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Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition
Part II: The Teaching

by

Whitall N. Perry

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I am not trying with words when I say that for some writers the Gurdjieff experiment, which is the great temptation, has and still does risk opening the ways to sickness, the hospital bed, and the cemetery.

LOUIS PAUWELS is the author of this admonition, which is quoted from his article "Une société secrète: les disciples de Georges Gurdjieff", published in the periodical *Arts,* May 1-7, 1952, wherein he assesses his encounter with Gurdjieff during the two years that he worked in a group under the direction of Mme. de Salzmann. He goes on to say: "However, thanks to Gurdjieff, I received a teaching on the arbitrary mechanism of the mind, on the illusion of living and thinking, on the non-possession of self, on the phantasmal existence of being and the possibilities of acquiring a real life, which is still today my most precious possession. I think that those who like myself have had the fortune to escape from Gurdjieff and who are serious enough to take true stock of their stay with him, rightly regard themselves as being damaged forever, yet also initiated[1] into the essential weaknesses and strengths of human nature. This is why I cannot speak of him without joining to the simplicities of condemnation the ambiguities of the profoundest respect."

These observations call for several comments. First: on the basis of the evidence, it is not just writers who have been tempted to the experiment, nor writers alone who have succumbed to the results, the risks being no one's priority. Secondly: few persons could admit that the condemnation pronounced by Pauwels is convincingly counterbalanced by the homage which follows, the permanent damage to which he so candidly testifies being a grave price to pay for any teaching whatever. And others who have tried to dissociate themselves from the movement know only too well that he is not exaggerating,—that they really have a monkey on their backs. Thirdly: the insights and acquisitions constituting what Pauwels calls his "most precious possession" are fully and integrally to be realized in the spiritual practices furnished by every authentic traditional organization, on the one indispensable condition of complete submission to

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1 Some adepts have called Gurdjieff's transfer of powers an "initiation into surrealism".

the Divine Will—revealed through the doctrines and rites of the religion in question—under guidance of a qualified master; this possession moreover is not only precious, it is priceless, as it includes everything, against it the gates of hell shall not prevail, and once acquired, it can never be lost.

What then is this patrimony of ancient sages brought to the West by Gurdjieff, this *something extra,* over and above what revealed traditions have to offer, that makes men like Pauwels and Bennett insist that "the game is worth the candle"? We shall therefore have to scrutinize with some care the teachings conveyed by Gurdjieff and see what is left in the sieve of his vision once all traditional elements have been sifted out. We need not, meanwhile, act unduly deferential towards the term "ancient sages", which like "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" has a ringing catch in the ear and can mean about anything one wishes it to mean. It is not traditional doctrines alone that go back into antiquity: subversive doctrines also claim a pedigree as "ancient and honourable" as you please.

* * *

Gurdjieff envied Ouspensky's abilities as a writer, but no one was his peer when it came to speaking: he could literally magnetize his listeners. Although they came away differing about what precisely had been said, they were in perfect unanimity that whatever it was, it was absolutely phenomenal. Bennett thinks the explanation for this lies in the fact that two different levels of consciousness were involved, with memory unable to provide the link. But this cannot be entirely true, as in a recently published book, *Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff, As Recollected by his Pupils,* those who edited the work claim that "even in these notes from memory, it is striking that there is always the same human tone of voice, the same man evoking a secret response in each of his listeners". One could of course rejoin that since much of what Gurdjieff said appears banal enough in print, therefore these words must have conveyed a second meaning on a deeper level of consciousness; yet by this token we have to be equally deferential when confronted, for example, with the inventions of a drug mystic, thus bidding farewell to objective criteria. Gurdjieff, incidentally, did administer drugs on occasion to some of his pupils to get certain psychic results, but this was little compared with the power of his *hanbledzoin,* as explained in the first part of this treatise.

Anyhow, we are not obliged to leave our reasoning suspended in clouds of subjectivity, for Gurdjieff himself gave his *imprimatur* to Ouspensky's thoroughly documented *In Search of the Miraculous,* originally called *Fragments of an Unknown Teaching.* When Bennett read out of this book to him, "he listened with evident relish, and when I finished he said: 'Before I hate Ouspensky: now I love him. This very exact, he tell what I say.' "The information given by other followers also sufficiently concurs with the broad outlines of the exposition presented by Gurdjieff's foremost Russian disciple to make it perfectly clear that the corpus of teachings at our disposal is authentically what the Armenian thaumaturge expounded.

