

# Enneagram Centers

OF



AND

## *Human Evolution*

Nathan Bettger

I have used the Enneagram extensively in my practice of spiritual direction, as a means of understanding ourselves and our relationships, along with how we might mature and find more balance in our personal spiritual and psychological lives. It is becoming more and more important, though, that we not stop at the individual process and understanding, as this is a significant pitfall in our increasingly individualistic modern world. Rather, we must challenge ourselves to reflect culturally, historically, and evolutionarily—something that will make more sense as we get further along here. I will largely avoid discussing the individual numbers and will focus on the three centers of knowing into which the Enneagram is divided. These have been extremely helpful to women and men I meet with in understanding themselves as whole and balanced people, and also in understanding the journey they have been on religiously and spiritually.

The Enneagram is often divided into three centers of knowing and each number interacts with its center in different ways. The 8, 9, 1 triad is what we would call the Gut (or Body) center. The 2, 3, 4 triad is the Heart center. And the 5, 6, 7 triad is the Head center. As I often speak of this, the Head center affirms that we know something because we can defend, explain, reason, and justify our understanding through linear thinking. This essay is largely written from a head-centered focus (for reasons that will make sense shortly.) The Heart center affirms that we know something because we feel it to be so. Our emotions, our sense of relationship to others based on their needs for connection, and our personal feelings are the “evidence” for our understanding. Finally, the Body

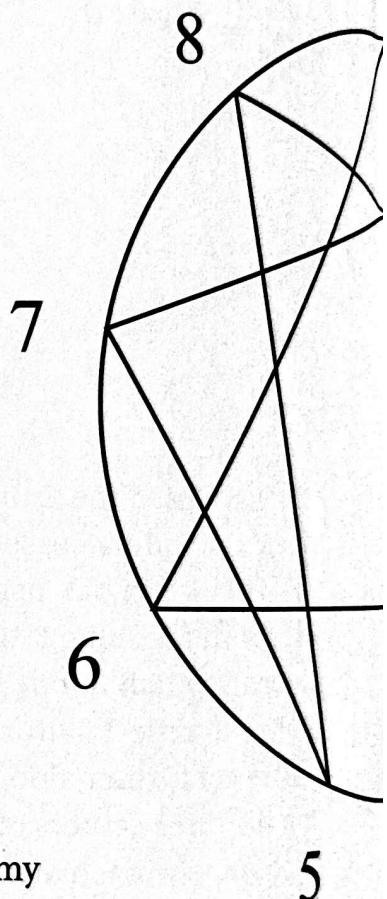
or Gut center affirms our intuition, our instinct, and sense of understanding that supersedes an ego identification of Self. Here, an individual might say "I know because I know."

In our current culture and worldview, specific centers of knowing are prioritized over others. Having grown up in modern evangelical Christianity, I came to learn that the most important thing for me in explaining my beliefs was that I could defend them with specific biblical references and/or historical and theological evidence. If I couldn't lay out a specific scriptural defense, the belief wasn't valid. The same goes for modern psychology, which has largely affirmed that when our thinking is aligned, when we can get the right information, change will happen. The modern age has been literally formed by Descartes' axiom, "I think therefore I am." Most of the shifts and movements in philosophy, economy, government, and religion have occurred because of changes in beliefs and theories.

The other centers of knowing largely play second fiddle to the Head. Approaching a "thinker" with a "truth" coming out of feelings or emotions leads to an uphill and very frustrating battle usually resulting in feelings of being unheard, shut down, and confused. This jump between the head and the heart is, in the Enneagram, the largest gap—between numbers 4 and 5. This is why so much emphasis gets put on the necessary bridge from one's head to one's heart. It often gets posited as something men need to be challenged in, but it is not, in many ways, a gender distinction. (We could discuss at length how the left side of the enneagram is more masculine and the right side more feminine; also, how our cultural history largely being directed by men in power has led to the fixation on "head knowing.")

Ironically, the body center often gets left out of the equation completely when it comes to how we know. Imagine how it would be received if I were to step forward and proclaim: "We must trust this truth. I know it simply because I know it. I can't defend it logically and in many ways it doesn't even align with how I feel about life itself. I just know." Such a statement would be suspect, more so even than if I were to speak from my heart. To instinctively know something, to sense its truth because of my connection with nature and the universe around me and within me, is not "good enough" in today's world. It feels idealistic, naive, or fantastical. I would say, though, that when someone is well centered in their body-knowing, they are often perceived as grounded, steady, and even an "old soul."

