

Balanced man: a look at Gurdjieff fifty years later

Fritz Peters

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by

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Chapter 1

Why would anyone write (let alone ask a reader to read) another book about Gurdjieff and his work?

I am in a reasonably good position to ask — and answer — that question, because:

1. In my first two books (*Boyhood with Gurdjieff* and *Gurdjieff Remembered*) I was unable (and to some extent unwilling) to write every thing that I could have written;
2. Some people who had been associated with Gurdjieff (and with me) — notably Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, as well as John G. Bennett, M. and Mme. Ouspensky — were still alive, and Victor Gollancz, who more or less commissioned my first two books, and I, agreed that material about such people was better left unsaid; not so much for fear of libel suits — but, rather, because certain facts about one's association with living people might be embarrassing to them or could give rise to gossip, arguments, misinterpretation and even maliciousness — which could be painful or harmful;
3. I recently re-read *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* by Margaret Anderson,¹ and while Margaret said to me, the last time I saw her — in 1965: “Fritz, why don't you tell the real story about your life

¹ Margaret Anderson (1887–1974) was the founder of *The Little Review* and the aunt of the author. She was largely responsible for his presence at the *Prieuré* from 1924 to 1929. In her last book, *The Strange Necessity*, she writes: “Mind to mind, I have a great bond with my nephew, Fritz Peters, a brilliant example of the mental-emotional type.”

with Gurdjieff... you could do it in plain English,” I did not feel — at that time — that I could; and I was not prepared to say anything, in depth, about his *work* for a very simple reason: the results of my relationship with Gurdjieff had not really “come together” in me yet.

So much for reasons. Having known Gurdjieff, intermittently, from 1923 to 1947, as a child and as a young man, I now feel that it is perhaps my obligation to write something more about him. To quote Margaret Anderson again, she writes:

... when I remember what pains he took to make plain some of his most difficult teaching, I think someone should try at least to make plain his function — what he called his ‘obligation’.

My previous books were written, as I have said, largely at the behest of Victor Gollancz, who felt that I had something special to write because, as he put it: “You are the only person who was there (at the *Prieuré*) as a child who is now literate.” At that time (about 1960) I was still laboring under the impression that I was *special* — the *real* son of a Messiah. In an emotional sense, I was Gurdjieff’s son; I loved him more than anyone I had ever known. But times change. Victor Gollancz’s reasoning is no longer compelling, and I no longer feel like anyone’s “son”.

Chapter 2

In *Gurdjieff Remembered*, I wrote the following:

'Must make announcement,' (Gurdjieff) said, dramatically, and in English. (Several nationalities were represented, but all the people there, I knew, spoke or understood English.) 'My last book is now finished, except for work with editor.' He paused, looked around the room, as if to examine each person, separately and intently, and then continued: 'This mean my work is through — finished. This also have very important meaning for me. Mean at last I can die ...' there was another pause, but his inflexion indicated that the sentence was not finished, but not just because book is finished. In life is only necessary for man to find one person to whom can give accumulation of learning in life. When find such receptacle, then is possible die.' He smiled, benevolently, and went on: 'So now two good things happen for me. I finish work and I also find one person to whom can give results my life's work.' He raised his arm again, started to move it, this time with a finger extended and pointing, around the room, and then stopped when his finger was pointing directly at me.

I have had a good many repercussions from that paragraph, mostly from “seekers”, members of Gurdjieff groups who, for reasons best known to them, are dissatisfied.

Such people frequently write to authors, or even telephone them because — particularly (in my opinion) in the United States — people like either to meet, or at least talk with or correspond with so-called “famous” people: movie stars, painters, writers, you name it...

I don't misunderstand this phenomenon. Being an American, I have the same kind of interest in “celebrities”. My argument, however, is that such people usually go beyond the act of simple “meeting”,

“writing to” or “talking to” the celebrity in question. In my case, what they generally want to know is whether I am really Gurdjieff’s “heir” and/or “son”.

