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Ancient Spirituality, the Enneagram, and the 23rd Psalm

Much has been written, and brilliantly so, by Richard Rohr comparing the spirituality of Jesus of the Christian Bible's New Testament to the Virtues and Passions of the Enneagram. For Christians the story related of Jesus in the New Testament is the fulfillment of the promises of the Jewish Bible. In this essay I will compare the fascinating concordance of Enneagram wisdom with that of the 23rd Psalm from the book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible. I will use the King James translation as I view this as most expressive of the poetic voice of the psalms which are believed to have been sung, perhaps accompanied by the lute, lyre or harp. The titles 'Psalms' and 'Psalter' come from the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT.) The traditional Hebrew title is *tehillim* meaning 'praises.'¹ Here is the complete psalm uninterrupted so that the reader may experience the prayer's poetic and emotional impact.

***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the
paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for
thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they
comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the
presence of mine enemies; thou annointest my
head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the
house of the Lord for ever.***

This prayer, which is both poem and song, was from the Psalter, a collection of psalms representing a process spanning centuries of oral tradition which is thought to have been finally recorded in the third century B.C. by temple writers; however, at least parts of the psalter probably date back to the time of David who is credited with the authorship of many of the psalms. Considering the scope and breadth of the 150 psalms in the collection, the compilation can be viewed as a book of both inspiration and instruction in man's efforts to stay connected with God.

The Enneagram, from its oldest known roots, whether we consider those roots to be the Early mystical Christian Desert Fathers in the Middle East or the Sufis, the

mystical branch of the Moslem faith center in today's Afghanistan, the focus centered around man's search for re-connection to the divine within.ⁱⁱ During these early times, although the terms of ego, superego, id, and personality were millennia in the future, the

foundational concepts of nine ways in which man loses contact with his divine nature, or as George I. Gurdjieff, the great spiritual teacher put it *falls asleep* were present. The Enneagram symbol itself was brought to the Western world by Gurdjieff in the late 19th century.ⁱⁱⁱ My intention here is to show how the beautiful 23rd psalm is a teaching of Enneagram wisdom in its most fundamental aspects as the totality of man's gifts from God. He need only be reminded, even if countless times, of these gifts and how to find guidance back to them.

Not only does the 23rd Psalm bring one into contact with the Essential Qualities of the nine Enneagram Types, but is also embraces all three of the Centers of Intelligence in a deeply felt, deeply touching, and deeply guiding way.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

From this opening line one is given the assurance of guidance, leadership, and abundance. Implied in a shepherd's care is the love and attention for his flock. From the first we have the leadership, the manifestation of the strength of the Eight, the clear guidance of the Six, and the abundance of the Seven, all enveloped in the Heart Center's Type Two holding embrace.

The cadence of the words, their flow from our physical tongue, miraculously viscerally felt in the English translation as well as in the original Hebrew, establishes a feeling of safety. Within these lines we may rest, take in the wisdom, be comforted, be reassured, be guided, be loved, be reminded of what is already here. In the same way, the three Centers of Intelligence of the Enneagram teaching reminds us of what is already here and real in which we can rest (the Body Center,) the comfort and love that is ever present (the Heart Center) and the reassurance and guidance always available (the Head Center.)

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

What does lying down, and specifically lying down in a green pasture, that is a pasture soft with new grasses and nurtured with moisture of fallen rain invite? It invites a rest from all the *doing*, the active moving doing so typical of the Dutiful (Types One, Two, and Six) and the Assertive Types (Three, Seven, and Eight.) To rest, to cease to move, to slow down amidst openness is the reminder of the starting point for the types for whom this is such a challenge.

For the Type Eight specifically, to lie down in an open space can look and feel like placing oneself in a highly vulnerable position. It is God here making this happen in a nurturing and safe environment. What could be more supportive and encouraging for the Type Eight.

