

Conversation with A. H. Almaas

with Andrea Isaacs and Jack Labanauskas

Enneagram Monthly: *Since your approach to working with the Enneagram is different from all of the other Enneagram teachers, can you give us an overview?*

A.H. Almaas: Yes, as the Enneagram is part of a larger teaching used in the Ridhwan school, we only use it at certain stages in our work. The Enneagram seems to work very well at those particular times. For instance, the Enneagram of Fixations is very useful at the beginning stages for people to learn about their character and their basic personality tendencies, and to help their orientation and self-observation. Having a good map like the Enneagram helps to orient people.

EM: *At what stage might you introduce it?*

AHA: Usually we don't introduce it at the very beginning—it would be after three months or so of work on establishing our basic practices. When the students have this orientation, we introduce the Enneagram types.

EM: *What are some of the “basic practices” you do first?*

AHA: What we do is basically spiritual work. We use psychological tools to help in the spiritual work. So in the beginning we teach people meditation, awareness, and self-exploration practices, all basic elements of our work. We orient them and then we begin to study the personality or the ego structure, and we use the Enneagram as one of the major tools for that. That is the Enneagram of Fixations. We spend nine months or more studying it. We're not only interested in people learning about their type, but in actually working with it—inquiring into themselves, doing exercises, so they begin to see it in their lives and live with that awareness.

That's one stage when we work with the Enneagram. A few years later, there's another stage when we work with the Enneagram, after they've done a lot more work on themselves and they begin to contact and know their essential, or spiritual, nature. At that time, let's say after five or six years of intense work on themselves, we focus on the Enneagrams of Passions and Virtues. By then the students have enough experience, enough understanding of themselves that they begin to see their resistances, impurities and attachments—the various tendencies that keep them holding onto surface orientations. That's when we find the work on the passions and the virtues very useful. We work with the passions as they reflect and are related to the virtues, and we use that work as a process of purification of the personal consciousness, a way of purifying the soul.

EM: *And it takes five years before you think people are ready for that?*

AHA: Yes. We don't teach that until about five or six years into the work.

EM: *Why does it take so long?*

AHA: Because it's a lot of work to do! Purification is not a little thing—nor an easy thing! And most people don't understand it and don't want to do it.

EM: *We could also ask “why so short?”*

AHA: Right. Most people are not oriented that way; to really work on purifying yourself from attachment is a major undertaking. A third stage of work with the Enneagram is the teaching on the Holy Ideas. This is the Enneagram teaching that has unfolded in a unique way in the context of the Diamond Approach® and is the basis of my new book, *Facets of Unity*. The Holy Ideas at this stage are particularly useful in helping the soul transition from the perspective of an individual consciousness to the more universal and objective view of reality.

So that is generally how we use the Enneagram as a part of what we do. As you see it's not a major part of the Diamond Approach.

EM: *For the benefit of our readers and to get the terminology straight, can you recap in just a few paragraphs how the nature of mind, the nature of ego or the nature of soul is structured? Could you describe what the status of a normal human being is—“Where are we, where should we be?” and then talk about how to get there?*

AHA: We begin as an unformed soul that doesn't have much structure or ego. But as we develop and mature through childhood, we have experiences and we interact and deal with things, and in that process, our soul develops what we call an ego structure. In this way the soul becomes structured and patterned into what is called one's character or personality. This happens mostly through some kind of a mental imprinting of experiences and interactions. From that arises a sense of self or identity, which is based on an image that we develop of ourselves from past impressions. This identity is some kind of a self-concept that is a constellation, an integration of many experiences and impressions.

So we develop a self-image that becomes a lens through which we look at ourselves, and at experiences of the soul and of life in general. This image becomes an intermediary which structures and patterns our experiences according to our personality, or ego self. That's the normal development of the soul, which is also ego development, and it happens to everybody. We develop an image which structures our experience and gives it a particular flavor. The overall flavor, the overall character of our structure can be understood through the Enneagram of Fixations, which describes the specific flavors of the nine character types.