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The focal point of Gurdjieff's message lies in the famous injunction: "Know thyself"—an exhortation that traditionally has two poles. On the one hand we are enjoined by spiritual authorities to know our individual self in all its potentialities, pretensions, and limitations; and on the other we are to know our true Self, the one real Being sustaining all separate selves behind their illusory independence, This doctrine, of course, is universal, and given great prominence, for example, in Buddhism. Since mention has been made of the Yesevi order of Sufis, it is fitting to cite in this context (from Bennett) several of the beautiful precepts of a twelfth century Bokharan Sufi in the same spiritual lineage, named Abdulhalik Gujduvani:

> Be present at every breath. Do not let thy attention wander for the duration of a single breath. Remember thyself always and in all situations.
>
> Thy journey is towards thy homeland. Remember that thou art travelling from the world of appearances to the World of Reality.
>
> Solitude in the crowd. In all thy outward activity remain inwardly free. Learn not to identify thyself with anything whatsoever.
>
> Remember thy Friend (Allâh). Let the invocation (*dhikr*) *of* thy tongue be the invocation of thy heart (*qalb*).
>
> Be constantly aware of the quality of the Divine Presence. Become used to recognizing the Presence of Allâh in thy heart.

How does Gurdjieff expound this message? Man, he says, is born without a soul; the soul can only be acquired through conscious effort. Ordinary people are just machines, no better than fertilizer —and to make sure his listeners got the point, he used the four-letter word for it (or five when speaking French) in his inimitable English, which is mentioned here on purpose—not out of derision for any failure on his part to master all the intricacies whether of English or French, which would be ridiculous—but because although no mean linguist and philologist he nevertheless deliberately exploited barbarisms for calculated effect: "When he spoke or lectured," says Bennett, "he paid no attention to the rules of grammar, logic or consistency; . . . [he] went further and put all rules behind him."

To continue: we are so far in the school of Leucippus and Democritus, who taught that a soul can be acquired; but Gurdjieff unlike Democritus does allow that a soul upon a certain degree of development can survive physical death—at least in some measure. What he further has to say about immortality, "reincarnation", an "astral body", and the rest is too chaotic to assemble into a rational formulation. From the traditional perspective, a person without a soul is as unthinkable as a body without a heart, a square circle, dry water, or a tree minus roots, since the body is purely the projection or "outer shell" of the soul.

Anyway, Gurdjieff tells us that people have the illusion of being conscious when in reality they are asleep, essentially unconscious, with no true self or identity which they can call their

own. But the possibility exists of acquiring a real consciousness, a volition under control, and a permanent *individuality.* Only, to achieve this, one must die to what one presently is. Yet in order to die, and not just "perish like dogs" the way ordinary mortals do, we first have to wake up to the mess we are in; when this is recognized and admitted, then we are ready to pass through death and rebirth into true "being". The way is by voluntary suffering (if we can overlook the fact that we have no volition) and strenuous effort; it is in Gurdjieff's words *"a way against nature, against God"*. Hypnosis applied to what he calls our "personality", namely, the accidents and blind accretions making up our life, can help in the liberation of what he calls our "essence", namely, the *individuality* in its raw untrammeled state. Since man at the start *"is not",* there can be no question for a "nonentity" joining the Gurdjieff group of making agreements or assuming obligations; he is not in any position to undertake a pact or receive an initiation, the only initiation being "self-initiation"—a concept which Mme. de Hartmann, and doubtless many others, found particularly appealing.

Although the brain for Gurdjieff "is just a muscle", man has three of these "muscles", being a "three-brained" creature, in contradistinction to two-brained vertebrates and one-brained invertebrates. Formerly these three interrelated faculties functioned harmoniously as a single co-ordinate, controlling simultaneously the "motor" or instinctive centre in man, the "emotional" centre, and the mental or "intellectual" centre; but some four thousand five hundred years ago there occurred a split in the psyche which fouled up the contact between centres and rendered them "completely independent 'entities', which bear no relation to each other", thus hobbling the normal course of man's "evolution". Hence, writes Gurdjieff in *The Herald of Coming Good,* "it has come about that a modern man represents three different men in a single individual; the first of whom thinks in complete isolation from the other parts, the second merely feels, and the third acts only automatically."

