

# ENNEAGRAM TRAPS & HOLY IDEAS

## #ONE: PERFECTION / GROWTH

The trap for ONES is their idea of *perfection* which is an obsession for them. Bothered by the smallest imperfection, they strive for an attainable ideal perfection. Nothing they do satisfies them so they constantly find fault. Reality, of course, is not perfect! So they try even harder and become increasingly impatient. For them what counts is the NOW. They are not process people.

The holy idea of *growth* can release ONES from the trap of imperfection. It recognizes that the world is governed in an evolutionary way. In other words, the entire creation of the universe is in the process of becoming. This reveals that the divine way of achieving betterment in the world consists of process. The real perfection of creatures involves their being in the ‘process of becoming.’ To exist and to be alive is a call to grow and become mature. The living organism at any stage in its development can be said to be ‘perfect’ inasmuch as it is at a certain stage of growth. Even mistakes can be counted as serving this process of maturation, as something a person needs to go through. Not to make mistakes, as a matter of fact, could be an indication that one is simply not trying anything new in order to grow.

For ONES to abandon themselves to the divine design of things involves their accepting the Creator’s way of designing all things to evolve in gradual steps. It means accepting one’s creaturehood. This can lead ONES to see that it is okay to have loose ends in what happens and that imperfections and mistakes are all part of becoming a person. Holiness itself is seen as a process of growth rather than as attaining some norm of being complete and correct. In this way ONES can live in greater peace and serenity concerning how things [themselves included!] are and rely on the divine way of governing through a process of becoming rather than neurotically imposing their own ideas of perfection.

## #TWO: SERVICE / GRACE

The trap of the TWOS is their idea of *service*. Because of this idea of service they think themselves totally selfless, whereas they are very dependent on the expressed appreciation, attention and affection of those they serve. Their help always has strings attached, and they will reproach those who do not give love in return. They play on the sympathy of another saying, “How can you do this to me after all I have done for you?” They seldom directly ask for something, but indirectly they attempt to make to other want to give it to them. When others fail to respond to this manipulation, they feel taken advantage of. This means they may be helping others more out of their own need to be appreciated than out of a sincere concern for people. They will flatter others and serve their superfluous needs. They will offer overly-effusive compliments, rescue others against their will, give unasked for advice and unctuous care – all out of their own need for approval and acceptance. This trap of service makes them jealous and possessive. They have much unowned anger because they do not feel appreciated.

The idea of *free grace* can release TWOS from their false idea of service. For them abandonment to grace means above all the recognition that there is no way to win love [human or divine]; it is always a pure and free gift. Once this is recognized, the TWO becomes lovable for themselves rather than for becoming what ‘the other’ wants them to be. By heeding this inner call, the TWO can have a profound change of attitude – such that they accept their lovability without needing to prove it through endless, manipulative service. As a consequence they stop their desperate attempts to win love from others to satisfy what was a craving for approval.

Such a ‘conversion’ in TWO comes from the fruit of quiet contemplation. They naturally find such difficult since it feels like ‘doing nothing’ and by compulsion they would prefer to be doing for another. To spend such time alone with the Divine Source of grace is to do something profoundly important for themselves. In solitude alone does the TWO finally begin to take into account their needs and thereby their willingness to expend energy on themselves for their own well-being. It is at this time that ‘amazing grace’ is recognized, they can relax and begin to live in peace rather than high anxiety.

## #THREE: EFFICIENCY / DIVINE WILL

The trap for THREES is their idea of *efficiency*, namely that they think they have to be efficient to be worthwhile and – that this is also true for other people. They make life consist simply in achievements in competition with others. As a consequence, they are always looking for a quicker or more profitable way of doing things, even to the point that they actually become less efficient. This quest is tied up with their endless ambitious plans, goals and expectations. All time is valuable for them, chiefly in being used to achieve the objective of their own enterprises, and the purpose of life itself is to get ahead.

The holy idea of *divine will* can release THREES from the trap they are caught in. The main way for THREES to ‘abandon themselves’ in the best sense of this notion, is to put their lives and their energies under God’s government of the world and to recognize the world as not belonging to themselves. To accept the notion that there is a Great Administrator over all creation, THREES can offer their lives to divine goals, plans and objectives rather than their own narrow interests. They come to see that they are much more happy and tranquil living ‘in submission to’ rather than working for the success of their own plans as absolutes. In this perspective, plans for their own success may only gradually become known. THREES also learn that a failure in their own achievements is not necessarily a failure in the larger plan of the universe. Even if their failure is ‘permitted’ by God, it remains for them to trust that good will follow – in the larger plan.

Trust in the Divine Will is an antidote for THREES’ excessive spirit of competition since in God’s plan there is providential concern for the activities of all other individuals and groups in the world. The ‘kingdom’ is ultimately built through the activities of many, all expressing their special talents that sometimes are missed by the THREE. When THREES accept the whole world as the divine domain, they are called to upbuild along with many others and they are able to rejoice in the accomplishment of another who otherwise could be considered a competitor or even hindrance to their own achievements.