In terms of spiritual work, that kind of development, although it's natural and happens to everybody, disconnects us from our essential or spiritual nature. This is because spiritual nature is basically the immediate experience of ourselves without the mind; while the result of ego development is that we end up looking at our experiences through our minds and through our memories. So because of the very nature of this development of the personality or ego, we become distant from all spiritual nature, from what is free in us, from what is the source of real fulfillment and maturation.

In adulthood, we recognize ourselves as a person with character, with a personality, and if we investigate further, we can see that we experience ourselves largely through the mind. Although we are still experiencing our soul, which is our experiencing consciousness, we are experiencing it through the mind which is a result of all the collected experiences of the past structured through the ego types.

So the work is how to see that filter, see that image, see the pattern of the personality, and be able to let it go so we can experience ourselves more immediately, more directly, without that mental medium. When we experience that, we experience our spiritual nature more directly as "presence." We feel we are present, we are here, and then the sense of fullness, authenticity, realness and truth can happen. That begins the spiritual process.

EM: *Where does the word "essence" fit in?*

AHA: I use the word "essence" to mean the true nature of the soul, or our true nature. It means our spiritual nature. It is the essence of the soul, because if we go as deeply into the soul as possible to find what its underlying nature is, what its true reality is, that is what we will find.

EM: *Are you in essence when you are connected to the Holy Ideas?*

AHA: Yes. Essence and the Holy Ideas are connected because the Holy Ideas are not just mental ideas. Essence is the nature of the soul. But in time you find out that essence is not just the nature of the soul, it is the nature of everything, the nature of all reality. And when you see all reality in its essence, that reality has patterns or major characteristics, and these are what I call the Holy Ideas.

For example, the idea of point Eight, Holy Truth, is that reality as a whole comprises an indivisible unity, a complete non-duality between true nature and the universe. The Holy Idea of enneatype Five is omniscience or transparency, which means the individual soul or human being is inherently inseparable from this unity. Each one of us is a cell in this indivisible reality. From the conventional or fixated point of view, reality is composed of discrete objects and we are separate and absolutely autonomous entities, the exact opposite of these Holy Ideas. So the Holy Ideas reveal the real and objective patterns of reality, while the fixations are distortions of such patterns.

EM: *There's a beautiful sentence in your book: "The Holy Idea is the archetype at the center of a complex and emotionally charged group of ideas and images." It really expresses its connection to the personality.*

AHA: Yes, at the core of the personality is the Holy Idea. This understanding, which is a major part of the book, is that the fixation of the ego type has a psychological core at the depth of it. That core has a center, and the center of that core is the Holy Idea which gives the type its characteristics that make it a particular type.

EM: *Is it necessarily a positive idea, or can that idea be destructive and negative?*

AHA: The Holy Ideas are all positive because they are pure spiritual realities. But of course, the way the Holy Idea is at the center of the personality is by its absence, by its misunderstanding. In other words, at the core of the personality is some kind of delusion. The delusion has to do with not recognizing or understanding that particular Holy Idea. So yes, the core of the fixation is in some sense negative, or something that is a manifestation of ignorance.

EM: *And that gives rise to a specific delusion?*

AHA: Let's put it this way. When we don't understand a particular Holy Idea, when we don't experience it or cannot be connected to it, we are left with something like the opposite of it, or its absence, which is a particular delusion. This delusion functions then as the center of the personality, giving it its characteristics. So the delusion is connected to the Holy Idea in the sense that it reflects the absence of that particular Holy Idea.

EM: *Before you go on with that, I have a question about some of the specific delusions. Since the Holy Idea of One is perfection, when you lose contact with that, it gives rise to the specific delusion of "localized rightness." What do you mean by "localized"?*

AHA: Localized means it exists in some places and not others, it exists at some times and not others. It's localized in time and space. For instance, the Holy Idea of point Nine, Holy Love, is not the fact that there is real love, but that love is the nature of reality as an underlying ground of everything everywhere. So if you don't recognize that love is everywhere, you will think that it is some places but not other places.

