

Yielding, Pushing, Reaching, Grasping, And Pulling: How Our Type Expresses Itself Energetically

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“The Ancients said that the animals are taught through their organs: let me add to this, so are men, but they have the advantage of teaching their organs in return.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Goethe 2001, p. 548).

I came across the passage above while I was preparing this article. As I was engaged in exploring the often-overlooked role of the body in spiritual transformation, I was struck by the synchronicity. Goethe wrote these words in 1832, on his deathbed, in the last surviving written communication of his life. He was 82 years old, had just completed his life’s work, *Faust*, after 60 years of labor, and he was writing to a friend about the sources of his growth and creativity as a man and as an artist. He is primarily referring here to the organs of perception: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and sensing body. He is reminding his friend that we, too, are animals, and that we learn through our senses and our bodies every bit as much as we learn through our thinking minds. He is also suggesting that, as humans, we possess a further faculty: through practice and attention, we can fine-tune our organs of perception so that they register finer and finer impressions – and impressions are, as Gurdjieff taught us, what feed the growth of our souls.

I believe that the Enneagram community, like our modern Western society in general, can always benefit from a reminder to include the body in our transformational work. In fact, we need more than just a reminder: we benefit greatly from actual, developed bodily practices that allow us to experience our work on our type structures in all three centers – Head, Heart, and *Body*. There is some powerful work already out there: two forms I have had the good fortune to experience are the EnneaMotion work of Andrea Isaacs and the somatic teachings of Marion Gilbert. Working with these teachers has been some of the most penetrating Enneagram work I have done, precisely because so much of the teaching lands in my body, by-passing my mind-filters, and is able to transform my ego-structures from a whole different angle of approach.

In this article, I will present some preliminary findings from work I have been doing with my wife and teaching partner, Katy Taylor, combining the Enneagram with Body-Mind Psychotherapy (or BMP for short). The most exciting aspect of this work is that the body-movement components of BMP seem to actually align with the Enneagram figure, so that certain Enneagram types clearly benefit from concentrating on specific individual

components of the BMP energy work. Indeed, we have seen a reciprocal “dialogue” emerge between the two systems, with the Enneagram revealing a characterological dimension within BMP, and BMP facilitating deeper and more rapid transformative work for the Enneagram types.

Susan Aposhyan’s Body-Mind Psychotherapy: A Brief Introduction

Katy and I have been working with BMP over the last few years, first by reading Susan Aposhyan’s profound yet wonderfully accessible books (Aposhyan 1999, 2004), and then by attending a training workshop in Vancouver in 2011. We are not, at this point, anywhere near being trained BMP practitioners, but we have found some of the basic components of Susan’s system to be readily adaptable for wider teaching and mentoring purposes, as well as easily accessible to our students.

The essence of BMP lies in developing a fine-tuned and completely allowing awareness of our bodily energies and sensations, and in learning to let these energies and sensations move and express themselves fully and spontaneously. Much of Susan’s system builds upon the pioneering work of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (Cohen 1993), which Susan has simplified, organized, and expanded in her own directions. BMP is a very rich system, but for the purposes of this article, a brief look at two of its core components will suffice.

First, BMP teaches us to experience the underlying energetic components of all our bodily movements and actions in the world. These components are called the Five Fundamental Actions and are comprised of the following: yielding, pushing, reaching, grasping, and pulling (Aposhyan 1999, pp. 64-72). There is a natural progression to the Five Actions: we learn them in this order as infants, and they continue to manifest most harmoniously as a sequence in the same order. This is a deceptively simple-looking model that enables surprisingly deep insights as we work with it.

“Yielding” forms the basis for most of our actions in the womb and as newborns. We float, we mold ourselves to the contours of our mother’s body, and we relax and allow the world to support us. Yielding is the necessary basis for the other four actions, which all build upon its sensitive and receptive foundation. As adults, hopefully, we retain the capacity to truly yield, whether we are yielding physically to the contours of a hammock, or yielding in our hearts and minds to the contours and edges of our experience in the present moment.

“Pushing,” to be effective, needs to arise out of a base of yielding, unless we want to be off-balance and at war with our environment. We experience this yielding-pushing combination vividly as we make our way through the birth canal, and as infants we learn to yield into the support of our mother’s bodies, or of the ground, in order to effectively push ourselves up and

into the world. Grounding the assertive energy of pushing on this foundation of yielding endows pushing with a creative intelligence and adaptability.

