Head, Heart, Body, 
and the Whole Self

Introducing the Intelligence Centers

Most of us are stumped when faced with the question, “How do you hear from God?” Typically, our most common answers point to hearing through others or through experiences, or to waiting on God to acknowledge our consistent and determined investments in a future answer to a prayer we’ve said.

Some of us think God is speaking outside of us, and so we’re always looking for signs or symbols of Divine movement in the world and fail to recognize that we don’t need to look outside ourselves to hear from the voice of Love who resides within.

Others think God needs to speak to us from someone else, so we’re looking for words from clergy or mentors, conversation partners or friends, books or teachings, and thus miss the good and loving messages that God is already speaking directly to us.

Many of us don’t know how to hear from God in the present, so we make the mistake of believing God is somehow waiting for us in the future. This requires that we figure out what’s next or how we’ll get to where we want to go. But God is here now, closer than our very breath, and can be found in our Intelligence Centers—the
Enneagram’s way of helping us recognize our primary mode of perceiving the world through either our head, heart, or body. Each of these Intelligence Centers offers us a different way of experiencing the loving presence and voice of God.

When we are centered, rooted in God’s embrace, and present to the God whose name is Love, we realize that we are heard and we can learn to hear. Our Intelligence Centers help us hear and invite us to greater discernment.

So what do we mean by discernment, exactly?

Discernment is our ability to judge what is good, true, and beautiful. Discernment is also the inner knowledge of how to act on that which we perceive. Our use of discernment relies on the clarity of our centered minds, the objectivity of peace-filled hearts, and the unobstructed impulses or instincts* of our bodies.

Frequent invitations to speak about my humanitarian work and lead Enneagram workshops take me all over the world. Most of the venues in which I present are conferences, churches, and campuses. Almost without exception after I speak at a university, a student will approach me and ask about discernment, about how to learn to make good decisions or to trust their judgment. Students aren’t the only ones seeking this insight, though; it seems all of us find ourselves questioning our ability to know which voice to listen to and which path to take.

Discernment helps us wade through complicated choices regarding career paths, relationships, where to live, or how to plan for the

* While the Holy Ideas rest in the Intelligence Center’s harmonious mind and the Virtues rest in the peace-filled heart, the Enneagram’s traditional Instinctual Variants or Instinctual Drives are said to be located in the body. Oscar Ichazo listed them as the Conservation Instinct, the Relations Instinct, and the Syntony Instinct. Today, the Enneagram's instincts are most commonly referenced as Self-Preservation, Sexual, and Social, but when they are referred to as the Sub-Types, the Sexual instinct is replaced by “One-to-One.” The Enneagram's Instincts are typically ordered from the dominant driving survival strategy to the tertiary or blind spot Instinct. Many believe the Enneagram's Instincts have the strongest defining influence on shaping the differences within people who share the same type.
future. It helps us weigh out new opportunities, their potential as well as their cost.

Discernment also assists us in simpler decision making—for example, learning to say no to social invitations when we’re tired and just need some time alone. But when it really seems to count is when we seek to discover our created purpose and how to live into it each moment of each day.

Usually I respond by reminding inquirers that they already know how to practice discernment, and it starts with self-awareness.

I ask them something I learned from an old friend, Jeff Johnson, former BET producer as well as former national director for the NAACP’s Youth and College Division: “What makes you cry? What makes you angry? When does your jaw clench or your back straighten?” These kinds of reactions are involuntary physiological responses hardwired into our bodies. We can’t help them and have very little control over them. But they’re telling us something. As we grow in discernment, we learn to listen to our inner God-given wisdom. And when we learn to tune into the ways God is speaking in us and to us, we are guided into wise living.

Can we learn to listen to God in our minds, trusting the silence underneath the clutter of noise? Can we learn to trust the voice of God that speaks in our hearts, through feelings of pain and peace? Can we learn to sense God at work in our bodies, speaking to us through our resistances and our openness?

I prefer to introduce the Enneagram through the Intelligence Centers rather than through the types because when we learn to trust our primary center, we learn to discern. Listening to thoughts (head), feelings (heart), or instincts (gut) based on your dominant Intelligence Center is the beginning of learning to hear how God has always been speaking to you.
INTRODUCING THE INTELLIGENCE CENTERS

The Enneagram’s three Intelligence Centers are the core lenses through which we take in the human experience. They highlight our primary ways of perceiving the world: through our thoughts, our emotions, or our instincts—our head, heart, or body. Each of us leads with one of these in the way we live in the world.

