

Modern Science, Psychology, and the Enduring Mystery of Consciousness: An Esoteric/Mystical Critique Part IV, G.I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way

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Abstract

This article consists of a further exposition of the Fourth Way—with an emphasis on the epistemological assumptions and propositions that distinguish Gurdjieff’s teaching on consciousness from that of modern psychology. If it is possible to attain higher states of consciousness, as the esoteric tradition maintains, then there must be masters who have realized those states. Most psychologists and scientists dismiss that possibility *a priori*. The question of Gurdjieff’s status as “a master” will be examined—as it is integrally related to and elucidates various aspects of his teaching. Further, that question serves to crystallize the radical differences in the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie esotericism and modern psychology. Esoteric teachings are premised on the idea that the level of one’s knowledge is dependent upon the level of one’s consciousness and being. Gurdjieff’s life and work shall be examined in order to consider the relationship between knowledge and being.

Systematic Self-Study

In the previous article, Part III, the basic tenets of G.I. Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way teaching were presented. Gurdjieff claims that our normal waking consciousness should be understood to be, typically, a state of waking sleep and that, as such, we labor under the illusion that we are self-conscious, unified beings who possess will and the capacity to do. Further, Gurdjieff contends that people do not know themselves—they do not understand the essentially fragmented nature of their being and mechanical level of their consciousness—because they are *asleep*. He also asserts, however, that human beings can awaken and acquire all

those properties and faculties that they believe they possess: unity, self-mastery in the sense of being properly conscious and capable of doing, and will. The ability to acquiring these faculties must be achieved by practicing systematic self-study—in terms of an esoteric path of awakening—under the guidance and tutelage of a teacher who has awakened. For Gurdjieff, then, we possess the possibility of awakening consciousness and making it more or less permanent through a process of self-transformation, but its acquisition demands long and difficult commitment, labor, and sacrifice.

Gurdjieff’s method of systematic self-study involves a coordinated effort to understand oneself as a “three-brained being” which functions intellectually, emotionally, and physically. By studying and working to overcome the mechanical functioning of these respective “centers” of intelligence, it is possible to begin to bring them into much more harmonious and conscious operation.¹ The pursuit of that aim involves the methods of self-observation and self-remembering. The former involves impartially witnessing various psychological and physical functions within oneself; the latter is an attempt to be present—without being emotionally identified with whatever one is

About the Author

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thinking, feeling or doing—and simply sensing and being aware that “*I am here.*”

The majority of modern psychologists give no consideration to the idea that systematic self-study might yield important psychological insights or that it is essentially an empirical method. They know very little about the practice of “self-remembering”—as there is virtually nothing remotely comparable to it within modern psychology. In addition, they assume that observations of the self are part of the discredited, subjective approach which the introspectionists undertook in academic psychology’s infancy and as such, are not to be regarded as legitimate scientific undertakings. Thus, academic psychologists rarely consider self-observation in its esoteric context: that is, as a method of acquiring self-knowledge through the disciplined application of a sophisticated psychological system. Unfortunately, psychologists have dismissed what is perhaps the most important and effective method of studying consciousness.

In an unsparing assessment of the necessity of properly formulating self-observation, Gurdjieff described the demanding level of commitment that his pupils must be willing to assume. In addition, he began by cautioning that self-observation:

... is not so simple a thing as it may seem at first sight. Therefore the teaching puts as the foundation stone the study of the principles of right self-observation. But before passing to the study of these principles a man must make the decision that he will be absolutely sincere with himself, will not close his eyes to anything, will not turn aside from any results, wherever they may lead him, will not fear any deductions, will not limit himself to any previously erected walls. For a man unaccustomed to thinking in this direction, very much courage is required to accept sincerely the results and conclusions arrived at.²

While self-observation demands a singular level of commitment, the rewards are commensurate with the effort involved. For systematic self-observation can dramatically and irrevocably alter one’s understanding of one-

self and the world. Gurdjieff explains that the results of self-observation:

... upset man’s whole line of thinking and deprive him of his most pleasant and dearest illusions. He sees, first of all, his total impotence and helplessness in the face of literally everything that surrounds him. Everything possesses him, everything rules him. He does not possess, does not rule anything. Things attract or repel him. All his life is nothing but a blind following of those attractions and repulsions. Further, if he is not afraid of the conclusions, he sees how what he calls his character, tastes and habits are formed: in a word, how his personality and individuality are built up. But man’s self-observation, however sincerely and seriously it may be carried out, by itself cannot draw for him an absolutely true picture of his internal mechanism.³

Rather than comprising some soft-headed indulgence in “self-examination,” then, Gurdjieff’s approach to self-study and the acquisition of self-knowledge is rigorous, unflinching, and empirical. But, as he cautions, self-observation can only lead so far; in order to overcome the more entrenched habits and sources of sleep, a teacher’s special instruction and intervention are required. Awakening is such an arduous and demanding process that it requires a teacher’s higher understanding of the nature of sleep and external vigilance.

A “Conscious Actor”

In the introductory Fourth Way article in this series, Part III, the author touched briefly on the wide and perplexing diversity of opinions that have been expressed regarding George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff—who has been called everything from a charlatan and fraud to a master and a “Messenger from Above.” In a *Time* magazine article, Gurdjieff was described as seeming “to have been a remarkable blend of P.T. Barnum, Rasputin, Freud, Groucho Marx and everybody’s grandfather.”⁴ That is a wonderfully evocative—albeit entirely superficial—description which succinctly captures the extreme range of impressions that Gurdjieff generated. But any serious questioning of who Gurdjieff was and what his mission may have

been confronts one with questions regarding his status as “a master.” That question leads, in turn, to questions regarding the enduring mysteries posed by the nature of human consciousness which, in coming full circle, leads to a further examination of his teaching. Quite simply: examining Gurdjieff informs his teaching; studying his teaching informs one’s approach to addressing the many mysteries that his life and work represent.

Any attempt to come to grips with Gurdjieff must begin with an acknowledgment that the facts surrounding the first forty some years of his life are shrouded in mystery. In addition, those “facts” are largely derived from his own accounts—most notably from his autobiographical tale, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.⁵ While there are certainly details within that work which appear to be factual, it is equally true that there are numerous stories and claims that are clearly not historically accurate, nor are they to be understood as such. In my opinion, the book is an allegorical tale, in the guise of autobiography, in which Gurdjieff describes the courage, sacrifice, and commitment involved in seeking after truth. On one level, it is, then, the story of his search for truth; on another level, it is a cautionary tale in which he challenges and dispels common assumptions about what seeking truth means and what the realization of spiritual fulfillment demands.

Having stipulated those qualifications, we do know that Gurdjieff was born sometime between 1866 and 1877 in the Caucasus region of what was, then, Russia and is currently, Armenia. As a boy, he experienced “an irrepressible striving” to know and understand the purpose of life on Earth and, in particular, that of humanity. In pursuing his quest, Gurdjieff traveled widely throughout the East in search of hidden knowledge, over the course of some 20 years, and seems to have made significant contact with esoteric schools.⁶ Eventually, Gurdjieff claimed that he had rediscovered an ancient esoteric teaching—the Fourth Way—which he reformulated in order to make it more accessible to and compatible with the modern mind.

With his appearance in Moscow in 1913, Gurdjieff began to disseminate his teaching; working with select groups of pupils. From the time that he met P.D. Ouspensky—his most prominent pupil—in 1915, until his death, in Paris in 1949, Gurdjieff’s work with his pupils was continually changing in terms of its presentation and its emphasis. In addition to lecturing on the psychological and cosmological aspects of the Fourth Way, he worked intensively with his students to develop physical awareness and consciousness by instructing them in highly sophisticated movements, “sacred gymnastics,” and Eastern dances. His expertise with respect to dance and movement was such that even professional dancers who studied with him acknowledged that the movements he was teaching were extremely sophisticated and both demanded and developed a level of awareness and a state of presence which was quite unique in their experience. Indeed, the many public demonstrations of the dances and movements that Gurdjieff taught were greeted with widespread approval and fascination amongst audiences in Asia, Europe, and the United States. In addition to the intellectual and physical demands, Gurdjieff also superintended various types of practical work amongst his pupils and often engineered situations that proved to be emotionally challenging for those involved. All of these elements of his work which he had been experimenting with during his time in pre-revolutionary Russia and his subsequent work in the Caucasus and Constantinople came together when he purchased the Prieuré de Basses Loges, an estate in Fontainebleau on the outskirts of Paris, and opened his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in 1922.