That is a difficult question for me to answer because I don’t know in my heart that I am anything other than myself. I also know, obviously, that Gurdjieff called me his “real son”. This is not a great dilemma for me in one sense; it is, however, an enigma of my life with which I have to live.

Occasionally, with some misgivings, I agree to a meeting with some seeker, and the following conversation (exchange may be a better word) is typical:

“It’s a privilege to meet you, Mr. Peters.” “Thank you very much.”

“May I ask you a few questions?”

“I assume that’s what you’re here for, so, by all means, fire away.”

“Well, I feel confused. I need to work out some problems, and I think I need help. I am unhappy and dissatisfied with what I have found in Gurdjieff groups so far, and after trying to read his books, but after reading your books, I began to feel that perhaps you could help me. The groups are so... serious, so grim.”

“Well, the Gurdjieff work is *serious*, so that does not surprise me; but I do know what you mean. They seem to lack a sense of humor. But, as far as helping you is concerned, I don’t know exactly what you mean. Help you *what?* I’m not a teacher or a psychiatrist.”

“I know that, but you really *knew* Gurdjieff. Your books have the ring of truth about them.”

“Thank you again, but I still don’t honestly know what you want from me. The Gurdjieff groups are, as far as I know, sincere, honest and are certainly trying — even if you don’t happen to feel you are getting anything from them — to transmit what Gurdjieff taught. In what way could I do it better?”

“Well, I want to know what Gurdjieff’s teaching was all about. *Really*. The groups don’t tell me that.”

I shrug my shoulders. “I knew the man and loved him. But I don’t think that I know very much about his work in any intellectual sense. We didn’t have groups at the *Prieuré* in the sense that they have them now. On the other hand, it was Gurdjieff himself who started the groups here in America and elsewhere, so they must be in some way part of his purpose.”

“I suppose they are. But something seems to be missing. What was he like, *really*?”

“I described him in my books to the best of my ability.”

“I know you did — but what an experience for you! Don’t you feel that you were chosen, or awfully lucky?”

“Lucky... no... fortunate, perhaps. But I had nothing to do with that. I happened to be there, and he *chose* me if you wish. But I still don’t know what I can *do* for you.”

“Well, I want to know what you know.”

At this point I feel frustrated and in a way trapped.

“It has taken me over fifty years to find out what I ‘know’. What do you want to do? Spend fifty years with me?”

“I’m desperate. I need to know it *now*.”

“Why now? How can you learn anything *now*? It’s a life work... a way of life. There isn’t any thing to know. The work is not something you can suddenly know.”

“But I can’t wait...”

“Then I can only suggest that you do something else.”

“You mean you won’t help me?”

I shake my head. “I only mean that I *can’t* help you. I can’t submit to your desperation. In any event, no one can do anything for you... you have to do it yourself. I can’t learn for you and I am not, I repeat, a teacher.”

“Won’t you at least be my friend?”

“I can be anyone’s friend. But, on the assumption that friendship is

mutually rewarding, what are you offering me? Why would I want to be your friend?"

"You mean that you want a reward?"

I shake my head again. "No. I mean that friendship, automatically, is a two-way street. It has to be mutually rewarding — that's a law of nature."

"All right. I'll buy that. Will you be my friend?"

"I don't know... not yet. And what you want, unless I am mistaken, is to pick my brains in the process of this 'friendship'... right?"

Coldly then: "I could *pay* you."

"How much and for what? How do you know that you will get anything?"

His turn to smile at me. — "I thought so. You're just a materialist like everyone else."

My turn. "I doubt that. I didn't come to you, did I?"

So much for my desire to *teach*...

In Kenneth Walker's *Venture With Ideas* there is an excellent description of the way Gurdjieff himself began to learn:

The young Gurdjieff showed a great interest in science, and it was no hardship for him to have to study the subjects preliminary to his course in medicine. It would indeed have been difficult to name any subject in which the boy was not keenly interested, and the danger which threatened him was that his energies would become dissipated over too wide a field. Unwittingly his father increased this risk. 'The great thing in education,' he declared, 'is not to accumulate a vast store of information, but to learn how to learn.' In order to teach his own son how to learn he adopted a certain procedure. The boy was set a certain piece of work to do with his hands and as soon as he had discovered the right technique for doing it, this work was immediately stopped and another entirely different type of work begun. By this means the youthful Gurdjieff rapidly learned a number of different trades."

