

WHEN A FIVE WANTS TO GROW: USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY TO EXAMINE INNER CHANGES THROUGH THE EYES OF THE ENNEAGRAM

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Abstract

The title “When a Five wants to grow” documents the author’s path of inner work, resulting in an awareness of his inner motivations and his effect on others. Changes of mental and emotional perception, cerebral processing, thirst for information, and self-withdrawal are analyzed to see whether and how they are in agreement with Enneagram theory. How these are related to the reality in the author’s social context is clearly revealed. This article emphasizes the dynamism of life experience which mirrors the subjectivity in each individual, and the author’s own struggles for the sake of spiritual growth.

Key words enneagram type Five inner change
self-withdrawal autoethnography

“Moo¹, what makes you think you are a Five?” said one of the facilitators to begin the panel interview for type Five². And that, for me, triggered a life-long learning with a system called the Enneagram.

This question brought many thoughts and memories about myself into the conversation. The talk was so enjoyable that the interviewer came up to me later and admitted that it was one of the best interview sessions that he had ever done. Meanwhile, I observed my own feelings during the panel and found that I was filled with pride and vanity almost all the time. I was so proud of talking in a clear and confident manner, but more importantly perhaps, I was secretly fond of the way that my approach to life was described.

“Fives’ thoughts are so systematic, clear, factual and rational.”

“If it’s something in which Fives are interested, they can provide plenty of comprehensive and deep information.” “A One like me really agrees with the Fives in the way that we both do things according to certain principles.”

“Apart from being knowledgeable, Fives are quite unemotional.”

“Fives are very self-sustaining, even when they are alone.”

¹ The nickname of the author.

² The interview was carried out on May 13th, 2007 as part of the annual public workshop of the basic Enneagram by the Thailand Enneagram Association.

All of these statements spoke to my ego through the typical characteristics of Fives. I clearly saw the advantages and strengths of myself as a Five. Moreover, I was coming to know how my way of being could be beneficial for others. The atmosphere of the interview, to me, seemed to favor Fives. My strong self-appreciation gradually formed as I learned what the Enneagram says about Fives, and this led me to think, "Everything about Fives is absolutely great!"

This article would not have been written if all the things mentioned above were true. However, after that very first basic Enneagram workshop, my inner voice started to say something. That inner voice seemed to be warning me that the feelings I had had during that panel interview might be too sweet to be true. I sensed that my true self might be very different from what I saw and felt on that day.

Inkling of the Problem

"Usually people have developed more strongly the qualities that belong to the natural tendencies of their types" (Nathans, 2004: 23).

According to Enneagram theory, people tend to develop their qualities according to the lenses through which they see the world; people can become very adept in manifesting these qualities. As a result, it is natural, especially for new learners, to be controlled by the habitual patterns of their types, which at first seem to be beneficial for them. They report that it can be terribly difficult to set themselves free. And this, of course, holds true for me as well. However, as the time has passed, my pride in being a Five has somehow diminished. I have started to experience some nervousness, particularly when my own type-specific strengths were directly criticized.

"You are so selective in what you want to hear. You didn't listen to it all."

"But what's wrong with that? Aren't facts more substantial than other things?" replied my inner voice.

"You are so flooded with information whenever you talk."

"But it is information that's worth telling, isn't it?" argued my inner voice.

"Is it not lonely for you to always shut yourself in your room like that?"

"Yes, it's deadly lonely inside even though my face says I am okay!" the inner voice shouted.

The feelings expressed by those whispering inner voices now remind me to pay attention to the old familiar me and whether or not I am okay. Some questions I ask myself are: whether emotions are less significant than facts; whether talking about one's emotions universally implies the invasion of one's privacy, i.e., becoming vulnerable; and whether total retreat into one's own private sanctuary is really safe and reliable. To question the things that have never been questioned before like this can strongly rattle me and also loosen me from my familiar

anchors. Inevitably, this has resulted in my noticing great sufferings in my life, appearing one after another.

This article presents my personal experiences regarding three aspects of inner change: mental and emotional perception, attitudes towards facts and information, and self-withdrawal. Based on the theoretical framework of the Enneagram, these changes are analyzed to see if and how they are in agreement with the theory, and also, how they are related to the reality of the author's social context. The tool used here is autoethnography told mainly through a first-person perspective, allowing subjectivity to take root, in addition to conventional data analysis and interpretation.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a research method which makes the author's inner experience explicit, based on the belief that one's own inner experience has a part in determining the outer reality and in influencing another if appropriately conveyed. This originated in the experiences of ethnographic researchers, who found that their own existence impacted the communities they were studying, and that they were more than outside observers. These findings have guided researchers to a novel way of writing by adding their own role into the research.