In many ways, Gurdjieff’s story sounds like a mythological tale: a hero’s journey to uncover the key to a great mystery leads to a miraculous discovery. Empowered by this special knowledge, he devotes himself selflessly to attempting to liberate an imprisoned group or oppressed population and, in doing so, must endure untold suffering and sacrifice in order to fulfill the obligations that his mission to serve imposes. To a certain extent, Gurdjieff

did frame the story of his search and his work in such epic terms. Given that no one really knows what he uncovered and what happened to him during his many years of travel and study, it must be admitted that the truth is beyond anyone's grasp.⁷ Moreover, because we have only Gurdjieff's word as to what he experienced—and it is clear that he frequently embellished, distorted, or simply lied about his past—the insurmountable difficulties of attempting to come to grips with him as a historical figure are apparent. But that task becomes even more complicated if one understands that Gurdjieff was a “conscious actor” who disguised himself and played parts for his own unstated purposes.

Almost everyone who had any sort of extended contact with Gurdjieff commented upon his “acting.” In his oft-cited account of his initial meeting with Gurdjieff, which took place in a Moscow café, Ouspensky described Gurdjieff as giving the impression of “a man poorly disguised.”⁸ But Ouspensky soon discovered that, despite the transparency of Gurdjieff's “acting,” it conveyed, paradoxically, a sense of strength and integrity; he adds that there was agreement, within the ranks of Gurdjieff's pupils, that their teacher would never allow them to see beyond the masks he assumed and the roles that he played. For his part, Gurdjieff maintained that to be what he termed “a conscious actor” represents a very great achievement. In order to “act consciously,” he explained, one must have realized a very high level of consciousness and self-perfection: one must possess the unity of being and the mastery of one's mental, emotional, and physical processes in order to play parts without emotionally investing in or attaching oneself to them. From the accounts of so many of those who knew and worked with him, it seems clear that Gurdjieff's level of self-mastery was evident in the extent to which he played parts consciously. Certainly, many of those who worked closely with Gurdjieff believed that he possessed a unique level of consciousness and being. Daly King, an American psychologist, knew Gurdjieff but refused to become his pupil; instead, King became a member of a New York group which was run by Gurdjieff's pupil, A.R. Orage. Nevertheless, King character-

ized Gurdjieff as having attained a unique “level of existence”; stating that he “gave the indubitable impression that all his responses, mental, emotional and practical were mutually *in balance* and . . . that everyone else was out of step, but not this man himself.”⁹

As to the reasons why Gurdjieff “acted” and would not reveal himself, they remain even more mysterious and elusive than the man himself. Within Sufism, there exists a path called “malamat” whereby a master frequently acts in outrageous, unexpected, upsetting, baffling, or otherwise inexplicable ways to challenge his pupils' capacities to exercise discrimination and self-discipline, as well as to remind them that they must always remember to separate the teaching from the teacher. It would seem that, in part, Gurdjieff's frequently unexpected or puzzling behavior and his penchant for engaging in exaggerated and bombastic displays should be attributed to his assumption, on some level, of a path of blame. As to why a master would assume such a path, it is apparent that Gurdjieff frequently upset or contradicted others' expectations, violated norms, provoked, disturbed, annoyed, and acted outrageously in order to provide his pupils with shocks that would awaken them. A central element of his method of instruction involved “the principle of irritation”: the creation of circumstances in which the pupil would experience an inner conflict—a struggle between “yes” and “no”—within himself or herself. Gurdjieff maintained that the experience of such inner struggle was essential to the process of awakening insofar as it was only under such circumstances that a pupil could become properly aware of habitual aspects of his or her personality and be forced to make a conscious effort to overcome significant sources of sleep. Further, only the teacher was capable of diagnosing and administering the shocks—the external provocations—necessary to create the inner friction which was essential to awakening. Thus, Gurdjieff spoke of the great value of “stepping on people's corns”—jabbing or applying pressure to their most sensitive and vulnerable spots—and not only his willingness to do so, but his duty as a teacher to do so. There are numerous accounts of Gurdjieff's uncanny insight into his pupils' psyches and his brilliant

creativity in devising situations that confronted them with their most essential problems. To do so, Gurdjieff often engaged in behavior that was seemingly excessive, bizarre, or incomprehensible; but, typically, there was eventually revealed to be a method to his madness. Having said that, it also seems clear that, as Ouspensky noted, sometimes there was too much of Gurdjieff's acting: that instead of being an expression of strength, it revealed a weakness in him.

The Mystery of the Master

When he met Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky was an accomplished journalist, mathematician, and philosopher, as well as being a prominent Theosophist and student of mysticism. He traveled extensively throughout the East attempting to contact a legitimate esoteric school; something which he firmly believed existed. Although he had made contact with many interesting individuals and groups during his travels, Ouspensky had returned to his native Russia disappointed by what he regarded as his failure to fulfill his quest. But, after his seemingly fortuitous meeting with Gurdjieff, he believed that he had met a man who, if not an emissary of an esoteric school, had clearly made contact with one and possessed a higher level of knowledge and understanding.¹⁰ While Ouspensky would eventually separate from Gurdjieff for reasons that remain a mystery, he continued to teach Gurdjieff's Fourth Way system after he had relocated to England in the 1920s until his death in 1947.

Although Ouspensky was a mystic, he also maintained a healthy skepticism towards most claims regarding the mystical and the paranormal. Thus, when he first learned of Gurdjieff and heard of his group in Moscow, he admits that he had little interest, as he had heard such "tales" many times before and dismissed as "bad fiction" most stories related to him by people who claimed to have met "Oriental masters who possessed special powers." Accordingly, he opined that: "People invent miracles for themselves and invent exactly what is expected from them. It is a mixture of superstition, self-suggestion, and defective

thinking ..."¹¹ Ouspensky added that it was his observation that such stories never appeared without the connivance of the supposed masters to whom they referred.

In light of his attitude, Ouspensky's willingness to become Gurdjieff's pupil attests to the uniqueness of the latter's being. Moreover, his description of "the miracle" which occurred when he was part of a group which had accompanied Gurdjieff to a summer house in Finland, in August, 1916, bears particular consideration. Ouspensky and two other pupils were in a room with Gurdjieff, who was demonstrating certain postures and physical movements with what Ouspensky described as "an astonishing assurance and precision."¹² Later, as they sat on a wooden floor, Ouspensky began to *hear Gurdjieff's thoughts*. He writes that: "... I heard his voice inside me as [if] it were in the chest near the heart."¹³ To the astonishment of the two other pupils present, Ouspensky replied aloud, over the course of a half hour, to questions and comments that Gurdjieff communicated to him telepathically! After retiring, Ouspensky relates that "a strange excitement again began in me, my pulse began to beat forcibly and I again heard G.'s voice in my chest. On this occasion, I not only heard *but I replied mentally* and G. heard me and answered me."¹⁴

Ouspensky's recounting of Gurdjieff's capacity to communicate telepathically is an intriguing indication of the uniqueness of Gurdjieff's level of consciousness and being. It is a particularly compelling report because of its source. As noted, Ouspensky was an uncompromising skeptic and was dismissive of most of the tall tales of supposed masters who possessed magical powers. He also wrote that Gurdjieff used to laugh at people who wanted and expected him to do miraculous things and to demonstrate "his powers." But then, Ouspensky was hardly alone in providing an account of Gurdjieff's seemingly miraculous capacities. There are numerous other accounts from those who knew Gurdjieff in which they describe him healing them psychically or somehow providing them with some sort of enabling energy to overcome some apparently

insurmountable obstacle.¹⁵ For his part, Gurdjieff claimed that he had acquired paranormal capacities in the course of his search but doing so had precipitated a crisis of conscience which led him to take an oath never to use his powers to gratify his own selfish needs or ends. Then too, esoteric literature is replete with pupils' accounts of their teachers exhibiting paranormal powers.

