

## A Bit About the Nine Trance

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Nines are part of the emotional trio who [8,9,1] tend to delete themselves, are unconsciously angry and have trouble thinking clearly. In their Enneagram trance Nines anticipate being overlooked by others and delete themselves first to preempt the world's indifference. Their central defensive strategy is to self-efface, to adapt to and accommodate their environment, tamping down their expectations and camouflaging their deeper needs even from themselves. Unlike Eights, who directly express their anger, Nines suppress theirs. This tactic requires that Nines conceal any part of them that might be disagreeable. Most Nines resent the result of this strategy – people overlook them – but they often downplay their anger, if they are conscious of it at all: “When I have to do or say something I feel angry about, I anticipate creating conflict. Some of the time I just chicken out.” Another Nine adds: “Everyone gets mad and frustrated, but there's no reason to get angry and hateful. I wasn't brought up that way. Angry, vindictive people normally don't get ahead.” Nines can express anger by being passive-aggressive or invisibly stubborn, or slowing down their tempo to thwart others, for example by making everyone late for a meeting the Nine resents having to attend. This is not unlike an anti-war demonstrator who offers arresting authorities a slack, relaxed body instead of a struggling one. One police officer can drag a resistant protestor to jail, but it takes four or five to carry a limp body.

As with Eights and Ones, Nines tend toward confused thinking and render complex subjects into polarized opposites. The Nine version is to present themselves with pairs ill-formed, unwieldy choices, neither of which the Nine truly cares about. Asked what he plans to do next, a newly-unemployed Nine might reply: “Well, on the one hand I could go to Hong Kong and study acupuncture, or maybe I could become a golf pro. I've wanted to go to Hong Kong for 20 years but never have. My grandfather was a golf pro so it runs in the family.” When you meet the Nine a month later and ask him what he decided, he might look at you blankly. The matter has been dropped or replaced by a new set of unlikely options.

Once in a college history class a professor who frequently got excited by his own lectures rounded on a half-asleep student. “And Johnson!” he said, “who won the Battle of Waterloo?” The startled student blurted an utterly honest answer: “I don't care!” Nines control through *sloth*, by being willfully indifferent to their own needs, a defensive not caring. In Enneagram books this is called “laziness,” although the term is misleading as only some Nines are physically slothful. Defensive Nines tamp down their aspirations, their sense of industry – whatever they would otherwise be passionate about. This may lead to being physically indolent but it's source is a spiritual and psychological apathy. One Nine describes her experience of sloth as “wanting to rest before I'm tired.” Another Nine says: “when my circuits are overloaded, it takes away from the

opportunity to have a serious understanding of the situation at hand. So I shut myself down.”

While some Nines are slow moving and phlegmatic, many are busy and active. Busy Nines get swept up in the needs of an environment to the exclusion of their own priorities; it's a lively active form of sleep, a laziness of personal purpose. Some go on automatic pilot, expending just enough energy and attention to function adequately. As a Nine says: “I was not aware that even as I led a hectic productive life, sloth had a firm grip on me. If I wanted to I could live just barely, refusing the gift of each day.”

In a regional guidebook to an American desert valley there is a photograph of an ancient petroglyph. The photo's caption reads, “Unknown people from an unknown time left these messages for people who don't understand them.” A Nine's sloth is born from a deeper feeling that who they are and what they do doesn't matter, so deeply committed effort is pointless. Entranced Nines have a resigned, fatalistic part of them that says things like, “What's the use? If I show others my gold, if I reveal what's in my heart, if I show the world what means the most to me no one will care. People will yawn, or turn away, or steal what I have and claim it as their own. Or, if I do something well, I'll expected to do it again and again, like a trained seal.”

The word indolence – being aversive to action or labor – originally meant “causing little or no pain.” Nines protect themselves through the defense mechanism of *numbing*, also called narcotization. When they start to feel upsetting emotions that might provoke conflict or lead to disappointment, Nines make their feelings go numb. Some Nines describe this as “freezing” their emotions; others compare it to giving themselves knockout drops. One Nine says: “It's like being on morphine: you know you're in pain on some level, but you can't rouse yourself to give a damn.”

Along with some Eights, Nines can have high physical pain thresholds. Some report refusing novocaine when they go to the dentist. In medical terms, kinesthetic numbing is known as anesthesia – a total lack of sensation; what you experience, for instance, when your arm “falls asleep.” Nines specifically practice analgesia, a subset of anesthesia. Analgesia is the absence of pain, but with the ability to still sense pressure. You have partial external physical sensation, but the inside feels dead. Self-numbing is supported by the Nine's auditory habit of “comparing down,” a form of minimizing. When Nines want something that could disrupt their equilibrium, they make the desire go dead, saying to themselves a variation on the statement “At least I don't live in Antarctica.” They compare their unsatisfying situation to a worse alternative, appreciating what little they do have in order to make themselves feel better. So: “Yesterday my house burned down, my car was stolen and my children are criminals. But I'm warm and dry and I just bought

a fresh box of strawberries at the Farmer's Market – they are really luscious. What a great fruit season this has been." It's like giving yourself a consolation prize, an act of defensively counting your blessings.