Many researchers in the social sciences have found that their own experiences, especially those that have had great impact in their lives, can add significantly to their findings. They have found that telling their own stories directly can be more understandable, powerful and influential than other methods such as interviews, questionnaires, or quantitative figures. However, to reveal one's true self takes courage and requires caution, so as not to distort through one's own thoughts or biases that tend to exclude certain realities one does not like.

In previous articles in the social sciences and humanities, autoethnography has been used as a method for many different reasons in many circumstances. Boyd (2008: 212-225) used autoethnography to study his own inner transformation about his perceptions of white privilege. He narrated his experiences through memories, documents and personal journals. Bruner (1996: 300-319) described his personal experiences at the Himalayan Institute, a New Age ashram located in Pennsylvania, from the dual perspectives of an ethnographer interested in understanding transplanted Indian traditions and as an individual engaged in a spiritual quest. Humphreys (2005: 840-860) used three autoethnographic vignettes as a means to enhance the richness and reflexivity in qualitative research regarding his own career change. Moreover, Brooks (2006: 185-207) employed autoethnography, together with narrative and dialogue, as the process to study *friendship-as-method* for inquiry on the social construction of masculinity in male-male friendship. Berger (2001: 504-518) indicated in her study that including her own stories in her ethnographic work increased rapport between her and her participants, and that autoethnographic method could foster empathy and openness among them.

As the author of this article, I am deeply grateful to Doctor Chanpen Choprapawan, the president of the Thailand Enneagram Association, who kindly made a precious comment about self-reflection within the framework of the Enneagram, which I have gratefully added to the final part of this article.

General Description of the Enneagram

The Enneagram is a geometric figure that maps out the nine fundamental personality types of human nature and their complex interrelationships. It is a development of modern psychology that has roots in spiritual wisdom from many different ancient traditions (Riso & Hudson, 1999: 9).

The Enneagram describes human personality as it is related to inner qualities, basic assumptions and motivations through nine different types. The Enneagram helps learners to become aware of their habitual patterns, to deeply understand themselves as well as others, so that relationships can be improved. Individuals learn to recognize their own type-specific strengths and to overcome pitfalls. This could result in more happiness and efficiency in life as one lets go of the automatisms associated with the type and develops towards the next level of consciousness (Palmer, 2005: 3-5).

Characteristics of Enneatype Five

Fives tend to detach from all kinds of emotion, and often stay in the background as observers and not as participants. They love privacy and feel exhausted and restless if they do not have enough time to review information or think about events that have just passed. They believe that they cannot safely engage with emotions whenever there is someone else around. For Fives, cerebral thinking is very important, and taking in information, particularly about specialized knowledge, is their life (Webb, 2007: 16).

The basic assumption for type Five is that “the world demands too much, to prevent intrusion I need to isolate and be alone to think and regain energy” (Palmer, 2007: 181; Nathans, 2004: 120). The passion or the emotional distortion of type Five is “avarice,” or greed. Fives feel avaricious about information, time, privacy and any resources which make them feel secure and autonomous. While the fixation or the mental distortion of type Five is “stinginess,” this implies that they tend to be over-sensitive to demands and expectations of others (Webb, 2007: 102; Nathans, 2004: 74-76; Riso & Hudson, 1999: 218-219). For growing Fives, “non-attachment,” which means allowing oneself to fully engage with all feelings and experiences without the necessity of self-withdrawal, is the holy virtue, or the emotional essence, that helps Fives overcome avarice. Likewise, “omniscience,” to trust that knowledge is available naturally at the right moment and that it does not have to be collected, acquired, or thought about or held is the holy idea, or the mental essence, that transforms stinginess (Webb, 2007: 112; Nathans, 2004: 89, 122).

Fives often report that as children, they did not feel safe in their families; they felt in danger of being overwhelmed by their parents (or the grown-ups—the author), and so they started looking for ways in which they could feel secure and confident. First, they retreated from the family into their own private space—mentally, physically, and emotionally. Second, they turned their attention away from their personal and emotional needs onto something “objective” (Riso & Hudson, 1999: 210).