These categories recall Dr. William Sheldon's classification of human patterns into the three physical components of mesomorphy, endomorphy, and ectomorphy, with the accompanying psychological characteristics respectively of somatotonic, viscerotonic, and cerebrotonic man. Gurdjieff held in particular disdain the "cerebrotonic" or "intellectual" type as exemplified by the "absent-minded professor", and he seemed to relish putting such people to work at Fontainebleau digging enormous ditches, which he would have them fill back in the following morning; or again, getting middle-aged English ladies to grub up the roots of huge trees felled by the men, which they would despairingly attack with trowels or even tablespoons where only winches would suffice, throwing little heaps of earth behind them while glancing surreptitiously from time to time at papers tucked under sleeves and bracelets scrawled with long lists of Tibetan words they had been charged to memorize.[2]

[2] A concert pianist infatuated with his beautiful hands was put in care of the poultry. After a time he nervously confided to Gurdjieff that the hens were not laying well. "Of course not," came the reply, "because you not love them. Hens here know people. They lay for people who love them. Must learn to

Sometimes Gurdjieff spoke of these three types in terms of the fakir, the monk, and the yogi, all of whom, unlike the educated European who with his "exact knowledge" and belief in progress and culture is making no progress at all, are in their crude, blundering manner at least on the way to evolution. The worst blunderers are the fakirs, namely those who struggling to gain power over the body submit themselves to terrible sufferings and tortures for a pittance of results blindly acquired; the monk is a bit smarter about knowing what he wants and, with the feeling that his efforts and sacrifices are "pleasing to God", can get in a week what the fakir needs a month to obtain; the yogi is the most sophisticated of the three, knowing very well what he wants and how to go about getting it; he can in a day cover a week's work of the monk. But these three ways alike require the renunciation of all worldly ties in return for very partial results and hence are ultimately unsatisfactory. Thus in one stroke do we see the likes of Rûmî, St. Francis of Assisi, and Sankarâchârya eliminated —unless one replies that they were secret practitioners of the Fourth Way.

This Fourth Way, which is the most difficult to find because it is very little known and has more or less to be stumbled upon, is at the same time the easiest to follow, since it dispenses with the clutter of religion and everything "superfluous" "preserved" by "tradition"; it requires no retirement into the desert and yet can work in the aforementioned three directions simultaneously simply by the preparation and swallowing of "a little pill which contains all the substances". For this reason it "is sometimes called *the way of the sly man.* The 'sly man' knows some secret which the fakir, monk, and yogi do not know. How the 'sly man' learned this secret—it is not known. Perhaps he found it in some old books, perhaps he inherited it, perhaps he bought it, perhaps he stole it from someone. It makes no difference. The ' sly man' knows the secret and with its help outstrips the fakir, the monk, and the yogi."

The source for this teaching is from the Sarmoun Brethren of Babylon, which, whatever else may be intended here, is almost certainly an alias of Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff.

On occasion the schema was amplified to include seven Mithraic-like categories, *man number five* possessing a knowledge even more objective than what is known by man number four, while *man number six* has complete knowledge. But he can still lose it; *man number seven* alone enjoys "the *objective* and completely *practical* knowledge of *All"*.

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On the subject of knowledge, Gurdjieff taught that it is *material,* hence possessing all the characteristics of materiality. Like "the sand of the desert and the water of the sea [there] is a

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love them." Bennett chanced upon the distraught pianist at the hen house the next day, struggling to carry out orders, but clearly bewildered as to how to win a hen's heart …. The mage's defenders claim that these people had only themselves to thank for their lack of critical faculties. This may well be; it was not easy to maintain critical objectivity in his presence.

definite and unchangeable quantity", so that the more you have here the less you have there. This means that if knowledge were to be evenly apportioned among the masses, it would become so diluted that no one would be a jot wiser, but everybody definitely dumber, not to say worse. Whereas if the limited reserves of this knowledge are concentrated with a few highly chosen initiates, then they will be tremendously wise and of enormous benefit to humanity, the vast majority of people being in any case too stupid to want knowledge, let alone to know they even lack it. From the traditional point of view, Pure Knowledge, being an attribute of Divinity, is Infinite—hence inexhaustible—and no more "partitionable" than Pure Being or Pure Beatitude. It is God's gnosis that "measures" the world, and not vice versa.

