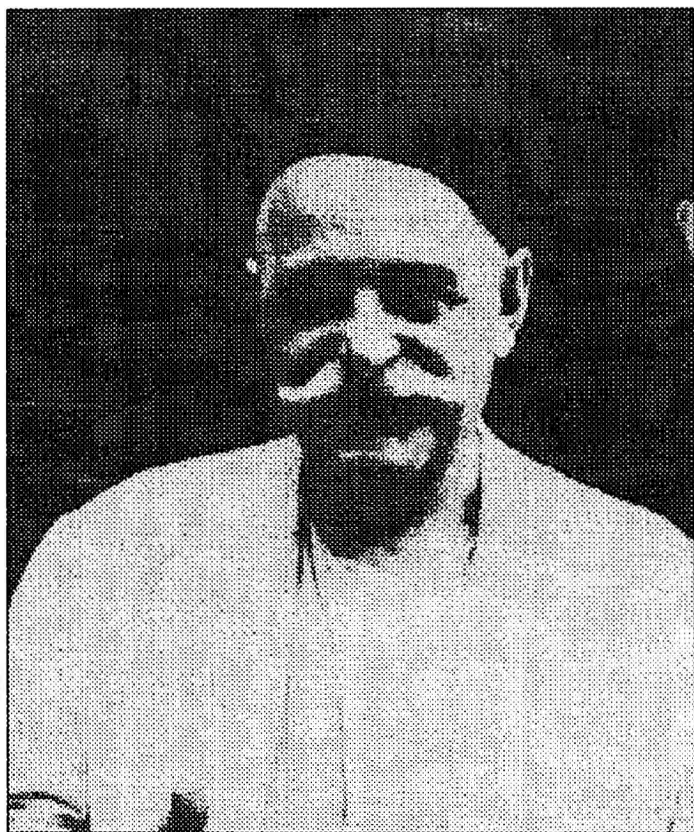


**BECOMING CONSCIOUS
WITH G.I. GURDJIEFF**

Solange Claustres





G.I. Gurdjieff in the 1940's

First published in French in 1999 as
La Prise de Conscience et G.I. Gurdjieff

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF G.I. GURDJIEFF

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF G.I. GURDJIEFF

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF G.I. GURDJIEFF

COPYRIGHT ©2005
EUREKA EDITIONS

ISBN-10: 9072395433
ISBN-13: 9789072395436

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photo-copying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Eureka Editions.

BECOMING CONSCIOUS WITH G.I.GURDJIEFF

by Solange Claustres

<i>Foreword</i>	3
A Sketch of G.Gurdjieff's Life	5
Introduction	7
My Meeting with G.Gurdjieff	13
Close to George Gurdjieff	19
<i>Accounts of my experiences with G. Gurdjieff:</i>	
My First Encounter	29
Toasts to the Idiots and Nicknames	33
The Veil	37
Dragging a Dead Donkey	43
Milarepa	45
The Wooden Snake	51
The Dessert	55
The Christmas Tree	60
Fear	64
Freedom from my Mother	66
The Snake who wanted to become a Monk	69
Fasting and the Different Foods	71
Once, One Day, Brief Encounters	75
Gare Saint Lazare	86
The Last Exercise	89
Monsieur Gurdjieff's Farewell	93
Vigilance, I Myself Am	97
The Dances – Movements	105
Sayings of George Gurdjieff	127
Ideas from this teaching in brief	131
Transformation of Substances in the Human Being	149

Foreword

This book is about my personal experience of G.I.Gurdjieff and his teaching in groups, meetings, Movements and at home with him in his flat from 1941 to 1949. And from then on, throughout my life.

This teaching based upon becoming conscious, of developing oneself with lucidity and honesty became my way of life. My experience over the years since 1941 allows me to bear witness to this.

And it is my duty, in this foreword, to warn readers about several things they should be aware of in order to clearly understand the difference between authentic and honest Work, in contrast to its opposite, or to imagination.

Several organisations have been formed in G.Gurdjieff's name, but not all of their leaders were taught by Monsieur Gurdjieff or Mme de Salzmann: some are pupils of pupils, from various sources, who have not experienced this teaching in depth; others, having got to know a pupil, the ideas, G.Gurdjieff's books, or books about G.Gurdjieff, organise meetings in G.Gurdjieff's name, without having practised his work. In this way aspects of the ideas become deformed, as happens in the Movements. This is not the real inner work of G.Gurdjieff.

Accurate knowledge and correct practice of the meaningful direction of energy, attention and conscience are lacking there, as they have not applied this practically themselves.

I would like to point out that some people, *in predominantly commercial organisations*, have taken G.Gurdjieff's name and other terms used by G.Gurdjieff – 'Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man' and 'The Fourth Way', amongst others – and have made use of books and all sorts of documents on G.Gurdjieff, whilst these organisers themselves have never actually practised G.Gurdjieff's work.

Even the people who have been in groups formed by Monsieur Gurdjieff or Mme de Salzmann are not always equal to this responsibility, due to various reasons: vanity, weakness, a lack of real searching, or a need for power.

Some other people within groups are not in this teaching, in a practical way, as they are not engaged in inner work: their ego is too strong, their imagination feeds their illusions – they consider their physical presence at meetings is enough.

In all this that I am describing here, I must add that certain people, through the honesty of their being, can understand the real meaning of this teaching instinctively and intuitively, and are able to pursue a real search, guided by sincere observation, through a deepening consciousness.

A Sketch of Gurdjieff's Life

George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was born in Alexandropol. There are two recorded dates of birth: 1877 and 1869, the latter probably being the actual one as his 80th birthday was celebrated in 1949, the year of his death.

His father was a descendant of the Ionian Greeks of Ceasaria, from a family that had been settled in Cappadocia for centuries. He was a great herdsman, and also a well known bard, having inherited a very ancient culture through oral tradition. G.Gurdjieff's childhood was infused with legends and poems from the distant past.

G.Gurdjieff was singled out by the Dean of Kars Cathedral to be guided in his studies by the seminarists, from whom he received an in-depth grounding in science as well as religious education.

Here in the Southern Caucasus where communities and customs of Russians, Armenians, Greeks, Iranians, and Tartars all intermingled, many things convinced him that a real knowledge of man and nature had existed in the past. Its traces had all but disappeared, but he felt its rediscovery was still possible. This conviction was destined to guide the whole of his existence.

G.Gurdjieff and some others, who like him felt the desire to understand the real meaning of human life, formed 'The Seekers of the Truth', a group which included geographers, archaeologists and doctors. By overcoming the greatest difficulties, they succeeded in

making contact with very isolated communities, monasteries and holy places in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Gurdjieff collected dispersed fragments of a traditional teaching; by submitting them to the fire of very rigorous inner disciplines, he succeeded in living them, and so reconstituting the unity of this knowledge.

In 1912 G.Gurdjieff returned to Europe. Groups of seekers formed around him in Moscow and St.Petersburg. The war, then the revolution led him to decide to come to France. After short stays in Europe and America, in 1922 he settled near Fontainebleau with his English, American and Russian pupils.

In 1940 Mme de Salzmann formed the group in which I took part.

In 'Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson' G.Gurdjieff set out his ideas in a similar form to the great traditions: a mythical tale on a universal scale, but which remains centred on the essential problem – the meaning of human life.

On the 29th October 1949 G.I.Gurdjieff died in Paris.

Introduction

This is the testimony that I wish to give, describing what George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was, as I knew him, his teaching as I understood it, as well as how I was myself at this time, through my thoughts and feelings.

In reliving my memories and impressions in order to be as true to them as possible, the effort to set this in writing has continued and extended my inner work with Monsieur Gurdjieff, made me more precisely aware of the full extent of what he brought to me, and, little by little, made me become conscious of my own personal inner path, the path of my deepest being.

I am attempting to convey what I received from G.Gurdjieff and in particular this extraordinary feeling emanating from him, this understanding from his being, from his heart, as if he had an 'ear' that could 'hear' the movements of my feelings.

He was like this with everyone. It was not sentimentality. His attention was an act of presence to another person, or persons.

As I had been deeply deprived of this kind of presence in those around me, I at once *recognised* this quality of attention to others, and to myself.

When I came to know G.Gurdjieff, I had already been affected by traumatic dramas since my childhood, and was tormented by questioning ideas, searching to understand the meaning of human misery, the meaning of life.

Hidden behind my assertive character, and passionate nature, made up of various inherited influences, was another part of myself, what was left of the child who had never been allowed to be a child, naïve and timid, which it seemed only G.Gurdjieff saw and understood, giving this child in me a feeling of trust.

I was not looking for a Master, I was searching for the meaning of life and of the human condition.

One event amongst many others resulted in my coming into contact with Madame Jeanne de Salzmann who was preparing a group to introduce to Monsieur Gurdjieff.

My meeting with G.I.Gurdjieff was that of the Master I needed: the Master who was conscious of himself, of others, of life and the meaning of this life.

Some time after G.Gurdjieff's death, Mme de Salzmann encouraged me to write about my experiences with him. But at that time I felt incapable of writing this down.

Later, describing G.Gurdjieff to my own pupils in this teaching, I deeply felt the need to write my testimony, as an act of gratitude and as a duty to convey what G.Gurdjieff was and the impact he had.

G.Gurdjieff's teaching is neither a philosophy nor a religion. It is a school for becoming conscious of oneself, for a deeper knowledge of oneself, for the development and opening out of all one's abilities, through a

discipline of thought, feeling, and body, through exercises for each of these parts, both separately and simultaneously.

This teaching is part of the 'Fourth Way', which is different from the way of the monk, the way of the yogi and the way of the fakir, which each act particularly on feeling, thought or body, and require one *to believe and have faith*.

G.Gurdjieff did not ask us to believe but, on the contrary, to question, to experience and learn for ourselves.

This teaching does not require a retreat from life; it must be carried out whilst remaining in life, and, little by little *to become completely present in all one's life*.

This way is more subtly demanding than the others.

G.Gurdjieff's school contains a deep knowledge of physical, physiological and psychic aspects of the evolutionary process of the being, through the transformation of substances, energies and their inter-relation-circulation.

The teacher or elder is there 'to wake us up', to give out suitable practical exercises for the pupils. If this is not done in a correct way, then he is not a true teacher or elder, even if he is occupying that position.

One part of this school comprises the 'Movements', called 'Sacred Dances' in some monasteries.

G.Gurdjieff put inner exercises into practice in the Movements, which are performed according to the possibilities of the pupil.

I am describing the aim of this school, but each of its participants is to a greater or lesser extent far from the real application of this, which demands humility and a very rigorous inner discipline, where discernment and the real wish to be in this path are not always strong enough, as the ego is always present.

The knowledge of these ideas *without* their strict practice cannot bring about any transformation, and *on the contrary* can be a very subtle obstacle to a real understanding and to its practice.



Solange Claustres at 8 years of age

My Meeting with G.Gurdjieff

My journey through life, with all its wanderings and crises, ended up in my being where I needed to be, at the right time and place to meet George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff.

I came to know G.I.Gurdjieff's teaching in 1941 in Paris. I was presented to him as part of a group, introduced to his ideas and dances by Mme Jeanne de Salzmann.

When I met G.Gurdjieff I was twenty years old, strong and forceful by nature, brimming with questions about understanding human life, with a deeply wounded feeling inside, which was hiding and struggling relentlessly, stubbornly and desperately, to live at any cost.

G.Gurdjieff with his quality of being, his wisdom, intelligence, and benevolence replied to my questions. I felt as if he was part of my family, like the father I had finally rediscovered, having been separated from my own father at the age of six.

As a child, from the age of eight to fourteen I lived in a flat with a substantial library and I devoured the lot: Balzac, Edgar Poe, Sade, Tolstoy, Baudelaire, Alexandre Dumas, Kierkegaard, and many others, philosophers, mystics, Axel Munthe's 'Story of San Michele', and Maeterlinck's 'Wisdom and Destiny', which I later learnt was inspired by G.Gurdjieff's ideas.

I was very interested in tales and legends from many

countries; these spoke to me from beyond the words, like a teaching that I received unconsciously, but which directly touched my feelings. The Bible became my bedside book, and I read it every day. Later came Milarepa, The Pilgrim Monkey, Saint Brendan. Together these spread before me a wide fan-like array of sources for reflection and meditation. While reading, my thoughts were drawn towards understanding these states of prayer, mysticism, and faith, the ascetic's exercises, the search for the way towards God, along with the prayer that had always been in me, since I was a small child: "Lord, help me!"

A series of shocks in my life led me to reflect deeply on the meaning of words, ideas, of what was around me, and gave me the need to understand the meaning of human behaviour.

And also the need to understand the meaning of religions, as I felt they were an expression of the same truth. Even as a child living amongst various different traditions, I used to say, "Why are there so many religions? It's all the same thing!"

As an adolescent I had heated discussions with priests and other people about books and their authors, asserting my own thoughts, convictions, and often accusing others of behaviour that in my view did not conform to their beliefs.

One day I read in the 'Carmelite Études' the story of a monk who had unintentionally performed a miracle. He was very ill. A poor, simple man, who went

unnoticed, relegated to the worst jobs, cleaning the monastery's latrines.

The Father Superior, wanting to understand and appreciate both what had happened and the real inner state of this brother, went to see him in his cell. When asked about his practice of spiritual exercises, the brother simply replied, "Everything I do, I do in the Presence of God, all my activities, all day long. For me God is always Present." The Father Superior came to realise that this brother had a deep humility and spirituality.

From then on I followed this practice myself. Its effect on me was deeply emotional. Since my childhood I had been giving myself different exercises that I had gleaned from here and there. In one of them I went round the bedroom several times on my knees, my arms crossed on my chest, as my grandmother had done all along the Way of the Cross at Lourdes.

I got to know Father George Dedeban (a foreign missionary and theologian who had spent several years in China). I used to talk with him for hours at a time. I asked questions to my heart's content, wanting to understand everything, as deeply as possible. When I said to him once, "I don't have a lot of faith", the Father, tearing his hair out, replied, "If everyone had your faith, life would be quite different!"

One day I asked him to give me Ignatius of Loyola's exercises, and when he refused, saying these exercises were not for me, as I was in life, I was quick to retort,

"It's exactly because I am in life, and not in a monastery, that I have even more need of inner exercises in order to follow the path I wish for!"

Later my needs were met by the inner exercises given to me by G.Gurdjieff.

I will always be grateful to Father G.Dedeban for his kindness and understanding. Through the questions I asked in our discussions, and the expression of my beliefs, my thoughts were clarified, further preparing me for my meeting with G.Gurdjieff.

Despite the rule in religion that one must not ask questions about the mystery of God, Christ and Mary, I needed to understand the meaning of these symbols, legends, myths, rituals and 'mysteries'. I yearned to decipher this language that I felt was speaking to me.

One day whilst discussing and questioning as I always did, with everyone, about everything, someone there said to me, "If these questions interest you, I could introduce you to someone worth putting them to. Talk to me about it sometime." I immediately asked to be introduced, and I came to know G.Gurdjieff's teaching.

My first contact was Madame Jeanne de Salzmann, whom I had already seen at a lecture by Philippe Lavastine. She was preparing a group of people to introduce to Monsieur Gurdjieff.

Mme de Salzmann's words and also the strict dances, called 'Movements' which she taught as part of this

teaching, all interested me straight away and gave me the feeling that they could enable me to understand what I was searching for.

In thinking about G.Gurdjieff I did not have the idea of looking for a 'teacher', I was looking for the meaning of what was happening in myself, in others and in life.

My meeting with G.I.Gurdjieff surpassed all my expectations. I want to bear witness in my writing to my profound gratitude to this man who nourished me in such a substantial way.

He alone gave me a deep feeling of security and trust, which no one else ever gave me. Through his quality of listening, I could be myself, and express myself. He summoned up and aroused my abilities, put them to the test, making me conscious of them, and enabling me to trust them; which is what I most needed.

He both confirmed and guided my searching, my feelings and my intuition. My life took on a more precise meaning in a path that I was already following but only groping around in the fog, reading everything, questioning, wanting to know and understand everything.

This relationship did not involve any sentimentality or mysticism. Even in feeling as if I was close to my father, there was never a gesture or attitude of fondness, neither on his part, nor mine. I never felt him to be in any way manipulative, dogmatic, paternalistic or egotistic.

He was an honest and unostentatious man, profoundly good, with respect for all, full of knowledge, and good everyday common sense.

He was a good, strict teacher, never unjust, whose ever wakeful attention never missed anything that was happening.

There was no solemnity in his manner of being and speaking. He was always very simple, direct, going for the essential, without idle talk: his words were concise and precise.

Following a serious accident, G.Gurdjieff lost part of his memory of the languages he knew. He spoke with few words, the essential words expressing his thought precisely, in very short phrases. But he played with this, as I also heard him speaking 'normally'. His understanding was expressed perfectly.

To watch over our work and respond to us, there was no need of lengthy discourse to say something that really hit the mark.

In these pages I describe his way of speaking more or less as it was. He did not always reply directly to a question; he either asked another question, or he made an observation that opened up a new perspective for us.

Close to George Gurdjieff

G.Gurdjieff lived in a first floor flat on the Rue des Colonels Renard; the two rooms above the street were used for groups, one for meetings and the other for meals. Across the corridor were the kitchen, another small room, G.'s bedroom and a further bedroom which all overlooked the courtyard.

Monsieur Gurdjieff saw all those who asked to speak to him personally in this small room. Its shutters were kept closed and there was no noise from outside. The peaceful quietness within gave a place for thought and reflection. I often used to have coffee with G. in this room, which I called the spice room.

Its walls were covered in shelves, filled with jars containing all sorts of condiments, herbs, dried fruit and spices. The ceiling was almost entirely hung with dried fish and meats, dried herbs, red peppers, cinnamon, and many other ingredients.

In this room I rediscovered all those scents and colours – browns, ochres, reds – that reminded me of the oriental markets I had known as a young girl in North Africa.

On entering, to the right there was a small divan where G. used to sit, and in front of you there was a small table and two chairs. There was always a thermos of hot coffee and some cups ready on the table.

On the divan lay a handheld harmonium, which G.

often used. He played music which spoke to the depths of my heart, like a whispered fairy-tale, resounding, vibrating, compelling one to listen, music that feeling understands without words. These harmonious sounds spoke to me in a calming contemplative language. In it I sensed the feeling of G.Gurdjieff in a pure expansive, gentle, quiet and peaceful state.

I exchanged few words with G., a question, an observation, a constatation. Above all in the silence I tasted this emotional nourishment, that no-one had ever given me, which I had been so deprived of, and which no other person has ever brought to me, apart from a hint from two people: a teacher from the Zaouia mosque in Kairouan, and later on, a wandering teacher and 'dervish' singer with whom I spent one day during some of my travels. They both had something of Gurdjieff's quality of presence and their approach towards me was very similar.

I still have the memory of being in that flat, following G. into one room or another – the spice room, the group room - helping him to cook, or laying the table. There were visitors to prepare for, meals to make. This was done simply, without words, or with only those that were strictly necessary.