Personal Narrative of the Development of the Enneatype Five Structure

I was born into quite a well-to-do family in Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. I am the eldest of three brothers, which gives me prestige and a special place as the first son of the family in Sino-Thai culture. It seemed that my personal interests were rather different from both of my brothers, and I was a few years older. They were closer to each other than to me most of the time. I had had my own bedroom since I was around ten years of age, while my brothers shared a room for many years. As I got, little by little, more and more opportunities to manage my own space—my own locker, my own bed, and then my own room—somewhat fascinating feelings about self-withdrawal were slowly forming internally. I felt that I was like an absolute ruler of a small kingdom with absolute autonomy to do anything within my land. Because of this, I couldn't help thinking that security, power and freedom were surely attainable once I got myself out of the mess of the outside world and came back into my autonomous territory. Since the material wealth of my family allowed me to possess many things, my “private land” was quite rich and full of much worth engaging with. This provided me with a colorful and never-boring experience on my own that I could enjoy. Meanwhile, the defense mechanism of self-isolation gradually developed.

“Whenever I come in here, I feel like I am in a very sacred private world.” said one of my relatives to me once when she was in my room.

“Of course you do. You may call it a *holy-monastery*!” my inner voice said back with feeling, and the inner voice added that every single item in the room had a proper reason of its own as to why it appeared at that very spot. This may not be appealing in someone else's view. However, in my overall view, everything looks absolutely right, and I know I am accountable for that. I expected people who happened to be in my room to be very humble observers. They had to be granted my strict consent before they could touch anything, and if they moved my things, forget it! Every guest was also expected to locate his or her body and move properly in each passing moment. All movements and activities in this room were, in my mind, planned in a very careful manner, just like staging an international event. If anyone did things against my plan, I felt an incredibly strong irritation. The holy-monastery owner (me) was extremely relieved once all guests said goodbye and stepped over the threshold.

Another way that the defense mechanism works is to promptly cut off my association with emotions, and instead use factual information as my only tool for communication. This is the second line of defense, and would be used whenever self-isolation was not possible. Sometimes, I could see myself sitting in the crowd while my true self was not there. My mental activities became the protective shell totally covering me from anything happening outside myself.

So many times when I was young, I felt that I needed to live and do certain things according to the wishes of the grown-ups. Those wishes might be very good and useful, but unfortunately, sometimes they did not go well with my own wishes. A good example was “eating.” The young me felt a major intrusion on being forced to eat what they wanted me to eat without argument. At the dining table, I felt that I was just a food-devouring machine trying to get rid of the top-quality nutritious meal, which my parents believed it their great duty to give to their kids. This was one of the reasons why I, at an early age, learned to withdraw myself and set aside all emotions.

Palmer (2005: 305) described the two types of family experiences that could cause self-withdrawal in children. One is the family that abandons their kids so that the kids learn to withdraw themselves for survival. The other, which is more common, is the family whose children are mentally intruded upon so much that they take refuge by ceasing emotional engagement. This was my experience, especially at the dinner table.

My skill of hiding in the crowd was developed even more when I went to reside in Japan at the age of twenty. There, I practiced what I called “mackerel skill” by using one of the world’s densest mega-cities as my arena. I discovered that I could stay protected among the huge crowd of people through a very simple technique: trying to do everything the same as the others. It looked like a large school of fish when one changes direction to one side, then the rest, millions of them perhaps, altogether instantly following. In other words, it’s so easy not to be intruded upon if you lessen your own feelings and identities, and instead try, as much as you can, to assume behaviors, and ways of thinking and communication (including the language) exactly the same as the majority. I thought that this helped me survive very well in a foreign land.

Another skill, of using facts as the major tool for communication, was something I gained during my stay in Japan. Apart from the academic background of the Doctor of Agriculture which I earned years later, it’s amazing to see that the way I talked with the Japanese also helped me familiarize and integrate myself with “objectivity.” I found out that in order to communicate efficiently in the Japanese culture, it’s helpful to deliver messages as objectively as possible, even the minor events of daily life. To clarify things by using measurable, quantitative figures is much more appreciated than just estimated, qualitative ones. For example, when your partner hits the tennis ball too far, it’s more useful to say, “It’s ten centimeters out,” than just to say, “Out.”

There is probably no evidence to universally validate all the experiences mentioned above, but according to my own perception, they truly have shaped what I am today. For me, to rely firmly on empirical knowledge alone and not feelings or emotions, is like arming myself before coping with the world. And it has helped me a great deal so far. Moreover, I have saved most of my energy from being used up in dealing with “insubstantial” feelings and emotions. To me, it's more worthwhile to spend energy for something tangible or something that can be scientifically proven real. Consequently, I tend to suppress my emotional perceptions, and direct attention to factual information through auditory sensing only, when I face situations erupting with many intense feelings. This continues until my goal in talking is met. Then after I am alone, all the feelings and emotions I previously intercepted might come up and overwhelm me, perhaps, to an exaggerated degree. That often happens no matter how good or bad the emotion or the situation is.

