

NLP and the Enneagram: two paths – one journey



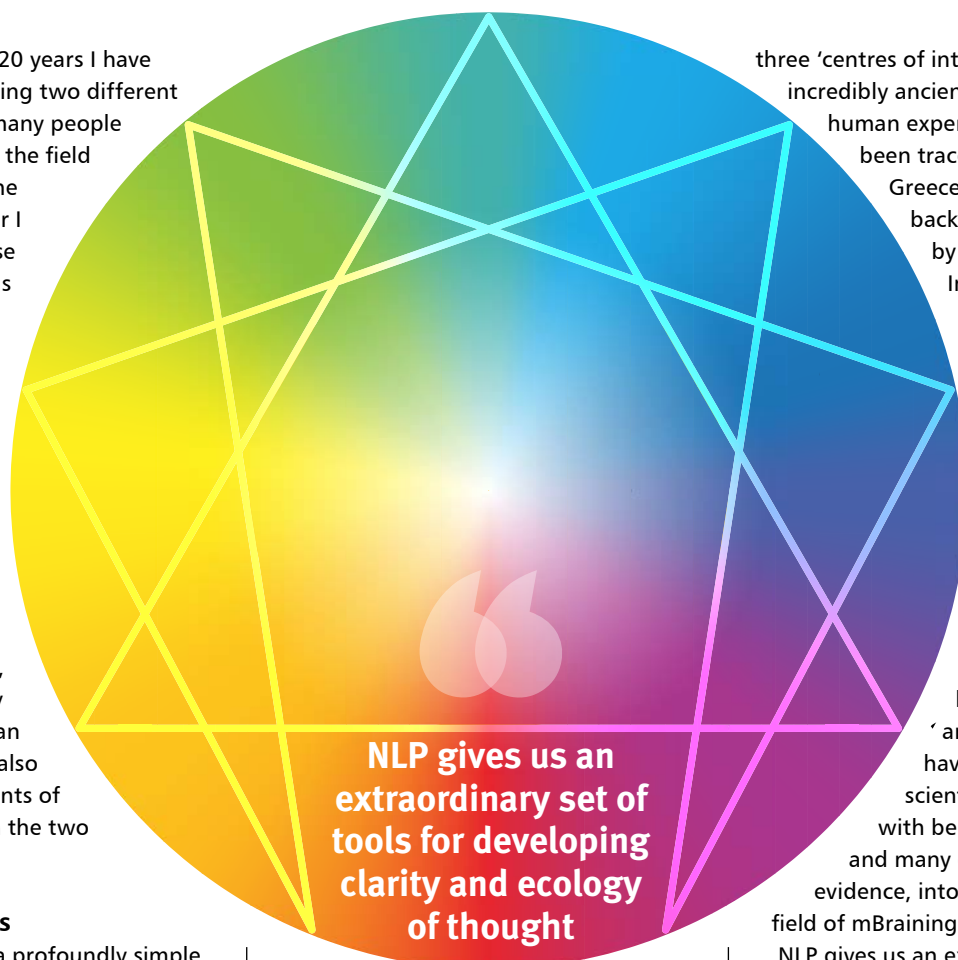
By Dr Henrie Lidiard

Over the last 20 years I have been exploring two different fields that many people feel are immiscible – the field of NLP and that of the Enneagram. However I have found that these two powerful models have a great deal to offer each other. The Enneagram can deepen our skill and precision as NLPers; and it can do even more than that – it can enrich our experience and self-awareness in ways that are absolutely profound, providing a doorway to our limitless human potential. There are also some interesting points of connection between the two disciplines.

The three centres

As we know, NLP is a profoundly simple and effective way of understanding the structure of our experience and it gives us choice about our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The core of NLP was formed from Bandler and Grinder's skilful modelling of therapeutic expertise. However the discipline also co-opted useful ideas (both ancient and modern) about how human beings tick. One of the most ancient ideas incorporated into NLP shows up in the deceptively simple 'Mercedes model'.