“Reaching” is the open, expansive energy that allows us to move out and interact with our environment. If not based on a solid stance, a balanced combination of yielding and pushing, reaching can turn into a toppling-over. Reaching is the curious, open, questing, and connecting energy that babies exhibit when they stretch a hand out toward some object that has caught their attention and interest. It is an energy that adults often find hard to experience in a truly open-ended way.

“Grasping” is the capacity that enables the baby to actually take hold of the object of interest. As adults, we need to cultivate the discerning intelligence of this capacity: How firmly do we grasp? Do we grasp for things indiscriminately? Do we know when and how to release as well?

“Pulling” is the culmination of the sequence. As babies, we learned to push our bodies up and away from our base of yielding into mom’s lap or the floor, to use that balanced yielding-pushing foundation to reach out and grasp something, and then finally to pull that something toward us, to take it in and make it part of us. As babies, of course, we often put the prized object in our mouths, which is a very literal and embodied way of “integrating” the experience. As adults, our ways of integrating and metabolizing the experiences we pull in are generally different, but this integration is still the natural outcome of truly mindful action.

The second core component of BMP I want to emphasize is what Susan calls “sequencing.” Whenever we become aware of a sensation or energy in our bodies, and these sensations can be either purely physical or have some emotional or thought component, we inquire into where and how the energy might want to move. Generally, unless there is something holding the energy in place – in which case that “something” can become the subject of our inquiry as well – we will find the energy naturally moving toward and out through one of the body’s “endpoints:” the feet, the hands, the face, or the pelvic floor. Anatomically, these areas of our body all have an abundance of nerve endings, small and mobile skeletal components, and finely articulated muscles. Thus, these endpoints are all very sensitive to stimuli, both from the outside world and from within our own bodies, and they are all capable of precise and attuned responses to such stimulation. I would include them under Goethe’s rubric of “organs” that can teach us and be taught in turn.

To help get the sense of sequencing energy, think of a cat stretching. If you observe the whole process, you will see the cat respond to an initial impulse somewhere in its body and then, almost like a visible wave, you will see the energy move toward and out the cat’s endpoints, with perhaps one paw extended especially far and seeming to stream energy out through the claws and foot-pads. I have come to deeply appreciate this feline capacity and

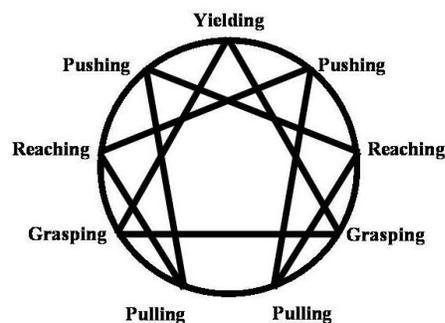
believe that we humans, with all of our stuck and stagnating energies, have much to learn from it. As Susan remarked during the Vancouver training, “when you think about it, if a cat isn’t sleeping, it’s pretty much constantly sequencing.”

These core components of BMP work together in important ways. For example, we can feel the energies of each of the Five Actions sequencing through our bodies as we attend to them individually, and we also come to appreciate how sequencing the energies produced by the culmination of the Five Actions together helps us to truly integrate and metabolize our experience.

Body-Mind Psychotherapy and the Enneagram

The more Katy and I worked with BMP, the more we saw intriguing differences in our individual relationships with the Five Actions. We started to see how much pushing seemed to dominate Katy’s repertoire of physical and emotional expression – and how grasping dominated mine. For each of us, one of the five actions seemed to operate as a kind of default – to be habitually over-used and unnecessarily amplified. The particular default action in each of us also seemed to be out of synch with the other four – we became aware of a characteristic imbalance between all the actions in our repertoires. Furthermore, we thought our individual imbalances and distortions looked type-related (Katy’s a One and I’m a Six), so we started inquiring into whether there might be a way to correlate BMP with the Enneagram.