Nor is knowledge for Gurdjieff the only ponderable imponderable; "everything in the Universe is material": "the Absolute is as material, as weighable and measurable, as the moon, or as man. If the Absolute is God it means that God can be weighed and measured, resolved into component elements, 'calculated', and expressed in the form of a definite formula…. *Therefore the Great Knowledge is more materialistic than materialism*…. I repeat: everything in the Universe is material. Ponder these words and you will understand, at least to some degree, why I used the expression *'more materialistic than materialism'*…. God and microbe are the same system, the only difference is in the number of centres." We are back again with Democritus—unless the "ancient sages" drawn upon here were others like Chârvâka of the nâstikas in India, or Pakudha Kachchâyana, the hump-backed philosopher of the Ajîvika sect, who lived in the fifth century B.C.

It must be clearly understood that what Gurdjieff teaches cosmologically is a form of atomism; and it must be equally well understood that not a trace of atomism is to be found in any of the great traditional systems either Eastern or Western, this tenet—apart from the variations advanced by one or two modern philosophical schools —turning up uniquely in certain heretical pockets on the fringes of these traditions.

The world, he states, is composed of vibrating matter, the rate of vibration being in inverse ratio to the density of matter. "In the Absolute vibrations are the most rapid and matter is the least dense. In the next world vibrations are slower and matter denser; and further on matter is still more dense and vibrations correspondingly slower."

The "Absolute" can be called world 1, whose atoms alone are really "indivisible". Through the intervention of an active, passive, and neutralizing principle, the "Absolute" begets a trinity, or world 3, called "all worlds", whose atoms consist of three atoms of the "Absolute", being three times bigger and three times heavier, with movements that are correspondingly slower. Next comes world 6, called "all suns", and which is our Milky Way, the domain of "archangels"; its atom is six of the "Absolute" merged together. Then comes world 12, the "sun", with an atom consisting of twelve primordial particles. The following world by the same progression is number 24, or "all planets" in our solar system, and is the domain of "angels". After this comes the "earth", world 48. The final world is the "moon", with an enormous atom of 96 parts, very

little movement, and extreme density. This "moon" is the "outer darkness" of Gurdjieff's cosmology: it feeds and fattens on the earth's organic life like a "huge electromagnet that is sucking out its vitality". But "in the economy of the universe nothing is lost, and a certain energy having finished its work on one plane goes to another". Thus the moon, being energized by the forces which death on earth releases, energizes in its turn the whole of terrestrial life. All men are dominated by the moon, save—need it be said?—those who, following the techniques outlined by Gurdjieff, have been able to develop their "common presence".

In a similar descending schema starting again with the "Absolute", these "worlds" are sometimes designated respectively as the *Protocosmos, Ayocosmos* or *Megalocosmos, Macrocosmos, Deuterocosmos, Mesocosmos, Tritocosmos* ("man" here replacing the "earth"), and *Microcosmos* (the "atom" here replacing the "moon").

We are now ready to grapple with the question of "influences" operating throughout the different worlds, which brings up the "law of three and then, further, still another fundamental law— the Law of Seven, or the *law of octaves*"—also called the Law of Seven-foldness, or Law of Heptaparaparshinokh. It has already been seen how the "simultaneous action of three forces—the positive, the negative, and the neutralizing"—is necessary to actualize phenomena; this is the *law of three.* And the perspicacious reader may by now have guessed that the seven worlds outlined above provide the basis for the *law of seven* or the *law of octaves.* All that is required is to identify the "Absolute" with the musical notation do, and we have our scale. Since there is nothing beyond or "beneath" the "moon" except the "Absolute", one can start "beneath" the "moon" with do, the "moon" then being re, the "earth" mi, "all planets" fa, and so on back to the "Absolute" do which is "above" "all worlds". This only gets a bit involved when Gurdjieff advances the theory of "inner vibrations", namely, the indefinite number of "inner octaves" that can be resolved from the fundamental octave. Since each "world" while having its particular "vibration" is at the same time permeated with the "substances" or "vibrations" of the "worlds" above it, and since thanks to Gurdjieff's "discovery" of the role of *hazard,* which does not enter into the Pythagorean and Platonic systems, octaves may receive "additional shocks" at the mi-fa and si-do divisions when intersecting certain "intervals", one can develop octaves within octaves reverberating into the most unforeseen directions *ad infinitum*[3].

Returning to the *law of three,* "the note do [in the Absolute] will be the conductor of the active force, designated by the number 1, while the matter in which this force acts will be 'carbon' (C)." The note si in turn conducts the passive force, number 2, whose matter is "oxygen" (0). La is then the neutralizing factor, number 3, with "nitrogen" (N) for its matter.

