

**Locating the Core Emotion of the Heart Types:
A Conversation on the Centers
By Dave Hall**

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In the September 2009 issue of the *Nine Points Bulletin*, Bea Chestnut invites her readers to join in a “thoughtful and sincere dialogue” around one of the more vexing questions in the Enneagram literature: how to describe and define the core emotion of the Heart Center types.

I want to thank Bea for her open-hearted initiation of this dialogue. In her article, she does a wonderful job of succinctly presenting a wide spectrum of different interpretations, including her own, with a tone that is respectful of all the different theorists and with a clarity that helps us to appreciate both the contours of the question and the stakes involved in answering it accurately.

I’m going to take a stab at presenting why I think “shame” is the term that best describes the core emotion of the Heart Center types, and I’ll try to lay out clearly why I make that choice.

To begin: it seems clear to me that any term we use for the core emotion of a Center must be both distinctive to that Center and able to encompass the various emotional tendencies of the three different types within the Center. In other words, the term cannot be either too general and universal to be distinctive or too narrow and specific to encompass all three types within the Center.

In addition, and this helps define how a certain emotion is “distinctive” for a given Center, I think the core emotions need to be understood as *motivating*: they are emotional states which we tend to react to, which are likely to kick-start our ego structures into action.

So, for example, with anger: all nine types experience anger, but with the Body Center types anger fuels the passion and the personality in a way it does not for the other six types. These types, in their three different ways, all have an instinctive reaction when they sense that the boundaries of their world are somehow being impinged upon. With Eights, the anger will express itself most directly and forcefully. Ones tend to repress the raw energy of anger, channeling and sublimating much of the energy into efficient action, while discharging the remnant as a kind of simmering resentment (the passion

of this type). Nines are often unaware of how much anger motivates their stubborn attachment to maintaining a peaceful-feeling inner environment, but most Nines will experience the periodic eruptions that betray the reservoir of rage simmering deep below the surface.

So we can see how anger is a distinctly motivating emotion for the Body Center types, and how the term is able to capture the shared emotional quality of three types who manifest in three such different flavors. Don Riso and Russ Hudson capture this shared motivation when they refer to the Body Center as the “don’t mess with me” types.

Similarly, though more subtly, we can see how fear motivates the Head Center types, again in three quite different ways. Fives tend to react to their fear of the world depleting them by retreating into the realm of thinking and mental mastery. Sevens react to their fear of being deprived or trapped in painful emotional states by living in a constant state of anticipating their next pleasurable experience. Sixes, the most ambivalent of all the types, tend to shuttle back and forth between seeking refuge in the mind and seeking distraction or support in the outside world. Because Sixes cannot manage their fear as easily as Fives and Sevens, they often experience a chronic anxiety, which I (as a Six) would liken to an ongoing fear of the fear itself.

So, again, we see how an emotion that all nine types experience serves as a shared motivating force for the passions and personalities of the Head Center types, even as they manifest in such different ways. Don and Russ call this Center the “who or what can I trust?” types.

So what name should we use for the core, motivating emotion of the Heart Center? Let’s look at a couple of the candidates that Bea discusses in her article, in order to test out the usefulness of my suggested criteria:

Bea’s own candidate is “sadness or grief at loss.” My sense is that this emotion is too universal (and too situational, to the extent that it is provoked by loss) and also that it lacks the motivating force I believe the core emotions all have. Grief, in my experience, is an emotion more likely to temporarily melt and soften the contours of our ego structures than to kick-start them into action.

David Burke’s candidate, “envy,” seems on the contrary to be too narrow to be the core emotion of the Heart Center, and envy has traditionally been seen, more specifically, as the motivating passion of Type Four. Burke draws upon a thought-provoking argument from Evagrius that envy is more general than the passions and somehow forms the ground from which they emerge. Evagrius is not alone, historically, in trying to locate an “*ur*-Passion,” which later medieval theologians usually identified as the “capital sin” of

pride – the sin of Lucifer. For my money, the structure of the Enneagram points the way convincingly to sloth, the passion of the Nine, as the “capital” passion. The passion of sloth, as many Enneagram writers have compellingly described, is not mere physical laziness: it is the falling asleep of the soul to its own true nature, which in turn creates the conditions in which all the other passions can take root and flourish.

The Riso-Hudson choice of “shame” does seem, to me, to fit the criteria. (Full disclosure: I trained in the Riso-Hudson tradition, so this was the first interpretation I was exposed to, but I have since read widely in the Enneagram literature and have also tried, in writing this article, to subject my familiar assumptions to the same criteria I have used for the other candidates.) So, how do I see the term “shame” as capturing the distinctively motivating emotion of the Heart Center types?

First, I would stress that using the term “shame” does not mean I think the Heart Center types walk around feeling ashamed of themselves all the time. The feeling of shame, at bottom, is more like the feeling of being “in the spotlight,” under scrutiny, as if all eyes are upon me. Indeed, many writers refer to the Heart Center as the “image center.”

As with the other Centers, the Heart types manifest in different flavors: Twos tend to be preoccupied with being seen as loving – and with *not* being seen as having emotional needs of their own. Fours want to be seen as unique and original. Threes seek to be seen for their accomplishments and their ability to excel. In this shared vein, Don and Russ refer to this Center as the “see me the way I want to be seen” types. It is this deep-seated preoccupation with *how I am seen* that motivates the passions and personalities of the Heart Center types, and the term “shame” captures the core emotion fueling this preoccupation.

So much, then, for my answer to Bea’s first question: “Which of the varied theories is the correct or most helpful approach to understanding the underlying experience of the heart types?” Her second question is harder to answer: “Why are there so many theories about the core emotion of the heart types, when there seems to be a consensus on the core emotional issues of the other two triads?”

I suspect we are brushing up against just how mysterious the workings of the heart really are. The core emotional experiences of this Center are subtle, nuanced, and delicate. When I remember this, I can appreciate the way in which *all* the different candidates in Bea’s article touch upon some truth of the heart’s experience.

But if I have to choose one term to describe the core emotion that fuels these three types’ personalities, I would go with *shame*.

[In the next issue, I hope to respond to Jack Killen’s choice of “panic” by linking shame – as well as anger and fear – back to its roots in a primitive biological arousal response.]