I loved this atmosphere, this activity in stillness and silence. I could be myself, with the feeling of being guided on the course I needed.

These activities with G.Gurdjieff were no different from ordinary daily activities; he was a man like

everyone else, flesh and bone, who knew how to do everything. I can see him now putting a big pat of butter on some meat roasting on the coal-fired stove, where five or six big stewing pans were simmering gently for hours at a time. He himself always cooked for the groups, for guests, or for just one person, with great care, with a deep feeling of reverential hospitality, close, I felt, to a communion, without the guests being fully aware of it.

Being close to G.Gurdjieff in all his activities in his flat, I felt as if I was at home with my family, at peace with a quiet and simple joy that I had never felt before.

I often came at 7 o'clock in the morning to help him prepare the meals. A Russian, Tchekovitch, who had been with him since they were in Russia, was always there, as well as G.Gurdjieff's family and several other people, including Mme and M. de Salzmann; they had travelled together through several countries, staying in one town or another, and then to Paris, as has already been described in other books.

G.'s sister came to take care of the flat. I enjoyed helping her. I had a good relationship with her and her husband. I had replaced Miss Gordon, who had fallen ill, working close to G. preparing meals, receiving the visitors who came in search of his teaching, and other ordinary people who had nothing to do with this search. Years later, when I married, Lise came to help Monsieur Gurdjieff.

The dining room had a fireplace, a low sideboard, a big

glazed dresser; an upright piano by the window, a small table, and one very long table surrounded by a divan, an armchair, chairs and stools. There were a lot of us, and often due to lack of space, some people had to remain standing.

There, I had my first meeting with G. Gurdjieff.

At the beginning of the group meals, G. sat in the armchair placed at the end of the long table, near the door. Later on, he would sit on the small divan beside the middle of the table, in front of a wall hanging. Sometimes he would go back to sit in the armchair.

We sat wherever we wanted but the occupants of the seats either side of him, were always chosen by Gurdjieff himself. Mme de Salzmann sat opposite him when he was on the divan, and remained in the same place when he sat in the armchair.

This dining room where we had meals after the group meetings left a deep and lasting impression. At these meals Gurdjieff used to tell us stories with extraordinary freshness and spontaneity, always full of humour, wisdom and irony.

There were some very strong moments in this place, where we had a direct contact with G. quite different from that in the group meetings. In these group meetings, questions asked were always based on inner exercises, but here at the meals different questions were possible.

It was there that G. 'caught' people in their 'chief feature'. I say 'caught' – like a fisherman catching a fish, or a hunter shooting game. He pierced to the quick an attitude, a word, a way of being or way of presenting oneself.

I saw a great number of people of all levels at these meals and private get-togethers. G. was interested in everyone, open to everyone. There were several people who were not in the groups, but who followed his teaching with him individually.

Some people around me were surprised that he received certain persons, rather eccentric people, not having the appearance of inner seekers, or people who were well entrenched in ordinary life, who did not have the status of pupils of inner work.

How can I describe G. Gurdjieff's life?

Apart from the groups and the Movements, it was a life like all others. He had absolutely no air of 'Master', 'saintliness', 'wisdom', or 'one who knows'. He did nothing that could give the impression of a 'Master'; on the contrary he willingly confused visitors. One was either sensitive or not to what emanated from him. It was the exchanges on work on oneself that gave the measure of what he really was.

I can see now his strong, solid build, his broad shoulders. He was an imposing figure. A great presence and strength emanated from him, with something intangible, of extreme subtlety; his

movements were supple and catlike; he had an open face, calm and serious, with oriental features, and a tanned complexion. He had a very strong physical presence, but his behaviour was quite unostentatious. He was simple, quiet, ever watchful, attentive, with a calm stillness that reminded me of a lion, or an elephant, symbolising for me G.Gurdjieff's qualities of unerring sureness, self-mastery and *immediate presence, always ready for action.*

His attentive, all encompassing gaze made me trust him at once. I felt recognised, *seen for what I was*, not as an object, but as a whole being.

Fully present, he allowed you to be completely yourself, which did not prevent him from seeing right through you, nailing you to the spot with a simple look, pinpointing the weakness that had just appeared through a joke, a comment or a stormforce anger. But he could also be extremely gentle with people. I never detected in him any trace of being inflexible or unreceptive.

He was for me deeply ascetic, a samurai, a Zen master, an itinerant traveller, a very great artist, and a grandfather.

Often I sensed him as a lion, with a muffled growling sound coming from his abdomen, from the deepest depths within, as if the earth itself was shaking. He could equally well be like the wind, or become a tiger at any second, always ready for whatever action the situation might call for, playing a different character,

adapting himself, flowing like water or air, with the extraordinary skill of both a very experienced actor and an impeccable warrior.

He appeared to be inattentive, but was like a big cat resting yet always ready to leap into action; aware of everything, at the same time as being completely relaxed. A lion or tiger does not sleep. I felt he lived like that, never agitated, but with extraordinary precision and vitality when necessary.

The silent listening from his whole being, seeking to understand, gave me, at last, my true existence, what was essentially mine. Every attitude or gesture in his presence was different from those I had in life. I felt another possibility of BEING.

I will never forget how at home I felt when near to him, and how my thoughts were free. I have never felt that anywhere else. There was no longer any fear or doubt in me; it was a real life for me, a still and full quality of life. It was simply – living.

His teaching was never given through speeches or lectures. We asked questions relating to what we felt, what we had observed of ourselves, to our exercises in becoming conscious. And, following our observations and constataions he sometimes asked a question to make us more precisely aware of something, guiding our search, through a task or a simple observation which brought us face to face with ourselves.

In his words he answered only the question asked; but

with an attitude, an expression, a tone of voice, he conveyed something emotionally which ordinary thought could not hear or understand, as with words the intellect and its associative mechanism of thought would have begun arguing and rationalising.

Sometimes he tackled an attitude, a gesture or a word head on. What he said at that moment was not understood straight away. You received the shock, you couldn't explain it, or understand it, but it was so true you could not argue, you were disarmed, the usual means of defence were rendered useless.

I observed him helping each person individually, with a remark, an exercise, mercilessly hunting down certain aspects of the behaviour of the personality, and at the same time giving out a warmth, stimulating our feelings. All this simultaneously, for everyone.

Truth before him was as if cut with a knife, the least deviation, lie or omission was revealed by a remark or a silence.

The acuity of his attention incited sincerity towards ourselves, put us in front of our weakness, the very inability to be sincere in relation to ourselves. His attitude, his words, opened up new perspectives for us, our understanding was widened by another point of view or an aspect that we had not seen, putting back into question our judgement of ourselves, of others, of a situation, of our way of living, of life itself.

Always watching him, I saw him 'listening' to what was

behind the words, what was not actually said. I saw in his facial expression how he was trying to feel and understand the unformulated question, the lack of understanding or the denial.

I also felt his suffering for others, his sadness before their inability to understand, or wish to understand, but also his joy for a person who was truly searching. One needed to be very watchful to perceive this, as G. gave nothing away; I was always very attentive to G.Gurdjieff's expressions and those of others.

I often heard him use the phrase: *to become the adult for oneself*, and its reference to our line of descendants; he made us feel the link with our close ones, our responsibility in relationship to our parents, our grandparents, our whole lineage – which has affected us all. And since we could transform our psychism, our being and develop our conscience, consequently we could transform something for them in return; through this work we help our parents and the people around us.

He attached great importance to this, and said that we had to become *the parents of our parents* by becoming the adult for ourselves. That every relationship is the result of the involvement between two beings, and we are responsible for this.

Coming to know the quality of G.Gurdjieff and his teaching gave me the feeling of someone shipwrecked out at sea, sighting land. I became calm, able to experience trust, and my thought, my need to understand, received a very substantial food.

My perceptions, intuitions and reflections were confirmed without any intellectual explanation. A more coherent understanding of the complex functioning of the being was appearing, bringing new knowledge, a new dimension widening my vision of the development of being.

One would have to have been in George Gurdjieff's presence to be able to fully understand his great knowledge, his deep understanding, his benevolence, his love of others, his simplicity. His strictness as a teacher enabled us to think, wake up and become fully developed.

His behaviour in any situation was in the present moment without weakness, without error, and above all without judgement.

At this time, I had the impression (and I still have) that my progress was like weaving a carpet... one thread, then another, one colour, then another, until eventually a shape would appear.

The gradual process of this work is like an expansive surface which appears little by little, which falls into place.

What I received from G.Gurdjieff's teaching, were the points that G. touched on, which over time were pieced together, little by little, touch by touch, piece by piece.

The relationship with G.Gurdjieff in the groups, Movements and meals, formed a precise design, guiding us all.

My First Encounter

It was one evening in the Rue des Colonels Renard that Madame Jeanne de Salzmänn presented to George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff a group of people that she had introduced to his teaching. I was one of those people.

We arrived in a hallway where we put our coats on an armchair and two chairs, and we went into a room, the dining room. It soon filled up with people, some sitting, others standing, as there was not enough room for more chairs.

On entering, I saw, at the end of a long table, seated in an armchair with his back towards the door, an imposing figure, his head slightly turned to the side. I couldn't see his face, but it could only be Monsieur Gurdjieff. Impulsively I went and sat on the floor to his left almost up against his chair.

I knew nothing about him, having not even seen a photo. But the little I saw of his back, his physical form, the impression I received, gave me this irresistible urge to be near him, along with a very strong feeling of rediscovering my family, of feeling as if I had come home.

Sitting on the floor close to G.'s chair, the table at head height, I only had to lift my head to see him, but I did not. I made myself quite small, as if huddled up and hidden. I didn't think anyone would pay any attention to me.

But this is where my first strong and direct experience happened.

There were a few preambles, which I didn't pay attention to, as I was immersed in this feeling of discovery of being at home and of what was emanating from G.Gurdjieff, which gave me a deep impression of something familiar, from long ago, which I was rediscovering.

And at one moment, in a silence, G.Gurdjieff turned towards me, and pointing to me said in a positive, questioning and slightly emphatic tone of voice, "This person has a question to ask, something important to say."

I was totally taken by surprise. I didn't expect to be interrogated, as we had come to ask questions! I was almost too embarrassed to speak. I cannot remember my exact words but all I could ask was my constant question, "I am searching to understand the meaning of life."

Monsieur Gurdjieff, without replying to me, turned towards Mme de Salzmann and with disappointment in his voice reproached her for bringing along people who were not ready, meaning that I was not ready.

He continued his invective towards Mme de Salzmann, who remained calm and unperturbed. From time to time G.Gurdjieff slightly turned his head towards me, watching me surreptitiously.

I realised then that I was not ready. Tears came, streaming silently down my cheeks, coming from a great distress, and a deep need of 'I knew not what'. I said nothing, I really had nothing to say.

In all the years I was to spend close to him, this was the only time when Monsieur Gurdjieff showed such disappointment in a situation concerning me, and this was my first contact!

It gave me a very strong shock, especially as I was the only one he addressed directly, even though I was quite silent. . . . I felt as if I had fallen into a deep ravine. . . .

In the silence that followed, G. having looked at me again, turned towards me and asked seriously, "You, angry with me?" I replied straight away with no hesitation, "No Monsieur." It was true – why would I be angry with him since he was right?

Still turned towards me, G. asked the question again in a surprised tone of voice, "You, not angry with me?" I replied the same way, "No, Monsieur." My tears were still flowing like water down my face.

G.Gurdjieff then turned towards Mme de Salzmann, shook his head, emitted a deep, muffled sound in acquiescence. Then, with slow movements, he took his own dessert, and leaning towards me, gave it to me with extraordinary gentleness and tenderness.

My feelings were indefinable. Still in tears, taking and tasting this dessert, a little bowl filled with cream,

yoghurt, fruit and jam, I had the impression of being *nourished for the first time in my life*. It was like a recognition, he of me, and me of him – like a pact made between us.

The meeting continued as if nothing had happened.

I tried to understand the meaning of his behaviour, as he had not attacked me personally. I had sat next to him due to an essential need: *to be at the centre*. In fact I was well and truly at the centre. Had G.Gurdjieff wanted to draw attention to my having sat next to him?

The gift of his dessert was like a consecration, an initiation, I felt it to be a *communion – a feeling and sensation of being nourished for the first time in my life*, made manifest in the taste of the dessert which was spreading through me and filling me.

This first encounter had a huge impact on me: the feeling of being seen for what I was, giving me the impression of existing. I understood G.Gurdjieff as a being who felt the depth of being, and went directly to the essential.

I felt *recognised* by him. I felt myself existing for the first time – I *existed*.

Toasts to the Idiots and Nicknames

After our group meeting there would be a meal with G.Gurdjieff, where we proposed toasts to the names chosen by pupils in the group, and sometimes by Monsieur Gurdjieff himself.

For the toasts, G. asked you to choose a name from a list consisting of several series of names, grouped in threes. There were for example: ordinary, superior, arch; zigzag, square, round etc.

G.Gurdjieff called this series the 'idiots'. This name did not have the negative meaning of the French word, but G. undoubtedly used it to be provocative! It simply meant: 'someone'.

The toast we drank was only a tiny glass of armagnac or vodka. The women could merely pretend, or just drink a third, as could the men.

I often had the role of proposing the toasts to the 'idiots'. I observed that the name chosen expressed what one thought of oneself. Sometimes G.Gurdjieff gave someone a name himself, or he changed the ones we had chosen. I noticed that these names corresponded to a character trait or expressed the quintessential nature of the personality.

One day G. said that it was possible to pass from square to round, or the reverse, from round to square, where there are stops. A change of name given by G.Gurdjieff indicated an inner movement to a

different level. *It was therefore all about work on oneself transforming one's being.*

I remembered that in the old traditions, names were given at each stage that the individual passed through: birth, adolescence, adulthood, and events which provoke a change in one's life.

I chose the name 'recalcitrant'. I felt myself to be like that and I still do! One evening, when my name was pronounced, G turning towards me, said in a surprised tone: "You, be recalcitrant?" . . . Then he added, affirmatively, "You – be compassionate!" I was surprised, I didn't see myself like that at all!

And one evening, on toasting my name, G. said to me, "You, Compassionate? . . . But . . . subjective? Or objective?" . . . In this way G.Gurdjieff put everything back into question! . . . I had to understand that I was 'compassionate', and subjective? or objective? . . . !

The following example put me on the track: one day I told G. that I was helping a friend, giving financial and moral support. He said to me, "*You, have help someone? You receive blows from this person! One must know how to help, learn to help. The human being is made like that!*" Later, I was able to taste the truth of his words: this lady disappeared without explanation or reimbursement!

I took a long time to become conscious of my tendency: Yes, naïve and subjective, instead of being clear-minded, objective, knowing how to say 'no'.

My nature often led me into situations like this, time and again, with all the resulting human inconsequentialities: egoism, cowardice, dishonesty.

Sometimes G. Gurdjieff gave us nicknames.

From the beginning, he called me 'Mélange'. This may have come from my name, Solange, but, other nicknames given to my companions, such as – Little one, Quarter-asleep, Half-asleep, Mouse, Brioche, Skinny, Fifty-fifty, and others – revealed an aspect of the person, a character trait, or their deepest being.

What did my nickname mean?

I observed, for example, that 'Little One' did not have a negative meaning for the person given this nickname....quite the opposite!

G. Gurdjieff was often ironic, but never scornful.

When G. called me this with the 'g' pronounced 'che': Mélanche, I didn't question it. But later, I asked myself, what mixture? There were various hereditary elements, influences from very different social milieux, at every level, from the top to the bottom of the social ladder, in which I had lived as a child and throughout my life.

From childhood I had been in the middle of conflict: between both people and situations. I always tried to understand what separated them, and to find what they had in common. For me, the outer differences were like clothes or colours. I have always been in search of the

real meaning of the human being in life, in his own life.

Still searching, I realised that in the West, the idea of 'mixture or muddle' is negative, whereas in the ancient traditions, 'mélange' signifies the *balance* between two opposites, the link or the *union* between the fine and the coarse, the spiritual and the temporal.

Observing myself, I felt I had an out-going aspect, a need to live everything to the full. And at the same time, on the contrary, an unrelenting inner need to develop an ascetic self-discipline beneath the veil.

I had always lived these two aspects simultaneously, without being conscious of it. This nickname Mélange was an important lesson for me, like the name Compassionate, *stirring up* my whole being.

In 'Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson', G.Gurdjieff said that '*being*' means: *having two natures*.

In G.Gurdjieff's teaching, the aim is *to be in the middle of one's two natures, between them, consciously*, without one encroaching on the other, without one preventing the other from functioning.

The Veil

One evening in a group meeting, I was sitting cross-legged on the carpet, facing G. Gurdjieff, in the front row, about a metre away from him. Questions and answers were unfolding as usual.

At one moment, G. looked at me attentively, suddenly stretched out his hand and pointing towards me said in an affirmative voice, "You – have veil." And he made a large gesture with his arms, his palms facing towards him, from the top of the head, passing broadly in front of the face, and descending down the length of the body.

He added, "As in religious orders, with monastic rules: obedience, poverty, chastity."

I said nothing, shocked by his words. The meeting continued.

I reflected on my life and analysed it, in order to understand what G. had said: to become conscious that I had a veil? Or to have one consciously?

I did not consider myself obedient, but 'recalcitrant'. However my work to earn a living required a certain obedience. As for G.'s teaching – I felt it to be a completely just discipline.

As for poverty, I was well and truly poor! To the point of not even having fifty francs in my pocket!

Finally, I lived alone, divorced, cut off from the rest of my family by the war and the German occupation.

I lived on the top floor of a building in the north of Paris, in a servant's room, with no water and no heating.

I imposed strict disciplines upon myself in order to acquire endurance and will: in the mornings I took a cold shower in the building's 'Turkish toilets'. It was winter, the water was icy.

Afterwards I would practise meditation for an hour.

Then I prayed. My prayer since my childhood was: "Lord help me, have mercy upon me, give me whatever you judge good to give me, I don't know what I need, what is right for me . . . Thou, Thou must know."

I often went back to exercises that I had imposed on myself since childhood:

- to feel the 'Presence of God'
- to move around as long as possible on my knees, with my arms crossed on my chest
- to forbid myself negative thoughts and feelings, judgement and desire
- other exercises for physical, mental and emotional control

I recounted my memories. A long period of reflection showed me the distance I had travelled in my deep instinctive and intuitive search, which was revealing itself as it went along: *my path was continuous and consistent in its direction.*

As a five or six year old little girl, lodging half-board

with the Sisters in Tunis, I wanted to become a nun.

When I was thirteen and a half years old, I would come out of lessons at the Beaux Arts, or the Conservatoire in Marseille, and go to pray in a small Spanish chapel. I loved it for its simplicity, its 'felted' silence, the women in black praying from the depths of their hearts.

There, sculpted in dark wood, was a life-size Christ on the cross. I went there to pray, that He would ask His Father to help me. I called for help, with a very deep need to be helped and supported. Respectfully and gently I placed my lips on His feet.