The Intelligence Centers are the basis for how we perceive ourselves in relationship to our understanding of how the world works and how we work in the world. These centers are activated through our involuntarily physiological reactions and responses to every experience. Growing in familiarity with our primary Intelligence Center is key to helping us develop discernment. Furthermore, matching up an appropriate contemplative prayer posture with our Intelligence Center allows for spiritual alignment and growth.

The Intelligence Centers are one of the many triads found within the Enneagram. They include the Body (instinctive or gut) Center, the Heart (feeling or emotion) Center, and the Head (mind, thinking, or rational) Center. People dominant in type Eight, Nine, or One are located in the Body Center; those dominant in type Two, Three, or Four are clustered in the Heart Center; and those dominant in type Five, Six, or Seven are in the Head Center.

The centers, often referred to as the triadic self, demonstrate the tripartite view of humanity found in the teachings of Plato (concisely tucked into this quote often attributed to him: “Human behavior...
flows from three sources: desire [body], emotion [heart], and knowledge [head]) and echoed in every major world religion. In this tripartite understanding, the composite of our existence is expressed through three distinct components of the human person, commonly referred to as the body, the soul, and the spirit.

Jesus references this view in his call back to the Hebrew Scriptures’ greatest commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5) when he reminds us to “love the Most High God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

This makes sense for those of us who believe that humanity bears a Divine imprint, that we are made in the image of a Triune God.

And so these three core centers connect us to the Divine presence within us that is always guiding and leading through intuition, impulse, and insight.

Learning to observe and listen to these centers is what we generally mean when we speak of discernment. God has already given us everything we need; it’s just a matter of recognizing the gifts and accessing them. Our Intelligence Center is the innate gift that indicates how God speaks to us—through our senses and the impressions we experience in our instincts, feelings, and thoughts. These go-to places for each of us are rich spaces that offer clarity in perception, inquiry, and resolution.

What’s more, the centers explain something about each of the nine Enneagram types by helping identify a person’s most accessible emotional response or reaction: anxiety or distress for the Head Center, fear or shame for the Heart Center, and frustration or anger for the Body Center.
I’m convinced the Intelligence Centers help shape the three levels of consciousness. The conscious mind accesses our thinking or Head Center, allowing for self-reflection and cognitive rationality. The subconscious most readily accesses our feelings or Heart Center, validating our emotions by pointing out the ways they tell us things that our minds can’t seem to sort out or explain. The bulk of our unconscious, our instinctual drives, rests in our gut or Body Center, which may be why we carry so much somatic energy that ends up stored as stress or other negative physical sensations or sometimes even illness.

After Phileena and I had been married for twenty years, we finally got a puppy from a pet rescue organization, a sweet little brown dog with a huge heart. We named him Basil. As Phileena puts it, “He rescued us.” It turns out an Enneagram Eight like me has a lot to learn from the little guy. He constantly reminds me to be in the present with him, whether we’re taking a walk or playing on the rug by our bed, where he’s torn apart countless chew toys.
One of Basil’s adorable quirks is the way he shakes things off. That funny phrase “shake it off” actually speaks to the body’s way of balancing the nervous system. Somehow Basil doesn’t need to be reminded of it. He instinctively shakes it off before getting out of bed and starting his day, after being scolded for not following a command, after undergoing a stressful experience on a walk or in the car, or sometimes after spending time with someone he’s not so sure about. Basil quietly and quickly gives his little body a rigorous shake to discharge whatever negative energy may have been absorbed.

If only we could learn these simple tricks to return to presence by following our own centers. Just think of all the ways we would be better aligned, better centered, and better able to discern.

THE THINKING TYPES
OF THE HEAD CENTER

*Head people*, those in the intellectual center, have highly developed mental faculties they use to assess and address everything in life that is experienced as a threat or an assault on their inner state. Head people believe in competency as the cure for instability. Through mastering their environment, head people think they’re able to secure their own self-preservation.