EM: *Can we run through the progression of a type losing contact with the Holy Idea, resulting in the specific delusion, which gives rise to the specific difficulty and then the specific reaction?*

AHA: The delusion is a mental perspective on the experience that colors our various experiences. So when we lose contact with our ground, with our essential or spiritual nature, we experience a loss of holding, a loss of support and care. That experience we call the specific difficulty. It's as if the ground fell out from under you. Something that was holding you, supporting you, making you feel that everything is taken care of and that everything is safe, is gone. Each type experiences it differently. Then, there is a reaction to that, to avoid it, to hide from it, or to defend against it in order to deal with it.

A clear example might be point One. There's a sense of rightness everywhere, with everything, when we are experiencing the Holy Idea of perfection. When that is lost, we lose the inner sense of holding, of spiritual holding, of the universe holding us and taking care of us. We experience first the delusion that comes out of that, which is that there is wrongness some place, that rightness and perfection is not everywhere. That manifests in our specific difficulty, where we feel there's something wrong with us. The delusion is the delusion of right and wrong, that there is such a thing as right and wrong. From the spiritual perspective, right and wrong is not an ultimate thing, it's more of a surface thing. So right and wrong is the delusion, and that colors our experience. When we feel the absence of holding, the absence of caring, we experience that there is something wrong with us. And then of course the reaction is that we try to be right, we try to be good, which becomes the core that then patterns the rest of the personality as it develops.

EM: *Some of this you've connected to object-relations and how that develops when you're a child. For those of us without a developmental psychology background, could you describe what that object-relations theory is?*

AHA: We use the theory of object-relations in the Diamond Approach in our various courses and teachings, not just with the Enneagram. The idea is that the personality, or the ego, always develops in childhood within the context of relationship with others. The child's relationship to the parents, for instance, is the crucible in which the child's identity and its image of itself develops. That's the basic idea. Those interactions are internalized in the mind as images. When they are internalized in the mind, they are called object-relations. Our inner structure is always based on the sense of self that we have within us that is relating to a sense of another, like a mother or father; or later on it can be any person in our lives.

EM: *Or the entire environment?*

AHA: It can apply to that, and to everybody. It applies to everything, but the parents are the most important.

EM: *Once you catch yourself in the delusion, difficulty, or reaction, what do you do about it? How do you comfort that diminished sense of self, or whatever arises?*

AHA: You start working with it, you see. First, we work with just the ego-type itself, the fixation—all the understanding and knowledge about it—through self-observation.

The system of the Enneagram hinges on the notion that there are fundamentally nine types of personalities. The type does not indicate simply the Enneagram of Fixations, for this Enneagram is only one manifestation of the types. The Enneagram of Fixations basically describes the patterns, attitudes, and tendencies of the deluded and fixated type, just as the Enneagram of Passions describes the major emotional proclivities of the fixated types. However, other Enneagrams describe the unfixated or not deluded types, as in the Enneagram of Virtues. This means that the type is something more basic than the fixation; the fixation is what happens to the type when it becomes deluded and falls from grace into ego. That is why when a person becomes free from the fixation he or she does not change type; one's experience simply becomes more accurately described by the higher Enneagrams, as those of Holy Ideas and Virtues.

Even though there might be variations in the description of the fixated types by various schools and authors, this can either be a reflection of different focal settings, or inaccuracies. This is because the Enneagram is supposed to be an objective map, something that can be discovered and not something created by somebody.

We begin our work with recognizing and learning about the patterns of the fixations, the deluded level of the types. We come to recognize those patterns themselves, and see how they are, how they affect us, how they affect our actions, our lives, learning their dynamics, how they arise from childhood. That's a lot of work. As that work deepens, at some point, we get to the place of recognizing the specific reaction, that is, how we react to the difficulties. When we recognize the specific reaction, it becomes possible to recognize the specific difficulty, which is usually something we have gone to great lengths to avoid. If it's a core difficulty, you don't want to experience it, because it's a vulnerable place, it's too painful. The idea is to recognize and experience it, which is the beginning of being free of it. As we recognize the reaction and recognize the specific difficulty, that brings in, of course, our history from childhood, and how the loss of holding happened. That's why, in the book, the first part is about holding. Working with holding needs to come before the work on the Holy Ideas.