### **Negative Hallucination – Passive Hiding**

A Nine recalled dining with friends at a Chinese restaurant. Her friends knew the Enneagram and, when they opened their after-dinner fortune cookies, each found a fortune that spoke to their personality style. An Eight's fortune read, "Underneath you are soft and tender." A Seven's fortune said, "You love adventure and excitement." A One's read, "You make order out of chaos." After each fortune was read everyone at the table laughed. When the Nine's turn came she broke open her cookie and found it empty – she had no fortune.

A Nine's defense of going numb is supported by the hypnotic phenomenon of *negative hallucination* – not seeing what's there. Entranced Nines blind themselves to their own deeper needs and the self who has them, concealing both in a kind of blank inner state. Nines usually describe this in passive terms, as something stealing over them, like a fog rolling in off a bay. But when Nines go blank they are hiding, protecting a point of vulnerability. They hide in such a passive, practiced way that it fools them too. Just as they are absent to others, they are absent to themselves. Nobody's home or, at least, no one is answering the door.

Many Nines who try to focus on themselves and their priorities will say they see an internal image of a fog, a haze, a void or a wall. This is the visual expression of the Nine's feeling of non-being, a paradoxical self-image that says, "I am an absence. I am the one who is not here." As a Nine explains, "I felt like a non-entity in grade school and high school. I was there physically but really wasn't aware of my feelings or needs. I would blend in with whoever or whatever was convenient – never trying to identify myself with anyone or anything."

I once described this tendency in an Enneagram workshop in Canada. People in the audience began nodding and said that it paralleled Canada's national identity. They said that Canadians often emphasize how different they are from their culturally and economically dominant neighbor America. "We are the not-them," one audience member said.

If you know Nines you may be baffled by their habit of asking for advice and then not following it. You and other friends could see with utter clarity what the Nine should do about a decision or vexing situation, while the Nine sees all but the one clear choice. It's like a principled, willed deletion; missing the center of the problem and seeing only the irrelevant, extraneous and incidental. If the Nine saw the obvious choice, it would be like admitting she has a

self, that she has a fortune after all.

### **Confusion Technique**

Archers are familiar with what are called "flu flu arrows," a specially made arrow used to kill birds at short range. Flu flu arrows are aerodynamically designed to fly at full speed for about 50 feet. Then they stop dead in mid-air and drop to the ground. In the trance of their Enneagram style, Nines practice "flu flu logic," a kind of confused thinking that seems to go forward and then dead-ends. This is evident when Nines speak in rambling, saga-like stories filled with off-the-mark details that ramify like ivy. A Nine could begin relating a recent event, get part way into the story, veer off into an irrelevant sideline, double back to explain something they left out, then continue telling the story in long rolling sentences peppered with stray bits of coherence. The whole narrative is a segue, like a drug with only side effects, a town with only side streets. As you listen to the Nine, you could become perplexed and frustrated and then tired and indifferent. At that point, you feel the way the Nine feels.

In hypnosis, speaking this way is called *confusion technique* and it is often used to help a client with an alert, controlling conscious mind lose focus, grow tired and drop into a trance. To off-balance such a client, a hypnotherapist might tell an excessively complicated story, full of misleading clues, subtle puns and hard-to-follow plot points. Once the client grows mentally tired, it is easy for him to enter a trance-like state. In this same way, Nines use confusion technique to self-hypnotize, inducing in themselves a sleepy inability to think clearly that distracts them from their own priorities.

NLP calls this speaking without a "referential index," which means talking about something without reference or context. If someone says to you, "Jason went to the wrestling match the other night," and you don't know anyone named Jason, you will likely be confused and preoccupied as you search for the missing information in the remark.

Confusion technique supports the way Nines can have "Virtual Life Obsessions," (VLOs). VLOs are dissociated obsessions that Nines create about the direction of their lives that replace *living* their lives. These come about when a Nine is hiding, doubtful that the world has anything more to offer than it did in the past, but the people in the Nine's environment expect her to have ambitions. Partially to placate others, the Nine obsesses about the goals she should have, the decisions she should make, the ambitions she ought to have. On a deeper level, meanwhile, she remains numb and non-committal.

Some Nines express their VLOs externally, for example

by living in a chaotic, cluttered environment. While many Nines are neat and orderly, some have packrat tendencies. One Nine had a house overflowing with books that he was reluctant to get rid of because he “might read them someday.” Another lived in a large house that she filled with debris – unopened mail, collections of her children’s toys and books, even garbage that had been accumulating for years. This is living metaphor, a Nine’s physicalizing of her jumbled inner state.