The Inner Journey

My first major inner experience was in October, 2007, when I participated in a ten-day course of Vipassana Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka, an Indian Vipassana teacher. The practice emphasized the importance of the awareness of *vedana*, or sensation, which is one among four interconnected aspects of awareness, or *satipatthana*, as described in the Buddhist teachings (Hart, 1987: 147).

Goenka's intensive ten-day course incredibly changed my frame of reference, turning it upside down. My beliefs that the entire universe behaves only mechanistically, that what is ultimately real is no more than matter and energy, and that consciousness is just the by-product of the material systems, were sadly and firmly uprooted. They were all shockingly replaced by something far greater than the scientific approach. I began to be seriously convinced that mind or consciousness had a vital role in determining what happens on the physical level as well. I discovered, explored and proved this new and frightening idea during the course. For me, it was really a moment of fear, shock and panic like I had never before experienced. In fact, it was difficult for me to imagine that this rare experience, bringing both miracle and fear together, could happen to a very ordinary guy like me.

Before that, I was also the one who put the highest priority on tangible, measurable, and rational knowing without any skepticism. The most important inner state for me was being free of feelings or bias that might distort the factual meaning. I might say that I had never questioned whether matter determines mind. For instance, whenever there is some chemical change on a particular spot of skin, this can result in the feeling of itchiness; then we move a hand to scratch at that spot. The scratch causes another physical and chemical change there, and then the feeling of itchiness is removed. This kind of truth (or belief?) was so self-evident that I could not imagine how it could be challenged. However,

after just the first three to four days of practice, it was enough to tell me that my long believed “truth” no longer seemed real. Sitting meditation for more than ten hours a day substantially boosted the strength of my awareness, which then successfully helped my mind to focus on one particular thing, and also to see more subtle contents of my mind. I could see that, in fact, all feelings I perceived were mainly due to the function of the mind, and not of the automatic response of my body. The feeling of itchiness mentioned above can be viewed as happening from the engagement of the mind towards some stimuli. If the mind liberates itself from the engagement, or if we completely divert the focus of the mind from it, we then can totally be free from such physical change, and no itch would be detected. In other words, it’s the mind, not the body, that makes us itchy. By then, I could see and simply justify to myself how powerful and influential my mind was.

The mind closely interconnects with the body in a way that is more profound than we used to know, and without the awareness of sensation, or *vedana*, we may not be able to come close to understanding of such reality (Hart, 1987: 147; Phra Brahmagunabhorn, 2006: 36 - 38).

Such a profound discovery not only filled me with joy, but also uncertainty, as I doubted what would come up next.

The practice in the following days of the retreat switched from focusing to developing equanimity. Equanimity is the state of mind that opens and perceives any mental activities or changes as they are, using physical sensation as the tool to attain.

What I found out more obviously was that I could use my developed power of awareness to shift attention towards a particular place, like my upper lips, to stay away from those painful places in my body. It’s like escaping the undesirable feelings by emptying all the sensing entities I have from the pain-prone spots to a safer spot. I knew I was becoming keener and keener at that. However, once I focused on the pain in my body, I could not develop equanimity. The very last thing of which I could or would let go seemed to be my own thoughts or mental formations. My inner voices then kept telling me that to let go of materials, possessions, or people was somewhat possible, but it was absolutely not possible to let go of my thoughts. I just could not imagine where or how I would be if I had no thought left at all. I myself might disappear, be sucked into a black hole, or vanish into thin air! It was too scary to think about it. Fear surged up in me to a peak where I felt I would disintegrate and be gone with the thought. “Am I (spiritually) dying?” I tearfully asked myself, sitting alone in the cell, shivering as extreme fright ran down my spine. Such experiences continued for many hours, before I realized how thinking plays so much a vital role in my life. Therefore, it’s not surprising at all why I think I must keep intellect as my sole weapon to struggle in the world. To me, thinking is more precious than anything else,

allowing me to stand up to everyone, and to keep myself as I am. It's definitely not an exaggeration to say that my experiences during that ten-day course were drastic and did shake my beliefs to the core abruptly. The way I view the world has since been changed irreversibly.

Contemplative Education

Experiences that confirm the significance of mind over matter have been happening to me one after another, including my participation in meditation retreats and spiritual classes. Nevertheless, the most important opportunity that brought me into this learning occurred when I became a student at the Contemplative Education Centre at Mahidol University in May, 2008.