Then as we experience and recognize the reaction, recognize the specific difficulty experientially, it becomes possible to recognize the specific delusion. This is because the reaction and difficulty are based on a particular mental stance. By basically challenging this stance through experiencing, working with, and inquiring into it, at some point we truly begin to see that, first, it is a delusion, it's not true; and second, it's a perspective we have developed. And as we recognize that, it becomes easier to connect with the Holy Idea that was lost.

In our work, we also introduce the Holy Idea directly and work with it through spiritual practices. Learning about the Holy Idea and getting the experience of it actually becomes the only thing that can diffuse the delusion. In other words, we believe in the delusion until we know the Holy Idea.

EM: *And are there specific practices for each of the Holy Ideas?*

AHA: There are general practices for all of the Holy Ideas. And you can take one of the Ideas and work with it in a particular way.

EM: *Can you give an example?*

AHA: For instance, the Idea of Holy Perfection, that there is a rightness to existence in general. Now that's not an easy thing to get to and hence it requires the essential development that is central in our work. That's why I say we use the Enneagram as merely part of our work, because we do a lot of work to connect with our essence, apart from the Enneagram. It's in the development of the work we do with essence—meditations, chanting, visualizations and all kinds of processes—that the experience of essence develops, deepens, and expands until it permeates and informs the experience of our whole environment; then, the whole world is seen from the perspective of essence. When that begins to happen, it becomes possible for us to recognize the Holy Ideas. So it's a process, it's not just one activity. When we recognize the Holy Idea, we might not recognize it from the perspective of the Enneagram or anything like that, because it's a spiritual experience without the mind as intermediary. Then, when spiritual realization is related to the delusion, when you put the two together, the contrast shows how one is a delusion.

EM: *And that allows the delusion to disperse?*

AHA: When you recognize a delusion as a delusion, it's hard to hold on to it.

EM: *Of all the Holy Ideas, I've had a really hard time understanding the Four, Holy Origin. I understand that there's a sense of feeling connected to source, or to your higher self. Can you elaborate on what is meant by Holy Origin?*

AHA: The idea is that everything comes from a source, and that our spiritual nature, essential nature, or God, or whatever you call it, is really the source of all existence, all forms, all manifestations, including the soul. It is the source and origin of our body, our mind, everything. When you recognize that, that we have a source, and you recognize what the source is, and you feel connected to it, that's when we experience Holy Origin. Most people think their source is their mother and father, for instance, while really our source is much more fundamental than that.

EM: *All the Holy Ideas are something that everybody has, but each individual would be more influenced by one of them.*

AHA: Yes, we tend to be more sensitive to, or more influenced by one of them. But definitely, we have them all because they are all perspectives on the same reality. Like angles of experiencing the same thing.

EM: *I think one of the difficulties in my understanding Holy Origin was that it's something I just took for granted, that I thought everybody understood and had, and it didn't seem unique to one Enneagram style. Now I'm realizing I must have more sensitivity to it.*

AHA: Exactly. That's what everybody thinks!

EM: *(Laughter.) Doesn't everybody see the world like I do?!*

AHA: We do think that everybody's like that! People may all experience it but may not be affected by that perspective as much as another one.

EM: *In Facets of Unity, you talk about this quite a bit...*

AHA: Right, what we've been talking about is a large part of the subject matter of the book. The book is about the Holy Ideas and how the core of each fixation develops. It's basically a run-down of each of the Holy Ideas, giving an understanding of them and discussing how the lack of understanding or the loss of understanding leads to the specific delusion. Then I discuss the specific delusion and how that contributes to the core of the fixation, which is the specific difficulty and the specific reaction. There are chapters on each one of the types, looking at them from the perspective of the Holy Ideas. That's the major part of the book.

The first part of the book has to do with the loss of holding and trust in childhood which leads to the loss of the Holy Idea.

EM: *In the book, you referred to something you called the "assemblage point," or view of reality, and that you can move it. Can you elaborate on what the assemblage point is?*

AHA: It's an idea taken from Castañeda.

EM: *Yes, it was familiar.*

AHA: He talked about the assemblage point meaning that reality has many levels, or many bands in it. We usually exist in one band, or a group of bands, and we're stuck there, and we don't see the perspective of the other bands. The assemblage point is like the center in us which keeps us in that place.

