

## EXPLORING THE ENNEAGRAM AS A PREPARATION TOOL

### Introduction

Prior to beginning Vital, people in my life started asking me if I would hold space for them while they entered into non-ordinary states of consciousness. My initial motivation to join Vital was to better understand best practices about how to do this. While doing this work, I have seen how transformative inner work can be for people, and I wanted to honor it the best I could and allow it to grow into a more robust practice. In Vital, I have learned the importance of the “set and setting” of an inner work experience. Rather than intervening or guiding someone else’s inner work journey, one of the most important things I could do as a space holder is to create the proper container to allow the journeyer to access their own Inner Healer to gain insights into their own nature. A critical component of creating a proper mind ‘set’ is to intentionally prepare for any extraordinary inner work experience by setting a clear intention and having familiarity with one or more frameworks to help make sense of the depths of the inner world. In my own experience, I have found that the Enneagram, a dynamic typology system for mapping core human motivations, is a powerful example of such a framework. It is a tool I have used in my own inner work, and this paper explores the application of the Enneagram in preparing for inner work experiences, supported by a case study conducted with eight participants preparing for the Vital breathwork retreat that took place in Costa Rica in January 2024.

### Theoretical Framework

Stan Grof describes the Inner Healer as an innate wisdom or intelligence within each individual that guides the process of self-exploration and healing. This concept is foundational in transpersonal breathwork and other transformative practices. According to Grof, the Inner Healer operates beyond the conscious mind, orchestrating psychological and physical healing processes. It can surface in various

forms during therapeutic sessions, guiding individuals towards experiences that promote profound personal growth and healing. Recognizing and trusting the guidance of the Inner Healer is considered crucial for navigating and integrating deep inner work experiences effectively. A challenge I have found in my own inner work and in my help with others is that it can be difficult to discern at any given moment whether the conscious mind or the Inner Healer is guiding an experience. I believe the Enneagram can be useful in helping the journeyer make this distinction.

On its surface, the Enneagram is a typology system that describes nine different personality types. However, at its core, the Enneagram is a framework that describes the basic human condition where the mechanism of our personality structure can prevent us from directly experiencing our inherent nature, or Essence. Under this framework, each of us is born with a pure Essence, and the nature of that Essence is determined by our Enneagram Type at birth. As life unfolds, we begin to experience pleasure and pain, and through this life experience we start to lose touch with our underlying Essence. For example, if your underlying Essence is Unconditional Love (the Essence of Enneagram Type 2 – the “Helper”) and you experience pain that is not comforted by the external world, this creates an internal dissonance. As a result, the Type 2 personality structure learns to express love for others to alleviate this pain and feel closer to the underlying Essence of Unconditional Love. The details are different for each Enneagram Type, but we all do this starting at a young age. Our personality begins to form in an effort to help us reconnect with that Essence, but this mechanism is inherently flawed. In fact, the more the personality patterns dictate our actions, the more we identify with the personality, and the further disconnected from our Essence we become. It is my personal belief that our Essence, as described in the Enneagram framework, is the same as the Inner Healer as described by Stan Grof. So, if we can use the Enneagram to help us better understand what the nature of our underlying Essence and how the structure of our personality is the internal mechanism that is keeping us disconnected from our

Essence, then we can better make these patterns conscious and allow our Essence or Inner Healer to naturally emerge and guide us.

Although we all suffer from this same flawed strategy to reconnect with our Essence, since each Enneagram Type has a unique Essence, the particular patterns of the personality and the particular way to see through the pattern varies across Enneagram Types. It is this knowledge of the unique pattern that can help us form an intention before an inner work experience, thus helping establish a proper mindset for the experience. Broadly speaking the intention is to see the personality patterns, but this can be made more personal based on knowledge of your Enneagram Type. As mentioned above, Enneagram Type 2s have an underlying Essence of Unconditional Love. When they feel disconnected from this Essence, the personality structure seeks to obtain love by sending love out into the world through their actions. If this process remains unconscious, Type 2s essentially give away too much of their love. To reconnect with their Essence of Unconditional Love, they must learn to nurture themselves. So, a suggested intention for a Type 2 to establish a mindset of connecting with their Inner Healer is to explore how they can learn to nurture and care for themselves. In effect, self-nurturing for a Type 2 can act as an antidote to the tendency to identify with their personality patterns, which creates space to allow the Essence, or Inner Healer, to emerge from under the grip of the personality.