After some false starts, where we tried to apply Enneagram structures we were familiar with to BMP (e.g. aligning the five actions with the three Centers, or with the Harmonics or Hornevians), we started to think it just might not work to try to correlate a five-part model with a nine-part model. It was good, in the end, that we dropped these efforts and came close to giving up, because it created the space to simply think about the types and the actions together and look for correspondences. The model that emerged surprised us. It was symmetrical, which possibly promised some validity, but it didn’t look like anything we had seen before:



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At this point, we have conducted a five-session workshop series to explore this model with some of our advanced students, have presented it before a gathering of the Minnesota IEA, and have begun to use it in individual Enneagram mentoring sessions. As we continue to get feedback that people resonate with the model and find it personally transformative, we would like to share the model with a wider audience through this article, in the hope that readers will likewise find it useful. I ask the reader to keep in mind the inherent limitations of reading about a practice that is predominantly physical and experiential. I will suggest a practice with each action that may help readers get more of a felt sense of what I am talking about.

Yielding: Type Nine

To give her readers a vivid and nuanced experience of the yielding energy, Susan suggests a simple exercise, which I will flesh out a bit more fully here. Place your hand on a nearby object, such as a book, or a table, or the arm of your chair. Relax your hand and sense into the entire contour of contact between your hand and the object. See if you can sense an energetic flow or exchange between them. Stay as aware of your hand as you are of the object. This is the energetic action of yielding, which Susan calls “resting in contact.”

You can fine-tune your awareness of this energy by withdrawing your fully engaged attention from your hand and thinking about something else. Now your hand is “resting inertly, which is resting out of contact” (Aposhyan 1999, p. 64). At one end of this spectrum, you are yielding into the contact experience with a fully receptive sense of the object and of your own energies and responses. This is like the yielding, intelligent touch of a gifted massage therapist. At the other end of the spectrum, you are leaving your hand to lie like a lump of inert flesh on top of the object. You may have memories of being touched this way by someone who was zoned out or preoccupied, dissociated from his energetic aliveness in the moment. You may have noticed how vividly your body can detect the difference between truly yielding contact vs. inert contact.

The spectrum described here can be correlated with the energetic spectrum of the Nine’s personality structure. At the healthiest levels of their being, Nines fully exemplify the capacity to “rest in contact.” They can mold themselves to the contours of their experience, even in situations involving many other people, without losing their sense of themselves. They are pliant without being vague or mushy. They can relax without losing alertness or engagement. Typically, however, as Nines fall into the trance of their ego-personalities, their yielding capacities start to show qualities of inertness, of “sloth,” of a more passive pliancy that prevents them from showing up fully with their own energy and needs.

In working with this Enneagram/BMP model, we have found that all the types can benefit from two general explorations and practices. One is to fully explore how their type’s default action feels along the spectrum of health, from the level of our true nature and essential qualities, down through the “normally neurotic” range of habitual behaviors, and if necessary

even down to those highly reactive moments of deep personality distortion. The other is to explore ways in which their type's default action may be out of balance with the other actions.

For Nines, then, it is important to practice actually sensing the yielding energy at different moments in their lives. How does it feel when we are truly relaxed yet fully engaged with others and ourselves? How does it feel when we catch ourselves just "going along" with everyone else's agendas because we don't want to disturb the peace? How does the energy feel when we are actually dissociating from our own aliveness because the world and our reactions to it seem overwhelming? The more we practice actually sensing the energy, staying with the embodied experience, the more chance our bodies have to make their own choice about where they want to be energetically. We may start to notice welcome shifts in our way of being that we didn't consciously decide to initiate.

The other important practice for Nines is to combine their yielding energy with some of the pushing energy. The pushing energy helps Nines to stay with their experience in a more focused way, not losing themselves in the experience but rather maintaining their own vitality, individuality, and engagement within the experience. In our workshop, we used the simple yoga pose called Tadasana, or Mountain Pose, to help everyone feel this yielding-pushing combination.

Readers unfamiliar with yoga poses may want to search online for the descriptions, pictures, and even videos that are so readily available these days, but in a nutshell here is what we suggest: stand in a comfortable stance, preferably without shoes, and notice first how the soles of your feet yield and conform to the ground. Relax your shoulders and any other parts of your body that are tense because they are resisting the yield to gravity. Now notice how, in order to stand upright, you are also pushing down through the soles of your feet, up your spine from your pelvic floor, and up through the top of your head. Feel the relaxed, open strength of this yielding-pushing combination.