My prayer was only a call for help in order to surmount the dangers, the suffering and helplessness before the tests that were beyond my strength; it was never to satisfy my own desires. *I always forbade myself that, as I do even now.*

One day, when my mother was accompanying me to this chapel, she saw me kissing the Christ and, as soon as we came out, she angrily told me that I could catch diseases from this. I was shocked by the way she spoke, showing total unawareness of my feelings.

Lifting my head towards her, I retorted firmly, "If God wants me to be ill, I will be; if God doesn't want me to be ill, I won't be!" She said nothing more.

Following on from these memories, I concluded through looking at my nature and the influences in my life that G.Gurdjieff had defined my situation well.

With hindsight, my life and the events I lived through were proof to me – I did have a veil, even if it was not visible. And I still have it, even if it is still not visible!

From the outside, my life could be interpreted differently to how it was in reality – a path that I had followed which led to a search obeying a 'law' of which I only became conscious much later: *a very strict inner asceticism*, whilst remaining in the outer 'world', leading a life like everyone else, my two conjoint aspects – outgoing/ascetic, neither seen nor understood by those around me, *nor by myself*.

I realised this was one of the aspects of G.Gurdjieff's teaching. This particular pathway is not necessary for everyone. Each of us has his own path.

This way demands a choice at every instant so as not to lose the path that leads to it. There are inevitable and necessary crossings or experiences, alliances and misalliances, separations, renouncements and acceptances, which must be made.

In my case these choices were not made with clear consciousness.

But according to the law of this path, which the being follows within itself, such actions are *always* guided in *the direction being followed*.

These crossings, these 'stages', are not understood straight away by the person who finds himself there. For me it took a long time.

I 'submitted' to what life brought me. I responded intuitively, instinctively. I tried to take things on, to face them as if I had to pass through fire and emerge from it intact and stronger.

It was much later that the *meaning* of these crossings became apparent to me.

It is invisible to the unpractised eye. This progress along the path is not understood by those around you, who don't see it, don't sense it, quite the contrary.

I always had the need to obey my feeling: to avoid the pursuit of money, honours, official positions.

Several were given to me, but I did nothing to keep them, quite the opposite. I was looking for something other. It was something in me, that was stronger than myself. Through my experience, I know that within this process the unfolding of being can *take on a different aspect and direction*.

The subject is caught in situations that seem open to criticism; he suffers betrayals and misunderstandings. And *he who is in this process is absolutely unable to unveil the truth*.

One does not understand what is happening. Instinctively, intuitively, one obeys the need for silence, even if it makes one appear guilty in the outside world. I obeyed without knowing how, nor understanding why.

The subject can transform himself through these situations.

They can be taken consciously. I made the connection with what G.Gurdjieff meant when he talked about 'voluntary suffering'.

It takes a long time working on oneself to free oneself from what may remain of egoism, pride, and even the idea of *being on a 'way'!* *For one must always be searching for it.*

I would not have perceived the notion of this process, of these stages to cross, without passing through certain traumatic experiences, painful and distressing situations at the limit of what was bearable.

The choices and the suffering that took place in me, the reflection on and understanding of the shocks given by G.Gurdjieff, ripened the field of my perception, thought and consciousness. I found myself, as I still do, as if in a particular realm of asceticism.

Did G.Gurdjieff want me to become conscious of this?

In any case, his words had this effect and they have never left me. On the contrary, they have always pushed me to search, to really understand what my path was, my real, deepest essential need. To become conscious of it, and to follow it.

Dragging a Dead Donkey

This happened during the first few months of our meetings.

In one group meeting, in the middle of the questions and exchanges between the people present and G.Gurdjieff, I wanted to remember an exercise, and had difficulty expressing myself.

Monsieur Gurdjieff said to me, gently and simply, "You – drag dead donkey behind you."

I was in fact experiencing a difficulty I often felt when it was necessary for me to express myself, for me to speak, especially in public, and sometimes I felt completely blocked.

This remark from G. gave me the energy to speak, as the tone of his voice was not judging me, but pushing me forward.

As always, he explained nothing beyond this brief statement. I had neither the idea nor the wish to ask him questions. His abruptly uttered phrases led me to think, not to talk.

I needed to find for myself what was going on in me.

An exercise that G.Gurdjieff had given me previously in a private conversation helped me in this: "Recall everything that happened yesterday, the day before yesterday, the day before that, going right back to your birth."

I knew I was afraid of not expressing myself correctly.

I became conscious that my difficulty was related to deep traumas experienced during my childhood, where talking freely, like writing was not allowed, was even considered seriously dangerous: as a child, in situations where I did open my mouth and speak the truth, this triggered exaggerated reactions in others.

And also similarly in my eventful life following that, through circumstances that were out of my control.

My suffering in these traumatic situations was so deeply felt, that I was still marked by it. These wounds were still there in me.

No wonder I was “dragging a dead donkey” behind me!

Milarepa

During a class in which we had just learnt a movement, suddenly, Monsieur Gurdjieff, stopping in front of me, said, "You – make hand movements like them," pointing to the pupils on my left. As it happened there was a slight difference between the pupils to my left and the rest of the class! Although Mme. de S. then corrected this, it was the first time that G. had corrected a position! And it was me he asked to "do it like the others"!

I was stupefied: how could he ask me to do something other than what he had shown, as if I had made a mistake?! It hurt my sense of dedication to do well, to do it correctly, because I loved the Movements, and, as always, I had paid very close attention to the positions G. was showing. Facing the class there were long, tall mirrors along the wall in which I could see Monsieur Gurdjieff's positions both from the back and the front. I was never mistaken.

On top of this, because of my position as Movements assistant, I was always alert to their accuracy, with the feeling of having to guard the gestures that G. gave in their integrity; I would have fought to defend them.

One day in class, G. Gurdjieff had pointed out that there was no one behind one pupil in the first row to my left, whereas behind others there were two or three people, and behind me there were six or seven people, demonstrating that I was doing the movements correctly and the pupils could follow me.

Full of all that, I replied very sharply, "No, Monsieur! I will do the positions as you showed them to us!"

Quietly and calmly, G.Gurdjieff told me again to do as the others were doing.

He had *never* behaved like that with me. I did not understand. I felt suffocated, I was reduced to nothing, emptied. I felt lost, worthless, no longer having any strength, not even able to do the movements any more. In despair I was overcome with tears. Tears clouding my view, as the hurt was clouding my heart, I walked unsteadily out of my row and went to sit at the back of the room. . . . The class continued.

After a while, Monsieur Gurdjieff gently, slowly called to me in a honeyed, singsong voice, "Mélanche! . . . Mélanche!" . . . But I was absolutely incapable of moving, completely annihilated. G. repeated his call with sweet gentleness and insistence in his voice. Then, very slowly and heavily, I got up and rejoined the class, at the back of my file, unable to put myself back in my place in the front row. I did it "like the others" as G. had asked, my tears still flowing.

As the class went on, each person in my file, one after another came and stood behind me, pushing me forward. And I found myself back in the front row.

The Movements finished. After the class, as always, there was a meal at Monsieur Gurdjieff's flat. We all went to the Rue des Colonels Renard.

During the meal, G.Gurdjieff briefly told the story of the ascetic Milarepa, of the earthen cauldron in which he cooked his nettle soup, which broke through wear and tear, whilst the inside, made up of a thick layer of nettles which had built up during years of cooking, remained whole.

And G. turned towards me and said gently, "Mélanche, you, this evening, the earthen vessel broke, but the inner vessel remains."

I knew the very beautiful story of Marpa and his disciple Milarepa, whose adventures were rich in teachings about work on oneself. The story of the broken earthen cauldron and the inside which remained intact happened when he was a hermit, living in a mountain cave, after finishing his apprenticeship with his Master, Marpa.

But I connected my experience to another of the many adventures that happened to Milarepa: building a tower, which he had to build alone, without any help, not even the slightest amount from anyone. Milarepa carried out honestly what his teacher Marpa had asked him to do. And the latter, insisting that it was not what he had said, made him destroy and rebuild the tower differently. And again, Marpa became angry with him, saying he was mistaken, yet again making him demolish and rebuild what he had done differently. And all this happened seven times. This tower took various geometric shapes — square, rectangular, round, triangular, and others. I saw my test in this: I was carrying out what G. had shown, and he made me

change it as if he had shown me something else.

However, the story of Milarepa and G.'s comment touched on another idea: "the earthen vessel is broken, the inner vessel remains." Thus, this test was a provocation, touching my being deeply, disarming it, and, like the broken cauldron, there was only the depth of the being left, what remained within.

There was no point in visually going over the movements Gurdjieff had shown us; I was still sure of what I had done. G.Gurdjieff sometimes clarified a gesture, but *never, never had he acted like this with anyone*. He did not correct our positions, we followed what he demonstrated. He left us to sort out for ourselves the movements that he gave us one after the other. And there was often a complete dance per class.

This incident involving injury to my being left me questioning what purpose had G.Gurdjieff intended in carrying out this test – suffering and a passing beyond that?

Why had I not obeyed what G. had asked, in the way that Milarepa had done?

Then I remembered that before he told me to do as the others did, he had moved over to my left in such a way that I only saw him from behind, and not in the mirror in front of us. Without my being able to see it from his position, he could have changed the hand movement. And that could only have been done intentionally without anyone's suspecting it.

It is the *only time* that Gurdjieff put me in this situation, as if he had chosen this moment. As if, at that precise moment, I could only say "no!" What I absolutely cannot bear, is to be accused of being wrong, and this coming from him plunged me into a state of sleep. But in this situation where I appeared to be in the wrong, I did not feel judged by him. That was what was important for me, but it did not stop me from suffering.

I reflected that this test was linked to the stage in Milarepa's life when the earthen vessel, in other words the *outer layer*, the *personality*, no longer had a role to play, whereas the inside made by the cooking of the nettles, the *substance obtained* by work on oneself, by asceticism, had found its place. 'Something' in me had to be moved aside, separated, so that the 'inner' could be brought into the light.

Strangely, this test, and what it entailed, gave me a deep impression of belonging to something which I did not know how to define other than as a direction, following a path, a way, as at my first meeting. Well before that day, I had made the connection between Gurdjieff and Marpa. An impression that was reinforced by this experience: that very special quality of a Master.

My reaction could have been partly due to my susceptibility, but there was clearly a deliberate *provocation* from Gurdjieff, who had wanted to touch on something precise. I saw that I responded to provocations, as I had quite clearly on this occasion, though without being conscious of it – this came later.

And the quality of my tears made me feel that they didn't come from a reaction in personality, but from the depth of my being.

I had noticed Mme de S. observing the scene in a very particular way. I had seen her being very attentive to what was going to happen in G.Gurdjieff's other tests. She knew he was going to provoke me. I felt afterwards that G. knew how I would react, through the looks they exchanged, their expressions. It was afterwards that I also became conscious of that.

Later, my understanding of my experience was confirmed: a fellow pupil was put to the same test in a different set-up. She defended her position, affirming the correctness of her action, whilst also obeying what G.Gurdjieff had asked. And in her absence, I heard G. express to Mme de S. his satisfaction that she had behaved well under attack. So I had understood.

And later still, I heard Mme de S. say with satisfaction that I defended the work like a tigress.

The Wooden Snake

At one of our meals, Monsieur Gurdjieff was telling funny stories, as he often did, and everyone was laughing.

Then he began to tease the women about their fear of mice. And, still laughing himself, he started searching for something on the small sideboard next to him, then tried his pockets, and took out a little snake made of pieces of wood painted green and yellow, stuck to a central thread, making it possible to make it slither about. This was obviously an irresistible opportunity for G. to pretend to threaten those around the table, giving rise to squeals and laughter amongst some of the women.

G. always knew how to create a light-hearted atmosphere like this, and he enjoyed the reactions to his jokes.

That evening, I was sitting at the table, almost opposite him. And in response to his provocative behaviour, and the reactions from others, I suddenly had the urge to reach out towards him, open handed, all smiles, asking for the snake.

G.Gurdjieff stopped dead in his tracks, suddenly serious, looking at me fixedly, without moving, his arm outstretched, with the snake in his hand. A deep silence surrounded us.

There was a very strong feeling in me that I have in a

situation where I go deeper within, as in a battle to be won, decided, calm, sure of myself, continuing to hold out my hand, still smiling, facing Monsieur Gurdjieff — both of us remaining in the same positions.

Around us there was astonishment, murmurings, stifled exclamations.

Continuing to stare at me, as if reading what was in me, G. very slowly, put the snake in my hand and, still moving slowly, with a serious expression, he turned and pointed towards one of the canvases on the walls, depicting Cleopatra with the asp in her hand, held towards her heart to kill herself.

In the total silence which ensued, G. Gurdjieff, in a low, solemn voice, said something like, "She changed the face of the world." (I could not quite hear the first few words.)

The silence became heavier. Everyone was waiting. But G. became silent, with unusual gravity, his eyes lowered, remaining in deep reflection, as if something special had just happened, as if he were no longer there, but far away.... The silence lasted a long time.

G.'s penetrating gaze scrutinised me for a long while, and I looked back into his eyes, sustaining my quiet feeling of sureness. Often a profound exchange happened between us, without words, as if transmitted by an understanding of the being.

But what had he understood? And what had I understood?!

My head could give me no explanation.

I looked for the meaning of my impulsiveness. I still have the same feeling: I responded to his provocation as if it were a challenge, and I was determined to be stronger than what was happening around me. I was affirming that I was not afraid. I have never been afraid of animals, of any animal at all, quite the contrary.

But as for G.Gurdjieff? . . . The meaning of his behaviour? . . . Of his words? I thought he had wanted to distract attention. But the strength of his solemnity suggested that it could have another significance.

I remembered the tale G. told about his father who, with a view to educating him, made him handle snakes and even play with them.

As for the snake, its meaning is represented in different traditions:

- The meaning of the serpent of the tree of knowledge, his true role in relation to Adam and Eve.
- He is likened to Mercury, to the mercurial Dragon.
- The serpent is linked to a transformation, a transmutation.
- It represents knowledge, strength, wisdom.

I still have the memory that at my grandmother's house there was a large statue of the Virgin, her foot placed on the head of a serpent, mastering it.

As for Cleopatra, she was a very erudite lady, having knowledge of a dozen languages, a woman of great strength, wisdom and intelligence. She did everything to save what she valued most highly, her country. She failed and chose to die rather than fall into enemy hands.

So there was G.Gurdjieff's father, the various meanings of the serpent, and Cleopatra wanting to save her country.

The way G. had pointed at Cleopatra led me to an association with saving: serving a cause – with the transmission of this teaching and its continuity.

One day G.Gurdjieff had said that the role of the Fourth Way, this teaching which is neither the way of the monk, nor the yogi, nor the fakir, *is to appear and disappear, after having deposited what was necessary at this moment, in a certain epoch, in a certain place on the Earth.* That this way could blend into society, change form, become an organisation, a religion, or disappear.

Another time G. had said that what had been created would disappear by the fourth generation.

Which generation are we? As a direct disciple of George Gurdjieff, I would be the second; our young people would be the fourth. I could be mistaken.

There is no conclusion to draw, but it is up to us to consider how to enable *the transmission and continuity of this teaching in its original form*, without distorting it, and without the degeneration that I perceive creeping in here and there.

The Dessert

One evening when I was helping Monsieur Gurdjieff with the cooking, the doorbell rang. I went to open the door. It was Mme de Salzmänn who urgently wanted to talk to him. G. received her straight away.

But as it was soon time for the meal, G. asked me to make the dessert. The group was about to arrive; it had to be done quickly.

Faced with this responsibility I felt petrified. I had often helped him to make this dessert, but I had never made it on my own.

G. always did the cooking himself, often for over twenty people, with such dexterity, taste, refinement, and an extraordinary knowledge of dishes from many countries, never making anything in exactly the same way. To create this recipe on the spur of the moment, in his place, seemed to me simply impossible.

I came back to myself. I had to face this now. I set to, gathering the necessary ingredients, remembering all G. Gurdjieff's movements.

The recipe combined various sorts of fruit jellies, jams, yoghurt, some cream, and other ingredients.

I gathered everything up and gradually mixed it all together, concentrating on trying to estimate the amounts to put in. I worked by visualising what I remembered G. doing.

Then, after having tried to work it all out, when I thought it was almost there – I tasted it . . . Yes! . . . it was close to the desired result. I would have added some more sugar, but I was afraid of spoiling it.

Everyone was arriving, so I left it at that, and put it into little bowls, ready to serve.

I went to find G. in the 'spice room'; he looked at me intently, asking me straight away if I had made the dessert.

I replied, "Yes, Monsieur, but I think the sugar side is . . . just right." G.Gurdjieff somewhat surprised, turned to Mme de Salzmann and asked for an explanation in Russian, not understanding why the word 'right' was said with hesitation. Having received the reply, he shrugged his shoulders and growled, "Right or not right?!" . . .

Still anxious, I went back to the group.

The meal unfolded as usual, with questions, stories and laughter.

I was back in the kitchen again, when I heard a roar coming from the dining room, that was quite obviously G. . . . What was that about? Was he calling me? I went to see, worried.

When I went in, everyone was looking at me, watching as if waiting for something. G.Gurdjieff held 'my' dessert in one hand with a small spoon poised above it

in the other, and looking at me with intense attention, asked, "You – have make this dessert?"

In total silence, all the faces turned towards me.

I can still see myself, looking into G.'s eyes, vividly going over everything I had done, and answered him, "Yes." I didn't see where I could have made an error.

Another moment of silence passed, everyone waiting.

Then, turning towards Mme de Salzmann, G.Gurdjieff inclined his head and pronounced, in a soft, rolling voice, "Khoroshó!" (It's good!)

I thought I would faint! . . . After this waiting in fear of not having succeeded with the dessert, this word resounded like a blow on the head.

Then, slowly, with meaningful intent, G. took his little bowl of dessert, turned towards me, and held it out to me

I took it and received it *as I had on my first meeting: it represented a recognition of myself.*

I no longer know what happened next. This test had been so strong, that only the inner experience remains in my memory.

A deep joy within came from this difficult, but well met test, and the face to face contact with G. during which I searched for whatever error I could have made – all

lived out in front of the guests overflowing from the crowded room into the corridor.

All this touched me deeply. In G.Gurdjieff's presence, I felt myself in a state of such trust that the important thing was not so much whether I had made an error, but to know if I had. That was the essence of it.

I felt I knew one thing well: even if I had committed an error, G. would not have made a negative remark.

I understood that Monsieur Gurdjieff had brought about this drama precisely so that I could become conscious of having done something without error; the fear of doing badly was ever present in me – I needed to know that what I did, I could do well.

Even today, reliving this memory, I feel myself recognised again, authenticated. It was as if G. had used this situation, leaving me burning with the question of whether I had done well or not, to make me pass through an inner watershed.

Through the tests that I underwent, I received an apprenticeship and a teaching which I owed it to myself to apply and practise, and which has followed me all my life.