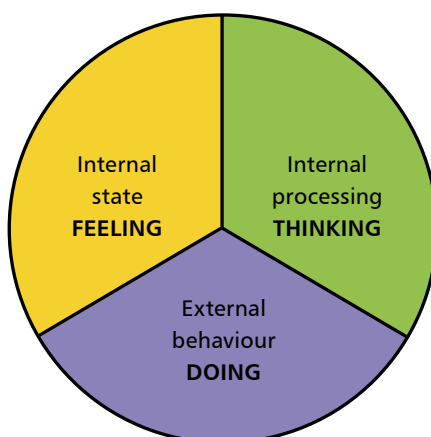
The Mercedes model usefully divides our experience into three 'compartments': the emotional domain of the heart (internal state); the cognitive domain of the head (internal processing); and the domain of our physiology and external behaviour. This model of the



three 'centres of intelligence' is an incredibly ancient way of viewing human experience and has been traced back to ancient Greece and even further back to ancient Egypt by some authors. Interestingly there is now a vast amount of neuroscientific evidence that 'shows us that our head, heart and gut centres are not just metaphors or figures of speech – we really do have three 'brains' in these areas of our body. (Marvin Oka ' and Grant Soosalu have synthesised the scientific findings, along with behavioural modelling and many other sources of evidence, into the brilliant new field of mBraining.)

NLP gives us an extraordinary set of tools for developing clarity and ecology of thought (a clean, objective use of the head centre). It also helps us to build awareness and choice in how we respond to the world, rather than reacting to it (a calm, open use of our heart centre), and it enables us to make helpful changes in how we take action, relate and behave (a wiser use of the 'belly' centre). NLP doesn't give us the last word in how our centres function or how to inhabit them, but it paves the way and lays a steady, strong foundation from which subtler, deeper experiences of our centres can naturally follow.

The Mercedes Model



So what is the Enneagram?

For those unfamiliar with it, the Enneagram is at one level a nine-pointed



geometric symbol based on particular mathematical ideas (also deriving from Ancient Greek thought).

However it is also a powerful synthesis of insights about human nature, some very ancient and drawn largely from the roots of our Western spiritual traditions, and some from modern psychology. Together these insights form a powerful model, which gives us a startlingly accurate description of nine habitual and unconscious aspects of human nature and their rich and complex interactions. These nine patterns are often described as personality 'types'. Interestingly the nine core patterns of the Enneagram are also clustered around our three centres of intelligence and how we inhabit them (and how we often unconsciously scramble and misuse them).

'Know thyself' – an invitation to liberation

Both disciplines invite us to deepen our self-awareness and suggest that this will give us the ability to *choose* what we do, rather than to unconsciously act out our habitual feelings and impulses. They also suggest that by choosing to *do something different* to our usual habits and routines, we can experience greater degrees of personal freedom.

Two disciplines, one path

NLP opens our eyes to many habitual and repetitive aspects of our nature and in addition brings a deeply pragmatic approach to helping us become more flexible. The Enneagram's invitation to 'know thyself' goes a little further than the transformative insights of NLP. It shows us clusters of deeper patterns within our unique 'maps of the world' and illuminates more unconscious grooves in our thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

When we begin learning about NLP, we embark on a profoundly developmental journey. We can make enormous changes and may achieve far more in a short space of time than we would ever have believed possible. These shifts are often profound, even life changing. The Enneagram enables us to *continue* on that deep and fulfilling growth path, beyond the point that our NLP tools can take us to. The self-awareness and resilience that NLP gives us offers us

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a stable platform from which to embark on a deeper inner journey.

NLP brings us many benefits; it can heal aspects of our personal history, help us to express more of our strengths in the world, and improve our resilience and mental health. We can become more objective and our relationships can become more functional, rewarding and fulfilling. In the language of psychology, then, the tools of NLP, well applied, help us to develop a healthy, *open* 'ego structure'. In addition, we learn that aspects of our experience are **not** fixed but can, in fact, change. This insight enables us to *dis-identify* with certain structures in our psyche that we might otherwise have taken to be the way '*we are*' or the way the '*world is*'.

There is an interesting side effect of all this that you may have already noticed. While NLP is not inherently a spiritual discipline, as these changes occur, many people begin to open up to subtle but tangible aspects of their experience that they had not previously been aware of. To use a metaphor – it is as if NLP can 'clean the windows' of our perception, naturally letting in more light. ►

► Moving from 'ego' to infinite potential

Interestingly, though, a healthy robust ego structure is not the end of the story. It is just a necessary stage in our evolution and development; a station perhaps, but not an ultimate destination. Without realising this we can mistake our familiar habits and preferences, even our talents and gifts, for something more than they really represent. We may start to believe that our personality is all we are. You might have heard yourself or others say things like *'That's just the way I am'*, *'That's just me'*. This identification with our personality or ego structures is, in NLP terms, a grand 'complex equivalence' and is probably one of the biggest distortions that we are capable of as human beings. In this way our self-concept falls far short of reality. Truly – whatever you think you are, you are so much more than that.