Forecasting helps head people attain a sense of safety. Those dominant in type Five analyze everything to predict the future based on research and a proper understanding of history. Sixes
are on constant alert, always attempting to cut off any threat through contingency planning (the kind of person I always want seated in an airplane’s exit row since they’ll already know there’s a problem before the pilots do and will make sure everyone has a chance to get out before the plane goes down). Sevens feel an inner compulsion to maintain access to opportunity as a way of experiencing freedom.

Head people may be the most afraid of their own pain. They think they are unable to emotionally engage their pain through their feelings, so they minimize it. Fives attempt to reduce it as illogical. Sixes consider it another threat that will destabilize their inner sense of security. Sevens are concerned that their pain will limit their freedoms and so they try to reject it entirely.

Fundamentally, head people are obsessed with quieting their inner distress in an effort to create external peace and security. Head people don’t have time for the irrational impulses of the instinctive types, nor do they have the patience to truly engage the emotional complexities of the feeling types; rather, they methodically face each of life’s problems searching for solutions. Ironically, they often have a hard time activating the answers they discern for the following reasons: Fives generally are concerned that more information is required before coming to a conclusion; Sixes don’t trust themselves to formulate correct answers; and Sevens are afraid that answers will bring completion to an internal journey that is unending.

Father Richard explains that in an attempt to cope with their anxiety, “Fives try to master it by gaining more and correct knowledge. [Sixes] link up with an authority or group for security . . . or may take foolish risks or make pre-emptive strikes to overcome their fears. Sevens deny and avoid pain and create fun and fantasy. All three are clever ways of largely living in your head.”1
Heart people are social types who feel their way through life by leaning into their emotional intelligence. Those in the Feeling Center teeter between compulsions for connection with others and comparison with others to validate their own sense of worth.

Compared to gut people, those in the Feeling Center are likely to have an overwhelming social presence and are substantially more emotionally present than the other types. However, this emotional presence is also an unconscious coping technique; though heart people can be highly emotionally intelligent, it’s not uncommon for them to be out of touch with their own feelings or emotional needs. Thus they seek out connection with others as a way to experience their own feelings through the mirroring of others’.

Through affective connections that may seem authentic, heart people externalize their interior fears of not being loved, valued, or seen. At their core they project their fears through quiet attempts to have their own needs met: Twos want to be loved for who they are; Threes are concerned they’re more admired than loved; Fours worry there will be no one with the particular ability to love them for what sets them apart as special.

Healthy heart people become a source of love in the world, doing good and bringing balance, but when unhealthy, they lose their sense of self by comparing themselves with others. Twos begin to believe
their needs no longer matter, Threes quietly compete with the needs of others, and Fours wallow in their unmet, insatiable needs.

When heart people allow comparison to lead to feelings of disconnection, they blame themselves and can be overcome with profound experiences of shame. Shame in turn produces a sense of fear—the fear that they are unworthy to experience their own needs. This fear is followed by a feeling of even more shame that comes from having needs in the first place.

In an effort to cope with this fear, Father Richard says heart people may “unceasingly develop activities to secure the devotion or attention of others. Twos pose as loveable and helpful, Threes play whatever role ‘goes over’ best publicly, and Fours put in an appearance as someone special and authentic (to themselves).”

For heart people to practice and grow in discernment means they must learn to trust their feelings. It turns out my younger sister Mendi is dominant in type Two. I remember as a kid hearing adults tell her not to trust her feelings or rely so heavily on her emotions. But people in the Heart Center need to learn that their feelings are telling them something they will have a harder time figuring out in the mind or experiencing in their gut. Discernment for heart types is rooted in their fluency in accessing and trusting their emotional impulses.

**THE GUT TYPES OF THE BODY CENTER**

Those in the Body Center are *gut people* who experience life through intuitive instincts and tactile engagement with their senses. People in the instinctive center engage the world through activity in an effort to assert and maintain a sense of their control. Gut people are generally more impassioned than emotional, and their great determination is often the source of their pain.
As gut people ride waves of intensity, instead of shaking it off, they often project their energy onto others as an unconscious way of dissipating the constant static noise of frustration they perpetually experience. By externalizing their interior irritations, gut people assert their desire for control by becoming the solution to the drama they’ve created: Eights dominate it, Nines attempt to broker it, and Ones seek to bring back balance by correcting it.