Frankly, as much as such descriptions of purported paranormal acts might fulfill expectations regarding a master's exceptional powers, I would suggest that they represent the thin end of the wedge with respect to accounts of Gurdjieff's unique level of consciousness and being. During one of their early talks,

Ouspensky asked Gurdjieff about the value of reading "mystical" or "occult" literature. Gurdjieff replied that a great deal could be learned by reading, if one "*knew how to read.*"¹⁶ He told Ouspensky that, if he *understood* everything he read, *then he would have already found that which he was seeking.* Gurdjieff added that, if Ouspensky truly *understood* what he had written in his book, *Tertium Organum*—a work about the nature of consciousness and higher dimensions which he had recently published to great acclaim—he would bow down and beg Ouspensky to be *his* teacher. However, Gurdjieff explained, there is a significant difference between *knowledge* and *understanding*, and that the importance of this distinction is almost entirely unrecognized in modern times. For Gurdjieff, understanding involves the practical apprehension of knowledge; it is knowledge which has been transformed from mere "head learning" to one's entire being. Thus, while Ouspensky might be able to write accurately and insight-

fully about consciousness and higher dimensions, Gurdjieff was claiming that, in order to *understand* consciousness and higher dimensions, Ouspensky would have had to realize the transformation of his own consciousness

and being—thereby acquiring the faculties of the higher emotional and higher intellectual centers—which would allow him to experience and apprehend them directly.

From the many accounts produced by Gurdjieff's pupils, there emerges a consistent portrait of a man whose level of being supported his contentions that the possibilities for self-transformation and the perfection of consciousness represent the great secret of human existence. Dr. Kenneth Walker, an

accomplished British surgeon, wrote that everything Gurdjieff did "seemed to originate within" and that, because of his extraordinary economy of effort, he possessed a unique and "immense capacity for work."¹⁷ Adding that the more he saw of Gurdjieff, the more he was convinced of his uniqueness, Walker described him as a man distinguished by his "profound knowledge, immense vitality and complete immunity from fear."¹⁸ Margaret Anderson, an American editor and writer who became Gurdjieff's pupil, also wrote about his unique presence and seemingly incomparable level of being. She relates that within the circle of Gurdjieff's pupils he was regarded as being a great teacher who was presenting the perennial wisdom of the East in a terminology which would not alienate Western thinkers. Anderson added that:

... what philosophers have taught as "wisdom," what scholars have taught in texts and tracts, what mystics have taught

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through ecstatic revelation, Gurdjieff would teach as a science—an exact science of man and human behaviour—a supreme science of God, world, man—based on sources outside the scope, reach, knowledge or conception of modern scientists and psychologists.¹⁹

As much as the assessments quoted from Walker and Anderson are shared by so many of those who worked with and knew Gurdjieff, somehow the succeeding generation of scholars and critics who have written about Gurdjieff and his work have tended to discount the importance of his pupils' consistent assertions regarding his unique presence and demonstrably higher level of consciousness and being. There have been two major biographies of Gurdjieff published in English: James Webb's *The Harmonious Circle* and James Moore's *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth*.²⁰ More recently, Paul Beekman Taylor's *Gurdjieff: A New Life*,²¹ which draws on previously unavailable documents, identifies some of the errors in the earlier biographical works and provides a dissenting opinion regarding some of Webb's and Monroe's interpretations and opinions. While both the Webb and Moore biographies are carefully researched and well-written, providing valuable information and insights about Gurdjieff and his pupils, I believe that they share the same failing. While each author readily acknowledges Gurdjieff's profound effects on his many students and describes his charismatic presence, neither of them grants serious consideration to the idea that Gurdjieff was a master who had attained a higher level of consciousness and being. Furthermore, both Webb and Moore seem to believe that providing an "impartial portrait" of their subject demands that they "balance" their accounts and interpretations of him and his work by reciting stories of his puzzling decisions and courses of action, his eccentric behavior, and his madcap antics. But in doing so, I would suggest that their failure to understand that these external manifestations were parts that Gurdjieff was playing for his own purposes leads them to reduce their interpretations of him and his actions to familiar terms and normal understanding. As such, they never grant the idea—that Gurdjieff was a

"conscious actor"—the consideration it most certainly merits. More importantly, they do not examine the question of what Gurdjieff meant when he said that "to be a conscious actor represented a great achievement." While Taylor gives the impression that he is much more inclined to recognize Gurdjieff's unique level of consciousness and being and appears to tacitly endorse the idea that he was "a conscious actor," he does not address that issue or examine it in any depth.

All such attempts to "normalize" Gurdjieff must be greeted with skepticism, in my opinion. Denis Saurat, a writer and professor of literature who knew Gurdjieff, argued that there is a resistance in the West to admitting the idea that there are masters who, having gone to schools and perfected themselves, return to the outside world, and live amongst us. In the East, Saurat said, the idea—that such people do exist and that "the rules of the ordinary man do not apply"²² to them—is widely accepted. In the introduction to *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Jeanne de Salzmann—who was Gurdjieff's longest serving pupil and one of those charged with the responsibility of continuing his work after his death—addresses the difficulty that the concept of the master creates for Westerners. But she then adds, in unequivocal terms, that it is only by recognizing that Gurdjieff was a master that one can grasp the meaning of his life and work:

According to traditional conceptions, the function of a master is not limited to the teaching doctrines, but implies an actual incarnation of knowledge, thanks to which he can awaken other men, and help them in their search simply by his presence. He is there to create conditions for an experience through which knowledge can be lived as fully as possible. *This is the real key to the life of Gurdjieff*.²³ [emphasis added]

Strangely, both James Webb and James Moore seemed to have been unwilling and/or unable to take Mme de Salzmann's assessment seriously. I would submit that their refusal to do so constitutes the fatal flaw which their respective works share.

In keeping with Denis Saurat's perspective, I believe that those who have attempted to reduce Gurdjieff to familiar categories by treating him strictly as a historical figure—one who can be evaluated and understood in terms of normal psychology—have completely misjudged and underestimated the man. In my book, *An Alien Intelligence*,²⁴ I adopt the perspective which Northrop Frye, the great literary critic, argued must be applied when interpreting the life of Jesus as it appears in the Gospels. As Frye explained, Jesus is represented as a *mythical*, rather than a *historical figure* in the Gospels. Therefore, he must be understood to be “a figure who drops into history from another dimension of reality, and thereby shows what the limitations of the historical perspective are.”²⁵ [emphasis added] While I am certainly not equating Gurdjieff with Jesus, I am suggesting that he was a man who had acquired a higher level of consciousness and being. Therefore, I believe that Frye's characterization of “a figure who drops into history from another dimension of reality” succeeds—in a way which has completely eluded his biographers—in capturing the quantum discontinuity of Gurdjieff's level of consciousness and being from that with which we are familiar. Accordingly, I am suggesting that Gurdjieff should be approached as a figure who reveals the limits of not only the historical but the conventional psychological perspective. Furthermore, I would suggest that the more one works on oneself in terms of the Fourth Way—which progressively reveals the depth and the coherence of the teaching—the more one is inclined to regard Gurdjieff as having been a master. While critics and skeptics assume that Gurdjieff's pupils were too close to him and too invested in his work to provide unbiased assessments of him, it must be acknowledged that they were afforded privileged perspectives by virtue of their direct contact with him.

Most importantly, Gurdjieff's pupils and all those of succeeding generations who have actively worked to study and know themselves in terms of his teaching subscribe to a psychological system which posits the existence of human beings who have acquired higher levels of consciousness and being. To the extent that the hierarchical nature of consciousness becomes a

psychological and cosmological reality, one apprehends the unique authority and integrity of Gurdjieff's life and work.

