

THE ENNEAGRAM AND MY BODY!

An enthusiastic Seven friend came back from an Enneagram Workshop many years ago, and insisted I investigate. I had heard the word "Enneagram" bandied about by others in my spiritual direction training group, but paid little attention to it. Once, in the midst of an impassioned discussion, the trainer seated behind me leaned over my shoulder and whispered, "Are you a Four?"

"A Four?" I said aloud. "What do you mean, a Four?"

The trainer shrank back in her seat. "Oh," she said apologetically. "I thought you were familiar with the Enneagram."

I began reading my Seven friend's notes—the descriptions of the types. I was having trouble finding myself, but only because of the key words describing the Three. Otherwise, the general pattern fit perfectly. But success? I grew up the daughter of a minister, and have spent my life in Christian ministry of one sort or another. The word "success" was always applied to "worldly concerns." The word was simply not in my vocabulary.

Then I tried on a synonym or two: "effective, efficient." Ah, I was suddenly at home.

Thus began a decade-long exploration. There were not many works in print at that time, so I sent for Jerome Wagner's thesis. I attended a series of workshops led by Ruth Duffy. I found the Beesing-O'Leary book. And there were many miscellaneous scraps of mimeographed materials which I devoured. I heard about Ruth Creighton and her attempt to draw together various schools of thought in a regular publication, and went to see her in Chicago.

But while my head center was occupied with this aspect of the search, my heart was following another aspect—the internal search, culminating in a searing moment of truth during a week-long silent retreat in 1990.

I had recently begun working with individuals on "inner journeys" within the context of Life/Work Direction, the organization my husband and I had founded with others for counseling persons in transition in their life and work. From time to time, women had asked to do a piece of work individually with me in more depth, and I had accepted. To support this in-depth work, I had asked a Jungian analyst for supervision, and had also begun my own analysis, little realizing how this would upend my life. I did not realize then what a deadly force the Three's motivation can be for making an impact in work that is inner and spiritual and cannot be pushed.

Over the fall and winter months of 1988, my body began to complain by sending me a series of disturbing and inexplicable symptoms. There did not seem to be a reason that doctors could find, though the word "stress" was often included in their comments. And there was no part of my body that seemed exempt. Tests were done, and I visited numerous specialists. Always the results came back: "normal."

I was totally absorbed in my body by day, and at night in my dreams, which I brought to analysis each week. I drew the images-tormented swaths of gray and brown and black depicting arid islands, lurid caricatures of women, and an occasional image of serenity. Underneath it all, I accepted this whole experience to be a spiritual journey, albeit one of seemingly endless proportions.

In February of 1990, exhausted by the ordeal of the previous year and having finally sought treatment with an alternative practitioner (whose prescribed cure almost killed me), I scheduled my usual annual silent retreat at a retreat center nearby. I deliberately asked for a certain spiritual director whom I knew to be a self-identified Two, and who was also a nurse, because I felt she would have some understanding and ability to deal with my precarious and troubled state.

But even an evolved Two could be shocked at the degree of distress I was manifesting, especially on the second day of the retreat when I sat with her saying over and over, "I'm sick. I'm sick. I'm sick," and vomited into her wastebasket. I was ashamed and despairing. At lunch that day, which we ate in silence, I remember sitting opposite a lady whose eyes were full of pain. She never flinched as I sat there eating my salad while tears streamed down my face. When she left, she patted my shoulder, and I knew she understood.

But then a day later, I wandered into the lounge where I noticed a shelf of tapes. Idly, I picked one up which had no clear title, and took it back to my room to listen to it. A cool, clear, feminine voice was speaking about "the Beaver"-the Beaver this, the Beaver that. I suddenly knew she was giving a lecture on the Conversion of the Three. I huddled close to the tape recorder as the words ground into my soul.

"If you say to me, 'You're a failure,' I'll have to kill you because you are threatening my life (my defense systems). If a person tried to convince me of this, she is trying to be God. Only God can convince me of this, and has the right to ask me to drink that cup to the bitter dregs, to go through that kind of martyrdom."

Then, again:

"It's hard for people in the Heart Center to be a Christian-to need to be saved. We are frightened if we don't know what to do. We read the Gospel and correct ourselves, improve ourselves. We do it by will power. We don't need a Savior for a very long time in our lives.

"There will come a day when we can't do it by ourselves...the greatest day of my life, though it doesn't feel like it at the time."

On and on the message went, speaking of passions and virtues, and finally, the avoidance of failure. One sentence caught my attention: "Only Threes know what failure is, and can drink the cup to the very dregs."

"The avoidance is the golden key to unlock the 'skin' (protection). It comes in darkness and desolation. It is the one reality we cannot be in touch with without experiencing terrible pain, foreboding, a fear that our life is over and we are going to

die. This is the moment of our Christian martyrdom because we realize what Jesus is saving us from [failure, for me]."

There it was: my own present reality-the terrible pain, the desolation, the death to the effective person I had always been and prided myself on. The image of the cross became significant in a new way at that moment. A Three in Jesus' place on the cross would have rankled at the taunts of the crowd, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." I suddenly realized that this was what Jesus had gone through-for me! He went through failure.

That night, I awoke in the stillness before dawn and drew the cross, then listened to the haunting beauty of the "Pie Jesu" from Lloyd Webber's Requiem, and went to sleep.

I cannot use the Enneagram lightly now. I tread gently as I introduce our Life/Work Direction participants to the Enneagram toward the end of our vocational process. I know what it is like to experience the raw exposure to the truth of one's being.

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