## #FOUR: AUTHENTICITY / COMMUNION

FOURS are trapped by their idea of *authenticity*, which they see as something they can achieve by themselves if they remain in touch with all that has happened to them, and they keep practicing how to express their deepest feelings in their personalities. As a result, they keep mulling over the deepest feelings that they have from past experiences to the detriment of being able to live in the present in a relaxed and satisfied way. They get so preoccupied with all that makes them special because of their past experiences that they feel no one can understand what they have gone through. This makes them somehow unreal as persons, as though they were aristocrats in exile, putting on airs. They do sense they are never quite themselves, but they believe that they will become truly authentic once they finally begin to live their ‘real lives.’

The idea of a *holy com-union* can release FOURS from their obsession with authenticity. It is only through union with another [and particularly with the Divine Lover] that persons truly become themselves in a unique and striking way. It is true that each person is created unique and irreplaceable and through divine providence, they bring about a special creation at this point in history. However, by yearning for divine union above all else, the mundane ones are growth-filled and make life a true pilgrimage. This can only happen by living in the present because holy union takes place only in the ‘now and present moment.’ Thus FOURS are freed from the kind of destructive nostalgia of past tragedy they typically dwell on. And by accepting abandonment to divine union as a new way of life, they discover in themselves a new creativity in self-expression which spontaneously comes forth from themselves in response to life on a day-to-day basis – including the most ordinary of experiences. Each moment – no matter how ordinary – has a divine presence in it which becomes a kind of ‘sacrament of the present moment.’

## #FIVE: KNOWLEDGE / PROVIDENCE

FIVES are trapped by the insatiable quest for *knowledge*. They find life fascinating to know from a distance but too terrifying for personal involvement. Feeling like abandoned orphans they withdraw from others and meet their personal needs through thought and reflection. They equate perception with experience, ideating rather than feeling and acting. Quantity of information replaces depth of experience. Ask them how they feel and they will tell you how they think. FIVES compartmentalize everything, viewing even their own lives as a series of distinct events. The most difficult action for FIVES is to request help; they are compelled to find all their resources within themselves. Weak interpersonal relationships make commitment and loyalty problematic.

The holy idea of *divine providence* releases FIVES from the trap of their idea that knowledge is most important and that they have to withdraw from others to attain it. Divine providence means that all of our needs are taken care of including those we are tempted to conquer through our heads in order to function well. This idea that what we need to know will always be provided makes FIVES more willing to get involved with life [especially its interpersonal dimension] rather than just watch it and reflect on it. By getting involved with persons and events around them, they begin to allow life to be the great teacher it is intended to be. FIVES thus begin to trust that each new circumstance is not a threat to be conquered but an opportunity to be embraced. Such an idea offers a true intellectual conversion for FIVES. They find themselves able to make the necessary 'leap of faith,' trusting that all the needs they have will be provided in order to do things well.

## #SIX: SECURITY / HOLY TRUST

SIXES are trapped by their idea of *security*, which is based on obedience to authority, persons or norms. Loyalty to a leader promises protection from their self-doubt and indecision. Fear inhibits their freedom to become self-actualized. Instead they are over-cautious and blocked in communication and action. Orthodoxy masquerades as courage, authoritarianism as decisiveness. When living up to the expectations they have introjected becomes intolerable, SIXES rebel by projecting their resentment and deviance on others. SIXES perceive a questioning of their ideas or procedures as a personal attack because they overidentify with their own thoughts. They feel themselves to be personifications of the groups or institutions to which they belong; therefore criticism of group values is considered a personal affront.

The idea of *holy trust* can release SIXES from the trap of their own insecurity. Trust is the only satisfying response to our basic insecurity needs and is the only rock on which solidly to build our otherwise fearful lives. This security based on holy trust involves a kind of ‘covenant’ of divine adoption. This means that SIXES can come to believe that they have indeed ‘come from God’ and ‘are going back to God’ thus nothing can ever hurt them, not even death itself.

Authentic spiritual tradition seems especially formulated to free persons trapped by the compulsion of the SIX. Their addiction would look for ultimate security in religion or some other institution, observance or external law rather than in a true security that precedes commandment or custom. For SIXES, to abandon themselves means to look and trust the divine spirit which dwells within their deepest core rather than outside of themselves for external validation.

## #SEVEN: IDEALISM / CO-CREATION

SEVENS are trapped by their false notion of *idealism* which causes them to avoid or deny whatever is painful. Thus they are on a head-trip, thinking about how nice things were or will be rather than living and acting in the present – the real world. They are compelled to expel doom with their habitual ‘smile or whistle.’ They experience the joy of an event in its planning, so they often fail to actualize their plans. They find everything interesting, especially if they can talk about it.

