ourselves: the problem is simply that we mistake the part for the whole. Personality depends on our identifying with certain states, feelings, thoughts, and reactions even though whenever we do so, we experience ourselves as less than the totality of who and what we really are.

The spirituality of the Enneagram does not divide us into good (Essence) and bad (personality), but simply recognizes that when we are identified with our personalities, we forget that there is much more to us. The personality has the function of closing us down so that we can feel more defended against a threatening and uncertain world. At one time in our lives, in childhood, this response was adaptive and necessary. We had to identify with whatever qualities we found in ourselves in order to defend ourselves more efficiently and to find our place in the world.

But if we were able to stop identifying with our personality right now, who would we be? What would guide our actions? Who or what would be speaking in us? If, all of a sudden, the "autopilot" that directs many of our actions is no longer in charge, how would we be able to live?

There are no predetermined answers to these questions since we are not talking about finding a better formula or more rules to live by. We are talking about transformation - changing our state of Being - which requires being aware in the present moment. This inevitably leads to learning how to interfere with our habitual patterns, which in turn entails some degree of discomfort. But if we are willing to allow this discomfort, we can suddenly emerge from the tangle of reactions, plans, self-images, and tensions that constitute our regular life and realize that we are here. We exist. We are real. When we experience this recognition, it is like walking out of a fog bank.

Of course, learning to be more present is an art and takes practice - in fact, that's what spiritual practices are about. They help us cultivate awareness so that we can become more present to our lives and the miracles which are unfolding around us at every moment. Because the personality operates "in the dark: and depends on tension and identification, when we become present, it cannot operate in its usual automatic way and the deeper qualities of our heart, mind, and body - our Essential nature - manifest themselves. In this state, we see reality more clearly, and when we are in touch with reality, truth governs. In the land of truth, there are no contradictions, no conflicts, no hindrances, and no fears. But first, we must learn to be present.

The personality is always composed of a small fraction of the total range of our potentials. It contains imitations of the real, more expansive qualities of our Essential nature which include joy, love, peace, compassion, strength, understanding, and many other priceless qualities. Moreover, our Essence awakens us to the beauty all around us - to the gifts of nature and the miracle of other people. In every moment, there are treasures and sources of delight, if we could only open to them. In the world of personality, we are too filled with our own projects and preoccupations, worries and hopes to notice the exquisite pleasure of being alive and the astounding variety of life.

But as we expand more fully into our Essential nature, our senses are awakened - seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, intuiting. The world is more immediate and has a deeper impact on us; everything becomes more vivid and alive. We have all had moments in which a veil seems to have been removed so that the enchantment of even the smallest things touches us deeply. We experience the world once again with the innocence of a child, with all of the awe and mystery of life restored.

When we are functioning in personality, however, to varying degrees, our attention is caught up in imagination and is looking to the future or toward the past. Personality is always in some kind of reaction to the present moment. When we are functioning in Essence, we are grounded, present, and receptive to the moment. We see precisely what is necessary, and with exquisite economy, we are able to do it without unnecessary effort or resistance. We are capable, substantial, and real.

Further, because it is not what is real in us, but merely a construct in our minds, personality does not have any authority or power in itself. When we are lost in personality, it is not surprising that we often feel powerless, confused, and unsafe because we are basing our identity on an artificial construct. (If we are identified with something that is not real, then many things are going to be extremely threatening. Our entire identity structure has been built up in our memory and imagination, whereas our true power and authority comes from our Essence, from our contact with the Divine. And yet, ironically, we fear and resist opening to that which is most real in us. When we trust in the process and give ourselves over to it, however, our authentic self comes forth. The result is real integrity, love, authenticity, creativity, understanding,

guidance, joy, power, and serenity - all of the qualities we are forever demanding that personality supply.

The part of this process that is so difficult to understand is that we do not have to do anything to experience our true nature. The almost magical part is that our old personality patterns change without effort on our part in proportion to the depth of awareness that we bring to them. All we need to do is to stop identifying with the agendas of our personality. The effort is in waking up and letting go. The rest will take care of itself.