One of the crucial learning philosophies applied here is “to wholeheartedly engage the mind into mindful awareness practices in order to deepen one’s own investigations,” in which the importance of mind in all dimensions is very much emphasized (Thongtavee, C., 2008: 27; Panich, V., 2007: 17) Here, we do talk a lot about the way we develop authentic contemplative concepts within the curriculum. Thus, what we learn is mainly by having direct experiences through different activities. What we always do is to share the inner “feelings” that occur in the moment. Generally, the learning goes beyond content, but touches directly our inner feelings and perceptions. The courses in the program are an outline for the learners to pursue.

At the beginning of this program, I noticed how often I got stuck in my own thinking mind, including analyzing, summarizing, and conceptualizing, whenever I connect with the world. The way I jumped back into my brain and started objectively to organize and compartmentalize incoming information happened automatically, and I just couldn’t see it. I found out later that by doing this, my other channels of communication, like feelings and emotions, including non-verbal ones, were very much obstructed. All my attention was focused on conceptual messages only, and I ignored the rest almost completely. This resulted in selective perception, depending on my familiar habits of mind. On the other hand, the way I spoke was also problematic. I could see myself becoming too informative, as if I were giving an academic lecture. What was in my mind was that I wanted the listener to get the most comprehensive, correct and substantial information possible, so that our conversation would be most beneficial and fruitful. However, all of this could be viewed by others as pushy and not really being present to the person in front of me.

At times, when we practiced interviewing, I found that as an interviewer, I often pushed my partner toward a particular agenda that I had determined as correct. Sometimes I thought for them and expected to hear particular answers or conclusions, or I would even put words into their mouths. By staying focused in my thinking brain without really connecting to the other person, I could bring about negative outcomes in many ways. I found I would press the person

for the answer, missing non-verbal messages, talking too fast or confusingly, or stumbling over my words. These things were more clearly noticeable after I practiced more dialogue; developing the skills of respecting, deep listening, suspending, and voicing (Wangwinyoo, W., 2005: 26).

My practice of self-awareness through interview was improved when I became one of the participants in the workshop of Advanced Skill Training for Enneagram Facilitators in November, 2008 (Santikaro, 2008). The workshop allowed me not only to gain skill as an interviewer, but also, more importantly, to be aware of my own type bias and how my type influenced an interview. I could see in both typing and panel interviews, how often I fell back into my old track of thinking and analyzing. To be aware of and to overcome this thinking habit became my priority. The old patterns usually came with over-expectation. Self-withdrawal into the mode of thinking like this can perhaps be described as getting oneself locked into what we call "preparation mode" (Riso & Hudson, 1999: 219). Another observation was how tense I became due to my attempts to input as much as possible. There would then be too much information and knowledge for the listeners to understand. At the same time, it impeded my ability in communicating when I was not present to the subject, as mentioned earlier.

After several months of training with various results, I developed a synthesis for myself. I need to be aware of keeping a balance between retreating back to preparation mode as usual, and coming out to face mindfully what is happening, to stay present and to limit my expectations. This seems to correspond with the description of the levels of development for type Five (Riso and Hudson, 1999: 216). Fives who are at healthy level 2 are called "observant perceptive," while those at level 1 are called "*participating visionary*." They can leave their isolation, are able to engage in life, and can focus on the environment so they can feel confident in functioning in it.

Meditation is one of the most essential practices in the Contemplative Education Centre. It is the path to creating one of best tools for self-investigation, *sati* or mindfulness. According to the Buddhist teaching, *sati* is the tool needed in meditation practices for perceiving mental activities, which also allows us to be aware and not absent-minded (Santinan, 2009: 17). *Sati* corresponds with the ability to remember or to be mindful; it is a virtue necessary for being aware of body, sensations, and mental activities (Saipanich, S., 2009: 37). By the wholesome power of *sati*, I found that I could learn to become more aware and gain an accurate comprehension of my inner aspects, including instincts, feelings and emotions, and thinking. There was one practice that we emphasized, which we called "to watch one's mind," or mindfulness as regards mental states. "To watch one's mind," according to the description of Ajarn Pramote Pamojjo,

... is to mindfully see the state of mind after a mental activity has happened without the pre-focusing, or attentively waiting for the thing to happen. It is the awareness right after a particular state of mind has

already happened, and after that, “to watch one’s mind” concludes without any forcing or further formation (Saipanich, S., 2009: 39).