This sensibility of agedness is what caught my attention and opened the door to truths about human evolution and spiritual and conscious maturity. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Rudolph Steiner and the ideas he laid out in his lectures on the macrocosm and microcosm, particularly Lecture 10, given on March 30, 1910. This can be found in the book, *Macrocosm and Microcosm*. In



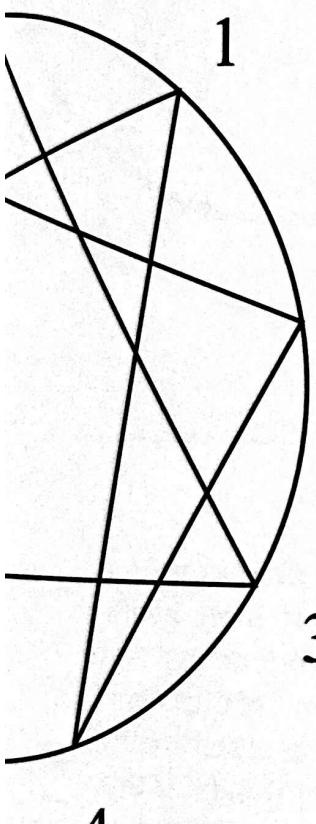
these lectures, Steiner speaks to the evolution of the “conscious heart-human” and the need to restore knowledge coming from the heart (our earlier way of knowing) after our current emphasis on head knowledge.

Steiner spoke to the early stages of human evolution as coming from connection with the world around them—a place of heart-knowledge, understanding through feeling. Only in modern times, he said, do we have the emphasis on our reason and intellect. He noted that as we move forward in our spiritual evolution we must return to our somewhat lost heart-understanding; not leaving the head out of it, but *including* our intellect as part of the process. This aligns with

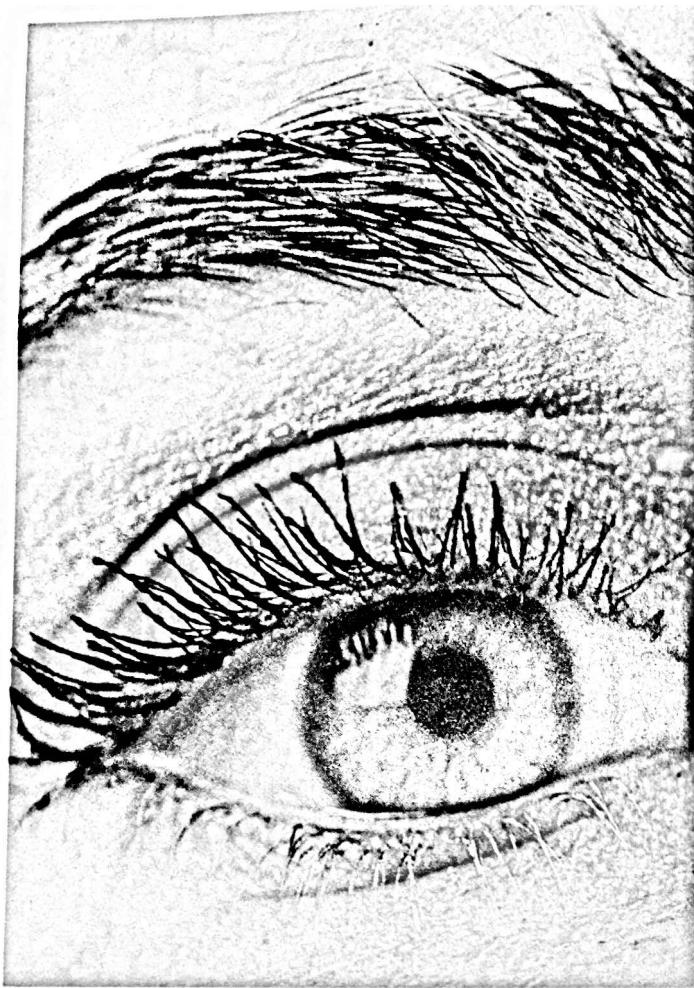
Ken Wilber’s teachings on “transcending and including” as we move to deep levels of consciousness. Steiner says that attributing the same value to head and heart knowing is like standing a 15-year-old person (head knowing) next to a 40-year-old person (heart-knowing) and saying that their insight is the same. Steiner invites his audience to wonder if the 15-year-old is a child of the older, how they might be related, or how the older has influenced the younger.