Although I do not believe, literally, in Gurdjieff's otherworldly origins, I would argue that he should be regarded as *an alien intelligence*: one whose level of consciousness and being differs to the point of incompatibility with our normal understanding of what it means to be human. In the same way, my thirty-five years of study of the Fourth Way have led me to share Ouspensky's opinion that the more one becomes involved with the teaching, the more one forms the impression of being in contact with a living entity—something organic and vital—rather than simply a set of ideas. In other words: an alien intelligence. Finally, my work to study myself and to develop the dormant faculties of consciousness and being has led me to conclude that the cultivation and the nourishment of self-knowledge involves the birthing of an alien intelligence from within oneself.

There is one other aspect of the master's life and work which is rarely discussed—even by those who do acknowledge the existence of such evolved beings—but which is essential in weighing any discussion of the subject. *A lower level of consciousness cannot understand a higher level of consciousness*. As much as scholars, biographers, and pupils may wish to examine, probe, dissect, analyze, and pontificate on the mysteries of Gurdjieff's existence and his mission, this indisputable reality—which is tacitly assumed by those who believe that Gurdjieff was a master—should temper any and all commentaries and conclusions. For example, consider the following reply by the great Sufi sage, Hazarat Inayat Khan, to a question about the perplexing variability in audiences' responses to his lectures:

“Did you think that my whole work consists of giving lectures?” ... “Those lectures are no more than a screen; my real task lies in the higher spheres. If I had to judge the results of all I do from the attendance of this handful of people, I should feel very discouraged indeed. ... One of the most important tasks that I have to fulfil is *the tuning of the inner spheres in the different*

*countries I visit, to a higher pitch of vibration. That is why I have to travel so much.*²⁶ [emphasis added]

H.I. Khan's reply is remarkably revealing and should serve as a caveat to all those who comment on the meaning of any master's work. That is not at all to suggest that the lives and work of alleged masters should not be approached critically and skeptically. Nevertheless, it does serve as a reminder that the masters may well be functioning and working on not only the levels of meaning with which pupils are conversant, but on higher levels and in terms of meaning that are completely alien to those who have not awakened and perfected themselves. The latter constituency includes most, if not all, psychologists and scientists.

Knowledge and Being

All esoteric knowledge is premised on the idea that the realization of higher knowledge is dependent upon the attainment of higher levels of being. Gurdjieff states that, while we recognize differences in levels of knowledge, we fail to understand that being can also be of different levels. Normally, people equate the term "being" with existence and define it in terms of its opposite of non-existence. But, for Gurdjieff, being may be of different levels and categories. Thus, he asserts that the being of a plant and a mineral is different, as is that of a mineral and an animal. But he also claims that:

... the being of two people can differ from one another more than the being of a mineral and an animal. This is exactly what people do not understand. And they do not understand that *knowledge* depends on *being*. ... in Western culture it is considered that a man may possess great knowledge, for example, he may be an able scientist, make discoveries, advance science, and at the same time he may be, and has the right to be, a petty, egoistic, caviling, mean, envious, vain, naïve, and absent-minded man. It seems to be considered here that a professor must always forget his umbrella everywhere.²⁷

Continuing, Gurdjieff states that, if knowledge is overdeveloped at the expense of being, it becomes too theoretical, too abstract, and can actually be harmful because it begins to complicate an individual's life, creating "new troubles and calamities." He explains that the reason for this unforeseen and unrecognized problem is that:

...knowledge which is not in accordance with being cannot be large enough for, or sufficiently suited to, man's real needs. It will always be a knowledge of *one thing* together with ignorance of *another thing*; a knowledge of *the detail* without a knowledge of the *whole*; a knowledge of the *form* without a knowledge of the *essence*.²⁸

According to Gurdjieff, not only is knowledge determined by being, but he also maintains that:

... at any given level of being the possibilities of knowledge are limited and finite. Within the limits of a given being the *quality* of knowledge cannot be changed, and the accumulation of information of one and the same nature, within already known limits, alone is possible. A change in *the nature of knowledge* is possible only with a change in *the nature of being*.²⁹ [emphasis added]

Gurdjieff insists that, generally speaking, the being of modern man is "of very inferior quality" due to an overemphasis on the line of knowledge. He adds that *realizing a balance between knowledge and being* is more important than the development of one line at the expense of the other. When knowledge outweighs being, Gurdjieff states that a man "knows but has no power to do. It is useless knowledge."³⁰ He characterizes an individual who has pursued the line of knowledge, without pursuing the line of being as producing "a weak yogi"; "a man who knows a great deal but ... *does not understand*."³¹ However, when the development of being outweighs knowledge, "a man *has the power to do*, but does not know ...he can do something but he does not know what to do."³² In such cases, the

individual is what Gurdjieff terms “*a stupid saint*”; if he does something, he follows his feelings which may lead him astray or to do the very opposite of his intentions.

I believe that the various testimonies about Gurdjieff’s status as a master are based not only on his extraordinary knowledge and being, but also the demonstrable balance that existed within him between the two. As such, it was not only the unique nature of his teaching which appealed to Gurdjieff’s pupils, but also his singular presence, which conveyed an undeniable authority and transmitted much more to them than they could identify or explain. C.S. Nott wrote that “when Gurdjieff said something to you, it registered not only in the mind but in the feelings, in such a way that you could not help but think seriously about it.”³³ He added that simply sitting with Gurdjieff—whom he described as “blazing with energy”—was a unique experience which left one feeling revitalized. Noting that an electrical motor could be charged simply by being close to a more powerful one, Nott said that “so a person could be magnetized by being near Gurdjieff, by his force and ‘being.’”³⁴

There are numerous accounts from both Gurdjieff’s pupils and others who knew him that are consistent with Nott’s comments about the distinct and palpable force of Gurdjieff’s being. But the attribution of such qualities is not restricted to Gurdjieff; they recur repeatedly in pupils’ descriptions of various esoteric masters’ presence. Indeed, as J.G. Bennett points out in his book, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, the idea of a master transmitting subtle energy to a pupil exists within various esoteric spiritual traditions.³⁵ For example, within Sufism, the *murshid* or master furthers the seeker’s spiritual development by transmitting *baraka*, an “enabling energy.” In Christianity, the term, “transfer of merits,” refers to the idea that an individual who has attained a certain level of spiritual development may help those who are less spiritually developed and incapable of helping themselves. Thus, a monk or nun might help sinners to repent—even without their knowledge or desire—by transferring “effectual grace.” Bennett notes that similar ideas occur in Buddhism, wherein one’s spir-

itual progress may be furthered simply by entering into the *darshan* of a sanctified individual. In Islam, a spiritual transformation can be effected by simple contact, *sohbat*, with an evolved spiritual teacher.

Of course, this idea—that masters are capable of transmitting subtle, spiritually enabling energies—is almost entirely alien to modern thought and would be perfunctorily dismissed by most scientists and psychologists as being utterly fanciful (not to mention scientifically unverifiable) and, hence, unreal. By contrast, Gurdjieff not only subscribed to its reality, but claimed that his pupils could draw on what he termed his “*hanbledzoin*”—the energy of the “*kesdjan*” (“vessel of the soul”) or astral body—in order to help them work on themselves to awaken. He claimed that, by virtue of his own spiritual development, he possessed more of this subtle energy than he required and, thus, he was capable of transmitting it to his pupils. Again, many of Gurdjieff’s pupils stated that they did feel he provided them with an enabling energy which they could not identify, but which they did not doubt was real. While not as spectacular as Ouspensky’s “miracle,” such accounts are further indications that Gurdjieff had attained a higher level of consciousness and being and had attained the status of being “a master.”