Such a mess can function as an excuse. The Nine might think, “I can’t begin to live my life until I clean up the house and alphabetize my book collection.” Creating disorder can also be a passive-aggressive way to express hostility to others in the Nine’s environment. In addition, packrat tendencies are sometimes a sign of mild Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

### **Other Sensory Distinctions**

There are extraverted and introverted versions of each Enneagram style but the difference in Nines can be striking. Extraverted Nines seem like cheery Sevens or busy Threes while introverted Nines can resemble taciturn Fives. Unlike Fives, who try to be socially invisible but remain self-conscious, entranced Nines hide so well that they forget they are present. Introverted Nines tend towards depressive pessimism while extraverted Nines often have sunny dispositions. Nines and Twos can also seem alike. Both have diffuse boundaries and may compulsively merge with others, although they do so in different ways. Twos merge with people, joining with someone’s image of them to form an alliance and find a role-identity. Nines merge with environments – which include people – and then accommodate (or sabotage) the expectations of their surroundings. Since Nines adopt the coloration of their environment, they are more likely to enter the family business – often a path of least resistance – and may capably rise to an inherited position that they did not seek. A Nine who followed in his father’s profession said, “I had a great relationship with my dad. I’m just carrying on his work.”

When Nines change places with others, they subjectively adopt another person’s perspective, what NLP calls “switching perceptual positions.” As they look at the world through another person’s eyes, they also might merge with that person’s body feelings. As one Nine says, “I’m not a very opinionated person and I can almost always see another person’s point of view.”

Some entranced Nines merge on visual and auditory levels – visibly and verbally agreeing with others – while their feelings say no. A Nine could nod and agree with you about a necessary course of action but you might feel subtly resisted or later realize that the Nine failed to do what he had agreed to do. Other Nines merge through feelings. One Nine was a professional motivational speaker who made speeches to different groups and organizations. A friend remembered being amazed at the Nine’s ability to galvanize meetings by sensing a group’s

expectations and saying exactly what the members wanted to hear.

Once in a workshop, I interviewed a panel of Nines, most of whom had vision problems. All wore glasses or contact lenses. One woman had been in a car accident and was sporting an eye patch, another had a stray eye, another had astigmatism and two of the panelists reported being myopic. One panel member recalled drifting through childhood in a soft haze until her parents realized that she needed glasses.

Eye and vision problems are not unheard of with this style and it makes metaphorical sense. A Nine’s internal vision is what most deleted – their defensive tendency is to go foggy or blank. As with Eights and Ones, the basic sensory strategy of Nines is auditory and kinesthetic – a loop of talking to yourself and having feelings. Their visual field is usually less conscious and more disordered, at least when they focus on personal priorities.

Sixes are known for *polling*, for seeking a show of hands from others in order to critic-proof a decision that they fear making. Nines can also poll, surveying their friends and soliciting opinions about what they should do with their lives. A Nine might then mentally replay those opinions, hearing their friends’ voices, maybe all talking at once, a noisy committee that distracts the Nine while she pretends to make a decision.

Nines are usually very kinesthetic but they tend to translate their emotional feelings into physical sensations. Instead of being angry, a Nine might get a headache or an upset stomach; instead of feeling scared, the Nine could have goosebumps. Needing to cry, the Nine could break out in a rash. Some Nines are what dermatologists call “skin erupters.” When they have strong emotions, their feelings come out on their skin. This means that physical touch is an indirect route back to a Nine’s emotions. Depending on your relationship, it may be important to embrace your Nine friends or punctuate your expressions of affection with touch. “There are times,” says one Nine, “when I have to stop and just go over to somebody and say, ‘I need a hug.’ And somehow once I’ve had that sense of touch, something just seems to dissipate within my feelings. And it can’t be from just anybody.”

A small but persistent percentage of Nines have medical scripts. “I’ve been physically ill for years,” says one, “I contracted malaria in Africa in 1969. I was in Africa for about three months, and I’ve just never been the same since. From malaria it went into hepatitis. I’ve just gone from one operation and illness to the next.” Allowing for genuine medical causes, a chronic ailment could serve to keep a Nine off the track of his life, get him attention or accommodate a family where having physical problems was somehow

the expected norm. Ironically, some Nines are prone to sleep disorders as well as daytime exhaustion. As one Nine remarked: “Everything I put off looking at during the day starts to crowd into my mind around 11 at night. Its like I sleep during the day and wake up at night.”

Some Nines conceal themselves with handwriting that is difficult to read, what pharmacists call “doctors handwriting.” One Nine had handwriting so bad that her friends couldn’t understand her letters. Another Nine – a college roommate of mine – had a signature so nondescript that cashiers would refuse to accept his checks. His signature was two flat lines, the first shorter than the second as his first name was shorter than his last name. I learned to bring along extra money even when it was my friend’s turn to buy groceries.

If it ever becomes possible to create medical profiles of the Enneagram styles, laid-back Nines might, on average, live the longest and age the slowest. Complimented on his good health and youthful appearance, a middle-aged Nine facetiously replied, “I don’t understand or talk well. I take it easy every day. I am like an idiot. Be like this every day and you’ll look young too.”