[3] Those readers desiring a serious work relating musical theory to cosmological laws will find it in Alain Daniélou's *Introduction to the Study of Musical Scales*, London, 1943.

"'Carbon', 'oxygen', and 'nitrogen' together will give matter of the fourth order, or 'hydrogen' (H), whose density we will designate by the number 6 (as the sum of 1, 2, 3), that is, H6."

The *law of three* allows for a progression of triads of increasing density, or a "Table of Hydrogens" based on a sesquialteral combination of two and three. Thus, after H6 comes H12, H24, H48, H96, H192, and right on to "hydrogen" 3072. Food substances pertain to the density of "hydrogen" 768; wood, H1536; water, H384. "Hydrogen" 12 corresponds to the hydrogen of chemistry (atomic weight 1). Gurdjieff goes on to observe that the atomic weights of those elements related to his "hydrogens" "stand almost in the correct *octave* ratio to one another".

"The 'table of hydrogens' makes it possible to examine all substances making up man's organism from the point of view of their relation to different planes of the universe. And as every function of man is a result of the action of definite substances, and as each substance is connected with a definite plane in the universe, this fact enables us to establish the relation between man's functions and the planes of the universe."

The rarefied "hydrogens" 48, 24, 12, and 6 are inaccessible to physics and chemistry, being the "matters of our psychic and spiritual life". Thus for example, man's thinking centre works with "hydrogen" 48, the motor centre with the even faster and more mobile "hydrogen" 24, and the emotional centre with "hydrogen" 12—which is why the emotional centre is so chaotic with most people, this fine "hydrogen" being beyond their control. Things are further complicated by the fact that there is a still higher "thinking center", working with "hydrogen" 6; it only manifests at sporadic moments in mystical experiences, ecstatic states, epileptic fits, or drug seizures, although if the "lower centres" were in order, it should normally function harmoniously.

"What is necessary to understand and what the 'table of hydrogens' helps us to grasp, is the idea of the complete materiality of all the psychic, intellectual, emotional, volitional, and other inner processes, including the most exalted poetic inspirations, religious ecstasies, and mystical revelations…. When the substance [sustaining a process] is exhausted, the process comes to a stop."

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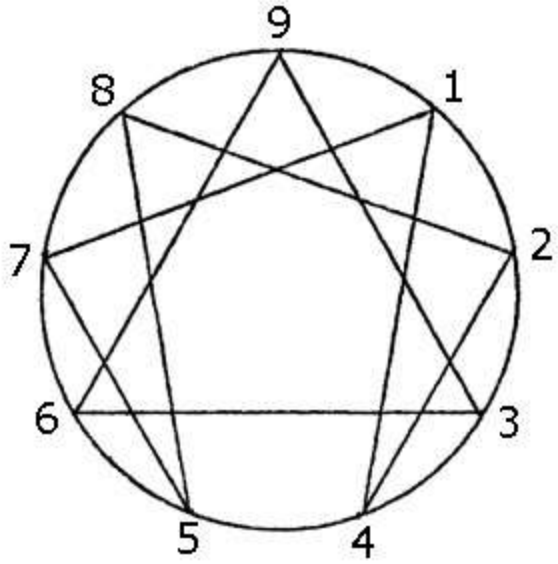
All these cosmological considerations, as we shall see, absolutely have to be mastered if one is to understand the "movements" of the "sacred dances". The reader who does not wish to master them need nevertheless not throw up his hands in despair, for he can be perfectly assured that all the foregoing exposition is pure Gurdjieff, which while it may make for superb science fiction, is good for little else. And he himself was the first to play down the importance of numerical systems with the comment: "Mathematik, she is useless. You cannot learn laws of World Creation and World Existence by Mathematik. You must only look for Being. When you have Being, you will know all these things, without the need of Mathematik."

Fascination with magic circles, squares, and numbers was of course another matter, and Gurdjieff's favourite symbol was the enneagram, a figure composed of a circle divided into nine equal parts connected within by lines forming a triangle interlaced with a twisted hexagon. For him it was a "universal symbol" of "perpetual motion" to which could be appended all his cosmoses, octaves, centres, and "hydrogens" in every conceivable juxtaposition and variation.



