

THE SOUL CHILD: Richard Rohr, OFM

According to the maturing study of the Enneagram, our compulsive identification actually emerges as a reaction against our original “soul space”, which corresponds perfectly with the number that we normally go toward for consolation. It actually becomes a very clear example and description of what the Tradition therefore meant by “original sin”. We have abandoned our soul, Sandra Maitri partially develops this pattern in her book *The Spiritual Dimension of the Enneagram*. I see that these nine deep knowings also correspond to the nine qualities of God in the Jewish Kabbala. God knows something in us and through us, God is something in us and through us. Eventually we learn to cooperate with that knowing and being.

The ONE has become resentful and demanding because as a child they could not maintain their idyllic and true image of a beautiful, perfect, happy SEVEN world. They move into overdrive to protect their deep and sad disappointment. “I will make it perfect anyway”, but now in a narrow and moralistic way. They once knew the GRANDEUR of it all, the MAJESTY of God. They judge and critique joy precisely because they want and know true joy so deeply.

The TWO has learned to demand that they be noticed and loved because as a child they, in fact, knew that they were the special and central FOUR. They were a beloved of the universe. When they could not maintain this truth, they became envious, manipulative and needy of the love of others to “re-convince” themselves of the truth that they already deeply know. “Others must and will love me!” they demand, instead of resting in the love that they already are. They once knew the LOVELINESS of it all, the BEAUTY of God. They compete with anybody else who is center of attention because at a soul level they know they are chosen. And they are.

The THREE needs endless successes and feedback to reassure themselves against a very honest and realistic insecurity. They know in a SIX way that all is unstable, passing, and non-necessary without God and truth. “I will prove by competence and overproduction that I will not fall apart” they say, instead of resting in the impermanence and fallibility that they deeply know and deeply fear. They once knew the VULNERABILITY of all things, and that God alone is the ENDURANCE to withstand the passing nature of all things. They judge ineffectiveness harshly because at a soul level they actually know that it is all passing away. They are afraid to say yes and cooperate with the dissolution and death of all things unless they reconnect with the permanence and endurance of God.

The FOUR tries desperately to create an outer world of self-created “symmetry”. In fact they demand it of life, and are often dogmatic and controlling about what is acceptable and what is not. They will not participate in an ugly world because they once knew a perfect and whole world like the ONE tries to create. While pretending to be free and original, they are deeply bound by a deeper set of absolute criteria about what is good and what is not good. “I will be special” is the mantra of a person who once knew a PERFECT COSMOLOGY of which they were an essential part. They once knew the eternal WHOLENESS/NOTHINGNESS of God, and how it included and incorporated the DARK. They try to make it happen in the world of forms and symbols, but seldom let themselves enjoy it. The serenity of the ONE is unworthy of them, yet they once lived there. They refuse to return to the garden, but just keep making “movies” about it!

The FIVE goes inside and in the mind to find the power that they were denied, or denied themselves, in the external world. They in fact, deeply want power and control, but denied themselves the external fight and decided to discover it in a world of ideas and information where they could smugly be the powerful person. Their primal experience was, in fact, of the ABSOLUTE POWER of God and the GENIUS of controlling all the parts in one working universe. Instead of taking on this Divine genius as an EIGHT would, they decide to conquer by quietly waiting, and listening, and learning about all the parts. Yet their power is in the now.

The SIX has chosen an entirely defensive posture against their primal knowing, which was true and perfect presence, the domain of the NINE. Instead of resting in the FULL PRESENCE of God, instead of trustfully being HELD BY BEING, they insist on forcing the issue. “I will assure it”, “I will prove it”, and “I will maintain it” they say. They once held an image of an utterly reconciled and peaceful world, a benevolent universe, and instead of trusting it from Another, they try to manufacture it themselves by laws, authority, and structures of certitude. Anti-faith. They are most defended against what they already know to be true: it is all OK already!

The SEVEN once lived in a world of “enoughness”, an inner world of satisfaction and essence like the FIVE. They usually admit to an early kind of quiet fantasy world where all was explained and had meaning and grounding. They dreamed alone and apart and it was a secure universe. When this security was threatened, they decided on a one sided response: “I will outdo God”, “I will make it all positive and no negative”, and “I will not carry the dark side”. They once knew God as total FOUNDATION, and reality as UTTERLY SATISFYING, but now they insist on enjoying it in an incomplete way. They will not accept that God’s foundation included and incorporated the negative. They must go back to the true and full foundation and still enjoy. They hate stingy ways because they know they are—and God and the world are not stingy! Their tension.

The EIGHT is at the soul level a little child, a needy TWO who decides to hate and reject and deny and project that neediness everywhere else-so they don’t have to cry over it inside themselves. “I will never cry” they say. “I will make others cry”, and “I will protect the little ones from crying”(which is also themselves). Their primal knowing was that God was warmth, food, protection, empathy, relationship, TOTAL UNDERSTANDING of how weak and needy and hungry we all are. But they somehow decide to do God’s work themselves. I will partner everybody and everything and take away this horrible aloneness, this unnecessary sadness, this unjust world. Because I know it to be softer and kinder than it appears. And they do! They are defended against compassion because they deeply know that God is, God must be, God was once for them compassionate understanding. Instead of floating in this river, they try to push it or even create it.

The NINE once knew that it was all about love, all connected, operative, and EFFECTIVE. They knew a kind of THREE optimism and motivation that all could be worked out and fixed because God was LOVE. And love changes everything and love resolves everything, and therefore things can be resolved. It is an effective and workable universe. When this does not happen, they give up, they stop trying to find any other pattern. If love does not work, then it is basically an incoherent universe and I want out, or at least I refuse to cooperate. And yet they do! By taking their small and honest place in a very big plan. They are used in spite of themselves, as we all are, but they seem to trust that somehow. The LOVE imprint has formed them deeply. We enjoy them, but they do not tend to enjoy/find allow themselves. Their “original” sin. They hate effectiveness precisely because they know it already ought to be that way. It ought to “work”.

According to Sandra Maitri, these qualities of the original soul child “are those we are most defended against and usually have the most judgements about”. She takes a fine, but more behavioral and psychological approach to the soul child. I am here taking a more theological and spiritual direction approach.

The Enneagram is given so that we might see, might stop trivializing the true nature of the darkness that we are, and as T.S. Eliot said, “know the place for the first time”, which is ironically our truest and deepest Self, the Self that always was but never is.