At their best, gut people harness this energy and direct it through their initiating ability to build a better world; at their worst, it seems everything annoys them.

Usually gut people don’t know what to do with their feelings. In fact, they tend to dissociate from them. Vulnerable feelings signal to gut people that they may be the source of their own anger, leading to exasperation that somehow they are inherently and irredeemably flawed—a terrifying limiting belief. To avoid such a fear, gut people repress the core emotion so that it is transmuted into impassioned outbursts, typically anger. Coping with fear propels gut people into taking charge of their environment as a diversion tactic to maintain an illusion of control over the consequences created by their anger.

Eights and Ones are more direct—Eights externalize their anger and Ones demonstrate more controlled anger—while Nines are more passive, suppressing their anger until it is finally triggered (often catching themselves and others off guard by it).

Father Richard suggests that those in the Body Center experience life through waves of intensity and “often experience life as too much,
somewhat like a full body blow to which they develop a characteristic defense: Eights hit back, Nines back off, and Ones try to fix it.”

As a gut type myself, I can attest to the constant static noise of frustration that follows nearly every thought or feeling I have. It’s most easily detected when I drive; as soon as I’m behind the steering wheel of my little two-door car, it’s as if every other driver on the road is trying my last nerve. My impatience and perpetual annoyance are played out in aggressive (not defensive) driving tactics, which only cause unnecessary stress for my passengers, usually Phileena and Basil. Driving really does help me wake up to my frustration, the most accessible emotion of my type, and serves as an invitation to observe its control over me.

**THERE’S ALWAYS AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE**

Now, you may be feeling some resistance to these generalizations about the Intelligence Center triads, especially if you identify as a type Three, Six, or Nine. When drawn, these three types in particular form the equilateral triangle in the center of the Enneagram’s circle and have been referred to as the Shock Points (Gurdjieff), the Balance Points (Hurley and Dobson), the Revolutionary Types, or the Anchor Points.

The three Anchor Points (Three, Six, Nine) have perhaps the most archetypal Holy Ideas (the fruit of each type’s mental clarity when the mind is connected with the True Self): faith for type Six, hope for type Three, and love for type Nine. You may recall that faith, hope, and love show up at the conclusion of Saint Paul’s most poignant declaration about love:
There are, in the end, three things that last: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Because these Anchor Points sit in the middle of their Intelligence Centers, neither of their wings reach outside their center. Because their wings don’t reach outside their center, they ironically are the most disconnected from their center. The Threes are the most estranged from their hearts (often manifested in their loneliness), the Sixes the most detached from their minds (which explains how irrational they can sometimes be), and the Nines the most disjointed from their bodies (experienced in the ways they calm down their external environments through the mellowing energy they project).

This disconnect from their center makes sense as an internalized coping mechanism because the Anchor Points function as a buffer between the extremes of their wings. Naranjo suggests that type Three is “a polarity of sadness [Four] and happiness [Two] . . . [that Six is] a polarity of aloofness [Five] and expressiveness [Seven] . . . [and Nine] one of amoral or anti-moral [Eight] and over-moral [One].”

To have to bring balance to these polarities internally exhausts the Anchor Points and so in a sense they step back as the referee of the extremes of their wings and, just like any referee, force themselves to become objective observers of the compulsions of their center. Though they demonstrate a pronounced disconnect from their Intelligence Center, they necessarily belong in their triad because they play a crucial role. Part of the inner work invitation for the Anchor Points is to reconnect with their center (head, heart, or gut) and integrate with the other centers for wholeness.

Though the Anchor Points’ disconnect from their Intelligence Center is the most obvious exception to the rules of the Enneagram, a couple of less developed and less obvious anomalies also exist.

Humanity’s flight, fight, and freeze responses to threatening
situations or potential harm can be mapped around the Enneagram’s Intelligence Centers. For example, the head types generally flee danger as a result of having thought through the implications of harmful situations. The body or gut types fight back as an instinctive response to control themselves and their environment, another form of domination commonly associated with the gut types. The heart types typically will freeze as a way of staying connected to their hearts and mirroring the hearts of others who also may remain in harm’s way.

The Anchor Points, however, provide clear exceptions: they take on the flight, fight, or freeze response of their disintegration path. Threes fight to save face and protect their image; Sixes freeze because they often doubt their inner instincts and natural responses; Nines flee or take flight, which is consistent with their tendency to function in the role of peacemaker, always avoiding confrontation.