I note that here, as in other recounted incidents, G.Gurdjieff's look was in itself a test where I found myself put through a sieve, and, at the same time, it made me discover what was in me, what I really was, as if, by a miracle, while watering a seed, it came up and grew.

He is the only person I have been able to look at in that way, right into his eyes, seeking to work out what was happening.

With other people, what's there is often neutral, superficial, or comes from emotion, seduction, anger, authority, stubbornness, confusion, flight, emptiness.

In G.Gurdjieff's gaze I discovered that I was looking in a mirror at my own search.

These tests never happened when I was alone with G. They were always in a working group.

There is also something to understand in that.

The Christmas Tree

One year, Monsieur Gurdjieff asked me to decorate the Christmas Tree which he himself always put up, together with one of his pupils, in the group room, in the right hand corner of the window.

G. put the roots at the top, as if in the sky, the branches spreading out downwards, towards the earth. *

The walls of this room were hung with woven fabrics, little mirrors, braid trimmings, embroidery, and canvasses depicting portraits of various significant people and landscapes. To the left of the door on either side of a dresser, laid out in strips of braid, was – the enneagram.

The tree was to be decorated with multi-coloured electric fairy lights and shimmering garlands. And presents for everyone, chosen by G.Gurdjieff himself with each person's name in his own handwriting on the package. I was always very touched by this personal gesture of attention to each one of us.

I set to work joyfully, but also with the fear of not doing the task correctly. I took what I remembered seeing in previous years as a model. G. came to see what I was doing from time to time; a slight but serious "hmm" told me that he was in agreement.

Then I had an idea that I would have been better not putting into practice: to put a star or the Moon at the top of the tree. As the roots of the tree were in the sky, a

decoration like shooting stars, the moon, or just one star would not be out of place. I began to make a star out of cotton.

At that moment Mme de Salzmann and some pupils arrived to see the decorations, and, when she saw my plan, she exclaimed, "Whatever is that?" G. Gurdjieff was watching; first there was silence, then he asked me very calmly, "What, you, do there?"

Mme de S.'s exclamation had frozen me to the spot, my joy sank to earth, with no time to see if Monsieur Gurdjieff was in agreement with my idea. At this moment, all that I had done no longer had any meaning for me. I wanted the ground to swallow me up.

But later I saw that my star was still there, and it wasn't questioned any further. After all, G. could have made me take it down. And his very gentle tone of voice had attenuated the effect of Mme de Salzmann's remark; she, it seemed, could only exclaim loudly when confronted with something unusual.

G. did not remove his trust in me. I needed it because, through this very thing, he gave me confidence in myself, and that was absolutely necessary for me. *All of G. Gurdjieff's behaviour left you free to think and act; he did not intervene in the process of thought, but helped and provoked it.*

* René Guénon – *Fundamental Symbols of Sacred Science*, (Gallimard 1962), Chapter 51: The Tree of the World, p.324 quotes: Katha Upanishad VI.1; *Bhagavad Gita*, XVI.1; *Rig-Veda* I.24.7; *Maitri Upanishad* VI.4; Dante – *Purgatorio*, XXII, 130-135 and XXV, 103ff; *Man and his development according to the Vedanta* (Edition Traditionelle, 1981), Chapter V, p.57 – Purusha unaffected by individual modifications; Ibn Arabi – *The Tree of the World*, French Translation Maurice Gloton (Ed. Les deux Océans, Paris).

'The world is like an everlasting fig tree (ashwattha sanatana) whose roots are lifted into the air, and whose branches plunge into the earth'; and similarly in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, XVI.1: 'It is an imperishable fig tree, roots above, branches below, whose leaves are the hymns of Véda; he who knows this, knows the Véda.' The roots are above because they represent the source, and the branches are below because they represent the unfolding and manifestation; if the figure of the tree is thus turned upside down, then the analogy, here as everywhere else, must be applied in the inverse meaning. In both cases, the tree is shown as the sacred fig tree (ashwattha or pippola); whether in this form or another, the symbolism of the 'Tree of the World' is certainly not limited to India: the oak for the Celts, the lime tree for the Germans, the ash for the Scandinavians – all play exactly the same role.

- C.G.Jung – *The Roots of Consciousness*. The inverted tree: p.481 – Laurentius Ventura, 'The roots of its riches are up in the air, and their tops in the earth . . .'
- George Ripley declares that the tree has its roots in the air (Opp., 1649, p.270) and elsewhere, it takes root in the 'Terra gloriosa', the land of paradise, (that is to say the transfigured world to come).
- Blaise de Vigenère writes that according to a 'rabbi, son of

Joseph Carnitolus', 'The foundation of all lower structures is fixed above, and its head is here below, as in an inverted tree.' Vigenère has quite a good knowledge of the Kabbala and here compares the philosophical tree to the tree of the Sephiroth which represents, in fact, a mystical tree of the world. But for him this tree equally well represents man.

- One also reads in the *Prodomus Rhodo-Stauricus* that the Ancients called man 'the upside down plant' (1620, fol.V r.) p.482-483 – The idea that man is an inverted tree seems to have been current in the Middle Ages. There is here a connecting thread, which reaches from Plato to the Hindu representations: *Timaeus*, 90A: 'given that we are not an earthly plant, but celestial.'

- Vettius Valens, Anthology Book IX: 'the soul rooted in men comes from the ether.'

Fear

One day while having coffee alone with Monsieur Gurdjieff in the little spice room, I told him that I experienced fear in life.

He replied simply with the information that fear could come from either thought, body or feeling. That was all he said. Perhaps he was expecting me to say more about it.

But I just pondered and remained silent. I was not conscious of where my fear came from. I tried to feel what was happening in me.

What was this fear? . . . Did it come from my body? . . . from my feelings? . . . from my thought? To me it all felt so mixed up that I couldn't see anything. During my searching I remained silent.

G.Gurdjieff calmly and quietly went on drinking his coffee, then picked up the small instrument that he often played, a harmonium with bellows, similar to an accordion, such as is often found in the Orient, and began to play very softly. As always sweet, gentle harmonies emerged, evoking a story, a tale, poetry that spoke directly to feeling, inspiring thought.

We remained like this for some time.

I still have this extraordinarily sweet and deep impression of this special music, which I had so often listened to, bathing me in a state of tranquillity and peace, where reflective thought could exist.

This was what always emanated from Monsieur Gurdjieff.

Later, dangerous circumstances showed me that my body and my instinct were not afraid. Then I remembered serious accidents that had unexpectedly occurred during my life, when my head was clear and alert; where my body acted immediately, efficiently with sureness and strength. Therefore, neither my body nor my head were afraid. That left my feeling.

Through observation, I became conscious that it was not a fear coming from my feelings in an actual situation, as then I faced things even with strength; but this happened in a situation of anticipated emotional danger, or involving loss, deception, betrayal, connected to the traumas in my childhood, and throughout my life, trapped in situations from which I emerged mortally wounded.

G.Gurdjieff's presence had such a feeling of openness without judgement, of such peace and stillness, that it brought about suitable conditions for my quest to observe and become conscious of myself. The picture of my life revealed itself and became progressively clearer through these flashes of conscience.

Freedom from my Mother

Just after the war, my mother came to Paris for a short stay, and during this time I found myself in a deeply agitated state of anxiety and panic, as always happened more or less whenever I was in her presence. I was really ill because of this, and even at times suffered from quinsy. I no longer knew what I was doing, I was unusually clumsy and forgetful. I could no longer be quiet in myself, sense myself, have attention or concentrate.

I talked to Monsieur Gurdjieff about it over coffee, when I was able to be alone with him in the spice room, as I did each time I had a personal question to ask him.

After having listened to me, he reflected silently. Then he said to me, "Stop working on yourself, stop the exercises. Your energy is diverted. Later you will talk to me about this again." Then he added, "You are going to take a long time to free yourself innerly from your mother."

I was overtaken by what was happening to me, because I was beginning to become conscious of an emotional state that had gradually settled in me little by little.

G. Gurdjieff gave me the hope of getting myself out of it, as I felt that I could acquire the possibility of having a state of inner peace, and to be myself; this always came to me in his presence.

From the time I came to know this feeling, I could

always depend upon it; it became the foundation of my inner work. Since my childhood, the only moments when I had been able to be with myself were when I was praying, sometimes when I was reading, and when I was playing the piano.

In meeting G.Gurdjieff, I had found what I had always unconsciously searched for, through a kind of inner certainty, through my reading, the people I met and my thoughts and reflections.

Indeed, it took me a very, very long time to free myself little by little, falling less often into these states of feeling danger, panic, despair, lost in an immense void, where I felt powerless, as if hypnotised.

It is true that in my life there had been some very serious situations involving my mother, which had left me mortally wounded. I loved my mother, and these states, like the dramatic situations, were for me inexplicable.

Curiously, several people had said that our relationship was as if I were the mother, and my mother the daughter. It is true that from my adolescence on I had to be careful with her, watch over her. I have several very distressing memories.

Here, again, G.Gurdjieff was for me an extraordinary support by being so present and quiet, without any reaction, with a deep love and understanding of others.

He was the only person not to be deceived by my

Mediterranean temperament, behind which I always instinctively hid.

The Snake who wanted to become a Monk

During one meal, Monsieur Gurdjieff told us the story of a snake who wanted to take religious vows:

In the middle of a forest a man-eating snake saw a monk coming along a path. He went to meet the monk to ask if it was possible for him to take religious vows.

After listening to him, the monk said, "Yes, but if you take religious vows, you will no longer be able to eat men, or attack them!"

The snake promised to obey his instructions.

So, the monk gave the snake some advice, told him how to pray, and said to him, "In one year I will come this way again, and we'll see how you are getting on," and he went on his way.

One year later, the monk came back through the same forest. He saw the snake coming towards him. But the snake was emaciated, and covered in wounds.

The monk asked him what had happened.

The snake replied that having kept to his promise of no longer attacking men, these men and children had started to throw stones at him.

"I see!" said the monk. "Yes! yes! I certainly asked you not to attack people, but I didn't forbid you to hiss!"

I took this tale as if it was meant for me. The nickname 'Compassionate' that G.Gurdjieff had given me, and what it entailed, was asking me a question. It made me understand that even if one doesn't intend to attack, it is necessary to 'hiss' to gain respect, to defend oneself, without harming anyone.

I also took a long time to learn to 'hiss'! And I still don't know how to do this very well yet!

This gave me a better understanding of one of the aspects of this teaching: G. had often repeated that it is necessary to learn not to identify with one's negative emotions and not to express them.

Not to identify with others, not to see them merely through habit: with fear, rebelliousness, or superiority; but to learn to 'consider' them and to *play the role suited to the situation, objectively* and clearly, whilst *being free inside and open to the other person.*

"*Consider externally, but never internally,*" G.Gurdjieff used to say.

Fasting and the Different Foods

As a part of the continuous progression of the teaching that Monsieur Gurdjieff gave to the special group, which included myself, Dr Michel Conge and Henri Tracol, there were some phases of fasting. For some people these fasts took different forms.

Personally, I had to eat only half of each dish, and leave the rest on my plate.

One day G.Gurdjieff said I must not get used to fasting, that I had to break it and eat a rich hearty meal. He invited me to a meal, especially for this, and asked me to eat each plateful completely.

After the meal, G. confirmed that I should go back to my fasting.

At this time, because G. had told me that the Movements were a medicine, I was studying kinestherapy in order to understand what he meant. I was very tired, because from eight o'clock in the morning there was my work as a nurse at the hospital, then, having hardly had time to eat, I had my kinestherapy course, and in the evening, I went to G.Gurdjieff's flat, to the Movements, or to a group meeting.

On top of this, I was confused by my very recent marriage to R.P., divided between this and the demands made by my mother and by Mme de S., because all this took me away from G.Gurdjieff whom I no longer saw every day as before.

So I was not able to tell G.Gurdjieff straight away about my studies, and Mme de S. told me not to! She gave me no reason and though I didn't dare to ask anything, I have never understood why I had to lie by omission to G. I was shocked, at the same time as trusting her. It was the first and only time that I did not tell G.Gurdjieff what I was doing. This troubled me very deeply.

So, one evening, I was at a group meal. Very tired and not having eaten during the day, I ate everything, not even thinking about breaking the rules of my fast.

Of course, G., always seeing everything, said to me very simply, "You, not kept the fast! . . . You, have eaten the whole plateful! . . . Stop your fast!" . . . I was reduced to nothing, in despair.

As soon as I could, I spoke about it to Mme de S., who reassured me at once, saying that through this, G. had seen that my fast had to stop, and had used this incident to end it.

I had seen this sort of behaviour from G. on other occasions so I accepted Mme de S's explanation. But I was strongly affected by this, being unable to accept my mistake.

* * *

From G.Gurdjieff's teaching it was evident that we receive a food from everything around us, from everything that we receive at all levels. All is

impressions – food: our activities, our environment, our personal relationships, our feelings, our thoughts, the air we breathe, and our physical food.

G.Gurdjieff used to say that one 'is' what one receives in the way of impressions, and that it is necessary to work at knowing the quality of what we receive from these different impression-foods, including human relationships, business, leisure interests, reading, as well as edible foods, and to learn to discriminate according to this criterion.

G. stated that concentrated attention took a lot of energy and substances. That we should eat the best quality foods, nutritious and rich in vitamins.

That we must understand what is received as finer 'food' in impressions coming through ideas, perceptions, feelings, images, sensations, actions.

The Movements, as G.Gurdjieff taught them, are an example of conscious choice in receiving impressions.

In the Movements, our thought, our attention, chooses to have sensation in one part or another of the body, in a given order, to be conscious of it, to link thought and body.

G. taught us to control and direct thought and attention, through progressive study.

The complexity of the Movements meant that the sensations and feelings could not be imaginary. To

experience them was difficult enough. For most of the pupils, as their attention was taken by performing and remembering the sequence of positions, the real work of this teaching was not really applied.

In everyday life, sensation is not a conscious thing, it is heat, cold, shock, pain; it is physical and fragmentary; tension prevents having sensation of the body as a whole, deeply, evenly and fully.

In the Movements, an aspect of the work on oneself is to be conscious of our tensions, which, little by little, reveal to us the link existing between a physical tension and an emotion, or a thought, or a habit, on which we are dependent, and over which we have no control, since these connections are created without our knowledge, unconsciously.

It is the control of our tensions and letting go of them that we must practise, for the release of physical and nervous tensions contributes to the release of emotional tensions.

Once, One Day, Brief Encounters

Tears

Once, while, having coffee with G.Gurdjieff in the little spice room, I was talking to him about personal questions that I was asking myself. While telling him about them, my eyes filled with tears.

G. looked at me very attentively, then, very gently, said, "Your tears come from one side of the eye. It is not the same thing if they come from the inner or the outer side of the eye, the meaning is different."

He didn't say anything else. I did not ask a question, hoping for a clarification, but knowing that he rarely gave explanations. The feeling within me was very deep, like a very old sorrow, *an ages old despair*. This feeling was familiar, I had always known it. It has appeared to me several times. It has always been there, deep down in me. It is always there, hidden.

G.Gurdjieff's gentleness helped me to become conscious of it.

Face

At one group meal, G.Gurdjieff, while talking with some other people, looked across at me from time to time. Then quietly, and very gently, he said to me, "Mélange, everything can be seen in your face: one can see you are working inside at this moment – that should not be visible." I was in fact, carrying out an

exercise to keep my observations in the present, rather than in the past.

G.'s remark hit me all the more because very early on, as a child, I had been irritated by certain people's 'concentrated', 'religious', 'thoughtful', 'humble' or other facial expressions which I felt were not real.

Even in this teaching, 'poses' are taken, without real concentration! A difference that is perceptible through observation! Since then, I have paid a lot of attention to that.

At the same time I realised that G.Gurdjieff never showed his inner state of concentration.

I remembered the seven great statues discovered in the Far East, sculpted high up in the mountains, their expressions corresponding to each level of the stages of inner searching: progressing from the novice looking very concentrated, to quieter, deeper stages, through serenity, up to the great Master – a man full of life, with no visible expression of concentration – who reminded me of Monsieur Gurdjieff, who was always fully in life.

Good Audience

One day whilst going about the usual tasks, with G. nearby, our paths crossed once or twice. Then, I saw him stop and, watching me, he commented briefly, "You, good audience!"

I didn't question it. I didn't think he would explain whatever it was.

He gave us a seed which had to germinate by itself.

Looking to see how I was a good audience, I felt that I soaked up the teaching and G.Gurdjieff's presence like a sponge; in my life as well I noticed and absorbed everything I saw, everything I heard, everything I read. But, what had Monsieur Gurdjieff really meant?

Dr. Conge

Coming to a group meeting in the Rue des Colonels Renard, Doctor Michel Conge and I arrived at the same time. Monsieur Gurdjieff opened the door to us, leaving us to go and sit in the meeting room. We were the first to arrive.

It was at the beginning of the small special group, consisting of around 15 people, chosen and formed by G.Gurdjieff, which involved an extremely exacting and intensive programme of work on oneself, lasting for over five years. This group finished once the last exercise had been given, ending the complete series. The other groups did not have all these exercises or such sustained progress.

I can see us both now, sitting cautiously, our hands on our knees, timidly waiting for our companions.

At one point, Monsieur Gurdjieff put his head round the door and looked at us attentively. And in his deep

solemn voice said to us, "You two – same!" In silence he continued to look at us. We waited, attentively. G. added, "You, same feeling!" Another silence, then, "Thought must be there more!"

Looking towards the door at G.Gurdjieff, I could see Michel Conge on my left. And, indeed, I sensed we had the same feeling, and in addition, at that moment were similarly perplexed: we would never have thought that we were alike!

Michel Conge had been one of my closest companions. Many years later I could see for myself that we were really close in our understanding of G.Gurdjieff's work. His pupils have also confirmed this. At the present time, there is no-one else apart from me left alive who was consistently an integral part of this special group.

It wasn't like that!

At one group meal, someone was talking about a minor incident. Having been present at this event, I saw that the description was far from accurate. Not daring to intervene, I waited for this person to state the facts. As nothing of the sort was happening, I kept repeating to myself, "No! no! it wasn't like that! it wasn't like that!" while looking at this person who was close to G.Gurdjieff.

And, suddenly, G. said to me, "Yes! yes! Mélange! I know! I know!" I was astounded, but reassured.

The group did not pay any attention to this comment. I

had not seen G. looking at me during the telling of this story, I was further away, on the other side of the table. So he had felt and recognised what was in me. This calmed me down, as I cannot stand people distorting situations, unwittingly or intentionally.

Atmosphere

One day, I told G.Gurdjieff that I felt a lot of energy after a Movements class, and that it disappeared, I could not keep it. I added that also in life, certain circumstances gave me energy, and that likewise I would lose it.

After a silence, G. replied, gently, quietly, that the human being is surrounded by an atmosphere, as is the earth. That, through thoughts and emotions we let our energy go, or we lose it. He told me that this atmosphere differed in extent for each person; it was like a continuity of one's body, like an outer limit.