It is true that Gurdjieff draws on elements of traditional doctrine for his own constructions, a fact he sometimes admits and sometimes conceals. He refers to the Kabbalah, for instance, when speaking about the relationship between man and the Universe as being that of the microcosm to the macrocosm; his *law of three* is recognizably related to the *gunas* of Hinduism; and he refers to the famous Emerald Tablet of Hermes for the teaching: "As above, so below". The Absolute for him is the primordial All or Whole, from the differentiation of which arises the diversity of phenomena. But his teachings fall within the *guna* of *tamas,* since everything is interpreted from a quantitative, materialistic, and non-transcendent perspective.

The Emerald Tablet in his case is a matter of: "As below, so beneath", seeing that he never gets off the ground save to descend into the subconscious. In other words, the only "worlds" open to his consciousness are the corporeal domain and the lower reaches of the psychic realm. The supraformal, noumenal, or archetypal spheres of reality—namely, everything spiritual—are completely sealed off from his "common presence"—not to speak of principial Existence itself, and above all the Absolute.

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Gurdjieff's attitude toward religion was: respect all faiths—and leave them a wide berth. Peters writes that "he dismissed all existing religions, philosophies and other systems of thought—as *practised* —as being worthless". The preamble to *Beelzebub,* it is true, launches out

with the stentorian blast: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and in the name of the Holy Ghost. Amen.” But the unsuspecting reader is brought down with a thump a few lines later where the author, having made obeisance “to the notions of religious morality existing among contemporary people”, prides himself as “beyond all doubt assured that everything further in this new venture of mine will now proceed, as is said, ‘like a pianola’ “. And what matters is anyhow the personage honoured in the title of the book, which Gurdjieff himself concedes is a stratagem to secure the fellow’s patronage: “Mr. Beelzebub also must possess a good share of vanity, and will therefore find it extremely inconvenient not to help one who is going to advertise His [*sic*] name.”

The founders of the great religions—men like Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and Muhammad—might indeed, we are told, be number eight men, i.e., Cosmic Individuals incarnated from Above; but their “three-brained” followers invariably made a hash of their teachings, inventing such “maleficent” notions as “Good and Evil”, “Paradise and Hell”, and other misleading “fantasies”. These “founders”, incidentally, did not reveal; they “created” religions. One of the great features of Islam for Gurdjieff is the stress on ablution and circumcision, and he devotes thirty-six pages in praise of these “beneficial customs” as impediments to venereal disease and onanism.

He taught that an ordinary man, not yet being responsible and his own master, can no more be a Christian than can any other “machine”, like a motorcar or gramophone. But “The Institute can help a man to be able to be a Christian”, and “this is esoteric Christianity”.

His “esoteric Christianity” had some strange tenets. Take, for example, that on the Eucharist: “The Last Supper was *a magical ceremony* similar to ‘blood-brotherhood’ for establishing a connection between ‘astral bodies’. But who is there who knows about this in existing religions and who understands what it means? All this has long been forgotten and everything has been given quite a different meaning. The words have remained but their meaning has long been lost.”

“Holy Writ”, he contends, became completely distorted through the “criminal wiseacring” of the “elders of the church”. An illustration of this is the anathema they heap on Judas, who for Gurdjieff is “now a Saint”. “Judas,” as Bennett recounts it from *Beelzebub* and from personal conversations, “was the best and closest friend of Jesus. Judas alone understood why Jesus was on earth. Judas had saved the work of Jesus from being destroyed, and by his action had made the life of humanity more or less tolerable for two thousand years.”[4]

[4] He also said: “Judas is universal type: he can enter into all situations—but he has no type of his own.” Were Gurdjieff a Christian theologian, he would be right on center here, for evil has no reality properly speaking of its own, but attaches like a shadow to the obscure side of manifestation with the “gravity” or suction of its own voidness.

Although this particular perversion of sacred history did not originate with Gurdjieff, he may perfectly well have come by it without the collaboration of "ancient sages", as it fits like a glove with his "doctrine" of the necessity of a "reminding-factor", exposed earlier in this monograph: just as "God" was compelled to send "one of His Beloved Sons", namely the "Devil", into the world for a perpetual "reminding-factor", so by the same token would Jesus logically be compelled to use his "best and closest friend", namely Judas, for the same end.