Thus, no matter how entranced in our personality we are, the amazing thing about Inner Work is that things begin to change rapidly as we bring awareness to the compulsive aspects of our personalities. The more we allow ourselves to feel the pain of our self-abandonment, the Essential qualities that we have been longing for begin to arise in us. The unfinished business of childhood begins to resolve itself in our psyches and our hearts begin to heal. When this happens, the ego matures and becomes a suitable "vessel" for further transformation. But until some degree of personality completion has taken place regarding the losses and vicissitudes of childhood, any spiritual attainment we have will be either fleeting or illusory.

Of course, the very fact of being receptive to spirituality can vastly accelerate the process of healing the deficits in our early development, provided we not use spirituality as an evasion for going through the whole healing process. And, by the same token, using the tools of psychology to heal the gaps in our development gives us the capacity to sustain spiritual states of consciousness. These two processes - the psychological and the spiritual - are therefore connected and need not be considered separate things; they are really stages in the full development of the complete human being.

From this perspective, saying that one is interested in spirituality but not psychology (or vice versa) is like saying that you want to learn to be a writer but are not interested in spelling or grammar, or that you want to be a doctor but do not care about biology. Psychology that does not address peoples' spiritual hungers is not going to lead to any complete and satisfying result. It is like climbing only half way up a mountain, or taking a dish out of the oven when it is only half-baked. We still get some benefits, but do not achieve the final goal. Psychology without spirituality is arid and ultimately meaningless, while spirituality without grounding in psychological work leads to vanity and illusions. Either way, disappointment and deception result. To be most effective, spirituality and psychology need to go hand in hand to reinforce the best in each other.

Another challenge is the common belief that to live in Essence is to have left personality entirely behind. This is not the case since both personality and essence are integral parts of each other, two sides of the same coin - the whole self.

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As one becomes liberated from the negative aspects of personality, Essence becomes developed. Or, more aptly, the balance between Essence and personality shifts from personality to Essence until more of the self is living out of its Essence (that is, authentically, from the depths of its being). The personality remains ready to be employed as a useful and necessary tool, but only as an extension and expression of the deeper, essential self - a self that, because it is an expression of Essence, remains unfathomable to the ego mind. Without some degree of personality to express the self in ordinary daily life, we could not communicate with each other and, ultimately, our Essence would be unrecognized and remain undeveloped.

The full development and expression of the true self is what we seek, and this cannot be done in a vacuum. Because we cannot live without form, our human Essence must express itself through the forms of our personality type, just as talents must be expressed in action if talent is to be developed. A dancing master does not become so perfect a dancer that the master no longer dances. Dancing is not forsworn as evidence of having achieved perfection: on the contrary, mastery is expressed by losing the self in the dance.

If we are fortunate, we are nurtured and guided in our development toward a stable, well-integrated ego, one that is therefore "ripe" for transformation. The idea is not to return to the infantile state, but to mature as adults so that we can move ahead with the process of transformation. In the famous phrase of Jack Engler, "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody," and we must develop a whole, well-integrated personality before we can really "give it up" in the transformational process. The healthy, well-functioning human ego plays a crucial role in the process of self-realization, and so our developmental deficiencies must be healed if our transformative experiences are to have any lasting effect.

Thus, personality is as necessary to the development of the soul as Essence, and it is to be used for living in the world and for contributing to it. Once we have begun to integrate and to live in Essence more habitually, we become the master of our ego and are increasingly able to express ourselves freely and appropriately. Ego no longer controls us: Essence speaks through personality.

Our Essence is always available because at our deepest level, it is what we are. The Enneagram reminds us again and again, that if we are on a spiritual path, we must begin to question our basic assumptions about ourselves and our identity. As awareness grows, we will open up to an expanded sense of self that includes more than the preoccupations of our personality; indeed, more than the personality can even imagine.

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I'm totally blown away, that you took the time to write, and acquire, (most don't even bother, they just want money). First let me say you guys have really been real good to me, and I can't say enough about you and your awesome service.

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