

The Redemption of Point Eight

Footsteps on the Path to the Pearl Beyond Price

I have lived most of my life under the delusion of point eight.

I would like to share some of my experience and journey toward becoming a human being. I want to talk about the enneagram – how it's been useful and how I see it being used to perpetuate the incarceration of the soul. I want to address compassion, humanness & vulnerability, integrity, and the Pearl Beyond Price (personal essence).

I was raised in a military family, the son of an officer. What comes to mind in this moment is not the discipline, which was firm, but the chain-of-command. Dad was in charge and mom second in command. We four kids, as is usual, developed our own pecking order.

My life, up until the last ten years, seems to have been a rebellion against the chain-of-command. Although my prior adult existence was also one of “might makes right”, I could not stand running up against this elsewhere in the world. Earn my trust; respect and cooperation don't – demand it!

It would take volumes to articulate all that I know (or don't know) about me: the issues, the history, and the dynamics of living in this trap; this fixation; this survival strategy of point eight. Let me offer you one image that came to me years ago and speaks to something central in this defensive constellation:

The world is an anvil and life is a hammer
Between them I exist
And I will survive

I knew little to nothing about what it meant to be a real human being. How could I? My defensive structures were formidable. One of them was an absolute assertion into the world of: “I know what's right for me.” In retrospect, it's obvious the truth was more of: “I know what I need to do to stay imprisoned within all my pain and suffering.” In short, how to continue being “me”.

Life is quite wonderful, isn't it? A mystery of grace and beauty and quite often confused astonishment.

My introduction to the enneagram did not come from a background, or even an interest, in psychology. I arrived via a crack in the cosmic egg called mysticism. One of the lessons that is blatantly clear in my life is that the ego can co-opt spiritual experiences using them for its means and incorporating them into its defensive strategies. The enneagram revealed this to me, as I will explain later, but first some more history.

At nineteen, I had my first spiritual experience: *A thick substance descends into my body. As it enters the top of my head, my whole body starts to tingle and the hairs go up on the back of my neck. It reaches my neck and shoulders. It is warm and a sense of “welcome home” suffuses me. It enters my chest and I experience a single point of exquisite pain, like a needle being stuck into the heart. Something awakens in me and begins a search for itself.*

My whole world turned upside down. I joined a spiritual path and spent the next fifteen years, or so, traveling to other dimensions and realities – mind blowing, earth shattering, light and sound of God.

At thirty-six, my life was a mess. I was having spiritual experiences others would die for, but my marriage was a wreck; my relationships with my children were really sad affairs; and me – well, I think the ten thousandth person had just informed me that I was an asshole.

I was cutting a rose when I realized that I was the greatest problem in my life. The “me” in my life was not changing in spite of all the experience it was having. That day, in that moment, something cracked in me. I realized that I wanted to be a real human being. I left the path to God Realization and went looking for a path to humanness.

Friends

*before you is a madman
listen, not to his words
they are lies
and he, a greater lie*

*how arrogant his quest
these many many years
thinking to find himself
and something greater
far beyond
thoughts and wild imaginings
he thought it brave and bold
to laugh at death
and pain and sorrow
the human condition
while chasing elusiveness
he strayed
to far beyond*

*listen, not to his words
they are lies
and he, a greater lie
before you
is a madman*

*friends
it was he who demanded
and gave permission
to be fooled
he thought to find himself
and something greater
he said “anything - anything
take me beyond
all beyond”
it was he who hung himself
his madness his creation
how was he to know
that beyond light’s blush*

*and the moaning wind
lay the slayer of all sanity
while chasing elusiveness
he strayed
too far beyond
where stillness and silence
steal you from yourself
and being no where
and no thing
that Presence
soft as finest down
faint as a still breeze
touches one
so very very gently
in a place
so very very hidden
all hope of sanity dies
this touch remembers
recognizes
awakens to itself
listen, not to his words
they are lies
and he, a greater lie
before you
is a madman*

*friends
returning to this world
of idiots and imbeciles
they say, "relax, you're too intense
surrender, God's will be done"
is insanity
how, can one surrender
when one is not
who, can scratch an itch
that is not
where can one prepare for
what is not
can any formula mandate grace*

*friends
I am a madman
living in insanity
where the only road back
is to expose all the lies
and I
is the greatest lie of all
listen, not to these words
they
are all
lies*

What good is spiritual experience if it does not transform us? Transformation is a caterpillar becoming a butterfly not a leopard changing its spots. Much of the “spiritual work” out there wants to help you acquire a more spiritual look while “you” remain “you”. Much of the enneagram work is oriented similarly. And, why not? It lends itself to the ego working on itself – trying to become better, more evolved, more appealing spots.