This method of teaching, although modified by the needs of maintaining and running a large establishment, was a definite part of life at the *Prieuré*. We learned how to do practically every thing that can be done physically: in the house, in the gardens, with the animals, in the kitchen, and the accumulation of facts or information was at a real minimum.

Chapter 3

In John G. Bennett's *Gurdjieff: Making A New World* the author writes:

At that time (*circa* 1923–1924) Jane Heap, who had come to the *Prieuré* with her two adopted sons, decided to leave them at the *Prieuré* where they remained all through this period. One of them has written about his experiences, evidently unaware of the intensity of the events that were taking place around him.

I take exception to this paragraph not because Mr. Bennett felt free to assume that I was *unaware* of anything, but because Mr. Bennett, after reading the page proofs of *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* in 1964, wrote a glowing letter stating, among other things:

“It is a great coup, and it will be one of the most important books for helping people to understand what kind of man Gurdjieff was.”

That he, prior to his death — or at whatever point he wrote *Making A New World* — had become convinced of the *intensity of the events* taking place in the twenties, is fully expressed in the quoted sentences. My only defense, if one is needed, is that while most of the persons who are interested in Gurdjieff now — which includes all the group members I have met (and they are legion) — have become “prophets of doom”, I have yet to be convinced that this is essential to the teaching of the Gurdjieff work.

An extremely good example of Gurdjieff's *method* is contained in another section of *Venture With Ideas*:

I realized now that whatever Gurdjieff did he did for some purpose and that these lunches and dinners had not been arranged merely for the enjoyment of eating and drinking but to bring us closer together and into more intimate

relationship with him. Too much theorizing was tending to make the minds of his London followers too rigid and our behavior too calculated and grim. We were in danger of acquiring the chapel-going faces of Plymouth Brethren and we needed loosening up.

If anyone was fitted to bring about this loosening process it was surely Gurdjieff, a man who had always lived life to its fullest, and, as some people thought, to excess. Under the excellent treatment meted out to us in the Rue des Colonels Renards, our faces became relaxed and any puritanical trends rapidly disappeared.

'It is necessary,' Gurdjieff reminded us, 'to know when to be serious and when to laugh.' He said that 'sleeping' man was without any proper standards; he was solemn when it was wiser to be gay; and he was frivolous when it was necessary to be serious. In other words, he had no idea of the true significance and value of the different things he encountered in life.

If there was one thing that Gurdjieff — in my experience — was not, he was certainly not a “doom-seller”. He was serious, but he did not have a long face about it. Quite the opposite: when he once told me that time was short, and that one’s “salvation” had to be accomplished — if at all — as rapidly as possible, we both laughed when I said that I had decided that a grim face and a heavy heart were not vital equipment for development into a “conscious” or “harmonious” being with, potentially, a soul to be acquired through “conscious effort”.

Why does soul-searching have to be lugubrious? People who are students these days are all desperate about the process, and sighs and groans and guilty consciences are apparently *de rigueur*. The long face and the whole grim attitude are almost like a uniform. As one man asked me recently (July 1975): “What are we supposed to do now that all the Gods are dead?”

Frankly, I can only answer such questions literally: “Which Gods are you talking about and when did they die?”

He did not care for this answer (or question) and managed to

convey with some hostility, that he was “jealous” of me because “why was it” that I, of all people, had had the opportunity to meet Gurdjieff, rather than he?

Such exchanges are, at best, exhausting as well as boring. I was living when Gurdjieff was in France. My interlocutor was not. I could only reply that an accident of birth (his OR mine) was hardly something either of us could control and I added, somewhat maliciously, that if he enjoyed his feelings of self-pity, it was all right with me for him to indulge himself in them. It was reported to me later that he felt I had been flippant with him. I agree. I am often flippant, particularly with so-called adults who want to mope their way to salvation or wherever they think Gurdjieff’s work may lead them. Anyone who has read *All and Everything* must have stumbled across the following:

All of us, people, are mortal and every man may die at any moment.