In my studies at the Contemplative Education Centre, we use the technique of mindfulness regarding mental states as the main path to approach the different dimensions of inner investigation. I personally familiarized myself with this when I first visited Suan Santitham, the residence of Ajarn Pramote, in May, 2008.

This morning when I drove to the Centre, I did realize clearly one knowing state. It’s that when some emotions come into contact with my mind, even a very weak emotion, at that very immediate moment there is an action of the aware mind to suddenly turn its attention to it and say, “Oh, I just feel” That’s quite new to me since it had rarely happened before. It comes more often when I am in a serene state; I’m getting more and more used to it. To be able to see the mental states like this looks fun and interesting to follow, although it always comes in a flash, a short moment. After such knowing, it’s more often that I still go back to engage with the same old feelings, but usually with less intensity. I think this kind of knowing state is a promising signal for inner development.—From the author’s personal journal, June 9th, 2008.

Mindfulness regarding mental states has opened me to the broader space, allowing me to discover many things that I’ve never clearly seen before. I believe it is the crucial foundation that lets me correctly continue on this spiritual path. It also helps me to be aware and go beyond my own habitual obstacles, like the limited world of cerebral thinking.

... “Tense, full of expectation, suffering, why should I remain tense?”

Whenever tension arises, the mind starts to look for some tasty things to cling to. That’s what I recognized during one sitting. Those tasty things often originated from certain flashing moments from my memory bank, which were subsequently embellished emotionally for me to enjoy. Most of the time, they came in the form of fun or amusing stories, or pictures of a huge and international choice of food, or even songs. These kind of mental objects are not too hard to be aware of, and once they are in awareness, they can instantly be stopped.

One more category of mental objects that I usually recognized was the stream of thoughts that seemed to search for managing or a kind of expected results. For example, “What should I do next?” or “How can I get this thing done?” Such questions could lead to a seemingly never-ending series of stories. The thoughts were repeated over and over, flipped from side to side in order to be seen from all angles, as if to get oneself fully prepared for any upcoming situations and have the most appropriate answers for those situations. This kind of mental object is

quite sticky and somewhat harder to recognize. Even though they are recognized them, it's still very difficult to stop them. Probably because I am a head type who always searches for the finest answers from the finest thoughts. Those seem to provide meanings and very well sustain my being . . .

Now, sitting seemed to give me more peace and stillness than walking. Around the end of the afternoon sitting, an interesting moment occurred. Actually it was the perception of breath in the way which was not too close or too far, instead it was kept in the background and then "let go." It was the letting go of the wanting the breath to be seen, the wanting to follow the thoughts, the wanting of managing the pain, and the wanting of anything. Anything. Anything there is there, and let it be there. Let go of everything. Let go of the heaven I wanted to climb up to. And let go of the reasons why I had to keep myself facing all the pain and difficulties. All of these came up almost instantly after my boredom approached the boiling point, bringing later the brief moment of light and comfort. My breath was there, for sure, and my pain was also there at the other corner, for sure, as well. And around the centre of my mental space, there was a blurred group of things. Not sure what it was, but surely it's there. It's so light and okay, as nothing had to be analyzed or named. The whole lot was there, but no name, and no wanting to give the names. No focusing in particular, but everything was perceived in one big view. Just wait and see, whatever happens, happens. . . —From the author's personal journal, November 22, 2008 (The Enneagram and Dharma Practice with Ajarn Santikaro).

Another gift that I got from meditation was a direct realization of the existence of intangible attributes like love and compassion. I can say with confidence that these energies really exist and are possible to experience. During the week of meditation with "Loving Kindness," guided by Ajarn Joel and Michelle³ as a part of Buddhist Contemplative Psychology (in October, 2008), I truly experienced the essence of loving kindness that filled the air of our classroom. All the teaching, blessing, and inspiring practices, as well as the beautiful mantras, empowered my heart to fully bloom and reach out for the boundless peace. Another powerful experience of great loving kindness happened when I joined the rally of non-violence⁴ held around the Monument of Democracy, in downtown Bangkok on September 3, 2008. Mindfully walking under the glitter of candlelight in the dark night of uncertainty, sorrow, and fear just turned

³ Dr. Joel Levey and Michelle Levey, the guest lecturers of the course, are from Innerwork Technologies, Inc., Washington, DC, USA.

into a white energy reaching out far in every direction to tell out loud the larger society with deep sincerity that, “Love heals the world. It really does.” Right at that mandala of great power, I felt the indescribable feelings of serenity, joy and lightness and was filled with hope. By the synergy of our serene minds with the strong intention for peace, I could obviously perceive that an infinite amount of energy radiated all around us. None of us would question that what we were doing there made an impact.