I am immediately drawn to the absence of intuitive and instinctual knowing (body center) in this head and heart interchange. The absence is ironic, but it is unsurprising considering how far humanity is from body-knowing. Thinking about human evolution, most would surely say that the reason and intellect are our uppermost stage of growth.

At the risk of oversimplifying, it seems that before landing in our intellect, humankind existed primarily through connecting in communities and in relationships with each other and nature. And before this, we operated out of an instinct and intuition that preceded even our emotions. This is perhaps why this way of intuitive knowing is so suspect: because it is so old and so far removed from our current reality. We could add to Steiner’s lineup with the 15-year-old and 40-year-old, someone who is 80 years old. Each has validity in their own right, but how true is it that the teenager would consider the elder almost entirely irrelevant?



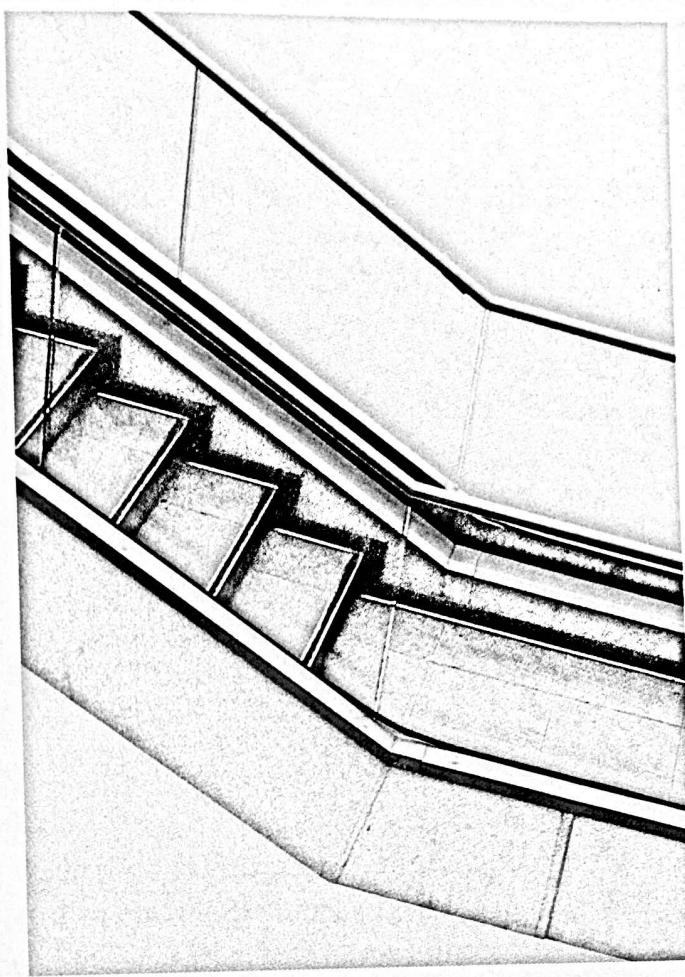
Humankind has, in a way, circled around the wheel of the enneagram unconsciously, to land in the realm of the mind—a place where many are stuck as they firmly hold to their *belief* that this is “arrival,” or the ultimate stage for humankind. I say unconsciously because, even as we have evolved, we humans *still* have the small mind that largely cannot see the oldness of the world we live in. It is impossible for us to fathom what has happened in the millions of years that humans have been walking on our planet. Many still refuse to consider this, assuming that we are at the pinnacle of nature largely because of what we believe about ourselves. But what if there is indeed more?!? What if, as Steiner taught, the evolution of humanity necessitates our reincorporation of those lost centers of knowing, the heart first and then the body?



This process doesn't discount the individuals who gravitate towards one center of knowing more than others, or those who have integrated all three. Rather, when we are observing human and cultural evolution over thousands of years, it seems there are "themes" that humanity has moved through as a collective, currently residing in the realm of head knowing. The process of incorporating other centers of knowing and experiencing the world will likely move much more slowly as a collective species than it can within individuals.

As a very current example of what this transition might look like, we need look no further than reflections that have arisen in response to the previous Pope Benedict's recent death.