Now the question arises, can a man really picture to himself and so to say ‘experience’ in his consciousness, the process of his own death?

No!...

Having lived with Gurdjieff, I do not attempt to refute what he says about “all of us”, except for myself. I learned, once and for all and forever, that as part of the *anthill* of humanity, I could hardly take the acquisition of my own soul very seriously. A drop of water — see *All and Everything* again — is not that important. And the whole process, at least from one point of view, is a joke. Nature’s or God’s — but in any event — a joke perpetrated by something or someone much bigger than I am.

I am told by practically everyone today that the world is rapidly going to hell. I fail to see that *suffering* about that possibility and looking grim about it, is going to alter that destination. And it seems to me that anyone who takes a trip on an airplane is — potentially

at least — accepting the possibility of death. Why single out airplanes? Only because air crashes are more spectacular than being killed in automobile crashes, falling from ladders in the kitchen, etc. We live with the possibility of death every day. Are we supposed to be permanently depressed about it?

Chapter 4

To take up the question of “heirs” to Gurdjieff’s work, I think it is undeniable that everyone who spent any time with him is some sort of “heir” or, more abstractly, a repository of the effects of Gurdjieff. He acted on people and they received whatever he was able to deposit with them, limited, I think, only by their ability to receive. Their receptivity is a key factor — one absorbs to the extent one is able to do so. So, in that sense, what individuals “got from him” varies.

It is my conclusion that the children who were at the *Prieuré* in the 1920’s were more receptive than anyone else. This is not because I have discovered in the course of becoming an adult that those children *know* more or are, in any sense, “better” human beings than other persons who — at some point — had actual contact with Gurdjieff. I exclude people who had only brief, and primarily intellectual, contact with him. Such individuals (or groups) did not — there is simply no question about it — have the opportunity to experience the man *as a whole*. The people who were long-time residents of the *Prieuré* had a relationship with Gurdjieff that was never duplicated in any other physical situation.

The children who stayed at the *Prieuré* for a fairly long time during the twenties, were basically just there. It was not their intention, search or need that brought them there. The ones I remember were Gurdjieff’s nieces and nephew, the de Salzmänn children, Dr. Stjernvall’s son, a boy named Tolik Mercouff, and my brother, Tom, and myself. There may have been others, but I don’t think so. I have included the main ones.

I think it is important to remember that the children were what might be called chance victims of the Messiah, or whatever Gurdjieff

was supposed to be. We had no choice in the matter, and were treated, for the most part, simply as *children*. Present day “seekers” should also remember that we were inevitably exposed to every thing that took place during those years. We watched the Ouspenskys, Bennetts, Orages, Jane Heaps, Jean Toomers, etc. come and go. But we were there all the time. We have, perhaps for this reason alone, a sense of continuity and belonging about the *Prieuré* and about Gurdjieff himself that, as far as I can say honestly, no one else ever experienced. He was, of course, respected by us and we even held him in awe — but rather in the sense that children are somewhat overawed by headmasters, not, however, as a *Herald of Coming Good*. Tom and I, certainly, had been told that he was something special: different, great, a mystic or a Messiah. But, speaking for myself alone, whatever the epithet (and at age 11 I didn’t know what a Messiah was anyway), he was a man at home. He lived there most of the time and he did — whatever else he may have been doing — what people do in their own homes.

I stress this point because I seriously doubt that any of the group leaders today — apart from Mme. de Salzmänn and perhaps one or two others — also had that kind of experience with Gurdjieff. He was, to me, first of all a human being. When you clean someone’s room every day, that person is perforce relegated to a universal norm that is comprehensible to us all: he used a bathroom for all the usual purposes.