He said that I should practise sensing the space around me, to feel my atmosphere as a continuation of my presence, to sense its limit, without coming out of it, without going beyond it. Learn to keep my energy within the boundary of my own atmosphere. Not to let this boundary be affected by anything on the outside, and not to let anything enter into it.

G.Gurdjieff continued, saying that if you let your energy go in imagination, emotions, you identify with these, and your energy is lost; it is necessary to learn not to let this energy be drawn out of you. That I must learn to think and feel, without identifying.

That habitual thoughts are not a real reflection but associations and emotions with which we identify – consequently the energy is absorbed and lost.

That the development of attention, and of consciousness is made with the energy of the being. That we must learn to use it to develop our being to the full and not to waste it.

Attention to Others

One evening, I unexpectedly saw a very great intensity suddenly appear in G.'s eyes. Looking in the same direction, I saw Mme de S. visibly exhausted, wobbling on her chair, about to fall.

Looking back at G., I saw him ready to leap in case she eventually fainted. From his expression, his whole body tautened, I had the impression that he was helping Mme de S. to hold on.

Then Mme de S. recovered herself, and G. resumed his usual behaviour as if nothing had happened – his attention on everyone, lighting a cigarette in his wooden cigarette-holder, which he often did to distract attention, without anyone realising it.

As often happened, the group had not noticed anything. It was all over in a few seconds.

I observed everything that I could; I have always been like that. I am interested in what is going on around me, in understanding what is happening. I have never

felt anyone else observing in the same way as I did. Apart from G.Gurdjieff, of course, who set me an extraordinary example.

The memory of something my mother used to say still comes back to me: that I should not look at people as I did, because it made them uneasy. But I couldn't stop myself, as I have a deep need to 'see', to understand what is in front of me, what is around me – and, some people fear my gaze.

The Velvet Ribbon

At one meal, in the middle of all the questions, toasts and jokes, I saw G.Gurdjieff look at one of my companions and say to him abruptly, as a simple observation, "You, wear as a tie, a bow of velvet ribbon . . ." He didn't add anything else, and carried on exchanges with other people.

Being responsible for the toasts, sitting on G.'s left opposite this companion, I saw his face become perplexed, then upset, and his eyes filled with tears.

I did not try to understand the meaning of G.'s words. I had to propose the toasts, and we were all taken by the intensity of everything that was happening, at a speed that was difficult to follow.

G.Gurdjieff's reflections always led to a moment of consciousness, or the instantaneous appearance of a memory, as if suddenly lit by a spotlight.

Quarter-Asleep

One evening, sitting on the carpet almost opposite G.Gurdjieff, I saw him suddenly stare across at a man seated close to me, with a very unusually severe expression. His nickname, given by G., was 'Quarter-Asleep'. I looked at him. He was staring very attentively at the floor in front of him, at G.'s feet. And I saw him change his posture immediately.

As I was Quarter-Asleep's editorial secretary at his publishing house, he told me later that he had been thinking of wanting to tickle G.Gurdjieff's feet, (since, according to G., thoughts manifest themselves) so as to see what such thinking might bring! . . .

I saw the incident and heard his explanation! I was very interested in G.'s behaviour as well as my companion's reaction. Once again, no-one noticed anything.

At another meal when, as always at that time, I was in charge of proposing the toasts, I saw 'Quarter-Asleep' address Monsieur Gurdjieff with an ill-timed outpouring which I found disrespectful. I intervened to stop him but he continued.

I then immediately added in a very strong, clear voice. "There are ways and ways of talking!" . . . Quarter-Asleep stopped, rather embarrassed. I think he had been drinking prior to the meal.

Seated on G.'s left with the task of proposing the toasts, I could see Mme de S., almost opposite me, give a clear

sign of approval for my intervention. And the meal continued. I had been the only one to interrupt Quarter-Asleep's ramblings, to protect G. who was letting it happen. Those present were uneasy, but did not say anything. Apart from me, no-one ever intervened during the meals.

Later on, Quarter-Asleep informed me that Monsieur Gurdjieff would have said to him that I will be stronger than him . . . Here was yet something else to understand! . . . But . . . what? . . .

I was always asking myself the same questions: who am I? is what I think right? . . . where am I going? . . . what am I doing? . . . is it right? . . . what is right?

Another day, when we were in the street, G. Gurdjieff was talking with Quarter-Asleep who had his motorbike with him. Then G. went up to the motorbike and I realised he was going to ride off on it with Quarter-Asleep.

And indeed, I can still see it now: how he got on the back like a young man jumping onto a horse. And, there they were gone in a flash, both quite happy . . . G. Gurdjieff was like that. It was his way of living, to the full.

* * *

During the time at the Prieuré, a very young small boy had received a little car as a present from G.Gurdjieff.

The child, full of joy, had wanted to drive it straight away. But G. asked him to take his sister, who was a little older, with him, and to take care of her while driving.

It is in all G.'s teaching to give joy, but, not for nothing. A twofold impression: joy, but also the feeling of a duty to accomplish, a responsibility to accept.

We receive, but we must also give, in another way.

G.Gurdjieff would give sweets to the children, and ask them to give half to the other children. It was always about sharing with others.

When I knew him in Paris, Monsieur Gurdjieff always had pockets full of sweets, giving handfuls of them to children, adults and tramps on the street.

Also at the Prieuré G. would open the kitchen garden gate to a cow that would eat the lettuces and other vegetables. Or he would pay the children to catch frogs or insects, and, afterwards, he made them let them go, or he would let them go himself.

There were many stories like that from the Prieuré, and, all the work that was done, which began at six o'clock in the morning and went on until about midnight or one o'clock next morning.

There was the vegetable garden – everyone lived from this.

There were the children, the cooking, the heavy work, the groups and the Movements.

Gare Saint-Lazare

On the day G.Gurdjieff set off for America, accompanied by Mme de Salzmann, several of us went to be with G. at his departure from the Gare Saint-Lazare railway station. For us it was quite an event, as we had been close to him for several years without separation.

While we were on the platform, G.Gurdjieff was as he always was, a simple quiet man, as if he had eternity before him. He got into the train with Mme de S. and they disappeared from view. We waited to see G. at his compartment window.

G.Gurdjieff appeared. But, he was no longer the same man. He was transformed. He emanated a great radiance, without his outer appearance being changed. His presence was filled with an unusual majestic force, which he had never shown us. He looked at us intently, as if passing us a message. What I felt from him made a very deep impression.

Then, G.Gurdjieff beckoned me to come closer. I went towards him, and G. told me of an exercise that I was to give to my companions at our next meeting: "To think of him, Mme de S. and all the group members as a network, all connected to one another, even at a great distance." I relayed the exercise that evening at a meeting in his flat in the Rue des Colonels Renard. This gave us a greater consciousness of our relationship with him and the group.

And ever since I have kept the feeling and sensation of G.Gurdjieff's presence.

During G.Gurdjieff's travels, there were various similar experiences, as described by his pupils.

This tale is an example of something which is found in many traditions.

I was reminded of a story about Moses: a king, who had heard his praises sung so highly, wished to have his portrait. He sent his painters to do this. But, in what they brought back there were signs of violent emotions, which contradicted with what had been reported of Moses' qualities. The king, furious, decided to go and see Moses for himself, threatening to kill the painters if the portraits were false. When he came to see Moses, his face lived up to the praises told of him. The king wanted to behead his painters. Moses stopped him and said, "They did not lie, look at me!" And the king saw Moses' face take on an expression revealing violent instincts. The king did not understand. Moses said to him, "It is the mastery of the instincts that are within me that has led me to another level of being. The two aspects of me are both true. Don't kill your painters; I showed them what I am in my primordial state."

I never felt any violence in G.Gurdjieff, on the contrary, he showed deep feeling and profound attention to everyone, immense benevolence and unequalled patience.

He had a very great strength, yes, *a very great power* – it

is true, but one that he never used. From the little I knew of his life, *this particular power was gained during the time of his searching, and he had renounced it through self-discipline.* In all the years spent close to him every day, with the people in the groups, or anyone else outside of the groups, I only ever felt and saw his compassion.

The Last Exercise

This concerns the special group of about fifteen people, chosen and brought together by G.Gurdjieff very early on.

He gave us inner exercises to be carried out at precise times and frequencies, during the day, and during the night, in a sustained progression consisting of: consciously taken sensations – going deeper and deeper – from the whole body to precise parts – or the reverse; of perception of oneself free from all identification; various different counting exercises; words to be said silently to oneself; becoming conscious of changes of state, and whether there was development or not, throughout these exercises, which had to be carried out simultaneously.

It was a very structured and strictly disciplined school.

This group formed the essential foundation of G.'s teaching during this period of his life. Some people did not stay in the group for reasons beyond their control, or they died during this time. Others, who were often absent, missed out on its continuity. Of those who remained throughout, Michel Conge died in 1984 and Henri Tracol died in 1996.

The other groups were given a few of these exercises, but neither the most important disciplines which constituted this group, nor its continuity of structure.

* * *

One day while I was helping Monsieur Gurdjieff around the house, he told me not to come to the next meeting of this group. I thought perhaps I was not up to it, and asked myself what was wrong.

I spoke about this to Mme de S., who replied that I was very young for this group made up of mature people with more experience of life. Of course I accepted this point of view but I was still very distressed.

A few days later, I was helping G. with the cooking as usual, and then we sat down to eat. During the meal, G. suddenly said to me, "You tomorrow, come to group. You, give exercise. You listen," and G. then told me the exercise to be given.

I had missed only one meeting. I thought that G. was testing me, the exercise being part of this, and that he had already given it to the group. He played so many tricks, often putting us through tests that weren't understood straight away, that it was necessary not to always take things literally. So, I just applied myself to do what he had asked as well as possible.

At the end of the Movements class, before the group meeting at G.'s flat, I spoke to Mme de S. of my anxiety about this task, having spent the night writing as accurately as possible what G. had said to me, trying to recall his exact words, so as to express them as succinctly and concisely as he had, not to distort what he had given me at the meal the day before.

Mme de S. did not know about it, and seemed surprised.

I showed her what I had written, saying that I was afraid of translating Gurdjieff's words incorrectly.

Reading my text, I saw Mme de S. draw herself up, having become very emotional. I said that I needed to go over what I had done. She looked at me very emotionally, and said, "No! Solange not at all! . . . One can hear Monsieur Gurdjieff's voice and his words."

Very emotional myself, I went to our meeting with great trepidation.

When the whole group was present, Monsieur Gurdjieff indicated that I should begin. I took out my piece of paper, and started to read. But he stopped me and said, "You talk to a large crowd, voice must carry very far." . . . So I began to read again in this spirit, and, indeed, I heard my voice carry.

Having finished, I looked at him, Mme de S. seated at his side. They both looked at me very intensely. A long silence followed.

Then the group continued as usual. And, as in other tests, there was no longer any question about what had just happened for me.

The exercise that Gurdjieff made me give was the last of this particular series, which was never repeated again afterwards.

* * *

After all these years of intense work, entering into each part of my life, this night spent meditating and writing what G.Gurdjieff had given me acted as a conscious maturation of it all. From it I received the taste of reaching an understanding, of transmitting what I had received, thought, felt and lived. Under G.'s direction my voice had taken on a force coming from the depths of myself, charged with the meaning of the exercise. This was also what this test had to offer.

Looking back I felt a responsibility with regard to what I had received from G.Gurdjieff. At that time however I saw all of this as a series of personal tests, wherein I strove only to do my best.

The principle of this last exercise was the basis for a way of a conducting oneself in all aspects of one's life, guiding it always.

This final exercise marked the end of the series. Briefly described, the exercise was to divide one's life into four parts:

1. to earn one's living, for oneself and one's family
2. to allow the mechanicalness of one's functions in life
3. to eat, sleep, and perform vital functions in a healthy and correct manner
4. to work towards developing an inner consciousness of self, and little-by little, to enable this consciousness to penetrate the other three parts. That is to say: *to become conscious and present to oneself in all the moments of one's life.*

Monsieur Gurdjieff's Farewell

I was helping G. Gurdjieff to do the cooking and lay the table for a group that was to come in the evening.

At one moment, G. was coming from the end of the corridor, and I was going to the front door. G. stopped as he came level with me and looked at me solemnly. I stopped, alerted by his behaviour.

G. continued to look at me for some time, sadly. I waited attentively for what he was about to say.

And, G. took my hand in his hands, a gesture he had never made before, and said, very slowly, "Mélange, me, go away, go away very, very far." His unusual tone of voice surprised me. As he was due to leave for America, several weeks later, I associated his words with this journey, and the great tiredness that I felt in him. I could only say that I was sad in myself about his departure, and to see him like this. I could only make him feel that I was close to him, with him.

This moment lasted a long time, Monsieur Gurdjieff all the while remaining in the same posture, sighing deeply without speaking. Then, very slowly, he let go of my hand and went back down the corridor. The tasks to be done began again as if nothing had happened, but a feeling of anxiety stayed with me.

As afterwards I saw G. apparently behaving the same as usual at the group meetings and the Movements, I did not understand that his expression, his words and his

gesture at that moment were a final farewell. Yet my feeling and my instinct had perceived the reality, as, afterwards, without realising it, I was looking at G. as if he had already gone. I put the unease that I felt down to what was going on in my life, when I should have been more aware of what was really happening. *

I am still filled with remorse for not having grasped the significance of these moments. G.Gurdjieff was passing me an implicit message: he knew he was going to die.

I didn't look for an explanation. Because of the changes that had occurred since the end of the war, with pupils coming from many countries (having lived far away from him for a long time) the rhythm of his life had become completely different from that which I had come to know – the visits, the groups, the Movements, the meals, the journeys.

Neither Mme de S. nor anyone else has ever known what happened that day. I never told anyone anything; this also applies to the other incidents related in these pages. It was not wilfulness on my part, but a life-long habit, a wariness learnt from experience.

During this time, I dreamt I was in a big park with a French style formal garden. In front of me there was a large building at the end of the park, surrounded by forest in the distance.

I went towards the big house, with the very clear feeling that G.Gurdjieff, myself and my closest circle were all going to die. It was a certainty, nothing

dramatic, but it WAS SO. I was faced with an inescapable reality: I did not cry, I was quite calm, as if I had always known it.

I woke up with this feeling in the middle of my walk towards the house. As my dream was about dying along with other people, I did not think especially of G.Gurdjieff's death, nor could I. I simply could not envisage that. **

Later, G.Gurdjieff became very ill and was taken to the hospital. I never saw him again! I will never forget that!

I asked Mme de S. if I could go and visit him but she said no. Never, will I forget that: not being able to say goodbye, to see him one last time, to express my profound gratitude. Why did I not do more in order to see him? The deep suffering in me took away all my energy. I was in a totally powerless state, empty, with an impression of irreparable loss that I still feel! And I learnt later that G. had had visitors! . . . My suffering is still with me today.

*These conditions, the hospital, my course, and my recent unwished for marriage to R.P., pushed by my mother and by Mme de S., were changing my whole life, as I could no longer be close to G., helping him as before. These things together masked what I was feeling, and my stifled unease, unable to express itself, became an anxiety that threw everything into confusion.

** I ought to have been more aware, as I had previously experienced a dull unease concerning a close friend who was in action in the last days of the war: I was paralysed, and could no longer write to him, even though I was still receiving letters from him. I did not understand what was going on in me. Then, I learnt that he had just died following a battle. I could not have known that he would suddenly become involved in this war. I bitterly reproached myself for not having brought him to G.Gurdjieff straight away. He was a serious man, intelligent and good, which is a rarity. It would have changed the course of our lives, as the allure of getting engaged was already there. I presented his mother, who became a friend, to G.Gurdjieff, and she took part in the groups.

Vigilance

Vigilance begetting keen intense lucidity
a discernment allowing one to distinguish
subtle inner movements.

Let hearing cease to lie in wait for outside sounds
and let the inner hearing develop.

Let sight cease to see the outside
and inner sight will be able to develop.

Let associations of thought, emotion, sensation,
be silenced within,
and let a finer quality of perception of thought,
feeling and sensation appear.

I Myself Am

To sense that I live, sense that I am.
Feel that I live, to feel that I am.
Think that I live, think that I am.
At the same time, at the same moment.

To think and sense what I feel
sense and feel what I think
feel and think what I sense
at every moment.

To search for balance, unity
concord and harmony
between all the parts of my being

To expose to the light
all mechanical thought
all impulsiveness
all repetitive feeling
to the very source of their formation
Through lucid sight
conscious attention
objective vision and reason –
all constant, unceasing, sustained.

To be Myself
and not an automaton
led by multiple strings.

Always to come back to the taste of myself
like an echo resounding in all my being
like a sound in the silence.

I perceive its vibration
I listen to it, gather it up
I make silence to listen to it in myself.

It is my need, my effort, my aim.
Here, now at the present moment
in time and space.

The rhythm of my associations slows down
the sensation of my body becomes whole,
complete, intense and subtle.

I feel the pulsation of my blood in all my body
The rhythm of my breathing becomes light, deep, steady
Stillness and serenity inhabit me.

There is now only the vigilance of my thought
the feeling of myself
the sensation of myself
the consciousness of all myself.

To learn to manifest myself in deeds
words, feelings and thoughts
free of behaviour rooted in habit —
the result of all my subjective reactions
since childhood.

To reach towards the other part of myself.
Realisation of myself by myself.

The other in me, who has always been there
with whom I don't have contact
that I don't listen to
to whom I don't open myself.

What the world searches for
is in itself
and nowhere else.

The way is before you
if you open your eyes
and if you don't close them again.

You have ears, but you don't listen at all.
You have eyes, but you see nothing.
You have senses, but you don't use them.
You have speech, but it forms
neither the Word, nor Silence.

Psychic sleep and the imaginary
take the place of presence in you.

You are quite content with this
whilst within you cries the call
to reality which is 'Awakening
Presence, Consciousness, Vision
— the reality
of this other in you,
which is wholly you.

All is material-substance

The body as 'place'
The body as 'means'
The body as 'reality'

Dead to itself
allowing a new birth.



Mme de Salzmänn, Marthe de Gaigneron and Solange Claustres during filming of a Gurdjieff Movements film.

The Dances – Movements

The art of transmitting a teaching without words

G.Gurdjieff's teaching can be divided into two main categories: firstly exchanges on becoming conscious of oneself, inner exercises and sensation, and secondly in conjunction with this – dances, known as Movements, which are the application of this teaching through inner exercises, that have to be carried out at the same time as the outer postures, rhythms and displacements.

These Movements are composed of several sequences of positions, asymmetric postures, rhythms, counts, and words – all to be carried out simultaneously in a very strict manner.

A free and conscious attention is necessary in order to perform them. This special attention is developed through this discipline, *and a deep resolve*, in addition to control of the body, feeling, and thought.

There are various kinds of Movements: sacred postures, geometric figures, prayers, dances and dervishes: whirling, 'chest-thumping', stamping. Several exercises also have words.

