

Divine Perfection

The Enneagram is an ancient, time-tested tool that brings together the worlds of psychology and spirituality. Unlike some approaches to the spiritual life that offer a promise spiritual perfection and the overcoming of our shadow, the Enneagram is a guide towards radical acceptance of who we are, both light and darkness. Enneagram teacher, Richard Rohr, considers how dualistic thinking is at the root of our illusions regarding human perfection:

Some traditional Navajo weavers include an intentional imperfection in their weaving pattern—a space sometimes called a "spirit line." It is said to be the place where the Spirit moves in and out of the design. The Semitic mind, the Indigenous mind and the so-called Eastern mind (which, by the way, Jesus would have been much closer to) understands perfection in precisely that way. Eastern thought is much more comfortable with paradox, mystery, and nondual thinking than the Western mind which has been much more formed by Greek logic, which is very clear, very consistent, and very helpful by also being dualistic. It seems to me that we first have to succeed at good dualistic thinking before we can also experience its limitations. But many in the West just stop at dualism and then find themselves struggling to deal with death, suffering, the illogical nature of love, any honest notion of God, Mystery, or infinity. Unfortunately much Western based theology and even spiritual practice can keep people trapped in a false promise of perfectionism.

By contrast, the Enneagram is a profoundly non-dual approach to the soul. As such, it challenges limited notions of the spiritual life especially regarding what wholeness means. In a conversation with Tami Simon on her Insights at the Edge podcast, Quaker teacher and activist Parker Palmer shared:

It's been a long time since I imagined that I would ever arrive at perfection in this aspect of my life or any other aspect of my life. I actually think that perfection is a kind of nightmarish wish dream. If you think of it socially, the people who promise perfection on earth are actually the totalitarian dictators who want to run everything themselves and are offering a false promise in order to seduce people into some sort of political or social pathology. And I feel the same way about spiritual teachers who promise perfection. I have never felt that wholeness, that human wholeness, a word that has meaning for me, had anything to do with perfection. Wholeness has to do with embracing the whole of who you are, which includes your shadow as well as your light. It includes the broken parts of you as well as the whole parts of you. [1]

Finally Richard Rohr emphasizes:

Perfection is not the elimination of imperfection, as we think. Divine perfection is, in fact, the ability to recognize, forgive, and include imperfection!—just as God does with all of us. Only in this way can we find the beautiful and hidden wholeness of God underneath the passing human show. This is the pearl of great price (see Matthew 13:45–46) in my opinion. Nondual thinking and seeing is the change that changes everything. It makes love, mercy, patience, and forgiveness possible.

Richard Groves concludes:

While there is a particular blind spot regarding the 'virtue' of Perfection in the #1 personality, every Ennea-type can reflect on the deeper meaning of what it means to be a whole human person. Old scripts, even unconscious ones, can lead us to false interpretations of a scriptural mandate like: "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Far from the impossible challenge to become god-like, the intent of such a teaching is "to become as complete" as the Creator intended when we

were created in the image and likeness of God in Genesis. Just as all creation is groaning and in agony where it is not yet complete, there is not a saint or holy person in history who did not admit to their dying day that they continued to struggle with imperfection. In fact, such a definition of 'whole-ness' is the hallmark of spiritual maturity.