This harmonious combination of yielding and pushing forms the optimal foundation for any action we take in the world. This is true not only on the level of physical movement but also in the realms of emotional and mental engagement with the world. For example, one of the Nines in our workshop reported on an experience she had in a new relationship soon after our session on yielding:

I recently experienced some feelings come up around an issue in relationship. I allowed them to come in more fully and realized I was feeling anger, which is extremely rare for me (a Nine with a One wing). Allowing and exploring that anger, knowing it would give this Nine some good energy, it felt solid and calming vs. uncomfortable/anxiety-producing (like "I want to quick run away from that"). I discussed how I was feeling with the person involved, and it actually felt like I was meant to give him a push about the issue...and it was

OK – nothing awful happened. Talking about this with Dave, he pointed out that this was an example of yielding (to the feelings) and pushing (bringing it up to the other person)... And it did feel GOOD!

Dianne Fouts, Certified Healing Touch Practitioner and Higher Brain Living Facilitator: workshop group email discussion, 10/13/2012.

This is an example of how sensing the energetic qualities of an experience with open curiosity can lead to a shift in our experience and behavior that might be harder to access through our usual channels of self-talk and conscious intention.

To practice a greater range of yielding-pushing energies, readers can try these other poses as well:

- Shavasana, also called Corpse Pose, for pure yielding energy.
- Horse Stance for yielding with a very strong dose of pushing: notice which parts of your body you can relax even while holding this strong and assertive pose.

Pushing: Types Eight and One

Pushing is the default energy used by types Eight and One. In its undistorted expression, pushing is a strong, focused, assertive energy. It is initiating energy, preparing us to engage with the world. “As we push,” says Susan, “we literally become denser, more substantial. Pushing illuminates the fullness of the body” (Aposhyan 1999, p. 67). When we put our attention on the pushing energy, we feel strong, empowered, and autonomous. We know where we stand – and we communicate our presence and our stance confidently and firmly to others.

We can see how the energy of pushing informs the healthy gifts and capacities of these two types. Eights are strong, direct, unambiguous, and able to empower and protect others. Ones are upright: striving for the best and most spiritually aligned forms of action, clear in their sense of right vs. wrong. Eights’ energy pushes outward, forcefully impacting the world around them. Ones’ energy pushes more vertically, aligning their actions with their core beliefs, allowing them to interact with the world from a place of unshakeable integrity.

We can also see how this same energy manifests in more distorted ways as these types fall into more habitual, automatic, and reactive modes of being. Thus, Eights can become aggressive and domineering, “pushing people around.” If their habitual behaviors don’t seem to be working for them, they may further amp up their pushing energy, seeking ever more frantically to feel the impact they are making on everyone around them. They may start to feel like the proverbial bull in the china shop, afraid they will unintentionally hurt others with a forceful pushing energy they do not quite trust themselves to control. Ones may go from

upright to uptight, the vertical pushing energy becoming hard and rigid. They might develop a ramrod posture that leads to muscle strain, particularly in the shoulders and neck. We see the folk wisdom in the phrase “stiff-necked,” and this is the way Ones can present when caught in the coils of their type: inflexible, with tunnel-vision, always “pushing their own agenda.”

As with all of the types, Eights and Ones benefit from simply learning to sense the energetic qualities that go along with their experience and behavior at varying levels of health and freedom. Shortly after our session on pushing, Katy reported to the group on a characteristic experience:

I was reading something I was interested in that's a little dense, and I found myself pushing through my face—my eyes were squinting in concentration, my face and neck jutting a little forward, my jaw and lips tense. When I noticed, I just released the pushing and let myself yield back into my body, into what I call “no-face.” And the sense of release traveled through my head, down my neck, even into my pelvic floor, where I had not been aware of pushing.... I felt an openness of contact with myself, a releasing of a familiar tension, and I returned to reading. And then I had to do this over and over again. In fact, as I type this, I notice the same thing coming up. Some part of me thinks I have to tighten up to get something done, to focus, to be serious...So, I'm working with noticing that ongoingly and allowing the yielding so that the pushing doesn't have to be rigid and tight. I imagine this will be hundreds of times today if I can stay aware of it. It's probably been at least fifteen times or so this morning already! - Workshop group email discussion, 10/17/12.