These Movements are performed by a group of people arranged in rows, or in tableaux. Each person carries out very precise, complex asymmetric positions, specific to each part of the body, right down to the finger tips, each individual having their own count or rhythm. There are displacements, various intermèdes,* all overlaid on one another.

G.Gurdjieff created music for these Movements giving each a characteristic rhythm and melody. Thomas de Hartmann arranged them for piano, under G.Gurdjieff's direction.

Performed in their complete form, these exercises lead to a change in the circulation of the blood, the rhythm of breathing, and the oxygenation in the brain. To hold everything at the same time, while moving, gives a lucid state, a conscious presence, and creates a more real relationship with oneself.

Visualisation of the body influences sensation and feeling. One's mental state is automatically expressed through the body posture. So a change in one's mental state leads to a change in body posture. And conversely the body's posture influences feelings and thoughts.

Each posture corresponds to a definite inner state, which I have felt through close study of becoming conscious of these positions. The principle of these 'Movements' is that they can be read as a *text*, of which each gesture and its continuation represent words and phrases, as if deciphering graphic symbols in a book. The meaning of the positions was never explained to us by G.Gurdjieff nor Mme de Salzmann, but the strict demands not to deform them in the slightest, were like an apprenticeship in calligraphy.

The complexity of these movements, the notion of presence in oneself, the motor co-ordination needed for their correct performance, demanded simultaneous representation and memory of all this. Through the

precision demanded by G.Gurdjieff's Movements, *more complete and finer connections are created between body, thought and feeling*. In these special conditions, as the Movements themselves unfold, the inner state: thought, emotion, perception, sensation and their inter-relationships become transformed.

Through the *inner exercises* of the Movements, and G.Gurdjieff's music, these Movements were for me a 'sound', felt by the body, the sensation and feeling of open space; a vibration of the being where an unknown feeling appeared – subtle, calm, profound, uncovering an expanse, an unusual wholeness of oneself.

G.Gurdjieff's disposition while teaching us the Movements, the acuity of his attention, the intensity and weight of what he was transmitting to us, as well as the deep interest I had in performing these Movements, filled me with joy and energy. They were for me a rich, very profound experience, completing and implementing his teaching, and this special music has always touched me deeply – I feel within it an authenticity, a language, whose origin I could not explain.

G.Gurdjieff taught us that each of the three centres in the human being: intellectual, emotional, moving, themselves each contain three parts – intellectual, emotional, moving. Among the exercises that G. gave us there were some that were to *occupy the moving centre of one of the three centres*, in such a way that thought and energy might be free to make this same centre work. I experienced the process of these exercises.

To sum up, in an exercise for the intellectual centre, a count occupies the moving part; the emotional part is occupied by the idea of family, religion, or by a quality of movement. In this way, the intellectual centre has the possibility of real thought.

For the emotional centre, there is an exercise which occupies the moving part, and/or the intellectual side, either by words, or by the movement itself, which can at the same time support emotional expression.

As for the moving centre, the movements themselves support it through the musical rhythm, at the same time as being able to support a part of either one or both of the other centres.

One example is No.2 of the 39 series. In giving us this exercise, G. told us that it was a prayer made by the three centres. The first part is the prayer of thought. The second and third parts are the prayer of feeling (two different kinds of feeling). The fourth part is the prayer of the body. The movements and the music which correspond precisely to each of these parts, in addition to the intermèdes, are an extraordinary demonstration of this.

I become more and more aware of the IMPORTANCE OF HAVING RECEIVED THE COMPLETE TEACHING TRANSMITTED DIRECTLY BY G.GURDJIEFF HIMSELF, as well as being part of the small special group at that time.

Everything was connected, each significant word from Monsieur Gurdjieff during the groups, the meals, personal contacts, and the experience of the Movements contributed to clarifying our understanding. It was an indivisible and inseparable WHOLE.

I was only able to understand this, when I later became conscious of it for myself, because I had a great gift for the Movements, which I had to guard against being proud of, since this was happening to me and I was unaware of it. I performed the Movements with great facility, immediately, without having to make an effort to do it, whilst most of the other people in the class were putting their attention on remembering the sequence of postures, and could hardly give attention to whatever inner exercises were included in the Movements.

So I was able, whilst doing the Movements, to apply the inner-exercises that were given, to practise them, feel them and receive what was within them.

It was an extraordinary experience. It enabled me to understand how G.'s work could and must be integrated in life.

Out of all the Movements given by G. Gurdjieff, that I took part in, the one that made the strongest impression on me was an enneagram, the most difficult one that we had ever done, and that we never did again.

This took place in a hall in Place Maubert, where we

had worked for several months. Our usual venue was the Salle Pleyel.

I have an intense memory of these places, where, in this work, I felt fully myself, existing in this expression in motion, allowing me to stretch my bodily possibilities, as well as attention and thought, to the limit, and where my feelings resounded with deep joy.

This Movement, the enneagram, is a representation of a geometric figure in which are inscribed the universal laws of progression, transformation, and all the processes in the universe.

The numbers 1 – 4 – 2 – 8 – 5 – 7 are set out around a circle where 3 – 6 – 9 form a triangle, the 9 being at the top. Each one of these numbers corresponds to a musical note, an organ of the body, and other symbols, allowing a possibility of tracing the processes that correspond to this system.

In giving us these exercises, G.Gurdjieff said to us, "What you are doing is the movement of the cosmos in the sky, the planets, the stars displacing themselves in space, advancing or regressing, in trajectories not visible at first sight."

We displaced from one number to another on the enneagram which we had to visualise for ourselves on the floor space where we had to move in various directions, turning while displacing and taking the gestures and postures of the Movement.

There are six groups of three people: the first from each group turns while moving from one point to another on the enneagram; the second person also turning in their own circle orbits around the first person; and similarly the third person while turning himself orbits around the second person. The six groups of three people displace on the figures of the enneagram.

* * *

G.Gurdjieff gave some Movements with a specific feeling to hold within oneself.

One of them was to remember one's parents with a feeling of remorse, for what we had not done for them. This Movement touched me deeply. It consisted of very simple movements of the arms, legs and head, foot positions, turns and intermèdes. The torso leaned to one side and then to the other against the beat in a very slow rhythm of three or six beats, with a count for the different sequences, as in all the exercises.

G.Gurdjieff's music sustained the movement – gentle and calm, with a continuous slow rhythm. As it was difficult to count with the head, I counted with sensation which was something quite different. In this Movement I felt a calmness and gentleness of feeling that none of the others gave me.

Relationships with others, parents, family, workfellows, formed the basis of several exercises. There is one Movement with the words, 'father, mother, brother, sister' to be pronounced whilst performing the

Movement, and another where we had to say the first names of our father, mother, brother and sister with each position.

At one Movements session, at a time when we were practising 'multiplications', (displacements according to multiplied figures) Monsieur Gurdjieff gave each of us a personal sensation exercise, none of which were alike.

I noticed that mine was the only one that started on the left hand side and went to the right. There was also another direction of sensation crossing this, down and up, up and down. As always, G.Gurdjieff explained nothing of the meaning of this exercise.

In the Movements and in the groups, there were exercises he gave us to do for the time necessary to become conscious, for a process to be begun. Then, the exercise would be modified, or extended, accordingly.

I observed this throughout what G.Gurdjieff gave us, without his ever explaining it.

There is one Movement that I consider to be an example of an invaluable aid for experiencing inner concentration:

It is one of the 'Tiberans', with particular words to say clearly for each posture. There are different positions of the fingers in relation to each other which are difficult to do and various arm positions taken while sitting on the floor with legs outstretched, together with

contractions of one limb or another, one part of the face or another, according to a precise order. The spinal column has to be kept straight, without tension, without force, to allow the whole thing to develop. Every part of you is called into action. *

All the attention is concentrated, leading to a presence of the whole being. There is no space for an associative thought, no respite or relaxation of any sort. This exercise brings a strength of presence, a full sensation of self, stillness and joy, clear thought that 'sees' without being tainted by judgement.

For another Movement, the feet had to strike the floor in a particular way. The whole leg does the movement and gives the impulse. The knee must not move. And in order to do this, the whole spinal column is mobilised, gathers energy, especially in the back down to the waist. This 'holds' the whole body, and goes right up to the head. Only the muscles that are holding a position should be 'mobilised', the others must be relaxed.

* * *

Monsieur Gurdjieff also gave us inner exercises, to do without movement, sitting silently, telling us to do them sitting as we wished: cross-legged, on a cushion, on a chair or whatever. He did not call this 'meditation' but it was a preparation for this, and was this. We never did this meditation with him. It was Mme de S. who established this practice.

There was a whole succession of exercises to become conscious of oneself, 'to remember oneself', in various everyday situations, while walking, while going through a door, while combing your hair, putting on your shoes etc., etc., to carry out for a chosen period of time, and then to change the exercise.

Meditation is an opening where there is a circulation of energy and the sensation of self. Motionless, one is completely there, present to oneself, one inhabits one's body, one inhabits the whole room.

TO BE, it is BEING, the 'taste' of this is the same in meditation, in Movements, and in life, it is the taste of 'I Am'.

It is I AM, it is not *this* thinking about *that*, it is BEING.

I felt that the exercise of 'being present' during the Movements sometimes gave me a taste which subsequently appeared all by itself, in life, without my looking for it, connecting with and enriching the exercises of 'remembering oneself' in the various habitual acts of everyday life.

After the Liberation, as G.Gurdjieff and Mme de S. left for America, he asked me to take the Movements classes, and to accompany them on the piano. Up until then Mme de Salzmann had always played the piano while *G.Gurdjieff took the class and showed us the positions.*

I improvised as I had no music available and there was no other suitable pianist. Luckily I had gained First Prize for piano at the Conservatoire!

Since the beginning, I had led Movements practices. I organised meetings with my companions, so that all the postures were accurately noted down by each person, and I then collated them for each Movement, because some Movements have different positions for each row or file, or even for each person.

So that Mme de Salzmann could have these detailed notes, I would give them to her secretary to be typed up.

I organised the practices when the Americans and the English came to Paris, to teach them the Movements, and when G.Gurdjieff was busy with the groups of new arrivals and could not do it, I took the whole class.

* * *

One day, while telling G. what I experienced in a Movements class, he said that Movements were a medicine.

In order to understand that, I took courses in kinestherapy, rhythmic gymnastics, Dalcroze, judo and Tai-Chi. And I found confirmation of what I was searching for. Also for experience I practised psychomotricity and relaxation in hospitals, health centres and privately.

In child psychiatry, those who look into the problem of the development of mental, psychic and motor faculties underline the importance of sensory and motor education as well as auditory-motor associations that hold the child's attention.

I rediscovered exercises that made an improvement in certain illnesses: displacements in space to break through static conditions. Asymmetric movements and stops that help psycho-motor control.

I was amazed that this knowledge was only used to treat physical or mental cases, and not for a complete development of *all the possibilities of human beings!*

I could appreciate G.Gurdjieff's teaching all the more – the way in which he directed the groups, the Movements, and the effect of this work on those who practised it in the strict discipline of searching to sense tensions, and their relationship with emotions and thoughts.

My work as a psychomotrician verified some things for me, and confirmed the effectiveness of this discipline.

These truths are officially known in medical circles but they are not *recognised as elements of the continuity of development of the being, just as the notion of four energetic 'centres', or the idea of several levels of consciousness also remain unrecognised.*

The sensation exercises make the relationship with oneself more natural, allowing one to become conscious of tensions and their relationship with thoughts and emotions. In life one can see the head-body separation, more noticeably in those who have medically recognised psychomotor problems.

My work in the hospitals, health centres and privately

gave me opportunities to observe and verify these things.

The picture of oneself, of one's body is modified by work of this quality: the precision of taking postures, the strict discipline in performance and visualisation of reference points – give the notion of oneself in space, a clearer and more organic consciousness of one's individuality in relation to the exercise, the place and the other people.

Given this information the brain receives a stimulation to the nervous system: inner and outer impressions, conscious and unconscious, not received in everyday life, *because we are not naturally conscious of the head-body relationship.*

These exercises work on unifying thought and body, which are the instruments for this teaching.

This change takes us away from the habitual state of the individual – semiconscious, mechanical, identified with our thoughts and feelings – to reach a state of consciousness, a state of conscious separation, a seeing of oneself as a whole – without being identified.

This is a description of what should happen But, even if the execution of the Movement and all its positions seems to be correct, that does not necessarily mean that the same is true for the real inner work.

Those who can reach this have the possibility of developing their inner faculties.

It is interesting to observe how, for those who make a conscious effort, the incorrect execution of one movement or another corresponds to a lack of feeling or openness, physical or emotional tensions, wilfulness, a domineering intellect, or physical difficulties (whether innate or caused by accident) or a psychic head-body separation-division.

The difficulties experienced in the Movements flagrantly delight in exposing the functional defects: the constant intervention of the head, or the emotions, unnecessary muscular tensions, all of which keep automatically returning. One has to practise these exercises for a long time to get anywhere near an act that involves the whole being.

Too often, one learns a Movement without really working innerly. More or less gifted people can appear to do them well but, *for someone who knows the real inner practice of this teaching and its exercises*, it is visible that they are not correct, the essential is missing.

The Movements by themselves bring more unity, control and co-ordination, and a new feeling; but compared to their real aim, this is only the first step.

Even at the heart of this teaching, many people do them and teach them without always really understanding their meaning and their effect.

I have met people responsible for the Movements who distort the positions, the sequences, the rhythm, or who do not understand *how the 'inner work' has to give life to the Movements, to marry itself to them.*

Those who 'appropriate' these Movements must be aware that *to do them without the knowledge and exact practice of all that constitutes this teaching means that their role of bringing about a special development cannot be fulfilled.*

The same goes for certain people in charge of groups who do not always really understand their full significance, be it through not doing them themselves, or having done them only a little, or having too much difficulty in doing them, and who only put emphasis on the group work.

Because of this, the group work, too far-removed from physical-sensory practice, cannot realise the full potential effectiveness of this teaching.

In my classes I try to transmit the application of inner and physical discipline in the Movements, in the way that I received it from George Gurdjieff.

I talk about the *meaning* of these exercises which are there for us to experience inner work, put it into practice.

In a class, each individual must 'work' in the sense of *'being present at every second'*, putting *all his attention on the relationship with his body*, and on the most exact execution of the positions and their sequences.

The material and the instructions are given to the pupils, but they alone can make the effort to be present, to be in contact with themselves, with a concentrated attention, to enable the correct execution of these

Movements. No-one else can make this effort for them.

Sometimes I ask about what they have experienced. They say what they understand and feel – they ask questions about what they don't understand.

The result is sometimes quite spectacular: within twenty minutes the class is different, something happens – the being changes, presence intensifies, attention is mobilised and unity of being develops (even in a person with a psycho-motor handicap). Thought, feeling, connections between thought and body are no longer so dispersed and divided, even if this is awkwardly expressed by the body.

This is something I have often experienced, it is visible, and the individuals concerned are conscious of it, feel it, and express their experiences in their own words. Their difficulty lessens. The subtlety and precision are clearer. A better quality of work is obtained. Consciousness of the functioning of the different parts of the being becomes clearer and enables one to 'work' more deeply.

It is extraordinary to see the real inner work that can develop during a Movements class when the strict discipline, on all planes, at all levels is correctly applied: the discipline of thought, the discipline of each successive position, the discipline of searching for contact with all of oneself consciously, the discipline of carrying out inner exercises, the discipline of the continuous effort of attention to keep watch over it all.

The psychological state is transformed, passing to

another level of consciousness – one of lucidity and separation – at the same time as a presence of 'being' begins to establish itself.

Each position of the body relates directly to the whole being, to feeling, the inner state, as if something else within was governing the body.

People who have an inner searching, even if it is unconscious, have a general unified rhythm, an economy of movement and tone of voice. There are no unnecessary words or movements. Everything is connected.

G. Gurdjieff's Movements teach us to listen to our outer attitudes which, through the impression we receive from them, reveal to us the state we are in at each present moment.

If one is conscious of it, all physical posture-attitudes, even of a single part, such as the head, express one's state of relaxation or tension, anger or joy, indifference or sensibility.

Physical posture is a direction of energy which has a meaning, like a word. Every position-attitude is a word, the expression of a feeling, of an idea, whether conscious or not.

It is not about looking for the meaning in words, but about feeling the physical attitude in order to understand it. In this opening, this searching, we become aware that we can learn about ourselves through these attitudes.

To be present to each of our movements, makes us take our postures in a way that corresponds to the state of our consciousness.

To pass from one position to another is a phrase. One must be *present* to this transition in order to keep the continuity from one position to another, in order not to cut the flow of energy, not to lose the impression of oneself.

If you are present in the right way, you are conscious of each position and the transition from one position to another, *you are 'with'* this transition, but not taken by it, you are not cut off from yourself. It is quite unlike our usual automatic reactions.

If the discipline of Movements is sustained for some time, this develops the perception of sensation, a new feeling of self, and more conscious thought.

The aim of this school is to stimulate and refine the energy of *thought* and *being*, through inner and outer exercises, and the movements themselves.

But it is an immense task, full of dangers, due to *the constant lying to oneself, and our own inability to be sincere. The first task, the first exercise then, is to learn to be sincere and honest in relation to yourself*, otherwise everything is only lies, imagination and fantasy.

The purpose of the Movements – the search to become conscious, to have a conscious relationship with one's body and sensation of one's body – gives to those who

perform them sincerely and accurately a kind of 'education' and 'enrichment' of being, a food for all parts of themselves: the instinctive body, the emotional centre, conscious thought.

But we must be aware that this enrichment nourishes not only the being, but also the *ego* which *intellectually* takes possession of all – we must be conscious of this and not fall into its trap.

If the Movements participant's search is honest in both his feelings and actions, this enrichment happens very subtly and directly through the *impressions received* in each posture, and from the whole succession of positions in the 'Movement'.

These 'impressions' are *teachings*, knowledge – acquired unconsciously, received by the body, the instinct, the intuitive feeling and thought coming from being – quite different from intellect. The three are linked to the All, which IS Being.

These 'received impressions' can become conscious if the pupil strives for this, with all the effort this demands – patience, will, perseverance, clear consciousness and humility – so that nothing comes to turn him away from the true direction of his search.

Then, a real 'thought' from all three centres can begin to develop.

One must not confuse 'intellect', 'thinking' and a real 'thought'.

Intellect has the wherewithal for what is called 'thinking', it produces this 'thinking', which may be intelligent, but which is formed, constructed and enclosed, bound by acquired knowledge, social milieu, profession, religion, politics – giving rise to automatic associations. This is not real 'thought'.

In order to develop a real thought, free from intellectual constructs and associations, which are always in us (because we cannot suppress them), it is imperative that *the active function of thinking*, of visualising and determinedly maintaining all the facets of the inner exercises and the sequences of postures and rhythms – should be practised continually. CONSCIOUS ATTENTION prepares for real thought.