The relationship of knowledge to being, which Gurdjieff puts forth, is precisely what is either unrecognized or denied within post-technological cultures. Modern science, psychology, and education are premised on *the epistemological and ontological assumptions* that being is, as Gurdjieff says, simply a term to denote existence and as such, is irrelevant to knowledge. There is very little, if any recognition that there exists a scale of being, just as there is almost no recognition of higher states of consciousness. Consequently, the concept of the master exists outside the assumptive framework of modern psychology. That position is a direct result of what Ken Wilber termed “the disaster of modernity”: in which the traditional Great Nest of Being—a hierarchy of human and universal consciousness—collapsed into the flatland of matter, wherein all interior qualities, including experience,

were devalued or denied significance. From an esoteric perspective, materialists' blindness to the existence of the scale of consciousness represents the essential failing in modern psychology and science. For self-transformation—through the acquisition of esoteric self-knowledge—unveils both the hidden dimensions and hierarchy of personal and universal consciousness. And in doing so, it further reveals our cosmic connections: as given by the integral relationship between psychology and cosmology. The efforts of those who have developed methods of self-transformation have created an esoteric science of being and consciousness. Its existence and its claims refute the alleged superiority of the Galilean revolution in defining science: wherein only that which could be quantified and measured was deemed to be real. Moreover, the existence of esoteric masters, throughout the ages, attests to the reality of the Great Nest of Being, and the impossibility of arriving at any comprehensive account of human beings or the Universe which does not recognize its existence. The study of those masters—who, by attaining higher levels of consciousness and being, embody what Gurdjieff termed “finished worlds”—may allow us glimpses and intimations of the profound significance of the relationship between being and knowing.

Personality and Essence

In part, Gurdjieff attributes the impoverished quality of man's being to the differential development of “Personality” and “Essence.” This distinction is unrecognized by modern psychologists. Yet, it is another critical concept in the Fourth Way account of the profound differences between what humans are, and what they can and should be. In broad terms, a person's Essence consists of that which is his own; Personality is what is not his own. Essence is that with which one is born: one's heredity, nature, physical features, aptitudes, disposition, proclivities, and the like. Personality is all that which comes from outside oneself: that which one acquires or is imposed on one through the chance and circumstances of one's upbringing, surroundings, culture, education, and life experiences.

A small child, Gurdjieff says, lives in her Essence. All her desires, tastes, likes and dislikes are her own. They directly express her being. However, as the child matures, Personality begins to develop and is basically established by five or six years of age—through the influence of others, by imitation, and by conditioning. Ideally, Personality and Essence would develop together in a harmonious balance, but this very rarely happens. Due to the myriad sources of imitation and suggestion—family, school, friends, grown-ups—the child's Personality grows rapidly and she is filled with ideas, feelings, and sensations that are not her own, but simply that which she has been conditioned and socialized to accept and believe. In this way, Personality grows over Essence like a crust or shell. Essence becomes less and less frequently manifest, and is more and more feeble when it does so. Therefore, Essence is deprived of contact with the world and cannot grow. Personality grows at its expense—assuming a disproportionate influence—and becomes dominant in one's interactions and commerce with the world.

It is important to understand that Gurdjieff is not stating that Personality is bad and Essence is good. Each is necessary and each must grow if one's being is to develop properly. Certainly, there are many things that must be learned and acquired through Personality's interactions in the world. As Gurdjieff says, Personality may even be underdeveloped in those uneducated, simple people who live close to Nature and in whom Essence is relatively strong. But more typically, Personality's dominance arrests the growth of Essence at a very early age. As a result, Gurdjieff maintains, it is not unusual to find that a sophisticated, cultured person has the Essence of a child.

Of course, the term “Personality” refers, not to one thing, but rather to all the *personas* one assumes or the masks that one wears in various rounds of life. These *personas* or masks—acquired involuntarily by the chances of one's conditioning and contact with sleeping people—appear and disappear according to equally involuntary and accidental dictates. Thus, Personality is asleep. The problem, according

to Gurdjieff, is that Personality *wants* to be hypnotized and remain asleep. Essence, on the other hand, is asleep, but it can be awakened. To do so, however, demands that Personality be changed consciously, such that it becomes more passive. Without such conscious direction, Personality remains superficial and is subject to constant unconscious changes. One set of experiences drives out another, which are, in turn, driven out by another. One aspect of Personality says: “I want” or “I like” or “I do not like,” and then gives way to another set of different appetites and desires. Consequently, people go through life existing as multiple, frequently antagonistic personages. In such circumstances—the life of the sleepwalker in the sleeping world—there is no control or real will. *Everything happens* and will continue to happen unless Essence is awakened. Only when Essence begins to experience and grow can its proper balance with Personality be restored, and the possibility of developing being and real “Will” be realized.

A.R. Orage, a celebrated literary critic who was one of Gurdjieff’s most prominent pupils, underlines the importance of developing one’s Essence by distinguishing it from Personality in these stark terms:

Essence is truth about oneself in contrast to social and expected opinions of oneself. Essence is truth irrespective of time, place, and the feelings of anyone. It is what one would dare to avow if no consequences were to follow on a statement of the truth. It is truth before God. Personality is truth before men—before the world, conditioned by “What will people think?”³⁶

Ouspensky recounts a story which is most instructive in considering some of these claims about levels of being, Personality and Essence, and knowledge and understanding. He describes how it was a practice of Gurdjieff’s pupils who met in Moscow, during the World War I years, “to keep silence”—that is, to avoid unnecessary talking—when they gathered at their teacher’s apartment. Unnecessary talking is one of Personality’s most automatic and common activities and, hence, an important habit to oppose by trying to make it more passive. Ouspensky relates what hap-

pened when he wanted to introduce some of his Moscow friends to Gurdjieff. Only one, V.A.A., produced the impression of “being sufficiently alive” to be considered. When his friend expressed an eagerness to meet Gurdjieff, he was invited to have lunch with him. Gurdjieff seated Ouspensky’s friend next to him and was the perfect host. However, as Ouspensky belatedly realized, Gurdjieff was testing his friend:

... The fact was that everyone kept silence. A. held out for five minutes. Then he began to talk. He spoke of the war, of all our allies and enemies together and separately; he communicated the opinions of all the public men of Moscow and St. Petersburg upon all possible subjects; then he talked about the dessication of vegetables for the army ... particularly the dessication of onions, then about artificial manures, agricultural chemistry, and chemistry in general; about “melioration”; about spiritism, “the materialization of hands,” and about what else I do not remember now.³⁷

Ouspensky goes on to describe how his friend was so carried away with his own talk and his need to express his attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that he was essentially oblivious to everything and everyone around him. He was completely unaware that no one else had said a word. As such, his friend was revealed to be a fool. Gurdjieff used him to prove a point to his pupils. After A. had thanked Gurdjieff for a “very interesting conversation” and had departed, Gurdjieff laughed slyly and said:

There, you see He is called a clever man. But he would not have noticed it even if I had taken his trousers off him. Only let him talk. He wants nothing else. And everybody is like that. This one was much better than many others. He told no lies. And he really knew what he talked about, in his own way of course. But think, what use is he? He is no longer young. And perhaps this was the one time in his life when there was an opportunity of hearing the truth. And he talked himself all the time.³⁸

It is very difficult to read this account without laughing at A.’s behavior—but the laughter is

that of self-recognition. Most people are much more like Ouspensky's friend than we realize or would care to admit. In our lives, Personality runs amok with unfailing dependability, such that, like this man, we are oblivious to its automatic manifestations. If this account seems far-fetched or contrived, one need only observe what happens when one maintains silence or speaks only when necessary in a social context. So much of what passes for conversation, the exchange of ideas, and repartee—even of the most clever and entertaining variety—simply happens. In a state of sleep, people talk mechanically. And one can prove that to oneself beyond doubt simply by struggling to oppose this activity. It would seem that nothing could be so simple, but that conceit merely reflects the extent to which so much of our experience and behavior is automatically elicited and how we fail to understand its mechanical nature.

As Gurdjieff says, A. is what is called a clever man. He is a man in whom Personality is very well developed—he knows a lot about a lot of things—but what good is it? Placed in a situation in which a seemingly innocuous contrivance—people not talking—creates an unbearable friction in him, his Personality cannot remain still. And so he talks until he is so engrossed in talking and being clever ... that he is not only unaware of what is happening but is literally deluded. Can such a man be conscious? Does he understand things, or is he more like a clever parrot who can name things? Is he a free man choosing to act from the essence of his being? Or is he an automaton—a clever machine—being controlled and moved by forces he neither suspects nor would recognize if he was told of them?

