

## A Case for the Enneagram

By Frank De Luca, PhD

Why would an ancient symbol that some claim describes nine types of personalities be taken seriously? Why should we be interested in something like this at all? I can think of several reasons. Let's start with the second question.

We all have experienced relationship malfunctions – break-ups, breakdowns, and broken hearts, hurt feelings, hurting others and trying avoid hurting other's, confusion, misunderstandings and "I never meant that," "Why can't you just . . .," "You never . . .," "You always . . .," and "You just don't get it!" What we want most is to get along, to be seen, to be loved, to know that we matter, to know that someone really sees us, really gets us and that we can do the same for others. In spite of our best efforts, we usually fail more than we succeed, but we keep on trying, or we may decide that human relationships are just not something we are ever going to be very good at. Yet, we know that at the end of life, what will matter most to us is the quality of our relationships and how we have loved.

The truth is, we are hard-wired to get along. The 2% of the DNA that distinguishes us from our simian ancestors is loaded with the need and desire to communicate and to cooperate. That's how we survive. That's how we flourish. That's how we evolve. Balancing our own personal needs with the needs of others, with the needs of the "tribe" is a life-long pursuit. Trying to understand why we are not all the same and feeling overwhelmed by all of our differences causes more stress than anything else in our lives. Tools that help us in this dilemma are invaluable.

The Enneagram is one of the most useful tools I have found for understanding ourselves and others and for learning how to get along. The obscure origins of the Enneagram symbol and its inherent meaning have led me to be curious more than skeptical. What does this ancient system have to say? Are there really patterns to people? My experience says yes. One of the measures of intelligence we have is pattern recognition. Otherwise trying to figure out every new thing we see, feel and experience would overwhelm us. When we see that our own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, biases, and presuppositions fall into certain patterns, we open another part of our innate intelligence. We awaken another part of our brain where we can make choices that are free from patterns that no longer serve us. In these moments of awakening, we can rise above the unconscious patterns formed in childhood to protect us from hurt and see that these patterns have outlived their usefulness. What once protected us now imprisons us.

The ancient origins of the Enneagram tell us that this information comes from a tradition of wisdom – knowledge accumulated through time from embodied experiences, not just good ideas. That is why this information has staying power. The curiosity of the human heart has always led us to investigate the nature of the world we live in and to look at our own human nature as part of that world. With patience and openness, the wisdom of the Enneagram reveals itself to us, giving us new ways of perceiving, new pathways in our relationships, and new ways of satisfying our deepest desire to get along and to be decent human beings.