Another exception in the Anchor Points is seen in the two pivots of type Six commonly described as the phobic Six and the counterphobic Six. It’s generally accepted that type Six is the only type with two variants. If that’s true, however, then this anomaly of the patterns typically observed in the Enneagram contradicts its fractal-like consistency and potentially exposes the Enneagram’s thorough consistencies as arbitrary.

I see the Enneagram as a fractal of human character structures, so any irregularity or departure from the observable patterns of the Enneagram creates a dilemma that requires thoughtful investigation. I’d like to suggest that type Six isn’t alone in its two variations but that all three of the Anchor Points adapt and fluctuate.

For example, the phobic Six, who moves away from their source of fear, is the fraternal twin of the counterphobic Six, who presses into whatever it is they are afraid of as a means of overcoming it. Similarly, the inactive Nine is prone to prolonged states of apathetic lethargy,
sustaining what seems to be a general disinterest, while the fraternal twin is the overactive Nine who is an exertive arbitrator, mediating and negotiating as a way of externalizing their own inner dissonance. And finally, the genuine Three who never makes even a nominal exaggeration but opts for sincerity in all things is mirrored in their fraternal twin, the disingenuous Three, who pretends, impersonates, mimics, and masquerades to attain their goals. Within this theory, the nine types with these three pivots become twelve types, another significant number throughout Scripture (consider, most notably, Jacob's twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, or the twelve disciples Jesus chose to be his first students).

INTEGRATING HEART, HEAD, AND BODY

Though we all have one dominant Intelligence Center, if we become stuck there without integrating the whole of who we are (including all three Intelligence Centers), then we miss the wholeness that is available to us—the wholeness for which we were originally created. For example, if you're a heart type but don't develop fluency in experiencing your gut and head, when you're uncentered or unhealthy, your emotions will be out of sync with who you are. When you are centered in your dominant Intelligence Center, the other two Centers support the dominant one.

Back to The Wizard of Oz. If you've seen the film, you'll remember that Dorothy, the young girl from middle America, gets knocked unconscious during a violent storm. While asleep, she falls deep into a dream set in the magical land of Oz, where her task is simply to find her way home. In her dream, Dorothy is joined by three companions who are all searching for something: The Scarecrow is looking for his brain, the Tin Man is looking for his heart, and the Cowardly Lion is looking for his courage.
Traditional Jungian dream analysis teaches that every person or character who shows up in our dreams can be interpreted as a disconnected fragment of our personal unconscious (actually a part of ourselves) trying to get our attention. Essentially, the characters in our dreams represent our inner wisdom trying to sort things out. As a thought experiment, then, what if we applied a Jungian approach to analyzing Dorothy’s dream?

If we apply this interpretive lens, it might signify that Dorothy is suffering from a lack of integration with her Intelligence Centers as portrayed by the Scarecrow who needs to connect with his head (the Thinking Center), the Tin Man with his heart (the Feeling Center), and the Cowardly Lion with his courage (the Body Center). Until these parts of Dorothy—these centers—connect, she won’t be able to get home and wake up.

And she’s aware of this truth the moment she looks at her traveling companions and declares, “It’s funny, but I feel as if I’d known you all the time.”

If Dorothy continues to stay asleep, her dream (or the illusion she’s participating in) will become more and more real to her, distracting and distancing her from the indispensable endeavor of facing reality and living beautifully into its gifts.

In the end, it turns out each of her companions already possessed everything they needed; they just had to come to that revelation for themselves.

That’s what we’re trying to do here: wake up from the dreams or illusions that often seem more real than our True Self. Dorothy’s dream of Oz is filmed in color, while her unintegrated life at home is filmed in black and white. Like Dorothy, sometimes we become so disenchanted by the ordinary that we can’t help but create a colorful illusion in which to live. Yet ironically, this fantasy-building only takes us farther from home. The Enneagram, through its unabashed
truth-telling, invites us to return to our essential nature, the home for our souls.

Bringing our centers together through the inner work of integration helps us wake up and come home to our True Self. It’s a challenging journey but a worthy one. To take the next step, let’s take a good, honest look at ourselves in the mirror offered by our Enneagram type.