The Centers' Wrong Work

In the previous article, Part III, Gurdjieff's concept of the seven centers of intelligence or brains—each of which has its own way of knowing, speed of operation, memory, and energies—was outlined. There are five centers responsible for humans' functioning in normal waking consciousness, and two centers that feature humans' higher intellectual and emo-

tional faculties. Because the moving, instinctive, and sexual centers typically comprise a human being's organic intelligence, Gurdjieff describes humans as "three-brained beings" that function intellectually, emotionally, and physically. In order to facilitate more conscious functioning of each of the centers, Gurdjieff states that it is necessary to understand the various classes of "wrong work" which are instrumental in keeping a center working at its lowest, most mechanical level of consciousness and precluding it from working properly and in harmony with the other centers. While these classes of wrong work are not recognized in modern psychology, the process of self-study reveals that they are common and that they frequently dominate and debilitate a center's functioning.

Self-study reveals that Gurdjieff's claim—that there exist three independent minds at work within us—provides, at the very least, an interesting interpretative framework within which one's experience and behavior may be analyzed. Further, it becomes apparent that, as he says, each of the centers works with varying degrees of consciousness, and that they are intimately linked with one another. Gurdjieff was most emphatic in asserting that we do not understand the extent to which our mental, emotional, and physical functions are in constant reciprocal action: how they inform one another, how they depend upon one another, how they result from one another. One cannot change without the others changing as he explains:

The attitude of your body corresponds to your sentiments and to your thoughts. A change in your emotions will inevitably produce the corresponding change in your mental attitude and in your physical pose. A change of thought will start another current of emotional energy, which will naturally change the physical posture. So that, if we want to alter our ways of feeling and our forms of thinking, we must first change our moving postures, and at the same time, without changing our emotional and mental postures, it is impossible for us to acquire

new moving postures. We cannot change one without changing the other.³⁹

This “connectedness” of the centers and the fact that psychologists do not study themselves systematically accounts, to a certain extent, for their failure to recognize the importance of understanding humans as multi-brained beings. It also explains the limited utility of thinking in new ways as a means of developing consciousness. Thought can only awaken one to a certain extent, before habitual postures and feelings interfere and mechanically evoke equally habitual and mechanical thoughts. In essence, the subtleties and the strengths of the centers’ connectedness and wrong work demands the guidance and the careful monitoring that only a teacher can provide. For only an informed and vigilant external intelligence can keep proper watch over a sleepwalker and provide the necessary shocks or interventions to awaken him or her.

In the intellectual center, “lying,” “internal considering,” and “imagination” are categories of wrong work that must be identified and opposed. *Lying* refers to our tendency to speak about that which we know as if we did. This pervasive tendency to inflate our self-importance with pretensions to knowledge is instilled and exacerbated by innumerable dubious sources of imitation, conditioning, education, and socialization. In addition, our lying is exacerbated by our tendency to believe that, because we can name something, we understand it. While we readily admit the difference in practical affairs between “knowing” and “knowing how,” we fail to recognize that the same standard should be applied to knowing and understanding. We may know something factually or conceptually, but understanding involves translating and applying our knowledge to being: that is, by digesting concepts and ideas in such a way that we are capable of integrating them into a more comprehensive and inclusive framework. To understand is to apprehend things not only intellectually, but also by sensing and emotionally incorporating them.

Internal considering describes the process by which we are preoccupied by our feelings that others fail to value or treat us with sufficient

sensitivity, care, and attention. Consequently, we are often absorbed in thinking about what others think about us or in conducting imaginary conversations wherein we express our feelings about the injustice of being slighted or wronged. Self-indulgent fantasizing about reactions to such affronts, both real and imagined, comprises internal considering. *Imagination*, in Gurdjieff’s terminology, refers to being lost in aimless and self-indulgent daydreaming and fantasizing. Such wasteful activity can assume the form of both self-aggrandizing and egoistic flights of fancy and descends into bouts of catastrophizing and torturous self-loathing, and everything fanciful and unrealistic in between those extremes.

The emotional center’s wrong work consists of “identification,” “self-love,” “vanity,” and “negative emotions.” In the previous article in this series, the subtle pervasiveness of identification was discussed, as well as its singular role as the most important obstacle to self-remembering. Quite simply, as long as one is emotionally attached or invested in any aspect of one’s experience or behavior, one cannot remember oneself by being fully present. *Self-love* and *vanity* are special types of identification. They are expressions of our absorption in our False Personalities: Gurdjieff’s term for the complexes of imaginary beliefs, images, and histories we develop about who and what we are. Our self-love and vanity involve our devotion to and nurturing of this fictional, narcissistic sense of self which becomes the center of gravity for our interactions with others and as such, the source of the spell of illusions and self-deceit by which we are unknowingly hypnotized and imprisoned.

Studying the final category of the emotional center’s wrong work—*negative emotions*—is a most illuminating and shocking process. The sheer number of terms for negative emotions—anger, disgust, jealousy, hatred, despair, dependency, distaste, irritability, envy, distrust, annoyance, rage, bitterness, disillusionment, fear, loathing, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera—is but the first indication of how pervasive they are and what a powerful role they play in most people’s lives. Not only are negative emotions useless and unjustified, according to Gurdjieff,

but they are also extremely debilitating. They deprive one of energy—as is obvious in the case of depression—but, more importantly, they feed and strengthen one’s identifications and False Personality. Because we live in a world which is dominated by and glorifies negative emotions, it is very difficult to recognize how they originate within us and express our pathologies—rather than being appropriate and necessary reactions to others’ outrages and excesses.

There are several classes of the moving-instinctual center’s wrong work: processes that restrict the body’s capacity to work properly. We all have chronic patterns of *unnecessary muscular tension* that constrict our physical awareness and bind our energy. In addition, we all display unconscious *habitual postures, gestures, movements, and vocal intonations*: all of which are linked with equally habitual and unconscious emotional and intellectual postures and processes. Although there is very little written material describing Gurdjieff’s analysis of the moving-instinctual center’s wrong work, that does not indicate a lack of emphasis, in his work, regarding the importance of developing consciousness of the body. On the contrary, Gurdjieff emphasized that self-remembering begins with self-sensing: that is, with increased consciousness and awareness of one’s physical state of presence. But because Gurdjieff worked directly with his pupils—taking each one’s type and unique problems into account—he did not leave detailed written commentaries upon or accounts of his methods. Thus, while he emphasized the importance of learning to

breathe, he was extremely critical of those who provided generic descriptions of breathing exercises. He asserted that it was necessary to study each pupil individually in order to understand how one’s breathing could be brought

into harmony with one’s postures and movements.

The sex center, Gurdjieff claimed, is typically engaged in wrong work. In fact, it is the misuse of the sexual center’s energy by the other centers and the other center’s energies in the sex center that is “the principal motive force of all mechanicalness”⁴⁰ and is responsible for the rule of waking sleep. Because the sex center’s energies are the most refined, they easily pass over into the other centers and are expressed through them.

In all such cases, “the misuse of sexual energy” is indicated by a particular vehemence or fervor which an activity or interest does not demand. Thus, the intellectual center does not simply write books; instead, it is always angrily and indignantly fighting, disputing, and criticizing. The emotional center preaches Christianity ... but it does so by invoking fire and brimstone, instilling fear of eternal damnation, raging against sinners or threatening the torments of Hell. The moving center is obsessed with sport, climbs mountains, wrestles, fights, and tries to create records. In each center, Gurdjieff claims that the common denominator which indicates the misuse of sexual energy is: “a particular vehemence and, together with it, the uselessness of the work in question.”⁴¹ None of the other centers can ever create anything useful with the sex center’s energy.

From an esoteric perspective, materialists’ blindness to the existence of the scale of consciousness represents the essential failing in modern psychology and science. For self-transformation—through the acquisition of esoteric self-knowledge—unveils both the hidden dimensions and hierarchy of personal and universal consciousness. And in doing so, it further reveals our cosmic connections: as given by the integral relationship between psychology and cosmology.