Ah Life!

My wife divorces me, takes the kids and moves out of state, and some local authorities think that a spiritual guy like me should be locked up. Three intrapsychic nuclear explosions bring my defenses down and I get reconnected to my feelings. I go on a roller-coaster ride I could never imagine – highs and lows of pain and anguish. It’s unimaginable to me that people live lives in touch with this. No wonder, I don’t understand people. It amazes me that I live through it. I pray that life will keep those walls down.

One night, shortly thereafter, I am on the floor living my worst nightmare. I’m a fetal, blubbering ball of protoplasm. My personal anguish is so great I can’t even attack myself for being in this state of total weakness.

An “inner guide” I had been working with for years appears. In his hand, a gray lifeless terracotta object. “Such is the human heart,” he says. More bad news, I recognize it as mine. His hand crushes it. The walls are old and brittle. They crumble to pieces revealing ashes within. “These are the experiences you have consumed in the service of your needs, fears and deficiencies,” he says. The news just keeps getting better. He blows the ashes away and a single spark is revealed. It’s like a piece of glitter. Hope springs forth in me. “Careful,” my mind cries out. He puts it in my right palm. It tingles – a delicate aliveness. His parting words, “Your job is to allow this to consume you.”

For two months, I try every meditation and spiritual technique I can think of to turn this spark into a flame. I’m powerless – helpless – the situation is hopeless. I pray to life for assistance. (Do you notice, that I don’t pray to God? Too much of an authority figure for me.) The nightmares come – lucid awareness – they last for weeks.

I’m in a room that shrinks or bound in chains that confine and smother me. All my frantic efforts increase the gravity of the situation. I finally realize that my efforts are tied to my sense of identity; to a position I am taking as part of myself. I relax and give up my position – I shrink in size. The room gets larger, the chains slip away, and the spark grows larger. I conclude that when I disappear, delicate aliveness will have consumed me.

Now I have to discover how to disappear.

The enneagram (I was not aware of it yet) can help us to disappear. It can help us to discover and articulate some of our positions, parts of our identity – the walls that confine, the chains that bind.

Most of the energy we expend in our great efforts to get ahead, deal with problems, and get through the day – is nothing – compared to the energy the ego is using to maintain its defenses and identity. What’s amazing is that this huge drain of energy is happening all the time at an unconscious level because it’s part of who we think we are.

Several years have now passed. I have reacquainted myself with Sufism because of the emphasis on the heart and their knowledge of “spiritual psychology”. I am reading Rumi to support the transformation of my heart. “Through strange coincidence”, I have come across the works of A.H. Almaas and am working with the Diamond Approach – learning how to disappear.

Two significant allies enter my life: compassion and the enneagram.

Compassion

Compassion has been the greatest agent of change in my life. The Diamond Approach’s understanding of compassion as an essential quality of the soul and the psychodynamic issues associated with the “loss” of it allows me to work my way into a state of “radical allowing”. In this place, I am open to forces outside of myself (meaning outside of the ego’s defenses and outside of my identity) working upon me; challenging my sense of identity.

The ego’s understanding of compassion is used to maintain the false. Like everything else it co-opts, it uses it to cover up the holes of deficiency inherent in itself or it moves away from them and walls them off. I should probably point out that the ego’s relationship to the soul is that the soul is constricted within the form created by ego defenses. This is considered a negative situation when viewed from the perspective of the essence of the soul, as it inhibits the dynamism of the soul. The soul becomes stuck in habituated, conditioned patterns. It is these patterns that the enneagram helps us to see.

From another perspective, that of physical development and survival, these patterns can be seen as mostly positive adaptive survival patterns used by an organism whose mental, emotional, physical, and neurological capacities require years to reach a state of optimal functioning. In other words, we do the best we can with what we have and this creates conditions that need to be readdressed after we reach maturation, i.e., if we desire to know what it is we truly are and function from that place.

Thus, the ego and its identity are actually created out of the soul substance by a reactive conditioned structure of tension and images within the mind, body and soul. Again, the enneagram helps to reveal some of these structures and the survival strategies underlying them.

The ego’s take on compassion is that the best way to handle emotional/mental pain and suffering is to be rid of it – move on to other things, forget about what is going on, find something better, suppress it, repress it, forget it, have a beer! One way it accomplishes this is by contracting around the distress and walling it off from consciousness. The ego is always trying to come up with a better strategy. Notice the mind’s obsession with refining your experience in life.

Real compassion, the essential quality of the soul, is a capacity that allows us to tolerate, to hold the pain and suffering so that other resources of our True Nature can arise and engage the situation with what is really needed for us to grow (human) or unfold (soul).