Just as practising scales on a piano develops dexterity and finger control, or as intellectual or physical training may give a desired result, the Movements, when practised consistently over time, enable a different way of feeling and living – on condition that the participant is truly searching with determination to become conscious of himself and to develop his being.

* 'Intermedes': These are interludes of varying lengths which punctuate the movement – bringing about an abrupt change in between the different sections.



During the filming of 'Women's Dances' – for a Movements film

Sayings of George Gurdjieff

G.Gurdjieff said to us:

- "Do not believe what I tell you, but experience it for yourselves."
- "The highest aim and the meaning even of human life is to strive to do your best for the well-being of your neighbour, which is only possible by renouncing your own self-interest."
- "Here there are neither Russians, English, Jews nor Christians, but only those following a common aim: TO BE CAPABLE OF BEING."
- "It is necessary to know how to sacrifice everything, including oneself. A price has to be paid for Knowledge. You yourself are this price."
- "Think that you could die tomorrow" . . . "The ego and the imagination will be seen better" . . . "Objective reason will be able to have a place."
- "Evil is ignorance of all the laws of Good. There is no such thing as sorcery, it is science."
- "Do everything quickly and well."
- "Question yourself always. 'BE QUESTION'."
- "One of the best means of awakening the wish to work on oneself is to always keep in mind that *we can die*

at any moment; but first it is necessary to learn not to forget this."

- "He who has freed himself from the 'tomorrow disease' has a chance of finding what he has come in search of."
- "The energy used in active inner work transforms itself immediately into new energy, but that which is spent in passive work is lost forever."
- "Man is given a limited number of experiences. If he is economical with them, he prolongs his life."
- "Rest does not depend on the quantity but the quality of sleep. Sleep little without regret."
- On the subject of hypnotism, "Those who work on themselves can be free of it."
- "When I AM, neither God nor the Devil exists."
- "An honest being – his presence is a teaching."

* * *

– "There have been several 'messengers from God' bringing men the possibility of freeing themselves from their condition: Buddha, Lama, Christ, Mohammed are some of these."

* * *

- One of my companions told G. the story of how his saddlebag, which was securely attached to his bicycle, had disappeared without his knowing it. G., gently shrugging his shoulders, simply said, "The devil's attention is always on the lookout." This expressed the necessity of constant attention, which we lack.

- "You have dogs within you, you must become their master. If you find the animal that is within you, you can understand it. It is not a matter of scolding the animal, it is part of you. You must get to know its nature: it barks, it attacks; but if you understand it, and love it, it will be pleased to serve you, it will not have to be on the defensive, because it will feel loved, understood and it will love you."

- G. said that a dog could perceive the state of its master. He told the story of a dog that could not bear his master demeaning himself by rolling on the ground blind drunk, and would push him to make him get up.

- "Within you, there is one part that is an animal, and another sensitive and defenceless part, which has totally different needs and aspirations, like two natures within you." It is necessary to recognise them and understand them.

We must learn to control, to become master of the first part and to be in tune with the second, so that it can assert itself, expand, express itself, and connect itself with the first part.

This idea enabled us to perceive the structure of the

being and its possibility for development. These ideas, together with personal effort and inner exercises, bring about a process of unravelling and a different way of thinking.

* * *

These words from G. demonstrate well the general psychic make-up of the human being – *"It is fortunate that men do not know the objective signs of real inner work of development, otherwise they would fantasise and imagine that they had them, and their possibility of developing would be lost forever."*

* * *

G. denounced all the attempts aimed at re-presenting his teaching in one way or another by giving it a defined structure.

* * *

– G. Gurdjieff referred to the story about 'The wolf, the goat and the cabbage': how to cross the river taking all three with you, without any of them eating each other. He told it without giving any explanation, but, while describing the situation, he said, "Within you it is like this, there are the wolf, the goat and the cabbage; and you must live while keeping them all intact." Let each person try to find out how to allow the three to cross, whilst keeping them all alive . . . It's very instructive! . . .

* * *

Ideas from this teaching in brief

It is a school for becoming conscious of oneself, knowing oneself.

This teaching leads us to become conscious of the conditioning and mechanicalness in which we live, and to work to free ourselves from them.

There are various different inner exercises, dance-movements, and work on all parts of oneself, with the aim of opening out to a more complete development of being.

It is learning to know oneself, and to know others.

Learning to be open to oneself and others.

To understand oneself, understand others, and to help them.

* * *

Although this teaching is not hidden, it does not put itself forward.

There is no contract, no rites to observe.

One is free to choose to come or go – there is only the wish to understand more, to strive to improve oneself.

This teaching is outside of all religious dogma, outside of all politics. We never talk about them.

Both atheists and believers are free to express their ideological views. There is never any question about this.

* * *

In man, his heredity, his typology, his environment, his education, the shocks of life make him: a work of art, a zombie, a robot, a human being or something else.

* * *

The way of the real man is that of the warrior, the one who undertakes war on all levels, and, firstly, the war against himself.

* * *

This work on oneself aims at freeing the being from all identification, from every sentimental and intellectual mode of representation.

One does not remove oneself from life, the world, but, on the contrary, one must learn to live there fully, consciously, in its environment, in social, professional and family situations.

* * *

The role of the spoken word – necessary to express thought and also to elaborate and analyse self-observation.

All is energy, all is material, all is vibration.

* * *

Will is that which man believes he has and that which he has to acquire.

* * *

The role of 'buffers', acting as protection.

* * *

To have a discerning mind, believe only what one has experienced oneself.

* * *

The role of impressions, which are more important than edible food:

The being IS what it receives by way of impressions – intellectual, emotional and physical, and from everything around us.

Learn to choose impressions to help develop all parts of the being.

* * *

Chief features.

In the state of vigilance chief feature can be seen as sleep, by seeing our automatic associations, dreams, fantasies.

To succeed in making contact with 'oneself' requires a complete asceticism. It is an undertaking of a path that is out of the ordinary. And because of the effort to be made in this direction, many prefer imagination, satisfying themselves with ideas, words, pretence, and lying to themselves.

* * *

G. said that man was born with a finite quantity of energy, that he must be economical with it and use it for the development of being, that he must learn to master this energy that he has at his disposal.

* * *

It is necessary to become conscious that we are attached to everything: our joys, our sufferings, our memories, our likes and dislikes, from the largest to the smallest things. Attachment goes deep, we are taken by it without realising it and as a result our emotions are led astray, also without our knowing it.

* * *

Level of being is conditional upon one's quality of *presence and thought*. Quality of 'consciousness' depends on these qualities.

* * *

One piece of knowledge that has been almost *lost*, is that the human being must *go against the current* that

carries him along. To go against the current, *is the awakening* spoken about by all the great traditions.

* * *

Monsieur Gurdjieff said that when you have started to work on yourself, at one point, you are between two chairs, and you are no longer calmly sitting comfortably on your original chair! . . . But, you have not yet managed to sit on the other chair! You have left one and not yet found the other.

Adding, "Uncomfortable situation! You, be poisoned. You can no longer turn back. Either you remain between two chairs, or you give all your efforts, you work on your self more and more, to develop your consciousness and reach the other chair."

To be between two chairs, is to be suffering doubt, contradiction in oneself, with its two tendencies: one towards the satisfaction of needs, the other towards perfection.

To suffer doubt consciously, *is the essential test* for one who searches for the real path.

* * *

Each person develops in this work according to his own possibilities, his wish, his tenacity, his honesty, his objective observation of himself, step by step, gradually and progressively.

* * *

G.Gurdjieff's teaching is not a search for religiosity, but it can be a deepening of religion for each one of us. For an atheist as well as for a believer, there is only the effort to be present, conscious of oneself, to enable an inner evolution of all one's faculties, of reflection and of perception. There is no question of 'for' or 'against' religion in this work.

* * *

Life is a teacher for us through the tests it brings us, G. used to say.

Challenging life events that call us to account, and the practice of G.'s teaching, result in elements of a certain material transforming themselves into elements of a different material, all overlapping, constantly interacting, and consequently the being transforms itself. Another quality of will is created, linked to the concentration of attention.

Through the discipline of energies in this work, the being *can become* a finer substance.

* * *

The centres: thought, feeling, body-instinct must be independent of one another. Freedom from their automatic links in relation to one another is there to be gained, if each centre works with its own energy, and not with that of the other centres.

Emotions and impulses are to be controlled, but not blocked.

* * *

Learn to think and not to imagine, fantasize.

* * *

An honest effort towards becoming conscious and a sincere wish to know oneself are needed so as not to be duped by oneself.

The great masters of all the traditions are called alchemists.

* * *

There are several ideas to understand:

– To free oneself from *hypnotism*, as the habitual state of the human being is a kind of hypnotic sleep. Everything we do, we do in psychic sleep, so deep, so hard to discern, that it takes great and prolonged efforts to get out of it. *But in order to do this, it is necessary, above all, to know it and see it.*

– Effort in this work on oneself, is an effort involving conscious and lucid presence of the whole being: thought, feeling, perception, sensation of self, all simultaneously.

– The different levels of being.

– Judgement is formed based upon character, cultural and social influences, but is not based on the *being*, nor on the different levels of being.

– The different levels of consciousness, and their development.

* * *

These ideas are interlinked, and form an *independent functioning*, a way of functioning that is quite independent of the habitual functions of the human being.

This functioning is not generally recognised for what it is. It develops and strengthens through the strict application of this 'work on oneself'.

The transmission of an idea, an inner exercise, intended to bring about a better understanding of the meaning of the '*search for self*', is often incomplete, misinterpreted both by those who receive them and those who are transmitting them.

Each word, each tone of voice, physical or emotional attitude, transmits a meaning to us, dependent upon our associative structure built up since childhood, and either hardened or softened by social environment.

In this, 'work on oneself' is a work of freeing yourself from what you are habitually, *automatically*, in your actions, words, gestures, in order to be yourself, and not an automaton.

For attention to become conscious and develop, it is necessary to practise having a discipline of thought, feeling and body.

Suffering, lived consciously, is like a purification where parasitic, useless and destructive emotions can fall away and disappear by themselves.

For the body, suffering comes from disciplined exercises to master it, train it. If it does not make the effort, it is content to do what is asked of it, and simply to be in action.

There is joy of the body, just as there is joy of feeling, and a joy of thought.

Along with the discipline of body and feeling, there is the discipline of thought, as it too must become more conscious. This can no longer be thought dependent on associations, feelings and impulses.

To reach more objective thought and perception of reality, and the mastery of energy, it is necessary to learn to control what drives us mechanically.

Through this discipline all parts of the being lead towards reaching the same level, forming a whole, allowing a continuity of quality, ever finer and stronger, giving access to other levels.

The aim is to be linked consciously with the whole of oneself.

In 'remembering oneself', as G. taught it, one knows that 'conscious thought' must lead the way, in relation to past experiences of feeling and body.

* * *

Just as the embryo develops from the foetus up to birth, and develops further over several years, an inner development must be pursued, so that the human being may be in possession of all his possibilities. Education, alone does not give us this.

The need for development is innate within the human being, it is in the very nature of man. The need to go beyond oneself is the basis of this principle. The being needs to be 'more'. Social grounding and other factors distort this need. Not knowing what this 'more' is, man throws himself into whatever comes along – performance in a particular field, the need for power, or something else.

The possibility that the human being has to develop himself, to raise himself towards 'something' higher, still exists. What he doesn't know, is that this 'something higher' *is in himself*. Imagination and credulity distort the reality, the being moves away from this 'more' that he aspires to.

As the development of the being happens in stages, and demands energy, there are certain stages of *abstinence or limitation, or more intense needs, necessity for action*, according to the nature of the human being and their stage of development, on the physical, emotional and

intellectual planes, reverberating within all their functions.

There are fasts and other disciplines to be applied at the required time, in a precise and correct manner. Sometimes, it is abstinence on one plane, or on all, and sometimes, it may be the reverse.

Some people perceive these laws and obey them instinctively, intuitively, whilst others only obey their impulses.

A monk, a nun, a 'master' or similar 'virtuous' person, can be mentally lost without knowing it, or simply gone astray, while hiding behind their role-label.

As in the Movements, where one must only visualise the positions to take without 'wanting' to do them, because this 'wanting' creates a tension severing the relationship with the body. The body itself obeys the visualisation.

It is particularly in the Movements that one can experience this 'taste of self', the discovery of 'self' in life, with others.

The inner exercises are often associated with movements. Their strictness is necessary for the structuring of the being and the evolution of the development of levels of consciousness.

* * *

An experience in the Movements classes gives me a constataion with a result that has no equal.

My inner state, as for those who perform the movements and the given exercises, is a changing of the state of being – more present, more conscious, more free.

It is a 'deep feeling' of oneself, that we don't have in life.

It is the result of the effort to be free from the imagination and the *habits anchored in the body, feeling and thought*, whose roots are more deep and resistant than one would ever suspect.

The being can become a different substance, more or less fine, through this process of discipline of energies.

Those who do not have this searching, either don't have enough force, or have no need of it. This proves that what can be understood and developed, *can only be reached by the individual himself*. There is no miracle: like grains of wheat, because they are wheat, they will be able to become wheat.

This is linked to the notions of 'essence' and 'personality'. The 'essence' of being corresponds to the image of the grain of wheat, like the seed containing the essence of a plant, that can give birth ONLY to this plant. The human being will *ONLY be able to be what his essence is*.

Essence is made up of all the senses, instinct and

heredity. It can grow or stop at any age. Life events can help it develop, or hinder its development.

Personality depends on cultural surroundings, education and studies. It can change, enrich itself, lose itself. It can be very different from 'essence' in its tastes and needs.

* * *

Faced with G. Gurdjieff's often 'thundering' behaviour, I asked myself why, with me, he was calm and gentle, never confronting me, apart from in the tests, which were only carried out in a group. I still have this deep impression within me, this feeling of being close to him, as if being part of his life.

I used to do a variety of things – cooking, housework, receiving guests, having meals or coffee, alone with him, as well as listening to him play his small harmonium – a profoundly questioning music, giving rise to an extraordinary feeling of hope and calm sweet joy within me – all this without talking, apart from an incidental word to convey some practical detail.

I was, it is true, quite quiet, I 'lived', I 'listened to' his presence; I felt his silent stillness, as an inner contemplation, which echoed in me as a sensation in myself. I loved this quality of silence, it met a need in me; it was this, that, as an adolescent, I went in search of in a church, one of the few that contained this vibration, as they do not all have it.

Close to him I felt myself alive, and it is this life that I wish to bear witness to.

* * *

Monsieur Gurdjieff had said that each person moves forward in a different way.

Some by little jumps, others step by step, others in leaps and bounds, others going forwards and backwards, and others in other ways . . . I could not see myself in any of these descriptions.

My journey in this teaching, as in my life, is peculiar to me. I saw that *I followed my path*, but without knowing where it led. It was like a force that *was, and still is within me*.

I received everything as it were, at the outset; Monsieur Gurdjieff's attitude, the space he gave me took away all my fears. What I was doing seemed to me so natural, that I didn't realise it.

Because of my needs in relation to myself, I went in headlong, wanting to do my very best.

I did not take what G. said literally, such as the day when he said in front of the group that I must have beautiful suitcases and clothes to represent this teaching in the world.

What G. Gurdjieff said and did could have several aims: to provoke a reaction from you, or others (which was

never lacking!) or to give a 'sign', to you or another person; to cause a situation or someone or other's behaviour to be understood; to address himself to you when his words were intended for someone else.

* * *

As a child the inner journey of my life had already begun with efforts I made to master my body, my feeling and my thought. Amongst others I made efforts not to have negative thoughts-feelings.

What I received from G.Gurdjieff confirmed and completed my first steps. I compelled myself to endure cold, hunger, pain, physical efforts and emotional discipline. This seemed natural to me, so I did it myself, without asking advice from Monsieur Gurdjieff.

Then at a group meeting, following on from my observations on an exercise where I had given my maximum effort, G.Gurdjieff stopped the exercise he had given. It was then that I felt I had to stop the ones that I was doing on my own initiative. Although I continued with some exercises, they were no longer centred on the body, only on thought and feeling.

I attempted to cultivate an attitude of remaining lucid, *upright*, facing what came to me, observing what was happening within me, observing what was happening in other people, in events in life – without judgement, without interpretation. Since my childhood, I had met all the knocks, losses, successes, joys with neither interpretation, nor judgement, so I did not even have to

practise this. I can say that I looked at what happened to me with curiosity, surprised as much by the negative as the positive, searching only to understand what was hiding behind, how and why it was happening in that way.

This attitude meant that I never took refuge in an exercise; I understood the principle of it without knowing it consciously. It happened naturally in me, through a life instinct. What I call my life instinct is not to be blind, not to believe, not to run away from suffering and tests, but to observe life, others, myself, as a ceaselessly unfolding process, without knowing the way.

I constate that I gave myself a general and fundamental test: either I get out of it, or I stay there, either I have the force or I don't, either I understand or I don't, either I move forward or I fall, either I live or I die . . . but, all while being aware!

Since birth my life has been a school causing me to experience tests and traumas, which have been useful, in giving me knowledge, in forming and forging an ability to see with discernment. I could have become anything, in a positive as well as a negative sense. I 'saved' myself from it, even from that which could have seemed positive. Indeed I'm nothing special . . . but, I am not a prisoner of any of these rules and regulations!

* * *

In order to understand the functioning of the human

being and get to know the psychic processes, I studied and practised kinestherapy, psychology, psychomotricity, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. Through these experiences, I could see G. Gurdjieff's great knowledge and the soundness of his behaviour.

* * *

The discoveries of physics, the concepts of space-time, the principle of quantum discontinuity, levels of reality, non-separability, the principles of physical interactions, the concepts of energies and levels of materiality, systematic thought, DNA structures, and all sorts of other knowledge are found, potentially, in the teachings of the great masters of the Tradition. Whatever the level of this knowledge, these masters never considered it to be absolute or final.

Quantum physics, in discovering that man cannot observe anything without modifying what he observes through the observation itself, does nothing other than point a finger at a natural characteristic.

We do not have access to reality, because our conditioning and modes of representation interfere.

Einstein, Max Planck (quantum physicist) observe that a state of nature exists, possessing qualities other than those that physics considers. Qualities that, submitted to other laws, give rise to possibilities that could appear to be miraculous.

Paradox according to Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen: this

paradox demonstrates and defines what in physics is called non-separability, the fact that two particles a-b interact simultaneously-independently of distance and time. This question is asked in the mystic tradition.

The aim for being is to reach towards the unknowable through a method of 'unveiling states of being'.

A state which, can appear luminous to us at one stage becomes dark and obscure at the following level.

More and more refined states of consciousness are possible and, in theory, this course of development makes constant appeal to the consciousness, or the consciousness of consciousness . . . a powerful science – an extremely subtle technique of multiple states of being.