What did Gurdjieff understand by "God"? "Nothing is immortal," he taught; "even God is mortal. But there is a great difference between man and God, and, of course, God is mortal in a different way to man. It would be much better if for the word 'immortality' we substitute the words *'existence* after death'." To get this idea across he used such expressions as: "OUR COMMON CREATOR, ALMIGHTY AUTOCRAT ENDLESSNESS", or "OUR COMMON ALL-EMBRACING UNI-BEING AUTOCRAT ENDLESS-NESS". But the Deity conventionally worshipped in church he referred to as "Mister God". For the rest, he compared his relationship to God on somewhat the same terms which a rather independent, obstinate, and touchy minister has with his king.

When questioned, "In what way does your system differ from the philosophy of the *yogis*?" Gurdjieff replied: "*Yogis* are idealists; we are materialists. I am a skeptic. The first injunction inscribed on the walls of the Institute is: 'Believe nothing, not even yourself.' I believe only if I have obtained the same results over and over again. I study, I work for guidance, not for belief."

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Allusion has already been made to various techniques employed by Gurdjieff to knock people out of their complacency in view of awakening different centers of consciousness hitherto unsuspected in their psyches. He taught certain procedures for fasting, he sometimes used drugs, and there was the constant stress on "intentional suffering" (*partkdolgduty*), or exploiting the potential of "additional shocks" in the system of octaves to boost one's "consciousness-factor".

By performing "sacred gymnastics" based on "ancient temple dances" from the East of "religious, mystic, and scientific" significance, his pupils were supposed to acquire a mastery over themselves coupled with universal insights. The "movements" could become alarmingly complicated, the left arm perhaps moving to the *law of three* while the right traced out the "Law of Sevenfoldness" with the feet simultaneously measuring sequences of the enneagram. No sooner did the students gain command of a movement than it might be abandoned for a whole new series. Any beauty the dances had was purely secondary, and Gurdjieff would also teach ugly and discordant movements to liberate his pupils from "obsession" with their own appearance. Here the women often chafed, finding it repellent to make ugly faces, even if they knew they were there for their psychic development and not just to be admired.

Surveying all this in a black leotard and astrakhan hat, Gurdjieff would suddenly shout: "Stop!" and the dancers would freeze in whatever stance they happened to find themselves,

wobbling to a halt or lunging off balance to the floor like a clutter of abandoned puppets until reanimated some five seconds if not ten minutes later with the shout "Davay!" or, "Continue!"

This famous Stop Exercise was, moreover, something that could happen at any moment, day or night, with the intention of trapping the ego off-guard in a still-life caricature of its habitual smugness for the victim's edification.

Gurdjieff recounts how he and some comrades were once pitching a tent in Central Asia by an *arik,* or irrigation canal, when a voice from the tent called "Stop!" just when one of the men was in the canal retrieving a fallen axe. At the same moment a farmer a mile away opened a sluice which rapidly raised the water level. Soon the man was completely submerged, yet no one could move, shout, or even look to see if the person in the tent knew what was happening. After what seemed ages came the cry: "Enough!" and the men on the bank sprang into the canal to drag out their half-drowned companion.

All this is a far remove from the ritual cessation of movement practiced in dances like those of the Mevlevi Dervishes and the American Indians, where the flutes, the singing, and the drums unexpectedly stop on an explosion of sound between two instants, and the dance evaporates into the Void. It is the moment of death, the close of the cosmic cycle. "This world is a playground," says Rûmî, "and death is the night." Or as the *Srimad Bhagavatam* expresses it: "My play here is finished. My kingdom is established." Then the music resumes, and the Cosmic Wheel turns once again. "God hath men who enter Paradise through their flutes and drums," to cite a saying of Muhammad.

Gurdjieff also gave his pupils various breathing exercises, combined sometimes with *mantras.* Thus, a person might be required to sit on the ground with knees bent and hands pressed together between the feet, then, lifting one leg, to pronounce *"Om"* ten times to special measures of breathing while "sensing" his right eye. Next, *"Om"* had to be repeated nine times, then eight, and so down to one, after which the series remounted back to ten while the adept separated his thumbs and "sensed" the left ear; the combinations and complications were interminable, all the different organs, limbs, muscles, and bones of the body consecutively being fixed upon in what was called the "Sensation Exercise". To keep the mind meanwhile from growing idle, it was put through numerical gymnastics in the form of 2 x 1 = 6, 2 x 2 = 12, 2 x 3 = 22, 2 x 4 = 40, 2 x 5 = 74 (resolved by adding the sequential progression 4, 8, 16, etc.), or following another system, 2 x 2 = 1, 4 x 4 = 13, 5 x 5 = 28—done rapidly to musical accompaniment, and then inversely. If a student fell into despair, Gurdjieff would reply, "I am only here for the desperate."