In this description, Katy addresses the second important practice as well: seeing how our default actions get out of balance with the other actions, how we come to over-rely on this one action and energy to live our lives. She describes her effort to remain aware and allowing of the yielding energy, so that the energy of pushing could function healthily, without the rigidity and tightness she was experiencing in her habitual mode of being. Just as Nines need to practice some healthy pushing in order to really show up in all their mindfully yielding glory, Eights and Ones need to incorporate the energy of yielding, which allows them to stay present to their experience in an open way with a sense of contact as they manifest in the world with their powerful pushing energies.

As we contemplate types Nine, Eight, and One, we can see how the yielding-pushing energy together creates the foundational energy of the entire body center: present, autonomous, and flexibly grounded. The emphasis varies, from the YIELDING-pushing of the Nine to the yielding-PUSHING of the Eight and One, but all three body types teach us the importance of this fundamental energy of simply being here now, with a strong and flexible presence.

For practice combining a strong yielding-pushing stance with an expanded heart center and exploratory reach, try Warrior Pose I (the variant with arms stretched vertically above the head).

Reaching: Types Seven and Two

Grounded in the yielding-pushing energy of our alive presence to ourselves, reaching, grasping, and pulling are all ways that we go out from ourselves and interact with the world around us. Often, we combine reaching, grasping, and pulling so automatically (think of picking up your cup of coffee while you read or sit at your computer) that we can lose our appreciation for the fullness and richness of each individual action. For the remaining Enneagram types, it is crucial to get in touch with the pure energy of each of these individual actions, so as to restore their overall energetic balance.

Pure reaching energy is open, exploratory, generous, extending – simultaneously an offer and a prayer. We stretch out our arms, or our hearts, or our minds with complete acceptance around not knowing exactly what we will encounter or how it will respond to us. The heart version of reaching, the gift of type Two, is an open invitation to contact and connection. Think of a mother kneeling on the ground and throwing her arms wide open so that her child can run into her embrace. Now, can we imagine that, even if the child's attention is momentarily elsewhere, the mother is still able to fully feel and celebrate her open invitation? That is the energy of the expanded heart reaching outward, needing no assurance of being seen or met in any preconceived way.

The head version of reaching, the gift of type Seven, is a questing, curious, adventurous probing into the unknown and undiscovered field of possibility. When I think of the healthy, expanded form of this energy, I am reminded of the lines from Robert Browning's poem *Andrea del Sarto*: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, /Or what's a heaven for?" As our healthiest Seven friends can teach us, there is a deep joy and gratitude to be felt in reaching out openly and curiously toward the manifold riches of the world around us. The reaching itself is the source of this joy and gratitude – not the ultimate outcome or product of the reaching.

For both types Two and Seven, the habitual and contracted expression of reaching entails two problems: first, these types neglect to ground themselves fully in the yielding-pushing energy of their own presence; and second, they lose contact with the openness of reaching and start to become indiscriminately grasping. For Twos, the "Wake-Up Call" is called "leaning in" (Riso and Hudson 1999). When Twos can catch themselves leaning, off-balance, out of their own presence and into trying to help or connect with another person, they can "wake up" to the trance of their personality and reground themselves in their own felt experience. The mental fixation of type Seven is called "anticipation" (Riso and Hudson 2006). This is a leaning out of the present moment and into the future that, when it becomes

habitual, means that Sevens can neglect to take in true nourishment from the experiences they reach after and consume. When these two types can energetically sense this reaching-leaning imbalance in their actions, they can reconnect with the yielding-pushing energy of grounding in their own presence. From there, their reach can once again be open *and* grounded – grounded in themselves and in the present moment.

Once this open, grounded relationship with reaching is re-established, these types will find it easier to remain mindful of the choice-points where they can decide whether or not to grasp. (Energetically, they are no longer “pitching forward” and, in effect, already trying to grasp onto something.) This mindfulness allows Sevens to work against their habitual tendencies toward gluttony, the indiscriminate grasping and consuming of experience. Similarly, it enables Twos to avoid the pitfall of manipulation, the tendency to take hold of and manage others’ needs (whether real or projected) at the expense of truly attending to their own.