#### Vital Costa Rica Retreat Case Study

When I first learned about the Enneagram, I used it at a surface level. It was helpful in pointing out why I behaved the way I did in certain situations. I learned that as an Enneagram Type 1, I tend to be critical and overly focused on getting things right. However, once I started using the Enneagram framework more deliberately for deeper inner work as I have described above, I found that much deeper insights would arise. I learned that the antidote for me, as a Type 1, was to learn how to accept reality as it is. My critical nature and focus on being right were an effort by my personality structure to connect to

the Type 1 Essence of knowledge of the Perfection of the universe. Rather than exerting effort to try to create perfection, I found that setting an intention before my own inner work to accept reality as it is would lead to a much deeper appreciation for the inherent Perfection of the reality around me. Motivated by these insights I began teaching the methodology described in this paper to those that I held space for in one-on-one settings. To further explore this framework, I conducted a small case study for the Vital retreat that took place in Costa Rica in January 2024. To kick off the case study, I created an application form to seek volunteers to work with me to prepare for the retreat<sup>1</sup>. Eight participants volunteered, and to help prepare for the retreat, they initially took an online Enneagram test to help determine their Enneagram Type. With each participant, I conducted an initial Zoom meeting to review the test results to confirm the participant had a clear understanding of their Enneagram Type and to give the participant some initial working knowledge of the Enneagram to formulate a clear intention for the upcoming retreat experience. Then, during the retreat, in addition to making myself available to answer any additional questions about the Enneagram, I lead a one-hour activity session that included an Enneagram-focused meditation and discussion in break-out groups based on Enneagram Type. After the retreat, I conducted an integration follow up call with each participant, and the participants completed a survey providing feedback on the case study.<sup>2</sup>

### Enneagram Intention Setting Guide

During the case study, I was able to refine my process of teaching the Enneagram system and how it can be used to set an intention before doing inner work. Through the process, including review of the survey feedback from participants, I distilled the process into a 2-page PDF Enneagram Intention

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<sup>1</sup> The original application form can be found at: <https://share.hsforms.com/1Y0wMgvycREKpuFodQb2IEw5f3d3>.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the post-retreat survey can be found here: <https://obg8npfhj8r.typeform.com/report/FQD1WmeQ/YYMes9CMvDLWjdYY>.

Setting Guide which is included in the uploaded material and serves as my creative portion of this final project. I intend to integrate what I learned through the case study by offering this Enneagram Intention Setting Guide as a free download for potential new clients that are seeking preparation services prior to embarking on an inner work experience. To make this guide available, I also created a landing page and funnel system that makes the guide available and offers potential clients the opportunity to schedule a discovery call with me to determine if they would like more personalized guidance in working with the Enneagram.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

While the Enneagram system in its current form has been a tool for self-discovery for many decades, the case study has shown that the particular application of the Enneagram as a preparation tool for inner work is worthy of further implementation. In particular, its use as a tool for setting an intention works well for establishing a proper mindset for the inner work journey and as a map to help us better understand the conditions under which our Inner Healer can emerge. Not only has it been shown to be a helpful tool for the individual, but I was also particularly pleased with the feedback from the case study survey results that highlighted the power of the Enneagram in fostering group bonding. The Enneagram gave the retreat participants a common basis to learn more about themselves and each other. In addition to using the Enneagram Intention Setting Guide as a mechanism to expand my one-on-one practice, going forward, I would like to further explore ways to bring the Enneagram to additional retreat settings to create an overall more fulfilling experience to the retreat participants.

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<sup>3</sup> The landing page sequence can be found here: <https://navaselfdiscovery.ck.page/33c62aacb9>.