

Buddhism & The Enneagram



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The Gift of Patience

Tony Schwartz (*What Really Matters*) describes each point on the Enneagram as "a defensive survival strategy that prompts a very narrow, habitual, and limited way of perceiving and responding to the world." These survival strategies lead to fixations, distorted points of view and attendant behaviors that impede progress on our spiritual path.

I see our spiritual path as a process that continually strengthens our connection with the universal and enables increasingly accurate discernment of our true purpose. The Enneagram is a powerful spiritual aid because understanding the dynamics of each style increases our ability to observe how our fixations keep us from moving forward in spite of our best intentions.

The One's passion of *anger*, for example, gives rise to *perfectionism*. Because their positive potential derives from their basic desire to be good, Ones try too hard to get things right. Open anger is relegated to their shadow except in circumstances where it feels totally justified -- then it shows up as a kind of moral tirade. Tom Condon described a Swiss train conductor who angrily lectured a passenger for wadding up money: "This is good Swiss money and look at how you treat it!" he said. The woman said, "I'm sorry, I was in a hurry." Waving his hand dismissively, the conductor said, "You should schedule your life better."

One of my clients, Frank R., brought the One's issues alive for me. According to one of his colleagues, "Frank should be commended for wanting to do the right thing. He's a big asset to the company and really wants to help, but he can be inflexible because he always thinks he's right, and that intolerance shows up no matter who he's talking to. If what they've done doesn't measure up to his standards he'll tell them, 'That's trash!'"

Of himself Frank said, "I'm not into this game of covering up things that aren't right. I've always tried to give people the benefit of the doubt, but I have a hard time when people won't do the right thing."

It's a healthy beginning to deal more effectively with criticism (of self and others), as Frank did. He learned to be more assertive (vs. aggressive), to give specific and descriptive feedback (vs. global and judgmental statements such as "That's trash!"), and to solve problems more creatively (instead of staying stuck in "either/or" thinking).

The practice of opening himself to other points of view actually helped him grow in patience. As he began to listen to subordinates explain why they hadn't met a goal, he discovered how his anger at them had been masking his own fear of not being good enough. As he became more able to embrace those elements of himself he'd kept hidden, Frank found himself feeling less and less angry, and more and more patient. He didn't lower his standards, but his employees were more highly motivated by his listening and engaging them in problem-solving than they had been by his angry criticisms.

In the end, however, our ego-traps are still engaged when we work only at the behavioral level, or even with attitudes and beliefs (e.g., "Well, I'm a 'One so I have to control my anger," or "I'm a self-forgetting Nine so I have to make sure my anger doesn't keep showing up as passive aggression").

Our spiritual path is not about control, it's about letting go. When we're able to maintain a transformational focus, the passions and fixations are diminished, while the virtues are enhanced. For those fixated on perfectionism this means instead of having to manage their anger, they become less angry and develop the gift of *patience*. How is this possible?

- As we study, reflect, discuss, seek understanding, and determine our Enneagram style, we learn how we're programmed so we can recognize our fixations when they occur.
- As we embrace whatever shows up while maintaining an attitude of openness and non-attached equanimity, our passion is evoked in ways that shake the underpinnings of our Enneagram patterns: we notice, without acting on destructive impulses.
- As we develop contemplative practices – breathing, relaxation, belly-centered meditation, and/or centering prayer – we begin to notice a centered attitude toward ongoing existence.
- As we offer appreciation when we experience ourselves without judgment, our obsolete responses simply drop away.