Twos and Sevens we have worked with have reported that energetically sensing their posture – becoming aware of how parts of their body are literally projecting themselves forward and out of balance – has enabled them to shift “leaning-in” and “anticipating” behaviors that they had remained unconsciously stuck in for much of their lives. A simple bodily reminder to re-ground themselves in the yielding-pushing energy of a balanced stance helps them to reconnect with the pure energy of open and exploratory reaching.

To practice open and receptive reaching, try this pose: kneel back on your heels with spine erect and arms bent at your sides so that your forearms are parallel to the floor. With your palms facing upward, sense the energetically receptive reach through your palms and through the top of your head. Sense also the balanced yielding-pushing ground of your kneeling position.

Grasping: Types Six and Three

In its pure expression, the action of grasping contains a highly discriminating intelligence. It is how we decide what we want to select out of the vast, open field of our experience in the moment, what we want to engage with in a particularly attentive and intimate way. An intelligent grasp also involves subtle and nuanced choices about precisely when and how to engage. We must be sensitive to the dynamic unfolding of the moment, both within ourselves and in the world around us.

Grasping is the core energy manifested by Sixes and Threes, seen both in their healthy gifts and capacities and as the energetic distortion that shows up when they are caught in the habitual and reactive modes of their personalities. The essential quality of the Six that Riso and Hudson call “Awakeness” describes the mind’s ability to grasp what is essential in the unfolding moment and to respond with a spontaneous flexibility. As a Six myself, I have

experienced periods of relative freedom in which I was able to do this grasping quickly and lightly, moving easily from one moment to the next and grasping with a spontaneous intelligence what I needed in each moment to navigate through my experience. At other times I may be caught up in my habitual personality agendas, and at these times I find myself grasping onto something in the moment with a kind of desperate death-grip. (The Sixes in our workshop came to call this familiar mode “hanging on for dear life.”) In these moments, I have lost the delicacy and intelligence of my healthy grasp. I have also forgotten how to release my grip when the moment has changed and what I am grasping is no longer essential to my understanding of how to move forward.

In Threes, the healthy expression of grasping shows up in the ability to unerringly identify what they value and then to unfailingly move to take hold of it. I feel almost embarrassed to introduce the metaphor of a ladder here, because the “ladder of success” has become such a stale cliché, but the image of moving steadily upward toward a goal, rung-by-rung, with a sure grasp at every step, actually describes this healthy capacity of Threes. (Unlike Andrea del Sarto, Threes do not want their reach to exceed their grasp.) When caught up in their habitual ego-needs, however, the grasping energy of Threes can feel more “grabby,” competitive, or acquisitive. The heart is no longer sure of its innate grasp of true value, which ultimately lies within, and they may begin to grasp for external trophies and validations.

As we have seen with all the types thus far, Threes and Sixes need to balance and harmonize their characteristic, default action with the other fundamental actions. First, getting back in touch with the yielding-pushing energy of a firmly grounded and relaxed stance in the world is vital. This foundation in a truly present and embodied stance provides much-needed support for the frantic mind and the restless heart.

Second, we need to honor the action and energy of reaching as more than just the prequel to grasping. We need to actually feel and allow that moment of not-knowing as we reach: we never know, completely and exhaustively, what is out there as we reach, and we don’t know ahead of time exactly how it will respond to us. In their own ways, Threes and Sixes often want certainty about the outcome of their reaching-grasping, and they benefit hugely from learning to experience the reaching for itself, as an open-ended adventure.

Using myself as an example here, I can report that my work with mindful reaching has transformed my relation to my physical environment. For years, without having any frame of reference such as the Five Actions, I would occasionally realize that I was emotionally and mentally ungrounded when I found myself repeatedly dropping things or knocking them over. I sensed that this was a potentially valuable “wake-up call,” but the remedy was often hard to come by: just telling myself to “get grounded” didn’t help much. Now, however, I can more readily get in touch with the automatic and impatient manner of my grasping: I knock things over by actually closing my grasp before I’ve reached them, and I drop them by

opening my grasp before I've reached the surface I'm trying to place them on. When I direct my attention to mindfully reaching out into my environment, I regain my sure sense of when and how to grasp – and I break far fewer household objects.