NLP begins our gentle journey of releasing and 'dis-identifying' with certain feeling states, behaviours and mental habits. We develop a freer, fuller sense of ourselves and our capacity. Once again the Enneagram can take us further along the same path, highlighting for us even deeper patterns of mind, body and emotion. As we start to recognise these deeper patterns we can see our personality structures more clearly for what they are and we can start to gently dis-identify from them too.

As we start to let go and to relax these deeper structures we begin to experience ourselves in a vastly freer way. Even more 'inner space' opens up, in which we can experience realms of our nature that were previously obscured by our inner noise and activity.

As this greater inner space opens up, it begins to fill with subtle and powerful aspects of what we might call our 'essential nature'. Deep and profound states of being can arise

in us, which are beyond those we have experienced before and are even beyond anything we could imagine. Strangely, even though we could not 'imagine', 'conjure' or 'create' them, when we experience them we do seem to



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'remember' them in a certain way. They feel true, real and absolutely, irrefutably an aspect of who and what we really are. There is a feeling of coming home to ourselves in a new way.

In experiencing this unfolding potential *in the moment*, our ongoing experience can become one of depth, mystery and spontaneous upwelling and renewal. This open-ended way of experiencing the undreamed-of realms of our nature, moment by moment, is a very different territory to that of choosing from a repertoire of 'resourceful states' that we are already familiar with (pleasurable and therapeutically useful though that is).

Being and wellbeing

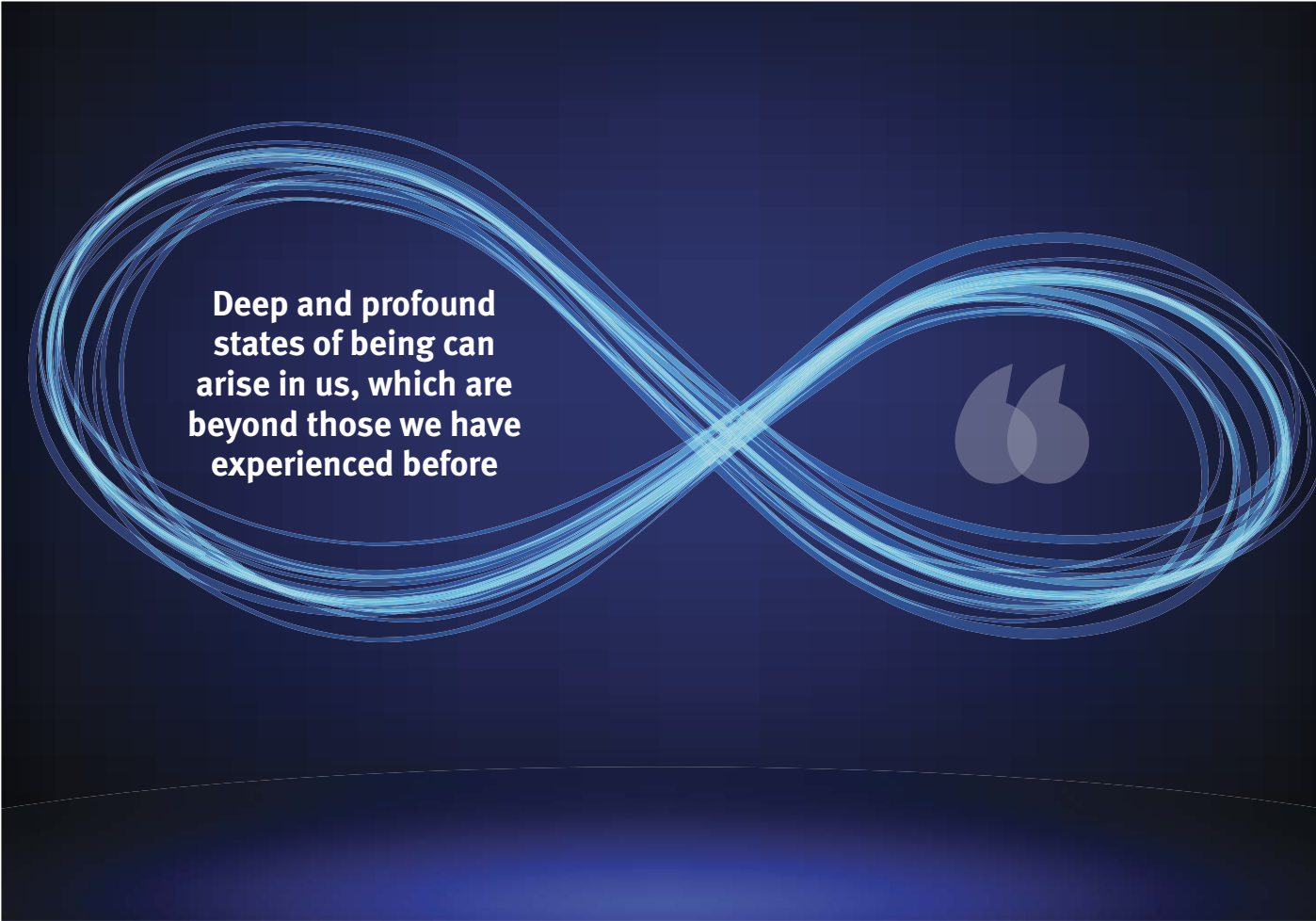
The methods of working with the Enneagram are both simple and incredibly powerful. Simple, though, is not the same thing as easy! Firstly they involve deepening our sensed contact with our physical body. Relaxing into our immediate sensation is a powerful tether to the present moment that profoundly enriches our experience. It deepens our contact not only with ourselves but also those we are in relationships