I have heard on more than one occasion a reporter reflecting on the last three popes' "centers of knowing." One reporter noted that Pope John Paul II held the "soul" of Christianity, focusing greatly in the areas of spirituality and contemplation. We might wonder if this is an aspect of the "mind" as much of our spirituality gets generated by our beliefs about life and faith. Many others have noted that Pope Benedict unarguably held the "mind" of Christianity, in his focus on clarifying the teachings of Catholicism, his emphasis on the formalities, his theological and scriptural writings, and even his attraction to the *image* of Catholic authority. Finally, Pope Francis has held to the "heart" of Christianity as he urg-



es and insists on our opening of our hearts to the plight of the poor, the devastation of our Earth home, and the need for inclusion of “the least of these.” Perhaps, we might follow the example of the last three popes and “resign” our overemphasis on the mind, opening our hearts to the grief and even horror of the state of our planet. This is our next evolution, and the planet we share offers a way in. I think that before moving to knowing with our bodies or our instincts—perhaps something we cannot even fathom at this state in our evolution—we have to move to knowing with our hearts.

This does not mean leaving behind our reasoning. Our evolution to this point has been outside of our understanding or ability to rea-

son, but now that we have landed in the place of reason, we must bring it along. So, evolution from this point forward must involve intentionally developing a vigorous and pliable consciousness that can re-engage the heart and the intuition. This takes work and it takes a reevaluation of our beliefs and our ideas about reality. This is very likely the reason individuals and societies are so resistant to moving into it. There is too much discomfort in recognizing the subjectivity of their reason and intellect.

Considering this transformation mystically and in stages, we can see that in our modern world of head-centered consciousness, we largely engage as individuals. *I am this; you are that. I believe this; you believe that. Salvation is for my individual*

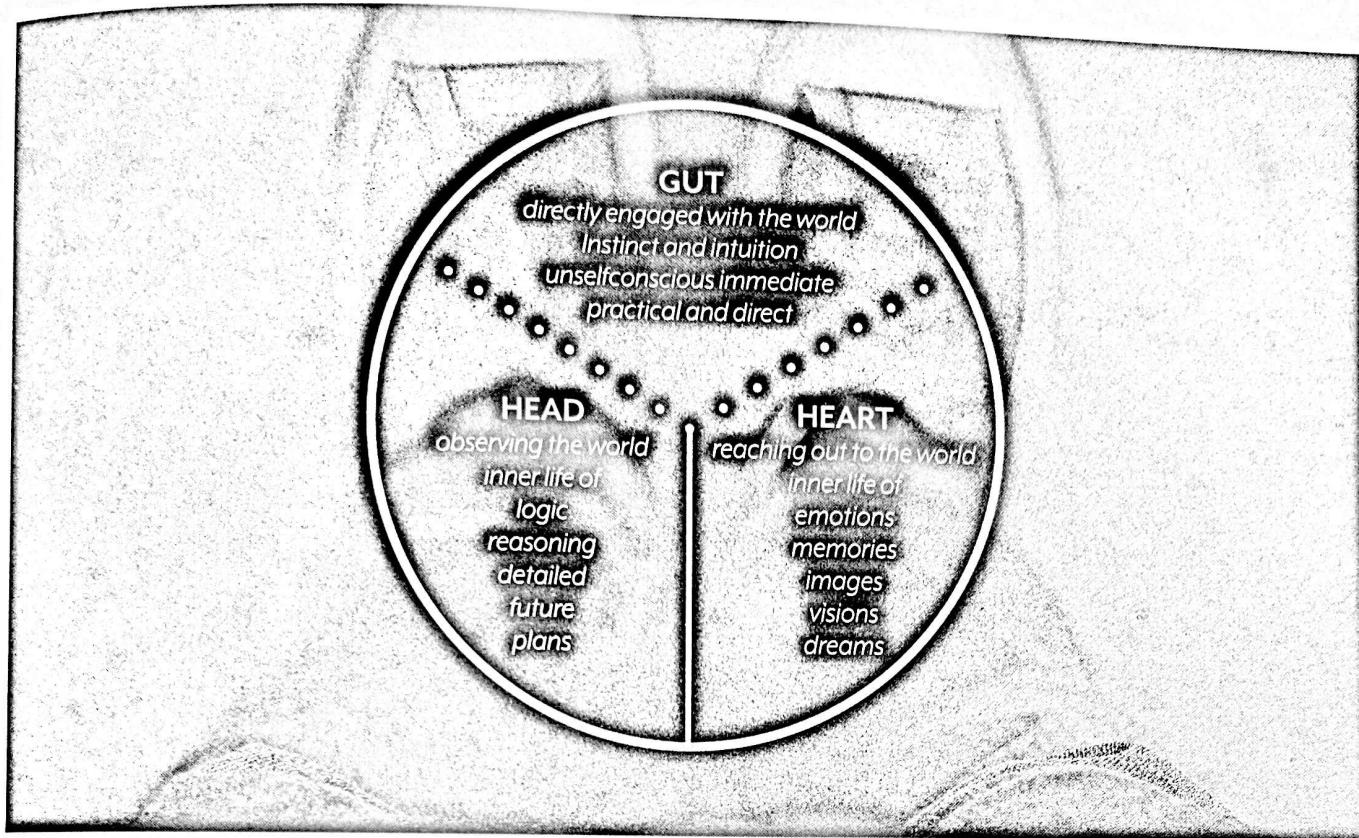
*soul through my personal relationship with Jesus. I can justify this action because I believe this thing. Someone else's beliefs are theirs so they can do what they want to do.* All of it is largely individualistic (personally, nationally, religiously, etc.) As we step into the heart center, it becomes less about "me" and "you" or "us" and "them," and more about the collective we: *How do my actions affect those around me?* It becomes more of how we see ourselves as a common humanity. The focus is perhaps still too focused on humanity versus the world, but incorporating our relationship with the rest of nature is part of it and moving close to the next stage.