Third, we need to practice grasping lightly, once we've made the conscious decision to grasp. An intelligent grasp contains the seeds of release within it – not as its opposite but as an inner dimension of the energy itself. A grasp without the intelligence of when to release becomes a kind of strangle-hold on our experience: we actually kill off what is alive in the moment and find ourselves holding onto lifeless trophies of success and empty rituals of security. If we consciously choose not to release, and this point leads us naturally toward Types Five and Four, we need to complete the action of grasping by pulling in whatever we have grasped so that we can integrate and metabolize the experience.

To experience dynamic poise with the grasping energy directed toward supporting and valuing yourself, we recommend a modified Tree Pose in which your palms are together in a Namaste position in front of your heart center.

Pulling: Types Five and Four

Pulling is how we bring the world toward us and, ultimately, bring it inside of us. It is also how we bring ourselves toward the world, though this can be a more challenging lesson to learn, especially for the “pulling types.” The culmination of a sequence that begins with our grounded yielding-pushing stance, creating the foundation for our mindful reaching-grasping, the act of pulling is what allows us to truly “take in” our experience, to integrate it, to make it our own and let it transform us.

At their freest and healthiest, Fours are gifted at pulling aspects of their experience into their heart center, where an alchemical process of metabolization takes place, making the experience completely their own and imprinting even commonly shared human experiences with a unique and deeply personal stamp. With Fives, there is an analogous process in the head center. Experience is pulled in and transmuted into knowledge and insight in such a way that their entire being shifts and responds subtly with each new bit of input. This is what specifically characterizes Fives' experience in the head center, I think. Any of us may enjoy knowledge and study, but with Fives there is this sense that I am, somehow, actually made of knowledge – it is part of the fabric of my being.

For both Fours and Fives, it is imperative to learn how to complete their pulling-in process by sequencing the energy they have activated in their bodies. In fact, this culminating sequencing step is important for all nine types, but with Fours and Fives it can be particularly easy to observe what happens if the energy is not sequenced. Fives can wind up pulling so hard into their minds that they pull much of themselves up into the head center along with the input from the outer world. This tendency is captured in the Five's Wake-Up Call:

“withdrawing into the mind” (Riso-Hudson 1999). As they pull their heart and body energies up into their minds, enlisting those energies to help them memorize, categorize, classify, and organize their knowledge, Fives can lose contact with the true needs of their hearts, bodies, and surrounding loved ones. Analogously, Fours can pull too much of themselves into their heart center, where they become lost in a fantasy world of lovingly rehearsed stories and carefully nursed feelings, typically revolving around themes of loss, or abandonment, or unfulfillment. In so doing, Fours can cut themselves off from the clarity of their minds and the vital energies of their bodies.

Both of these types benefit from learning how to pay close attention to the actual sensations bound up with their emotional and mental energies, inquiring with an open and non-interfering attention into where and how the energies might want to move. As noted at the beginning of this article, our energies have a natural tendency to flow toward and out one of our body’s endpoints: hands, feet, face, or pelvic floor. This sequencing action is the key to our ability to fully metabolize and integrate our experience. Without it, we will all be at least partially stuck in some version of our type’s habitual and reactive stuff. When we let the energetic sequencing happen, with full attention, we sense how our experience is affecting us, we are able to respond rather than react, and we are ready to shift and open to the next moment.

Sequencing our internal energy is also what brings us back into intimate contact with our world. Sequencing is an energetic exchange: our energy is literally flowing out into our environment. This is how the pulling action, completed by sequencing, not only brings the world into us but also brings us into the world. This is crucial for any type, but it is especially empowering and restorative for Fours and Fives, who can often feel as if they are somehow cut off from full participation in the world. The integration and sequencing of their experience is what allows Fives to truly share their knowledge with others, instead of merely downloading it, and what helps Fours to expressively create with their feelings, rather than compulsively nursing and rehearsing them.