There is one other general category of “wrong work” which consists of *the habitual working of one center for another*. Although this process describes “the abuse of sex,” it is also apparent in the attempts of the intellectual center to feel ... or of the emotional center to think ... or of the moving center to think or feel. Gurdjieff maintains that this substitution of one center for another is much more prevalent than one might imagine. He cites numerous examples of the deleterious results that occur when one center attempts to do the work which should properly be performed by another center. For example, the emotional center’s attempt to think creates unnecessary nervousness and haste in situations demanding calm deliberation and careful judgment. On the other hand, the intellectual center’s attempts to do the emotional center’s work results in excessive deliberation where quick reactions are necessary or, sometimes, an inability to make discriminations that the emotional center would recognize, but which the thinking center cannot distinguish. As Gurdjieff explains: “The mind cannot understand shades of feeling. ... *A full man does not understand a hungry one.*”⁴²² Similarly, Gurdjieff explains that the intellectual center can neither appreciate sensations nor properly perform the moving center’s functions. As he says, it is impossible to drive a car or even to type by using one’s mind to direct and control such complex motor activities because the intellectual center cannot function at the moving center’s speed. On the other hand, the results of the moving center attempting to do the intellectual center’s work are equally ineffective, as Gurdjieff explains:

Moving center working for thinking center produces, for example, mechanical reading or mechanical listening, as when a man reads or listens to nothing but words and is utterly unconscious of what he is reading or hearing. This generally happens when attention, that is, the direction of the thinking center’s activity, is occupied with something else and when the moving center is trying to replace the absent thinking center; but this very easily becomes a habit, because the thinking center is generally distracted not by useful work, by thought, or

by contemplation, but simply by daydreaming or by imagination.⁴³

It is safe to say that almost every reader must have experienced equivalent unconscious reading or unconscious driving or unconscious work of various kinds. In such instances, one is on “automatic pilot” and, only after one has come to and awakened briefly, does it become apparent that one has been reading or driving or working quite automatically. Gurdjieff’s model of the centers and their wrong work provides a framework for understanding this process which is much more sophisticated and revealing, I would suggest, than modern psychologists simply labeling this phenomenon as “automatization.” Indeed, given his contention that our normal waking consciousness is a waking sleep, Gurdjieff’s analysis identifies a critical aspect of the dynamics of how our intellectual, emotional, and physical processes happen mechanically and automatically. For Fourth Way pupils, efforts to self-observe repeatedly reveal that the substitution of one center for another occurs routinely and results in unconscious mechanical operation of the physical, emotional, and intellectual brains.

A New Language

In order to study oneself systematically, with the aim of consciously evolving, Gurdjieff insisted that his pupils must learn a new language which they would apply to themselves and the world. People hold a very firm conviction that, because they speak the same language, they understand one another. However, Gurdjieff asserted that this is simply a further expression of the illusions that characterize life in the sleeping world. Our normal subjective language, he explained, is:

... full of wrong concepts, wrong classifications, wrong associations. ... owing to the essential characteristics of ordinary thinking, that is to say, to its vagueness and inaccuracy, every word can have thousands of different meanings according to the material that the speaker has at his disposal and the complex of associations at work in him at the moment. People do not clearly realize to what a degree their language is

subjective, that is, what different things each of them says while using the same words.⁴⁴

Gurdjieff contends that, while people are able to communicate information of a practical character effectively, the limits of normal language become evident when they attempt to convey more abstract or complex ideas. In such instances, he says, people mistakenly assume that they are using words in the same way and that they understand one another. In order to overcome the confusion created by subjective language, Gurdjieff states an “exact language is needed.” He states that systems of ancient knowledge begin:

...with the study of a language which will make it possible to establish at once exactly what is being said, from what point of view, and in what connection. This new language contains hardly any new terms or new nomenclature, but *it bases the construction of speech upon a new principle, namely, the principle of relativity*; that is to say, it introduces relativity into all concepts and thus makes possible an accurate determination of the angle of thought—for what precisely ordinary language lacks are expressions of relativity.⁴⁵

Recall, from the previous article in this series, Gurdjieff maintains that the Universe consists of seven world orders and that everything in it is either evolving or involving as part of ascending or descending octaves, respectively. The application of the principle of relativity within his system is based upon “the indication of the object under examination to the evolution possible for it; upon the indication of its *place* in the evolutionary ladder.”⁴⁶ Gurdjieff maintains that, once one has mastered this language by being able to grasp its application in terms of his system of thought, then it becomes possible to communicate “a great deal of knowledge and information which cannot be transmitted in ordinary language even by using all possible scientific and philosophical terms.”⁴⁷

Gurdjieff states that, in normal language, a conversation in which the word “man” is used

will have as many meanings as there are people involved in the conversation. By contrast, he explains that, within his system, there exist seven words to denote “man”: man number one through man number seven. Within the Fourth Way, there exist three fundamental “types” of man who are ruled by sleep: man number one, man number two, and man number three. *Man number one* refers to those in whom the psychic center of gravity lies in the moving center; the moving and instinctual functions predominate over the intellectual and emotional functions. In *man number two*, the center of gravity lies in the emotional center and, thus, feelings and emotions typically outweigh intellectual and physical functions. For *man number three*, it is the intellect which characteristically dominates the emotional and physical functions.

In Gurdjieff’s classification, the most fully evolved level of being which a human may realize is that of man number seven. *Man number seven* possesses everything a human being can attain: consciousness, individual I, will, and immortality, as well as many other properties that, in our state of psychological illusions, we erroneously attribute to ourselves. *Man number six* is very close to man number seven; he is an evolved being, except that all of his properties are not permanent. *Man number five* has consciously evolved to the point of realizing unity. Gurdjieff states that *man number four* represents a transitional level of being and that he cannot attain this level accidentally but, rather, he is always the “product of school work.” Further, he stands on a higher level than man number one, two, and three by virtue of the fact that he has acquired “a permanent center of gravity which consists in his ideas, in his valuation of the work, and in his relation to the school.”⁴⁸ His centers have begun to become balanced and he has begun to know himself and to acquire real aims. Man number four was born as a man number one, two, or three, but he has transformed himself by working to awaken and to consciously evolve through the systematic study of himself.

Gurdjieff asserts that the division of man into seven categories—the application of the prin-

ciple of relativity—“explains thousands of things which otherwise cannot be understood.”⁴⁹ In accordance with this division, Gurdjieff explains that the principle of relativity may be further elaborated as “all the inner and all the outer manifestations of man, all that belongs to man, and all that is created by him, is also divided into seven categories.”⁵⁰ Accordingly, it is possible to speak of seven categories of knowledge, being, religion, science, art, psychology, and so on. For example, with respect to “knowledge,” Gurdjieff states that the knowledge of man number one is the knowledge of that which is acquired by imitation and conditioning, learned by rote. The knowledge of man number two is the knowledge of his likes and his appetites; “what he does not like he does not know.”⁵¹ The knowledge of man number three is knowledge “based on subjectively logical thinking, words, upon literal understanding. It is the knowledge of bookworms, of scholastics.”⁵² The knowledge of man number four is that which he has received from man number 5, who has received it from man number 6, and 7. Although man number four assimilates this knowledge according to the level of his being, he possesses knowledge of an entirely different quality from that which man number one, two, and three have. He has begun to free himself from subjective knowledge and move toward the acquisition of objective knowledge.