One of the effects of compassion in the life of an eight is the movement of eight toward point two. While this sounds like a good thing, it is initially a journey into a morass of unconscious material that the eight has been avoiding for a lifetime. Issues of neediness, dependence, vulnerability, weakness, confusion and fear, among others start to arise.

The capacity to look deep into one's life and structure requires other resources of the soul: clarity, will, strength, and a love for the truth. It's not a pretty sight for anyone including point eight whose blunt ways have left many bruised and battered including himself.

COMPASSION

*My heart was sad, it cried and cried
an ocean of tears that never dried
They never dried*

*Everyone said,
"Look inside, the healing lies deep inside"
So I looked and looked, and I pried and pried
and when the answers came, I couldn't hide
Nowhere to run, I couldn't hide
The truth and the pain lay side by side
and lit up the places I used to hide
Nowhere to run, I couldn't hide
And those I had tried and all that I tried
exposed the cancer we call pride
It seduces the soul and wounds the heart
and in all of our anguish plays a part
And my heart was sad, it cried and cried
an ocean of tears that never dried
They never dried*

*The root of life seemed to be pain
that sent me rocking again and again
And the sum of my life wasn't fit for the drain
In seeing it all the tears fell like rain
Yes tears thick as rain
When the wail of my soul, I could not restrain
it tore from my throat in a hellish refrain
that left behind all I knew to be sane
My inner being, a wounded child
was constantly flayed and driven wild
As an adult, I was always beguiled
and never admitted this hidden child
Innocent child, always reviled
And my heart was sad, it cried and cried
an ocean of tears that never dried
They never dried*

*Into the heart of this rabid place
moved the beauty of exquisite grace
In compassionate green she was lovingly styled
and when she looked at me, mercy smiled
And the hand of God, the mother's arm
gathered me in from further harm
To sacred ground, removed from harm
as the mystery worked its wondrous charm
and quieted down my demented alarm*

*Until all I beheld was bathed in green
and I found myself amazingly clean
And my heart was glad, it cried and cried
an ocean of tears that never dried
They've never dried
JH*

How I discovered my type

Friends in my Diamond Approach group introduced me to the enneagram. A couple of them were teaching local classes on it. Helen Palmer's book was recommended as a good place to start. (Did I mention that at this time in my life I was married to an eight police officer? What can I say? I love trouble!)

In reading Helen's book and then Don Riso's, I quickly narrowed my possible type down to one, three, five, seven, or eight. I went round and round for weeks trying to figure it out. Remember, I was already aware that "I" was the biggest problem in my life, so I was not expecting any good news. Each fixation is a trap and perpetuates the separation of the soul from True Nature – this is the fundamental wound to the soul.

I gave up trying to figure out my type by looking at aspects or qualities of the characters and started paying more attention to the dynamic movements each type manifests under stress. AND there it was as clear as day – 80% of my life seemed to be staring me in the face. Eight goes to five under stress. If I had a nickel for every time I withdrew deep into my mind, cutting off all affect, and trying to figure things out – well, I could drink Starbucks forever.

This secondary line of defense for point eight manifests as a schizoid withdrawal to point five. In this revelation it soon became very clear to me that my previous spiritual path was operating as a schizoid defense and that my spiritual experience had been subsumed into the ego for its continued existence.

What better way to avoid the mess of being human and being inept at human interaction than to make one's home in the cosmos or universal dimensions. No sticky or messy emotions here. Having spiritual experiences is a great support for grandiosity, arrogance and narcissism. A steady supply can keep the ego satisfied for a very long time. In my case for about fifteen years.

Thank God for the gift of the human heart and the deep longing of the soul for True Nature.

Integrity

I have been fascinated with this word for years.

in•te•ger: Etymology: Latin, adjective, whole, entire

1 : any of the natural numbers, the negatives of these numbers, or zero

2 : a complete entity

in•teg•ri•ty

1 : firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values : **INCORRUPTIBILITY**

2 : an unimpaired condition : SOUNDNESS

3 : the quality or state of being complete or undivided : COMPLETENESS

in•te•grate: 1 : to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole : Unite

Most of the books on the enneagram at some point address the fact that “everyone has all nine points within them” and we’re just stuck or predisposed, through habit, to one in particular. The soul freed from the constraints and influence of ego and grounded in True Nature, does not operate within the dynamics of the enneagram of personality types.

What I have noticed in my own experience is that I have more freedom and less reactivity in my dominant tripoint dynamic (2 – 8 – 5). My movement is much less defensive now. Not that I am completely free of reactivity and issues, but my capacity to stay “present” and conscious in the reactivity and to investigate it and the underlying issues and their dynamics has increased.