The assemblage point is not related to the specific difficulty or reaction, but is related to our identity, our inner sense of self that tells us who we are and how we are oriented. It's more related to the fixation itself, a crystallized sense or center that we experience that gives us an orientation in reality. Usually, your assemblage point is in a certain band of possibilities, and if you could move it, you would see other things, other perspectives.

When Castañeda talks in his books about the assemblage point, it is not very clear exactly what it is. I'm using it as a metaphor to discuss my understanding of the process.

EM: *Many teachers don't teach about the instinctual subtypes, and there is some disagreement about this topic among those who do. More recently Oscar Ichazo described the instincts as each being linked to one center (i.e.,*

head, heart or gut); while most others, whose information directly or indirectly came from Claudio Naranjo, teach that each type can be dominated by any of the three instincts. What is your perspective?

AHA: The way I learned it actually is that each type has three subtypes, and one's subtype depends on the instinct that is most dominant for that person. The subtypes are connected to the instincts, the social, the sexual and the self-preservation instincts. So if one of them is disturbed more than the others, that determines that person's subtype.

EM: *Would you say that the subtype originates with the wounding of one of the instincts, which becomes acute and takes all the attention?*

AHA: Exactly. And that determines the type to some degree.

EM: *So if you have, for instance, a highly developed capacity for adaptation and you're in the head triad, but your wound is with relation issues, then your attention could be totally absorbed with relational concerns?*

AHA: Yes. I think that's basically what it means. Of course there are Enneagrams for each one of the subtypes. That part I don't get into in this book, as you know.

EM: *Do you use it in your teaching?*

AHA: No, we don't use it.

EM: *Any special reason why not?*

AHA: It's just more detail about the type. That's what "subtype" means. When we work with the types, we use them mainly as a stepping stone to recognizing something more essential in us. Besides, in my experience, the teaching about the subtypes is not that clear. And I don't know how useful it is because of that.

EM: *So it would be going into unnecessary detail?*

AHA: Yes, and also because, in our work in the Diamond Approach, the Enneagram is only part of what we do. We have other ways of dealing with that than using the subtypes, even though we know about them and have some understanding of them. But I don't use them that much.

EM: *How would you define the origins of the work that you do? Which influences have brought you to where you are?*

AHA: It developed in the beginning of the seventies. I was at that time working with several people. I worked with Claudio Naranjo—that's how I learned about the Enneagram. I worked with Buddhist teachers, the Llamas, Sufi teachers, Gurdjieffian teachers, and I was also working with psychology and psychotherapy for a while. So I was getting all these influences. At some point, my own process started developing on its own, with its own logic, its own insights. All these influences were in it, but the process was a new thing that was emerging, which was a discovery of spirit, or essence, in a different or specific way. I didn't know it was a different way at the time. From that developed a teaching. I recognized after a while that the process was happening but it was not just my personal teaching, it seemed to represent a more objective process. And yet because it happened within the context of other kinds of work, the teaching integrated many of those things that I was studying.

EM: *So would you say it was several different things that brought you to a point where you began to have those insights that you later realized can be taught to others as well?*

AHA: Yes. All the understandings that I've realized occurred once I was able to be open in a certain way and had developed a certain perspective and insight.

EM: *It seems you could break up what you do into several sections—there's a part that speaks about personality and that would be the part where you might use the Enneagram, and there are spiritual practices. Where do you take those from?*

AHA: The spiritual practices have been drawn from the Buddhist perspective, some from the Sufis. But also, the specific thing about the Diamond Approach is that it synthesizes a psychological and a spiritual perspective, where the two are aspects of the same truth or the same experience. We use psychological understanding to move into

spiritual experience. As a result, our main practice is not meditation or something like that, but an actual inquiry into experience. An open inquiry, questioning and challenging experience, trying to understand it. By understanding it, it begins to open up and unfold. As it does that, it begins to reveal its spiritual underpinnings.