The knowledge of man number five is nearer to objective knowledge than that of man number four, as it both expresses and is dependent upon the distinct nature of his higher level of being. Gurdjieff explains that it:

... is whole, indivisible knowledge. He now has one indivisible I and *all* his knowledge belongs to this I. He cannot have one I that knows something which another does not know. What he knows, the whole of him knows.⁵³

The knowledge of man number six is the most complete and objective knowledge possible for man to acquire; but Gurdjieff maintains that it can be lost and, therefore, it is not permanent. The knowledge of man number seven cannot be lost: “it is the *objective* and completely *practical* knowledge of *All*.”⁵⁴

While Gurdjieff’s claim that there exist not only seven categories of man, but seven categories of virtually all of man’s inner and outer manifestations, it is impossible for anyone to simply hear that idea and make a meaningful judgment about its veracity. As a result of years of study, I have come to subscribe to that perspective—while acknowledging that my knowledge and understanding of it is limited by my level of consciousness and being. Whether or not one accepts Gurdjieff’s classification of the three categories of sleeping man, the inclusion of the higher men—numbers 4 through 7—restores not only the scale of consciousness within the Great Nest of Being, but establishes the importance of relativity in discussing any topic of significance. By adopting that framework, consideration of all and everything becomes, paradoxically, much more complex and precise. From this perspective, for example, the supposed conflict between “science” and “religion” is revealed to be grossly oversimplified. I would argue that there is no “science” and there is no “religion”; instead each of the seven levels of man has his or her own “science” and “religion.” Similarly, almost all discussions of “consciousness” amongst modern psychologists are bound to and determined by the simplistic framework of meaning that dominates the flatland of materialism. All experiences which cannot be rudely reduced to material “causes” and squeezed into interpretive schemes for which they are clearly unfit are deemed to be unreal and of no significance. The existence of figures such as Gurdjieff—and some of his contemporaries such as H.I. Khan, Paramahansa Yogananda, and Krishnamurti—constitute compelling evidentiary challenges to that position. In accordance with Gurdjieff’s claims about the relationship between knowledge and being, I believe that the knowledge of these more realized and perfected human beings is more objective than that which even the most brilliant sleepwalkers have apprehended.

Conclusion

Gurdjieff’s observation—that a proper understanding of the idea of sleep depends upon awakening a little or trying to awaken—identifies the most critical aspect in the study

of esoteric teachings: that they take on an entirely new dimension of meaning if, rather than simple processing or attempting to take them in intellectually, one makes the special effort to practice their methods and observe their disciplines. Doing so provides significant evidence for Gurdjieff's contention that humans should be regarded as multi-brained beings in which three distinct minds are responsible for psychological functioning in the normal waking state of consciousness. Further, sustained systematic self-study also reveals the subtle relationships between knowledge and being. As such, the idea—that one's state of consciousness is integrally related to and limits one's knowledge—becomes plausible. In that context, the question of whether or not Gurdjieff was a master is of immense practical and spiritual significance. If Gurdjieff was a man who had attained a higher level of consciousness and being and embodied higher knowledge—as many of his pupils maintained—then his teaching assumes a singular level of authority and integrity. His teaching begins with human beings as they are, but reveals what they are potentially able to become through a process of conscious evolution. It is a method of self-transformation, premised on an understanding of the nature of being and knowing, which conceptualizes the existence of a hierarchy of consciousness: the Great Nest of Being. That perennial psychological and cosmological hierarchy is almost entirely at odds with modern psychology: in which all levels of the Great Nest have collapsed into the flatland of matter, wherein there exist no higher levels of being, consciousness, or knowledge.

The next proposed article in this series will consist of an examination of the consistent descriptions and equations of consciousness with Light within esoteric and mystical teachings. An examination of the esoteric conceptualization of consciousness as being, paradoxically, *some thing* and *nothing* will be undertaken—with reference to the burgeoning body of research documenting the intriguing Near Death Experience.

¹ For an overview of Gurdjieff's concept of the centers, see the previous article, Part III, in this series.

² *Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff as Recollected by his Pupils* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973), 72.

³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴ *Time*, Review of Kenneth Walker's *Venture with Ideas*, January 28, 1952.

⁵ G.I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963)

⁶ Evidence from numerous sources suggests that Gurdjieff had been a monk in Tibet. He was clearly well-informed about Tibetan Buddhist teachings—including dances and music—and made references, on more than one occasion, to having studied Tibetan medicine. Clearly, Gurdjieff had also spent significant time and effort studying Sufism, and he incorporated many Sufi disciplines and practices into his teaching. He was also intimately acquainted with Sufi music and dances.

⁷ Any attempt to trace or reconstruct Gurdjieff's journeys is, for the most part, a futile undertaking. Both the passage of time and the inaccessibility of many of the places to which Gurdjieff may have traveled preclude any reasonable expectation of uncovering anything of import regarding his search; the trail went cold long ago. Nevertheless, a book by Kathleen Speeth and Ira Frielander—*Gurdjieff: Seeker of the Truth* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980)—provides an interesting overview of Gurdjieff's search for ancient wisdom.

⁸ P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1949, 1977) 7.

⁹ Daly King, *The States of Human Consciousness* (New York: University Books, 1963), 100.

¹⁰ After he had become G.'s pupil, Ouspensky learned that G. and his pupils had been reading articles that Ouspensky had been writing about his travels in the Far East. Clearly, Gurdjieff had targeted Ouspensky as a future pupil and there was nothing fortuitous about their meeting. See William Patrick Patterson, *Struggle of The Magicians: Exploring the*

- 11 *Teacher-Student Relationship*, (Fairfax, CA: Arete Communications, 1996), 14.
- 12 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 7.
- 13 Ibid., 261.
- 14 Ibid., 262.
- 15 Ibid., 263.
- 16 Gurdjieff's expertise in treating alcoholics and drug addicts was well established and, while running his institute, he raised money in Paris by doing so. In *Gurdjieff: A New Life*, Paul Beekman Taylor tells the story of G.'s cure, in 1939, of Anna Stefanna ("Anci") who had been experiencing intense intestinal pain, which was diagnosed as being caused by an inoperable tumour adjacent to her liver. She was referred to Gurdjieff, who "felt about her abdominal and thoracic regions and then held the palm of his right hand over the tumour." He told her that, if the pain persisted for more than 24 hours, she was to return to him. "Within a day, the pain and signs of the tumour were gone." 208.
- 17 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 20.
- 18 Kenneth Walker, *Venture with Ideas* (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1951), 153.
- 19 Ibid., 162.
- 20 Margaret Anderson, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1970), 78-79.
- 21 James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: An Exploration of the Lives and Work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky and Others* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1980); James Moore, *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, MA: Element Inc., 1991).
- 22 *G.I. Gurdjieff: A New Life*.
- 23 The quotation from Professor Dennis Saurat appears in C.S. Nott, *Journey Through this World: Meetings with Gurdjieff Orage and Ouspensky* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1969), 47.
- 24 *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, x.
- 25 James Moffatt, 'An Alien Intelligence': *G.I. Gurdjieff, The Fourth Way, & 'The Three-Brained Beings Of The Planet Earth'* (Kars, ON: Zero.Point Publications, 2003). This book is currently unavailable. I am in the process of revising and issuing an update edition.
- 25 Northrop Frye, *The Double Vision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 16.
- 26 Sirkar van Stolk with Daphne Dunlop, *Memoirs of a Sufi Sage* (The Hague: East-West Publications Fonds B.V., 1967), 62. Given that Gurdjieff and H.I. Khan were not only contemporaries, but traveled to many of the same cities in Europe and the United States during the 1920s, Khan's comment about the significance of his travels in terms of "tuning the inner spheres" in the countries he visited is particularly intriguing. To my knowledge, no one has ever asked, let alone examined, the question as to whether or not Gurdjieff was fulfilling a similar aim during his travels.
- 27 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 65.
- 28 Ibid., 65.
- 29 Ibid., 65-66.
- 30 Ibid., 66.
- 31 Ibid., 66.
- 32 Ibid., 65.
- 33 C.S. Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 196), 49.
- 34 Ibid., 61.
- 35 J.G. Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, 76.
- 36 C.S. Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1974), 168.
- 37 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 273.
- 38 Ibid., 273.
- 39 J.G. Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making A New World*, 228.
- 40 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 254.
- 41 Ibid., 258.
- 42 Ibid., 110.
- 43 Ibid., 110.
- 44 Ibid., 68.
- 45 Ibid., 70.
- 46 Ibid., 71.
- 47 Ibid., 70.
- 48 Ibid., 72.
- 49 Ibid., 72.
- 50 Ibid., 72.
- 51 Ibid., 72.
- 52 Ibid., 72.
- 53 Ibid., 73.
- 54 Ibid., 73.