Behind the Private Zone

People who are acquainted with the Enneagram usually say that Fives can survive well even though they are alone. Palmer (2005: 346) suggested that Fives should be particularly aware when they say, “I am okay without you” to friends, family, or whomever. Once I reviewed all feelings and emotions regarding this issue, including all the events involved during the past few years, I personally discovered another perspective of how I give meaning to privacy. For me, the reason that Fives are fascinated when staying in their own territories may not just derive from the fact that they can definitely take good care of themselves and be self-sustainable. It is more likely that they need the very thing that they can certainly securely rely on. The scariest thing about this happens when a Five one day comes back to his own space and just finds out that such a thing does not exist anymore. This then could be an extremely terrifying experience of spiritual loneliness.

Palmer (2007: 193) similarly added that to retreat to one’s own room remains good as long as there is someone in front of the door, as the isolation is your active choice when you feel it’s rational to defend yourself. However, your own room could become a jail if there is no one who ever knocks on your door again, and that could result in a situation that brings about loneliness you never wished for.

My changing perception towards the private zone has become the start of what I am today. Without it, I am more likely to continue my life under the shelter of my family. Without it, I probably dare not put myself among new faces, unfamiliar people, or different situations. And without it, I perhaps do not really understand why people declare renunciation and set forth on their spiritual journeys. The change is reflected in many practical ways. For instance, I started to become a freelancer in 2005, took part in the arts and in social activities with different groups of new people. I also participated for the first time in a formal spiritual learning course organized by Semsikkalai⁵ in 2007. I consider these

⁴ The rally was held several times during this period of time aiming to cease the political conflict which severely hit the nation like never before in modern Thai history. Due to the conflict, the country’s majority rigidly split into two aggressive sides.

⁵ Semsikkalai, or SEM, is an alternative learning institute founded in 1995. It offers a spiritually based, ecologically sound, holistic alternative to mainstream education, located in Bangkok, Thailand.

to be big steps that truly guided me on my inner journey and led me further to many other spiritual classes, including the Enneagram. The attempt to shift my own self to be part of a larger group of people seems to happen more commonly these days as I try to look for more essential answers in my life. In other words, the anchor of privacy to which I once firmly clung, as Fives generally do, is now vanishing. I need to substitute some other things more securely dependable from greater social or spiritual levels. The saying, “I will survive only if I have privacy” may no longer be as true as, “I will not survive if I have only privacy.” Because of this new perception, I may not be able to return to my private zone with the same old feeling of trust as I once did.

Summary

Despite the section title of “Summary,” it seems to me to be impossible to summarize one’s life, especially when it is still ongoing. By sitting down and letting my pen run across the paper to tell this story, I have had a great opportunity to carefully and deeply review my own life, to get to know myself better, and to be able to see my own being from different angles which I may not ever have been aware of before. For example, I have just realized clearly how my feelings about my own self-withdrawal into privacy changed after I wrote this article. To mindfully tell things like this is also like going back and gently embracing, and probably healing, the little me of the old days. One thing that I can surely conclude at this moment about life is that to change does not necessarily mean to grow, and to grow is not necessarily synonymous with being happy. Only the willingness of a person to grow will induce so many different things, including unpredictable dynamism; thoughts and feelings, either good or bad; a sensation of pressure, like being squeezed into a small and narrow path, etc. However, no matter what it is, it has cause and meaning all its own.

All the experiences described so far, if viewed through the eyes of the Enneagram, could be explained as follows. First, there are situations showing that the author is aware of being more open to spontaneity, and, at the same time, having less attachment solely to analytical or factual information. This corresponds with the development of type Five in the sense that one returns to his essential quality of “*non-attachment*” (Webb, 2007: 112; Palmer, 2005: 339), moves up to the levels of “*observant perceptive*” and “*participating visionary*” (Riso & Hudson, 1999: 216), or develops a new challenge to prevent one from landing in his own pitfall (Ofman & van der Weck, 2001: 86). Secondly, the author is working towards balancing the three centers, by giving himself more opportunity to be in touch with feelings and emotions, as well as a number of exercises (Nathans, 2004: 257). Third, in the author’s own view, his changing perception regarding self-withdrawal into privacy is not congruent with those described by some Enneagram teachers. Generally, the Enneagram says that a highly developed Five can confidently live in the world with comfort and release without the necessity of self-withdrawal or re-energizing oneself in privacy (Webb, 2007: 112; Palmer,