EM: *And the “repeating question” exercise [where the same question is posed over and over again to a student, who answers spontaneously], is an example of a technique to aid inquiry?*

AHA: Yes, the repeating question, or a monologue when someone discusses his or her experience, or journal writing. We present the material from a certain perspective, and people do exercises around it in groups or by themselves.

EM: *Would you say that you place more emphasis on practice, for example as those who say: “just meditate, everything will turn out fine;” or are you concerned that it’s crucial to make sure that “right thinking” is first established to prevent us choosing a “wrong practice”?*

AHA: In some sense, we do both. It’s important to have “right thinking,” and it’s important to do a practice. However, our practice is not just sitting and being quiet, for instance, or visualizing something. Our practice is a Western approach, which is actually an inquiry, a scientific thing. You ask yourself questions: “What am I experiencing?” “Why am I experiencing that?” “What does it mean?” “Where is it coming from?” But we do it in such a way that it opens up the experience and reveals its underlying truth. The way we do it is dictated by the spiritual experience and perspective that develops in this work. It’s the Socratic method, in some sense.

EM: *Is this process something that you developed from things you were studying?*

AHA: I wouldn’t say that. I would say the things I studied were a support, but in the process of my own work something opened up and developed on its own and revealed things I hadn’t learned before—though all the things I had done before brought me to the place where I could access that guidance.

EM: *The people who come to your courses come from different mentalities; they are different personalities with different needs. Do you have a way of sorting them, in the sense that some people are more advanced in the feeling aspect, in the thinking aspect, or in the doing aspect? How do you deal with that?*

AHA: That’s true. In the way we work with people, we have three structures all of which are important. In the beginning, the people go through an interview, a screening process, by two of our teachers to find out more about them, what they want, what their leanings are in relation to our work. If they are accepted into the School, they engage in the three structures.

The first is doing private teaching sessions with a teacher, weekly or biweekly, where the teacher spends an hour with the student exploring and helping him develop his own inquiry. There particular attention is paid to the student, and the work responds to the student’s unique character and personality.

The second structure we have is what we call “small groups.” A teacher works with a group of 12-18 people, helping them learn to work with themselves, assisting them in opening up and accessing their experience, and teaching them how to recognize what is true.

The third structure is the weekend retreats in which the perspectives and concepts about spiritual nature are taught. Here we use meditation, lecture, discussion and exercises to explore what is presented. All three structures taken together will address the differences in development. The private sessions in particular support the individual student, as the teachers are trained in how to recognize different characters.

EM: *How many teachers do you currently have?*

AHA: We probably have 50 that have finished their training.

EM: *You have an extensive teacher-training program.*

AHA: We do! We have over 150 in our teacher program.

EM: *How long does it take to complete it?*

AHA: In order to enter the teacher training program, you have to be in the school first. Students will be in the school for 3-4 years before they can be considered for the program. And then the teacher training program itself takes 6-7 years, during which time the students continue in the regular school program. In fact all teachers continue to be students in the school. So the training is pretty extensive. From the time somebody enters the school until she actually finishes her training and can work with students, it's about ten years or so.

EM: *By then, they've certainly done a lot of work on themselves.*

AHA: That's the point. It's important that they do that; it's the main thing. They have to know themselves. Some teachers teach on the weekends, some of them do the small groups. Almost all of them teach the private sessions.

EM: *Are any of your teachers writing about the Enneagram?*

AHA: Yes, we have teachers who work with the Enneagram. One teacher, Sandra Maitri, has finished a book on the Diamond Approach to the Enneagram. It's going to be published by Tarcher/Putnam, in the next year or so.

EM: *That's wonderful. It'd be interesting to have a book that can describe some of the exercises that one can do for either self-observation or self-inquiry.*

AHA: That's true. I am actually publishing a book about inquiry itself. It's been written and is now being edited. It's called Spacecruiser Inquiry, because the process is like being in a space ship and travelling.

EM: *Sounds like a Castaneda title!*

AHA: It is basically about the specific way we do inquiry in the Diamond Approach.

EM: *When do you think it'll be ready?*

AHA: In eighteen months or so.