* * *

Transformation of Substances in the Human Being

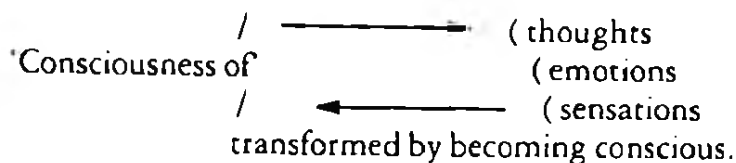
A description of the process of conscious attention:

Conscious attention in this teaching is a *new* and different attitude in relationship to oneself.

It is the practice of an *intentional* attention, directed towards one or several parts of self: thoughts, associations, emotions, sensations, or actions – here, now, an immediate and intentional act of seeing, of perception at each and every moment, of what is felt, sensed, thought.

Attention, intentionally directed on thought, emotions and body, consciously divided by act of will, whilst remaining ONE, like a light projected towards three fields, illuminating them, showing up what exists at that very moment.

This particular quality of attention creates a return perception, sending back the information of the new impression of what has just been experienced, awakening and reinforcing the practice of 'consciousness of...':



There can be no 'consciousness of...' unless the intentional attention remains active, *conscious of itself*.

This return ——— remaining in action, multiplied and augmented by the continuity and repetition of the act of attention, by being always the first action (hence the 'consciousness of...'), finding itself always modified by the fact that a fraction of a second later it is no longer the same as it was that fraction of a second earlier – the act of attention constantly modifies the nature of the 'consciousness of...', as an inter-relating process.

The voluntary dividing of this attention, which is 'consciousness of...' in several directions for various different purposes, together with the simultaneous return of the information, *augments the clarity, the intensity and the force of concentration of this conscious attention, by the very fact of holding to this act of dividing*.

This process engenders the functioning of the consciousness, conscious of itself, awake, perceiving, and keeping an objective vision of constantly changing states, of different ways of being of the Being, of energies in motion, creating a unity of consciousness, which is able to direct the intention.

Schematically, the human being develops by absorbing organic substances, vegetable matter, liquids, oxygen, on the one hand and, on the other hand, much finer substances, contained in these same things.

– The first food is physical food which is transformed into finer substances for physiological needs.

– The second food is the air we breathe which helps the first in its transformation.

– The third food is composed of impressions received by all the senses – physical, emotional, intellectual, psychic.

These three foods are transformed, one activating another through their interaction, fusing and creating new substances, which activate the physiological and psychic development of the individual.

It is known, in medicine, that not all the brain cells are active or used and that many remain undeveloped.

Substances are created by the reception of sensations and impressions. Their quality has an influence on that of the evolution of perception, the structuring of thought and psychic characteristics.

The nature of the individual, his heredity, education and environment mean that thought, feeling and body each have a different development, often incomplete, and the circulation of energies between these parts is not free – it is weakened, or blocked.

G.Gurdjieff's teaching, by means of what he calls 'remembering oneself', 'conscious work' and all the exercises, helps the transformation of these substances.

This 'inner work' is comparable to the transformation of vegetables and minerals in the earth.

All transformation is a question of quantity and quality

of material, energy, density and continuity in time.

* * *

The 'inner work' in this teaching includes exercises concerning thought, feeling and body, at several levels, and the impact received by one reverberates and transmits itself to another.

Prolonged work is necessary in order to develop one part or another. Little by little, one arrives at the level of another, then another. Then they can progress together.

G.Gurdjieff would simultaneously give us exercises both individually and for the whole group.

I was interested in the changes G. made to our exercises, given without any explanation, always upon a pretext that did not appear to be relevant to the meaning of the original exercise. On reflection, I realised that, at a certain point, such exercises no longer had meaning; having fulfilled their task like the yeast in dough, they had to be modified or replaced.

* * *

There are several levels of consciousness. In an ordinary everyday state there is partial consciousness of a sound, a sensation, an image, but not the whole. Our usual partial awareness, that we are familiar with, does not encompass all the impressions received, and, because of this, we remain unconscious of them. They can rise up in times of physical or emotional shock, but they only express themselves according to cultural conditioning.

On the subject of the three centres G.Gurdjieff said that the traditions that have appeared in various different epochs and regions of the world were concerned with either body, feeling or thought. Whereas in the esoteric part of some traditions that still exist, and others that have now disappeared, the follower works on all parts of the being at the same time.

He said that there was firstly an epoch of mastering the body, then one of mastering the feeling. Our epoch is that of the development and mastery of thought. This notion is part of the evolution of humanity in general, as well as for each individual human being. But only if these conditions are brought together.

G.Gurdjieff gave us an exercise: 'the non-expression of negative emotions' which infiltrate our feelings. These 'negative emotions' are part of a subtly disordered functioning in feeling and thought.

Energy is wasted and the remaining energy cannot circulate normally and allow the factory of transformation to function in the way it naturally should for the human being. So, the parts that are insufficiently irrigated waste away, and the relationship between them becomes too weak to participate in the functioning of the whole ensemble.

'Work on oneself' uses energy saved by the 'non-expression of negative emotions'.

We generally understand negative emotions as: envy, jealousy, anger, vengeance, pride etc. Without our

realising it this particular energy infiltrates what we believe to be positive: good feelings, altruism, virtue, love, religiosity, honour; it distorts all the feelings.

It is not about referring to a 'norm' serving as an equal basis for all, but uncovering the subtle interference of an energy deforming what is received, felt, thought.

In exercising this perception, we develop consciousness of what drives us, of what creates an illusion, of what we think we are, of what others are.

It is not a repression of emotions, it is not about rejecting them, but becoming conscious of them, 'seeing' them, holding them in our sight, separating from them so that they do not invade the being, burn up our energy in vain.

This discipline does not take away our negative emotions, but make us conscious of them, and allows us little by little to be independent of them, to feel that these emotions are destructive for ourselves, and that the fact of becoming conscious of them decrystallises them bit by bit.

It is about 'seeing' their purpose lucidly, discerning the mixture of pride, vanity, need for power, or other similar things from the hurt and suffering coming from a real feeling.

Suffering, like anger, can be 'just', or can be due to 'negative emotions'. All the Traditions teach this, which is taken as morality.

This discipline demands a daily training of attention, of becoming conscious, in order to decrystallise the functioning of negative emotions which have become deeply rooted in us since childhood.

The practice of making efforts to be 'conscious of oneself', 'to remember oneself', involves having a conscious relationship with the whole of oneself, including thought, body, 'feeling of oneself', quite contrary to our habitual feelings.

To be conscious of ever present mechanical associations, so as not to be taken away by them, not to be identified with them.

These associations, randomly linked to one another any old how, are mistaken for our thoughts, feelings and impulses, whereas, in fact, they are only automatic associations. A sound, a smell, a word, an image, unleashes the whole ensemble associated to the moment of imprint.

Automatism is built by environment, conditions of life in childhood, adolescence, shocks of all sorts and impressions received in all parts of the being.

To see that one is only a machine bringing out again and again what has been imprinted in us, without being conscious of it. To see that one is not in contact with reality, *because one is never sincere with oneself.*

Negative emotions deeply undermine the being, but through 'work on oneself' they are no longer

sustainable and give way to an actual balanced response.

It is not about imagining becoming a saint or a great sage, but simply to become a human being fully developed in all his faculties, in contact with the whole of himself, conscious of his acts, his feelings, his thoughts.

This asceticism is difficult, as the traps of illusion and imagination are ever present.

It is necessary to question what you believe you are, in order to *really see* what you are, and to develop a finer quality of perception.

Thought alone cannot undertake this act of discipline. It is necessary for the perception-sensation of all the being to be present. Once thought is separated from sensation, it 'imagines'.

We are partially familiar with this relationship through knowledge of psychomotricity: in the activities given to children every gesture, attitude, motor activity, if felt simultaneously while doing them, develops their consciousness of themselves.

Some so called primitive ethnic groups have kept some rituals in their daily life that serve to awaken this consciousness.

* * *

G.Gurdjieff gave us the idea of 'super-effort':

"You are going along, you are tired, but you go on."

"You do some intellectual or physical work, you are tired, you want to stop, but you go on."

As the least complacency towards yourself causes you to lose the result of a lot of efforts, it is about always being on the alert, making a super-effort in all aspects of body, emotion and thought.

A simple effort does not stop with mere acquisition. A super-effort is needed for there to be assimilation and result from this effort.

* * *

G.Gurdjieff also gave us the idea of 'voluntary suffering'.

This has nothing to do with suffering as we know it, which wounds, weakens or exalts, deforming thought and judgement. The nature of 'voluntary suffering' is totally different.

It is conscious acceptance of one's experiences of life, *to see oneself as one is*. It is to live one's automatic associations, negative emotions, reactions as they are happening. It is an asceticism where the ego is laid bare, without lying to oneself.

It is also about learning to voluntarily put yourself in

situations where you cannot but suffer from the judgements and reactions of people around you. A cleansing asceticism opening up the eyes and the heart, causing masks to fall away, but tempering the soul like steel.

* * *

In the depth of the being, there exists a need that is powerless to act, to express itself, as the force of the personality predominates.

This need comes from 'essence', that is to say from the being itself, quite outside of socially acquired knowledge. This essence can remain at a stage of development well below that of the personality, which can develop greatly by means of environment and studies.

Or sometimes, depending on the nature of the being and the accidental events of life, essence can, on the contrary, be more well developed than personality.

G.Gurdjieff's teaching, with exercises at different levels, helps towards a more equal structuring of the two parts. It is the *balance between them that allows the continuation of development of all one's faculties, through work on oneself.*

* * *

The centres, which are the brain, the feeling and the body-instinct, are the seats of diffusion, reception and transmission of energies.

For G.Gurdjieff, according to 'the essence' of an individual, his heredity, his character, accidental factors of life, there is the possibility of a continual development of each of the centres; but, inversely, there can be progressive degeneration of one part or another.

We can see this in certain illnesses, where life withdraws itself little by little. The body slowly dies, or it can similarly affect feeling or thought.

* * *

The centres depend on one another, in inter-relationship with the whole of the organism. One centre uses the energy of another, or infiltrates another centre, according to habits formed by education and environment.

Work on oneself allows their disentanglement and the continuity of development of each centre.

* * *

Through this work, perceptions of subtle differences appear: each centre has three aspects: intellectual, emotional, motor.

* * *

Two other centres exist, *unconnected* with the first three:

The higher emotional centre, being able to become conscious of feeling. The higher intellectual centre, being able to become conscious of thought.

These centres are accessed by waking consciousness in a moment of severe shock, an accident, a psychic crisis, or in a very deep state of meditation.

The nature and *material* of the first three centres is different, and contact with the higher ones, if it is *accidental*, is falsified, wrongly interpreted, because it is based on cultural material.

Certain memories are the expression of brief contacts with the higher emotional centre. Those who have had this experience, without being conscious of it, cannot really describe it.

The ancient traditions had as an aim the *complete* development of the centres by means of a particular asceticism and discipline.

This knowledge has been lost little by little, at least partially. And what is left of it traps us all the more in our automatic habits.

* * *

As a symbol, G.Gurdjieff gave us the idea that it is as if the human being had the 'organ Kundabuffer' grafted on to him; the function of this is to make him see everything upside down, distorted, so that he cannot see the reality of his condition, leaving him with the illusion of a life according to his imagination.

This idea seems to be pivotal to the meaning of human life in all its manifestations. Becoming conscious gives a

means of freeing oneself from the grip of illusion and imagination.

* * *

The Physiological Approach

Outlining the following few points gives the basis for the possibility of a more complete development of the human being: the physiological-biological laws of transformation of substance, their place, their role, their interaction, their manifestations.

- Cells, their interaction and development –
- Each cell possesses a particular memory. It can communicate to another what it must do –
- Thousands of cells die each day, which necessitates continual synaptic rearrangement –
- The sympathetic and parasympathetic systems –
- The neurones, their relationship – inter-relationship of brain and nervous system – inter-relating pieces of information in the process of different states of consciousness – relationship to the unconscious.
- The action of the spinal column, from the brain to the sacrum, the casing around it, the dura mater – the white substance of the brain that surrounds the grey substance –

- The lymphatic ganglions, receivers-emitters-transmitters, over the whole system of organic functions, motor-instinctive.
- One law seems evident: weakening or strengthening, degeneration or regeneration, death or life.
- Energies, under pressure, shocks and endurance, direct the course of our life. The ascending or descending transformation of our life.
- In the bowels of the earth, results are created by a transformation: mineralisation of vegetation, or other matter under the effect of pressure-heat-time.
- Plants transform the radiations of the sun, water, minerals.
- Man is a factory for the transformation of substances, energies. He is the only one to possess a brain having the possibility of consciousness.
- His brain has a great number of materials and functions at its disposition to attain this end. He can thus achieve a much more important transformation than the mere organic necessity of everyday life.
- It is his function, if the human being understands it. But he does not truly know it, he is unconscious of it, and does not make use of it.

An exchange on physiology with Pascal W:

P. – All that is in memory, is in fact the product of stockpiling information which has been received by the five senses; and, these five senses enable us to store everything, absolutely everything that we have memorised, memory which can remain conscious or unconscious; all memorised in the brain, in the brain's cells, neurones, about twenty milliard of them, providing the means for different evaluations.

We know that some of these twenty thousand million neurones are being lost all the time, every day, and, are not regenerated, but, on the contrary, those that remain are extended by dendrites which make connections with other neurones through synapses. We are capable of making these synapses all our life. This process is called synaptogenesis – one loses cells that do not regenerate and those that remain are capable of re-fabricating connections with others, with which they were not connected before. But one is capable of making synapses in a different way: if one makes the effort to concentrate, to work, by an effort of vigilance, memorisation and attention. Such connections do not regrow on their own!

S.C. – You are describing the work of G.Gurdjieff there.

P. – It is Work with a capital W, it is the making of synapses. The more synapses you have, the more connections you have, the more you are able to understand that there are contradictions, that are nonetheless linked. And that, is the work, from the point of view of its physiological repercussion.

S.C. – One can see the consequence and extent that that can have.

P. – So, this work, these synapses, it is all very well, but, the synapse, what is it exactly? It is the conjunction of two synaptic endings, that is to say two neurone dendrites, but which do not touch each other. There is a synaptic space, that is the miracle – I am going to draw a little picture of this. Over here is a neurone, which is in contact with another neurone. Here is the synapse, but there is no physical contact; so how does this impulse pass from one neurone to another? It is here that this is completely magic – it is that when one has a piece of information, whatever it may be, from one of the five senses, it produces this potential, there is potentially something which is capable of going into action, by means of an electric circuit, which one can now detect, thanks to electro-encephalograms which pick up the intensity of electricity which runs through the brain.

P. – By placing an electrode in the occipital region of the cranium where the ocular zone is situated, by moving my eyes, I produce a measurable electric reaction, whereas if I stare fixedly, my eyes quite still, the electro-encephalogram returns to normal rhythms – 'at rest'. So without knowing what a person is doing, or what they are looking at, I can observe by reading an E.E.G. the activity of their eye movements, or their immobility.

At the level of the synapse, there exists the inter-synaptic space. On the one side there are molecules in

waiting, and on the other side, receivers, which are also waiting – the potential for action is released, the electricity then passes a piece of information picked up by one of the five senses, depolarisation of the membrane, intercellular movement (Potassium) and extracellular (Sodium). The electrical current allows the crossing and transmission, via the synapses. But how does it choose its molecule? We do not know; what we do know is that it arouses the molecule by traversing the membrane of the corresponding receptive cell (*ad hoc*), which enables the receiver to recognise the right molecule so as to give the appropriate response in order to realise the action asked for by the transmitter. This is both chemistry and electricity.

When someone says the word 'chair' to me, I know exactly what that means. It is, however, a sound picked up by hearing, which is directed towards the auditory centre, transmitting representational images of a chair – which is an object on which I sit, which has four legs, a back – to this centre, which sends the information and the utilitarian object, which is being spoken about, back to me in a few hundred-thousandths of a second, all thanks to electricity and chemistry.

S.C. – I would like to describe the physiological process of a directed perception of self and directed conscious attention.

P. – We do not yet know exactly what happens, but it has been possible for example to measure a very significant increase in cerebral circulation in an individual concentrated on a task, and this would

increase even more than in someone under the effect of medication that increases cerebral circulation. In other words, there exist processes which come into play to vascularize the neurones, which need to be vascularized in order to be efficient and effective at the moment of concentration, that is to say at the moment that the individual makes his brain work. Knowing that the cell, the neurone, needs two important things to work well: oxygen and glucose; other things such as trace elements and vitamins are also important, but oxygen and glucose are the two most vital foods for the neurone.

S.C. – Breathing, which is the second food

P. – Breathing is oxygen, glucose is energy. On the subject of the six senses that G.I. Gurdjieff talked about, the sixth one could have been proprioception. In so far as it is true that one has five senses: hearing, sight, taste, touch, smell, when I talk about the memory of the five senses, I even include two others: proprioception and memory of gesture; this is also the memory of movement perceived innerly; it is the Work you are talking about. The more one is conscious of inner movement, the more one is in contact with all.

S.C. – That is exactly the work in the Movements, as they should be done.

P. – There is the tendency to go towards a seventh sense, or rather a seventh memory, which is a memory that completely passes us by, the memory of cells, of viruses. Why are antibodies formed? They know

perfectly how to recognise the pathogen and to defend themselves against it; there is a memory there, thus a knowledge of something. We do not yet know this mechanism very well.

S.C. – There is the study of the memory of water, a drop of water would have a whole memory recorded, and I think that in the human being each cell has its own memory.

P. – The *psilophyton* is a small blue algae. On the earth, there was already earth, rock and water; with H_2O something very important was made, two molecules joined together. Why? How? In short, they met, joined together, and they created water. And then, there was an important period when the sea level fell, causing rocks or solidified magma to emerge. In the humid environment of these waters cells and little cellular units of being began to proliferate. We do not know how and why they came about. Currently there are some experiments going on, to recreate the cell.

These cells floated around and nourished themselves with water, the surrounding water, bathing in the liquid, incorporating everything that was around, in order to be able to survive. When the sea level went down, and rocks emerged, the little cell that was there found itself on dry land. Without water around, it could not live long, might even die straight away.

It was then that the most important invention since the earth began was made. This plant had extraordinary creativity: it created little tendrils; in short, it invented

roots. What is a root? It is this: I have soil, I make prolongations of myself to capture what I no longer have around me. To go and capture what? What I am lacking: the water I had around me, and as I have vital need of this, and I no longer have it around me, I put it *inside*! This is called 'introjection'. Everyday we eat; what are we doing? We put water, foods inside, and that is all; we have not evolved further, we have not invented anything else. The rest are all avatars or artefacts.

This is a great fundamental invention: what was outside is put inside, and this then allows roots to be cut, to invent two feet, to go for a walk, to go to the corner shop to get a litre of water, and put it *inside*, within. We will never surpass this – it is the only invention. All the rest are gadgets. Intellectual food is the same thing. The need to feed oneself intellectually is vital, like water. One can develop a phenomenal intelligence yet it will always be necessary to feed it, it will always be necessary to *put inside* – water, ideas, images – the process has been the same for milliards of years.