For Types One, Two, Three, and Seven -- the energizer bunnies of the Enneagram; special permission is given, actually commanded, to stop, lie down, invite

in full attention to oneself amidst the luxuriant green growth. All the benefit is fully for oneself. What a relief to have this permission, this command. Here the opening may begin on the path back to one's divine self. Finding one's location on the map of the Enneagram is, much in the same way, an invitation albeit not a command, to stop and take stock amidst the rich wisdom contained therein.

He leadeth me beside still waters.

Still water is the perfect metaphor for the still mind. Still waters are clear waters where the sediment of the active stirring, turbulent flow, stamping animal hooves, uprooted earth now rest upon the river or lake bottom. We have a clear, still view as we are led to walk beside these waters. This line seems written specifically for the Thinking Triad Types seeking guidance and support to quiet their stirred unquiet minds.

For the Type Five, he or she is asked to actively walk and be led to clarity as opposed to stirring the waters to discover each and every speck of sediment and what it may add to understanding. Clarity is there, one needs only allow oneself to be led.

For the Type Six, guidance is also offered toward stillness as an antidote to the tremendous agitation of the anxious and doubting mind.

This same stillness is offered for each Type, regardless of personality perspective, and specifically for each variety of fixed habit resulting in constricted, unquiet thinking. Out of stillness opens expansiveness within which each personality type and may move toward loosening the grip of one's particular fixation.

He restoreth my soul.

Perhaps no line in this psalm is as key for each of us as we explore deeply; jettisoning habits, patterns, and the judgments of the carapace of our personality. The promise of restoration of our Soul, our *Essence* is profound. This declaration points to the connection with our Divine self as the source of our restoration, our transformation. The 'He' in this prayer may be interpreted in Enneagram wisdom as the Divine within us, the God in us. This essential wisdom is ancient. The Enneagram offers the modern man or woman a non doctrinal framework within which to work, but the core teaching is old and true and unchanging.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

This verse feels as if it were composed specifically in the support of the Type One and Type Eight, both upholders of righteousness. For a Type One the path of righteousness is fraught with the risks of excessive control, criticality, and perfectionism; for the Type Eight those of excessive force, anger, and oppression. 'His name's sake' is in the name of the loving, just, and patient God. As Type Ones and Eights reach out to do good, to lead, to protect others they are reminded that they are not alone and that the God within, when allowed to lead, can guide them along their journey. The juxtaposition of the framework of the Enneagram, with its Lines of Flow, its points of Integration and Stress, its very symbol a reminder of an easily followed pathway toward

self understanding and growth which ultimately supports the greatest desires of the individual.

Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.

Here we are all, every Type, reminded of our fragile humanity capable of being flicked out in an instant. It is as if the message reads: Don't get so full of yourself -- your spiritual contentment, your right knowing, your loving generosity, your glittering achievements, your dramatic uniqueness, your crystal clear vision, your steadfast loyalty, your joyful enthusiasm, your rock solid strength-*for dust though art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*^{iv}

Having offered this powerful reminder the writing goes on to remind us that we are not alone. The symbol of the Enneagram begins with the circle, the universal symbol of Unity. We are all One and the wisdom of the Enneagram begins there. The *evil* that we face, in terms of the Enneagram, is our personality, the ersatz version of our *Essence*, our true Divine self. As the ancients reminded mortal man of this, so can modern man realize and explore the same truth.

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

As humans we are prone into the thinking that we have to *do it all ourselves*. We are given here the reminder of firm (the rod) direction and the opportunity for rescue (the staff) and in that realization we may take comfort. I'm reminded of a line from Goethe's *Faust: man errs as long as he doth strive.*^v The ancient teaching is not to not strive, but to know that there is help along the way and that it is likely that you will need to be plucked up out of the rut of your errors with the rescuing staff. The Enneagram accomplishes the same purpose by offering a dynamic system in which, through awareness and study, one may predict and notice where one is likely to need that tap of the rod and lift of the staff.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

What enemy is referred to here? What sort of table is being set? Here, as in the teaching of the Enneagram we have the enemy within one's own personality patterns, habits, behaviors, fears, and drives. The self judging inner critic, while once serving as an aid to survival, so often becomes the enemy seducing back into the status quo of our current constricted state. The table set for the ancient Jews was the law and the promises of God. It was all there for support and if attended one could be prepared for any sort of assault, be it from without or within. Much as the Torah paved the path for an ancient Jew, the Enneagram by its very nature outlines the path for the modern man. The richness of the *meal* consists of the knowledge gleaned from observation of the human nature of each of the nine types of human consciousness. Digesting this becomes the fuel for metabolizing fixations and opening to a more expansive nature.