When we begin to move into a reincorporation of our body or gut center, this is no longer about just "us." We begin seeing the world as interconnected, as all. *I am the food that I eat. I am not just making my own decisions; the world around me, the authors, teachers, ancestors, birds I saw—these are all influencing how and what I am doing in every moment.* Also: *the things that I do have far-reaching impact into realms and time that I cannot even comprehend.* This is the movement from the microcosm to the macrocosm. When we live from the body center in later evolution versus earlier evolution, we have brought our consciousness with us in the experience.

As I have noted, it is very hard for individuals to move through the uncomfortable places beyond reliance on reason—the head center of knowing. There are countless models for human development and spiritual growth, and most describe a period of questioning that *has to be moved through*. Many organizations, including churches, while they might encourage questions, usually answer

the questions with previously established doctrine. If an individual or group can't move through the questioning to the mysteries beyond, they revert to previous ways of thinking. Fr. Richard Rohr often says that we only move beyond our current way of thinking through "great love or great suffering." I would affirm this and note that it is only through a head-on collision with reality, which is essentially beyond our control, that we come to see that our beliefs about this reality don't change it. We are then invited to trust something more than ourselves and come to grips with our need to control. This is what I had hoped the global pandemic would do for our humanity. As we saw so clearly, people's beliefs superseded the reality of what was happening on a global scale. Many died because of their out-of-sync beliefs. Transformation of human consciousness on a large scale likely will require something even more extreme and undeniable. As some have said, this may come through the looming climate crisis. Many will make the leap to deeper levels of awareness and connection, and sadly, many will die with their beliefs and ideas intact.

The Enneagram helps us understand which centers of knowing are easier or harder for us. Not everyone is going to be convinced through experiencing things in their body. Not everyone is going to be moved by tugging on their heart strings. Since our culture is largely head centered, I have attempted to lay this out in a reasonable and linear format. Many of those prioritizing reason have to be *convinced reasonably*; where convincing no longer works,



only the ice plunge shock of reality may be effective. As leaders, guides, and companions, we must continue to develop and grow in all areas of knowing so we can meet any and *all* persons where they are and walk with them into deeper levels of evolution. This is indeed a lifelong process.

Spiritual direction and companioning entails walking with others through these difficult and challenging awarenesses as they come. Sometimes this will feel exceedingly disorienting and strange, as though they were a saltwater fish growing up being told fresh water was the only thing to swim in. We walk alongside others as they find their homes in the waters they were meant to swim in, but there can be a transition where they may feel very much like fish out of water. Finding that new home, however, can be liberating and as spiritual companions we can celebrate this growth and evolution in those we accompany. How important, though, to have gone through this journey and this awakening ourselves! We can only lead others where we have gone.

The other opportunity for spiritual companions is to help those we support to see how their individual journeys fit in the larger story of humanity and culture and the planet. As noted above, we must move beyond the realm of the individual into that of the collective. The heart and the body lead us there, and finding ways of encouraging our companions to recognize the holy in their heart and body awareness is a significant part of moving into further levels of evolution. Many of those we companion will feel that understanding the holy through our heads is the only way. It is essentially the “water” we have been swimming in for centuries. When our eyes are opened to the collective and cultural emphasis, we are able to envision a way beyond. \*