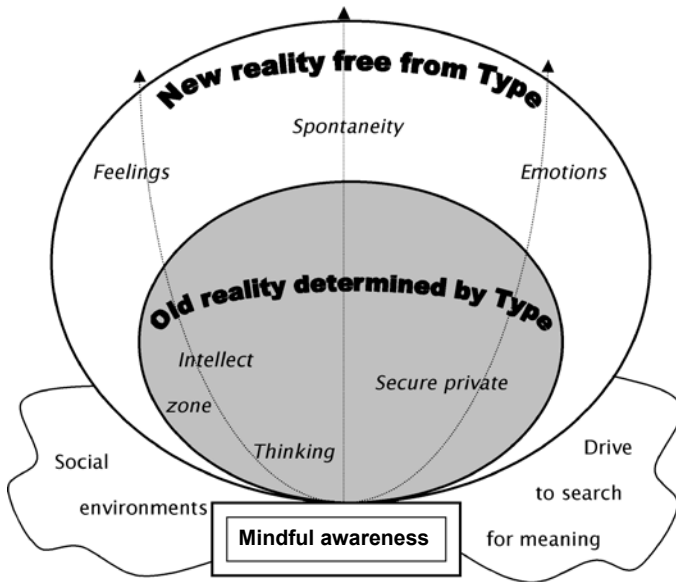
2005: 339), while Maitri (2005: 204) urged, “It is our wholehearted engagement with ourselves that takes us beyond our inner confines, beyond the prison walls of our conditioned sense of reality.” However, the author described that his change in self-isolation resulted from the yearning for a new and more secure anchor of life on which to rely, coupled with the longing for more meaningful ways of living by participating in activities outside his own private zone. This, also, can be clarified by the description regarding sub-types—i.e., the author’s sub-type is shifting from self preservation towards social in recent years.

The author believes that the most significant trigger for every subsequent transformation is mindful awareness and the realization of how the mind works. Meditation or any other exercise that cultivates awareness will effectively open up the inner realms for personal investigation. Fortunately, most Enneagram students in Thailand accept meditation as an indispensable foundation that allows one to be able to recognize, comprehend, then transcend their own vices, which otherwise are difficult to recognize.

Apart from self-narrative, this article also presents a contextual reality that is related to the inner reality of the author. How the author developed his beliefs and attitudes towards the intrusions, as well as self-isolation, reflects the relationship and the changing situations in his family. His educational background developed his thinking competency. Likewise, the changes in the author’s life that have happened recently are more or less related to his social environments. Very inspiring and diverse groups of spiritual people whom the author has met have made his life drastically different. By being among those people, many possible ways of searching for one’s meaning unfold. This gave the author enthusiasm to start his own journey as a spiritual practitioner. Meanwhile, the greater opportunity for the author to deeply immerse himself in spiritual learning also reflects the growing interest of the larger society in spirituality, especially the establishment of contemplative education centers in both mainstream and alternative educational institutions and universities in the last few years. And contemplative education can help people increase their learning potential, and guide them into new realms of inner investigation, which can be substantiated by learning experiences similar to those described throughout this paper.

“When a Five wants to grow” would not be complete without the following figure, which indicates factors that the author personally believes significant for his growth. Cultivating a firm foundation of mindful awareness through meditation, coupled with a strong intention to search for meaning in life with *Figure 1: Pattern of the author’s growth according to the framework of type Five and the factors involved*

assistance from social environments and learning communities, the author has found a way to grow from an old realm of reality perception. This former perception is generally limited by type. Growth is into the new, greater realm of reality perception which is free from type determination. Although the pattern



was developed from the author's personal experiences, it is undoubtedly helpful if people of other types apply the pattern for their own growth, learning to be free from the old situations where the type's voices, whatever they are, keep controlling them.

A story of self-reflection telling how a person struggles for inner growth may not only imply many external facts, but also creates an impact on others, since all of us exist within the interconnected web of the greater reality. Such a meaningful story of one person will not disappear into thin air, but can become a valuable sharing of learning for his fellow spiritual-travelers, and that is probably not because it is scientifically valid. However, it is so because the story can reveal how important and substantial the subjectivity of each individual could be for one's own life. And, for many people, that could reflect the crucial hardship that one needs to face and move through.

In short, the following factors can help a person to move from the grip of type to a new reality with more freedom and spontaneity:

- 1) Mindful awareness cultivated through meditation;
- 2) Strong intention to search for meaning in life;
- 3) Assistance from social environments and learning communities.

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