For a vivid experience of the difference between stuck and sequencing energy, try getting in touch with a powerful feeling or interesting idea and then pulling in at all the endpoints while you “concentrate” on the feeling or thought. Pull your head and pelvic floor in, feeling the spinal hunch that so often accompanies our moments of intense inner reaction. Pull your hands in toward your shoulders and your feet in toward your hips. Hold this posture for a moment or two with full awareness of how it is affecting you. You may find that it feels both familiar and awful: familiar because we do, in fact, pull our energy in from our endpoints all the time, and awful because we are bringing so much more awareness to it than we usually do. Now let all that indrawn energy move out through one or more endpoints. Sense how you feel now.

Conclusion

Our students and we have found the combination of BMP and the Enneagram to be a powerful way of working with type-related habits and reactions. Nines consistently report that learning to combine some pushing energy with their natural tendencies to yield helps them to shift patterns of passivity and “going along” in their lives and relationships – and that their work on the actual *energy* of self-assertion enables them to break through such patterns far more quickly than conceptual re-framings or affirmations. Similarly, Eights and Ones have told us how important it has been to learn how to yield into their experience, as well as learning how to reach for things in their lives instead of habitually pushing themselves toward them. Sevens and Twos have benefited greatly from the reminder to ground themselves in the yielding-pushing energy of their own presence before reaching out into the world for experience or connection. Sixes and Threes have come to feel the suffering involved in their habitual grasping, and have reconnected with the wonderful intelligence and discernment of this energy by learning to mindfully reach on the way to grasping, and then to complete the action with mindful release or pulling-in to integrate. Fives and Fours have resonated powerfully with the suffering of habitually pulling themselves inward, contracting or collapsing, and have learned to love the feelings of expansion and contact that come with sequencing their energy back out into the world.

Perhaps even more beneficial, however, is the way this work can help each of us to harmonize and integrate *all* the type energies. We all know that one of the central goals of working with the Enneagram is to gradually make available to ourselves all the types’ gifts and capacities and perspectives. Our students and we have found that working with these fundamental actions and energies, which constitute a deep bodily-energetic dimension within each type, can put us on a “royal road” to integration and wholeness in our personalities.

To re-visit Goethe’s comment about “teaching our organs” at the head of this article: we have found that using this model helps us to ground our process of self-discovery in the organismic, animal-instinctual dimension of our experience, where much of our personality’s “hard-wiring” resides. Thus grounded, we can enter into an active dialogue with the energies we find there, enabling us to re-wire some of the circuits responsible for our deepest and most intractable forms of suffering. In the process, we may also rediscover and reclaim some of the animal joy of movement and energy we have lost. One of the Sixes at a presentation we gave on this work told us that she had come to find a “sensual” joy in the act of lightly grasping. I myself have discovered that making the bed in the morning can be a symphony of sensual pleasures – instead of a merely irksome duty – but only to the extent that I can fully inhabit my actions moment-by-moment.

As a matter of fact, making the bed in the morning has become an important component of my current practice. Whenever I remember, I inquire into my experience: am I doing it the habitual way – slightly bored and impatient, worried that I will strain my lower back or right

shoulder and yet, amazingly, not really paying full attention to how those parts of my body are responding to the activity? Or am I feeling the aliveness of my energy in the moment: truly sensing how my body stretches to reach the coverlet across the bed, grasping it with just the amount of firmness needed to pull it toward me, checking in with the grounding and relaxed feeling of my feet yielding and pushing into the sun-warmed floor? It is such a simple thing that it is hard to stay with – our minds prefer things complicated. It is sensual, in a deeply satisfying way: I feel grounded and alive, sensing a deep well-being and intimacy with myself. I'm joyfully aware that I'm an animal in motion – and I'm teaching myself, after all these years, how to fully participate in the action of making a bed.

While writing this conclusion, I returned to Goethe's letter and found a passage I had not fully registered the first time. I include it here because I think it captures so well the actual rhythms of personal transformative work, with all the fits and starts and "not-knowings" of this open-ended process. Goethe clearly understood the level of diligence and the unremitting focus of attention needed to "teach our organs" and to become fully free and expressive human beings. He also had tasted the joys of success in this endeavor. I invite readers to sense and sequence any energies activated within themselves as they read his wonderfully pithy reflection:

"Through practice, teaching, reflection, success, failure, furtherance and resistance, and again and again reflection, man's organs unconsciously and in a free activity link what he acquires with his innate gifts, so that a unity results which leaves the world amazed" (Goethe 2001, p. 549).

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