with and with our surroundings.

As we learn to stay in sensed contact with the 'now' we can see more clearly our habitual nature as it arises in the moment – in *seeing it more clearly* and *sensing it as it happens* we really can choose to relax those patterns and do something other than following the momentum of our 'autopilot'. We don't have to do much as it turns out; simply feel the urge of our patterns as they arise – breathe, relax, feel it fully and *not* do it!

'Being' vs 'Doing'

This 'non-doing' isn't the same invitation as issued by Bob Newhart's therapist in the sketch where he told his client repeatedly to 'Stop it!' It is a fully conscious way of applying a gentle pressure to our ego structures, which respond by gradually softening and



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loosening. Each moment that we see our structures as they arise changes them. Each time we experience a structure for what it is we dis-identify a little more. Simply being awake to ourselves and sensing is enough. We don't have to 'do' anything more.

Gradually little by little we can learn to let ourselves be present with whatever is arising in us, without necessarily doing anything to change it. This 'letting be', though, almost seems counterintuitive to our NLP approach. (We may even have a strong opinion that we just want the good stuff, the exalted states and nice feelings, not anything that is dull or boring or uncomfortable. We may even become cross or fearful if someone suggests we feel something less than pleasant.) We are profoundly lucky in being NLP-skilled of course. We *know* that we can take care of ourselves and our state if we need to. We have a tremendous amount of choice to change things. This kind of change, though, while it takes us a long way, will only take us so far. The Enneagram offers us a strange invitation indeed – to see how much we can feel first, without pulling

away from it.

Much to our surprise, when we let ourselves really feel what is happening here in the moment, whatever it is (and stay with it as much as we can without acting it out, suppressing it, getting involved with it or swept away in it), we actually find that things change, quite quickly and in a really extraordinary way. As we taste this little by little, there can be a deep sense of trust, rest and peace in allowing ourselves to be 'as we are' in the moment without feeling the need to engage in 'relentless self-improvement'. There can even be a relief in acknowledging just what we are experiencing without needing to pretend, conceal it, embellish it, reframe it or 'act it out'. We can give ourselves the freedom to simply be. It is a skill, and as we build our capacity to stay with ourselves and allow our experience to unfold, we discover that there is an inherent intelligence in *how* it unfolds and what is revealed to us. Lastly – the most surprising thing of all – we find that even moments of discomfort open up into profoundly beautiful, supportive

and enriching aspects of who and what we are. Sometimes poetry touches it more closely than prose.

Unconditional

by Jennifer Paine-Welwood

*Willing to experience aloneness
I discover connection everywhere;
Turning to face my fear,
I meet the warrior within;
Opening to my loss,
I gain the embrace of the universe;
Surrendering into emptiness,
I find fullness without end.*

*Each condition I flee from pursues me,
Each condition I welcome transforms me
And becomes itself transformed into its
jewel-like essence.
I bow to the one who has made it so,
Who has crafted this master game;
To play it is purest delight –
To honour its form, true devotion.*

Beyond our personality, a world of mystery, depth and beauty opens up; a human potential truly worth exploring. ●