The idea of *co-creation* leads SEVENS to accept the details of work needed to implement their plans to make life better. To get involved in God’s creative process has the necessary consequence of accepting suffering as well as joy. Hard labor, tedious attention to present details and disappointing results are necessary – though they are neurotically avoided by the unintegrated SEVEN. Instead of trying to escape such pain, as SEVENS do when locked in false idealism, they accept ‘their cross’ as the necessary price to be paid for any good. This constitutes the chief way to abandon themselves to a world that is not always bright and cheery but always evolving exactly as it should. As a by-product of such acceptance, others find SEVEN much more tolerable, empathic and real.

## #EIGHT: JUSTICE / COMPASSION

EIGHTS are trapped by their misguided idea of *justice*. They are oversensitive to the issue of upholding their own rights to preserve their personal dignity and be respected by others. They see injustice everywhere and attempt to ‘keep tipping the scales of justice’ until they balance. As regards what is unjust or wrong, they will determine that themselves. When confronted by others, they often refuse to listen. They preach their own idea of what is right and restructure situations and relationships to achieve their own goals – assuming others do the same.

The holy idea of *compassion* can release EIGHTS from the trap of their own narrow definition of justice. The compassion of God reveals a different standard of justice which often confounds our human measurement. The EIGHT can act compassionately when reminded that ‘God makes the sun to shine on the bad and good alike.’

By abandoning themselves to dealing with evil through the divine way of compassion, EIGHTS are set free of their penchant ‘to be judge over’ others. There is no longer a need to cling to false over-confidence in knowing what is and isn’t just; instead the EIGHT can suspend judgment and trust a different kind of justice. For EIGHTS, it is a profound revelation that God insists on a special attitude towards enemies which expresses itself through mercy, forgiveness, non-violence and tolerance.



## #NINE: SELF-ABASEMENT / UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

NINES are trapped by their idea of *self-abasement*. They downgrade themselves and don't see within themselves much that is of value. Lacking love for themselves and unaware of their true importance as persons, they think their energy has to come from some outside source. Every aspect of an event is experienced as having equal value, so NINES assign equal importance to the trivial and the significant.

The holy idea of *unconditional love* releases NINES from the trap of their self-abasement. They desperately need to feel deeply within themselves the truth that they are a unique creation and gift to the world. This needs to be more than a belief, however, it needs to be a principle of action. To be effective in moving from the indolence caused by self-abasement, the idea of unconditional love needs to be translated so they see themselves as truly lovable because of who they are. Only then do they love in an outgoing, active way. For them above all, it is true that 'unless they know they are lovable, they cannot give love.' The idea of a divine, unconditional love calls them to see their unique contribution. Once they find life within themselves, they reach for real union with others rather than false peace of withdrawal from life's activities. For the NINES, conversion involves discerning the reality of unconditional love as directed to and within them.

*Based on information from: "The Enneagram", a journey of self discovery by Beesing, Nogosek & O'Leary*

## Holy Idea

Beginning with the Holy Idea of **Point Nine** at the top of the enneagram, when we see reality from the vantage point of Holy Love, we see that the ultimate nature of all that exists is beneficent and loving, and that we are each made out of and are an expression of that love. Moving clockwise around the enneagram, if we perceive reality from the vantage point of the Holy Idea of **Point One**, which is called Holy Perfection, our take is that the fundamental nature of everything, including ourselves, is inherently perfect, good and positive. When experiencing through the vantage point of the Holy Idea of **Point Two**, Holy Will, we see that the unfoldment of the universe has its own direction and momentum, and that what occurs within each of us and within our lives is part of that divine will. From the point of view of Holy Law, the Holy Idea of **Point Three**, we see that everything that happens is part of the changing pattern of the universe, and that nothing and no one functions separately from the movement of the whole. When experiencing reality from the angle of the Holy Idea of **Point Four**, called Holy Origin, we see that True Nature is the source of all manifestation, including ourselves, and that everything is inseparable from it.

From the perspective of the Holy Idea of **Point Five**, Holy Omniscience, we see that each of us is an inseparable part of the whole fabric of reality, and that the boundaries that distinguish us are not ultimate. When experiencing from the point of view of Holy Faith, the Holy Idea of **Point Six**, we see with absolute certainty that our inner nature is Essence, and this sustains us and gives us confidence and trust in ourselves and in reality as a whole. From the angle of Holy Plan, the Holy Idea of **Point Seven**, we see that there is an inherent logic and progression to the unfoldment of the human soul – including our own – whose natural movement is toward self-realization, just as a caterpillar naturally develops into a butterfly. With Holy Truth, the Holy Idea of **Point Eight** informing our perception, we see that Being is the ultimate nature of all that exists and that everything is made up of It, so all dualities of God and the world, Spirit and matter, even ego and Essence are fundamentally illusory.

...We are each born with all the Holy ideas available, but are “sensitive” or particularly attuned to one in particular. Like a sensitive nerve, we seem to arrive on the planet vulnerable and susceptible around this one way of understanding life. What transpires affects our contact with this understanding, and the universal thing that happens to everyone in the first few years of life is the losing of contact with our essential nature more or less completely as we develop a personality structure. As we lose contact with Essence, we also lose contact with the particular truth represented by our Holy Idea.

The Spiritual Dimension of the Enneagram, Sandra Maitri