EM: *What is your relationship with Oscar Ichazo?*

AHA: Well, he was Claudio's teacher, and Claudio was my teacher. When Claudio was first teaching, he was very much connected to Oscar and talked a lot about him. I never met Oscar myself. I only heard about him from Claudio in '71 and '72. My understanding of the Holy Ideas began from a handout of definitions attributed to Oscar many years ago, but I didn't know if they were actually his definitions or not. So, when it came time to publish the book, I wrote him to find out and at the same time asked if he'd be willing to write a foreword to the book. He was very kind in his response and said it was fine to use his definitions. So he gave me an original complete version of them and wrote the foreword. So I have corresponded with him, but we've never met.

EM: *In the foreword, Oscar was very supportive of Claudio.*

AHA: Yes, he said very good things about Claudio.

EM: *Have you been in touch with Claudio lately?*

AHA: A few months ago, actually, when I told him I was going to dedicate the book to him.

EM: *You said you ran into him in the early '70s. How did you actually meet him?*

AHA: I met Claudio at Esalen when I was there one time, in 1970 or something like that. I was taking a workshop he was conducting on Gestalt and meditation. That's when he mentioned to me he was starting a group in Berkeley, which I later attended.

EM: *Is there anything we've left out that you would like to talk about?*

AHA: Well, we've spoken about the Enneagram in terms of the Holy Ideas and its place in my work. In the book, it's important to realize that the first part, where I talk about holding and basic trust and a spiritual perspective, is very important in order to understand the Holy Ideas. It's the ground from which we can understand how we can lose and regain contact with Being. That understanding of holding and basic trust does not have to be connected to

the Holy Ideas, but it is part of the work of the Diamond Approach. However, I'm connecting these concepts to the Holy Ideas because I started having my own understanding of the Holy Ideas by dealing with that spiritual dimension, the dimension I call "Living Daylight," which is experiencing the spirit of love and light at the same time.

EM: *In the book, you describe having the "living daylights" scared out of you. Your description was so simple and yet profound, and I laughed with recognition and understanding. Can you give our readers a description of what that means?*

AHA: The Living Daylight is the name I give to the spiritual dimension that we experience when we have a sense of being adequately held. It looks like daylight, but it is the presence of love as the substance of light. When we do not feel held this way, do not feel safe, we react to our experience through some kind of dissociation from it. This dissociation, which is a reaction to the resulting insecurity and distrust, causes us to lose contact with the Living Daylight. It is as if it is knocked out of us by the experience of the lack of real and adequate holding on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels.

EM: *If someone does not have a good holding environment, and thus either creates too many boundaries or too few boundaries, how could you adjust that later in life?*

AHA: Everybody has a limitation in their early holding environment, right? What you do is you first work to become aware of how much trust you have in the environment in general: do you have blind trust? Do you have no trust at all? Or do you have more objective, realistic trust? By looking at the question of trust and the environment, that takes you to your early childhood environment, because that was the origin of your relationship to trust. Then you begin to work with your experience of that early environment and holding. That brings you to your limitations.

EM: *So if someone has, say blind trust, that might cause them to have too few boundaries?*

AHA: Yes, it might. Trusting or not trusting doesn't have to do with boundaries, but has to do with actions, how you relate to the world, and how courageous you are, how relaxed you are. The more trusting you are, the more you are relaxed and can be yourself.

EM: *So through a series of self-inquiries, you could get to what happened in your holding environment that caused this mechanism?*

AHA: That distorted the question of trust. That then reconnects you to some kind of spiritual dimension, the Living Daylight, which will make your trust more objective, more real.

EM: *During one of the early workshops that Ichazo was giving in '71 or '72, he was talking about the fixation occurring between the ages of four and eight. And at times, a person can remember the instant in which a fixation takes place. What is your opinion of that?*

AHA: I hear people saying that; I don't know how accurate it is. I know people who say they remember that. I think it's generally accurate, that around that time the fixation finally crystallizes, between four and eight. Whether somebody can actually remember the point when it happened, I don't know, but some people report that they do.

EM: *What about the argument of personality or type being genetic, and determined before you're born?*

AHA: That's the idea that came with the Enneagram teaching, that it's determined by the specific Holy Idea; we are born with a specific Holy Idea being more determined for us. The Holy Idea is pre-determined, which of course means the fixation is pre-determined.