This 'meal' can look so: for the Nine--contact with the body, for the One--a sense of authentic goodness, for the Two--generosity flowing without effort, for the Three--a

dazzling value emanating without doing, for the Four--joy in the ordinary, for the Five--plenty in all that is needed, for the Six--safety in the moment without doubt, for the Seven--freedom to be with the pain, for the Eight--support to drop bravado and expose the belly of vulnerability. The table is laden--we need only to sit down and partake.

Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.

This verse assures us that the divine is in each of us, none are overlooked as we are each anointed. No one is more deserving than another and no one is overlooked. We all have the divinity within, just as no Enneagram type is better than any other type. Each is a part of the Unity of the whole and each is connected with not only his or her individual divine gift, but with all the gifts of the whole.

My cup runneth over seems spoken directly to the Type Five and the Type Seven where not having *enough*, be it knowledge or experience, is a key motivating fear. The reminder that one's *cup*, the container of one's Essence, one's true self, has everything needed contained within. While each type may feel he or she hasn't *enough* of something, this concept is especially prominent in these two types within the Thinking Center.

For the Type Five to feel the abundance and see it 'running over' thus allows its expression outwardly; relieves the fear that there isn't enough to go around; and stills the feeling that it is unsafe to share. For the Type Seven the 'running over' fills the cup to the brim sending the message that the chasing after more and more is unnecessary and thus can offer profound relief.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

We each need assurance that our purpose here on Earth can in some way answer our soul's calling. This beautiful and graceful line gives us the assurance that as we follow our path goodness and mercy follow, not just at times when we are on our best behavior or when we are especially pious, but *all* the time, *all the days of my life*.

Here is a verse that even as we can all benefit, the Type One individual will experience a particular holding, for underlying the greatest fear for the Type One is that of not being good. In the at-times ruthless pursuit of this goodness or 'rightness' the One's inner critic may become a bludgeoning tyrant, more so for the Type One than any other type. The powerful word *mercy* is the special gift here. For the Type One to feel the mercy of the divine, bring mercy for himself or herself and experience this mercy with each assault of the inner critic is the offering of both this ancient wisdom and the wisdom of the Enneagram.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

'House of the Lord'-- what does this mean? The House of the Lord is the milieu, the felt presence of the divine within us, present in each moment. The fact that we may be *asleep* to it begs the point -- it is there and will always be there and we each have the choice to dwell in its supportive, protective, and sheltering presence.

This 'House of the Lord' is the Essential Quality as taught through the Enneagram and while present for every type, possesses a particular flavor for each

individual Enneagram Type: The Nine's unity and wholeness, the One's goodness and serenity, the Two's unconditional love and sweetness, the Three's real value and authenticity, the Four's true identity and depth, the Five's real knowing and clarity, the Six's real guidance and will, the Seven's real joy and freedom, and the Eight's strength and courage.

Amen: a word so similar in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French and Old English meaning *a solemn ratification or hearty approval*. The 23rd Psalm is just such a solemn and hearty approval of all that we have at our disposal to live our unique and gifted lives to our fullest touching on all of our capacities, using the knowledge of the brilliant map of the Enneagram held within the House of the Lord.

i Zondervan NIV Study Bible, Fully Revised 2002, pg 1039

ii The Enneagram A Christian Perspective, Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, 2001 pgs 14-21.

iii Wisdom of the Enneagram, Don Riso and Russ Hudson, 1999, pgs 19-25

iv Genesis 3:19 Hebrew Bible

v Faust, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translated by George madison Priest 1941 Prologue line 316