* * *

While the reader sifting through these teachings may well for all his diligence fail to discover something real that is lacking to Tradition, he certainly cannot complain to any paucity of things bizarre. Consider, for example, the so-called "buffer-of-prejudice": through a strange

twist on the doctrine of the Fall, Gurdjieff would have us believe that at some unpredetermined date in history, the "Higher Powers" felt man's "evolution" was getting out of hand through more objectivity in his growing consciousness than they were able to cope with; therefore they commissioned the Chief-Common-Universal-Arch-Chemist-Physicist Angel Looisos "to plant an organ at the base of the spinal column, where this "three-brained being" still possessed a tail, as a "buffer" to the "arising" in him of "Objective-Conscience", which said organ was given the name of "Kundabuffer", and which acted efficaciously to make men "perceive reality topsy-turvy", and to "engender factors for evoking in them sensations of 'pleasure' and 'enjoyment'". When it was perceived that the planting of this organ had achieved its desired effect, the "Higher Powers" ordered it removed; but what they had not perceived—"Our ENDLESS ENDLESSNESS" for all his interminability being in the Gurdjieffian system neither Omnipotent nor Omniscient—was the maleficent repercussions its former presence would continue to exert on succeeding generations. Thus men have persisted from that time until this very day as vain, conceited, and egotistical "three-brained freaks", where "everybody talks as if our learned know that half a hundred is fifty"—to quote some words that Gurdjieff puts into the mouth of his "highly esteemed Mullah Nassr Eddin". The fact would remain, however, that "Objective-Conscience" has not entirely disappeared from the scene; indeed in a near primordial state it apparently still lies embedded in the "sub-consciousness", and only needs hypnotism to pry it forth.

The author of these assertions based them on distortions of the *kundalini* doctrine, learned no doubt from Theosophical circles, which he held in contempt. By *kundalini* the Hindus understand the cosmic energy which lies latent in man, the Sakti or Devî symbolically coiled in the *mûlâdhâra* plexus at the base of the spine, and which when awakened by the *prâna* (vital breath) of the *sâdhaka* (aspirant) being directed upon it through appropriate yogic techniques under a guru's guidance, mounts the *sushumnâ* column "situated" within the cerebro-spinal axis, illuminating various *chakras* ("lotuses") or subtle centers in the person, the ultimate aim being deliverance (*moksha*) once this resonance has attained the synthesis of centers—the *sahasrâra* or "lotus of a thousand petals", "situated" at the crown of the head.

When Gurdjieff warns that the *kundalini* is "a very dangerous and terrible thing", the Hindus would be in complete agreement, as its evocation brings into play cosmic powers of the subtle order that can destroy the unwary adept physically, psychically, and spiritually, even leading to demonic states, and can therefore be undertaken only by orthodox Hindus endeavouring to obtain liberation with the aid of competent supervision; but they would be incredulous to hear him tell *why* he considers it "dangerous":

"Kundalini is not anything desirable or useful for man's development . . . In reality [it] is the power of imagination, the power of fantasy, *which takes the place of a real function.* When a man dreams instead of acting, when his dreams take the place of reality, when a man imagines himself to be an eagle, a lion, or a magician, it is the force of Kundalini acting in him. Kundalini

can act in all centres and with its help all the centres can be satisfied with the imaginary instead of the real. A sheep which considers itself a lion or a magician lives under the power of Kundalini.

"Kundalini is a force put into men in order to keep them in their present state. If men could really see their true position and could understand all the horror of it, they would be unable to remain where they are even for one second.[5] They would begin to seek a way out and they would quickly find it, *because there is a way out*; but men fail to see it simply because they are hypnotized. Kundalini is the force that keeps them in a hypnotic state….

"And if . . . a man has heard anything about *objective characteristics,* Kundalini at once transforms it all into imagination and dreams."

* * *

In *Meetings with Remarkable Men,* Gurdjieff records an admonition he received from a venerable Persian dervish:

Let God kill him who himself does not know and yet presumes to show others the way to the doors of His Kingdom.

(To be continued)

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

God is neither high nor low: and who speaks otherwise, is still but badly informed on the truth.

God is neither here nor there: whoever desires to find Him, let him chain his hands and feet, body and soul.

Angelus Silesius

[5] Which is exactly why Hindus practice *kundalini* yoga.