EM: *So it would not necessarily be fixated between ages four and eight, if it's already determined?*

AHA: No, it is fixated. It's determined to become that fixation. In the beginning, the person is not fixated.

EM: *I see what you mean; because an infant is in essence, and not fixated yet. Are you saying that acquiring a fixation is a two-stage process? There is a maturation towards it, and you prepare the ground, and at a specific moment, it becomes official triggered by a traumatic event?*

AHA: Yes, it becomes structured in the mind. Before that it's not fixed, though there's a possibility for it.

EM: *Have you experienced someone who was possibly born with an inclination towards a certain Holy Idea whose fixation became something other than the pre-determination?*

AHA: No, but I have not done that research.

EM: *Do you think it's possible to switch fixations during a lifetime?*

AHA: I haven't seen that happen. I think there's something called a secondary fixation that people have, one that can dominate at some point. That doesn't mean it replaces the primary fixation though.

EM: *Theoretically, if you're working on a fixation, then you should be rendering it more and more transparent, and therefore easing off its grip. Would it mean that during this time your secondary fixation which has not been worked on intensively can suddenly appear bigger?*

AHA: Exactly, I think that's what happens.

EM: *So in theory, enlightenment would mean to work out all nine fixations?*

AHA: Yes, and that's the approach we follow in the school. We work on all of them. In our teachings we do all of them, we have the students go through all of them.

EM: *Would you say the most difficult one to work on is the one that is our own?*

AHA: Generally speaking, yes. It's the one that's most fixated, most structured in us.

EM: *Do you have any words of advice to the Enneagram community?*

AHA: What I'm aware of makes me think that if we really want to be free from the fixations, we need to connect with a spiritual dimension. It's not enough just to know the psychological types. Another thing is that the primary purpose in the development of the Enneagram was to bring about spiritual liberation. Let's not forget that. Use it for other things, but these other things are not the primary reason for it, and not the most effective use of it. The greatest value in the Enneagram is in support of spiritual liberation. And of course the development of human life and fulfillment. And for that to happen, we need to go deeper than the Enneagram of Fixations, to a spiritual dimension.

EM: *What is your opinion of the link between Gurdjieff's material and the Enneagram?*

AHA: I don't really know. I haven't researched it. I know people have ideas and have researched it, but I don't know much about the Gurdjieff Enneagram.

EM: *If you encourage people to include a spiritual element, would you suggest a particular direction? Or any particular spiritual practice?*

AHA: The Enneagram itself has a spiritual dimension, like the virtues and the Holy Ideas, and other Enneagrams of our spiritual nature. Getting to those can happen by connecting to any spiritual teaching, and which teaching one follows is up to the individual. But doing the spiritual work and connecting to our essential nature can at some point take us to the virtues and Holy Ideas.

EM: *What I like about what I've heard about the Diamond Approach is that it's not just meditation and sitting on a cushion, and it's not just the psychological aspect, but you so clearly do work that connects the two.*

AHA: Exactly. But people have different inclinations and different teachings speak to different people, so each person needs to listen to his or her own heart, to his or her intuition, to find out which spiritual path to follow.

EM: *Carrying it a bit further, since people respond better to individualized teaching, would you have some suggestions for what kind of teachings seem to be more suitable for which types?*

AHA: No, I don't think of it that way. I think different types are sometimes attracted to different teachings. That does happen. But I don't know if you can make rules about it.

EM: *If different types are attracted to different teachings, is it because those teachings are pleasant and easy, and not necessarily transformative?*

AHA: It usually seems to be that way. I wouldn't say all the time, but most of the time it is.

EM: *So it could also give you a feeling of complacency that would block your growth.*

AHA: It's possible. For instance, people who tend to be more emotional will be more attracted to emotional, devotional work, which could be good in the sense that they could use themselves correctly. But at the same time, it could support their own tendencies.

EM: *So again, that which is our strength can also be our biggest weakness.*

AHA: Yes, but you see, a good spiritual teaching should be able to address all the types. And if you talk to spiritual teachers, they would tell you that. They don't just focus on one type.

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