One of the downsides of the enneagram is that people do get “typed” and this becomes yet another constraint upon the soul. The reality is that you and I are part of a Mystery that the mind cannot grok. Most of our great beliefs, intellectual understanding and “knowing” are ego defenses against the unknown and disappearing.

The import of integrity for me is the increasing capacity to know myself beyond classifications and defining traits. More meaningful is the freedom integrity affords me in resisting the temptation to “type” others.

Contrary to much of the enneagram rhetoric, the greatest trap is using it to understand others. What you see is a lie, a bunch of reactivity, not the person. I am not saying the enneagram of personality types is not useful, that it does not have its place in personal exploration, but if what you learn does not break your heart, scare you, or lead you toward helplessness and hopelessness then, it’s not helping the soul – it’s being co-opted into the service of maintaining the status quo.

There are times
When my mind
Would like to conveniently
Avoid the knowing
In my heart
These are the moments
That determine
The fate of the soul
And the world’s future
These points of choice
Often seem insignificant
But the reality
Is always life or death
The depth
Of your integrity
Is the key
To freedom
JH

Humanness & Vulnerability

One of the great conundrums that needs resolving is the conflict created between our longing to be truly human and the deep belief that being human around other humans is the most dangerous situation on earth. And who can really disagree with this wisdom? People mostly come in nine types and one condition – unconscious.

Take this point eight. My life is a history of unconscious aggression run amok in the service of higher ideals and aspirations. The sad fact is: ego by definition resists consciousness. Being stuck in a personality type or enneagram fixation means you are constantly hurting yourself and others.

The depth of this truth needs to remain unconscious in the mind because when it surfaces into consciousness, the wounding and remorse within the soul undermine ego integrity and cohesiveness. Like many others, I feel a debt of gratitude to Claudio Naranjo for conveying the truth of the situation.

*Remorse
Opens the soul
In a particular way
The soul weeps
As His Mercy showers
And cleanses her
Separation from God
Is the soul's
Deepest grief
God knows
And walks beside you
At every step
One moment of separation
Creates an ocean of tears
In the soul
God knows
And is already
Blessing those tears
With His Mercy
Before the soul
Discovers them
God knows
The sorrow of separation
All his children will weep*

JH

There is a great confusion around the soul, a widespread misunderstanding that the soul has a “real identity” that will feel familiar to me like the “me” I have always known. The soul is a medium of consciousness, a medium of experience, a substance of extreme sensitivity and resiliency. It can form or unform itself into becoming anything and everything, the particular and the universal.

There is a real self, a true self, and when the soul is married with it, who we have been and our familiar known world disappear as everything and everywhere and everywhen arise as a majestic beguiling unfathomable Mystery.

Any and all fascination with defining things within closed systems (like the enneagram) and making them known in a static way will give way to a knowing that ever continues to reveal Mystery as the depth and ground of Being.

And yes, the enneagram can help us along the way. Instead of using it to define things and make them known, use it to reveal the unknown. Every revelation will expand the unknown. Let this engage the entirety of us in every moment. Allowing our self to be completely open, totally vulnerable to the moment, experiencing the exquisite sensitivity of what we really are. This is the door to and the ground of being truly human. Here we are the circle of the enneagram, but a circle which is not bounded, circumscribed, or delineated.

*A thousand times over
My heart gives thanks
To my friends
For this wonder of wonders
The gift of humanness
At times, I ask myself
Where are thanks due?
Is it not Compassion
That opened the Heart's window?
It is so, but my friends
Are the agents of Her grace
Is it not, the Beloved's kisses
That keep the Heart wide open?
It is so, but my friends
Are Her soft and supple lips
Is it not the Absolute's great story
That is the telling of the Heart
It is so, but my friends
Are the pages in His book
A thousand times over
He has turned a phrase of thanks
In this heart
And with each turning
More and more disappears
Except these Friends
JH*

The Pearl Beyond Price

Yesterday at dawn, my Friend said,
*How long will this unconsciousness go on?
You fill yourself with the sharp pain of Love,
rather than its fulfillment.*

I said, "But I can't get to You!
You are the whole dark night,
and I am a single candle.

My life is upsidedown
because of You!"

The Friend replied, *I am your deepest being.*
Quit talking about wanting Me!

I said, "Then what is this restlessness?"

The Friend, *Does a drop*
stay still in the Ocean?
Move with the Entirety, and
with the tiniest particular.
Be the moisture in an oyster
that helps to form one pearl.

Rumi

Like This – versions by Coleman Barks

Oyster = ego shell, personality
Moisture = human vulnerability
Pearl = real human being

Comments can be sent to the author via email at: haj1155@gmail.com