Also, being an outgoing and affectionate man by nature, he was good to the children: a perfectly natural and ordinary response. He adapted himself to our level, took our problems seriously or, at least, listened to them as a parent would — ideally. So, I can only conclude that I am, without question, an “heir”. To *what* could well be the next question, and my answer would have to be a simple one: to some part of his *nature*. Part of his nature is in me for the very simple reason that he did not necessarily fill my mind or intellect with anything. He

influenced me in the same way that “parents” influence any child. I do except myself from the other children to this extent: he picked me, specifically, to be his personal attendant, body slave, room cleaner... call it what you will. And he gave me the affection, love and attention that my own parents, and my adoptive parents, Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, had not given me. In view of his “stature” in the occult world today, I am not surprised that some people envy me my time with him. However, I am disturbed at their assumption that I know something about his *ideas*. Naturally, I know *something* about them, but I am not and never have been an “intellectual”. Why Gurdjieff had a mission or had to establish a school is beyond me. I simply accept — at face value — that he was Beelzebub and apparently sent by someone or something to do something about this planet. The idea is no more startling to me than the stories about unidentified flying objects or the fact that men have walked on the moon.

Gurdjieff was also, according to some people, a man called Dordjieff who defended Tibet when it was invaded by England. He himself said, with a malicious grin on his face, that he was also Rasputin. Maybe he was. Frankly, I neither know nor — in the long run — care. He was the most sensible, logical, interesting, benevolent, wise, coarse, gross, obscene, funny and all-around human being I have ever encountered in my life, or ever expect to run into. In fact, one is enough.

Chapter 5

What Gurdjieff literally hammered into me as a child was that death — whatever else it may be — is inevitable; it is one's ultimate and *only* destination. It is largely thanks to this knowledge — or the innate understanding of this fact — that every minute, hour or day is something one should experience fully. I not only know in my mind, but *understand* in my blood, that I may very well be run over or killed or whatever if I should venture out into the street for lunch. This is not a meaningless statement: it produces two kinds of awareness. The first is that I will do my best to be sufficiently aware of what I am doing when I go out in order not to be maimed or killed; and the second merely reinforces the state of awareness which the first produces: get everything out of whatever you may be doing at the moment so that you will not, as it were, be either unconscious or unaware when you do meet your end.

Through Gurdjieff I came to understand that life, like an arrow, is aimed at one target: *death*. It (life) may have myriad bypaths, diversions or dreams along the way, but the final destination is the grave. Gurdjieff speaks of this frequently in his own books; in fact, it is almost overemphasized, although I doubt that the average reader takes in the message fully.

For example, the following is an extract from *All and Everything*:

Such is the ordinary average man — an unconscious slave of the whole entire service to all-universal purposes, which are alien to his own personal individuality.

“He may live through all his years as he is, and as such be destroyed forever.

“But at the same time Great Nature has given the possibility of being not merely a blind tool of the whole of the entire service to these all-universal objective purposes but, while serving Her and actualizing what is foreordained for him — which is the lot of every breathing creature — of working at the same time also for himself, for his own egoistic individuality.

[...]

The chief difficulty in the way of liberation from whole entire slavery consists in this, that it is necessary, with an intention issuing from one's own initiative and persistence, and sustained by one person's own efforts [...] to obtain the eradication from one's presence both of the already fixed consequences of certain properties of that something in our forefathers called the organ Kundabuffer,¹ as well as of the predisposition to those consequences which might again arise.

[...]

All of us, people, are mortal and every man may die at any moment. Think what would happen to a man who clearly pictured to himself and lives through the inevitability of his own death.

[...]

Individually the life of every man up to his reaching responsible age corresponds to a drop of water in the initial flow of (a) river, and the place where the dividing of the waters occurs corresponds to the time when he attains adulthood.

[...]

For the drop itself... For the drops, there is not a separate predetermination of their personal fate — a predetermined fate is for the whole river only.

At the beginning of the flow of the river, the lives of drops are here one moment, there the next moment, and a moment later they might not at all be as they are, but splashed out of the river and evaporated.

¹ An organ introduced or injected purposely into the human race — cf. *Kundry*. In Wagner's *Parsifal*, a mythical woman who having laughed at Jesus while he was carrying the cross, is doomed for ages to helpless remorse.

[...]

A man who has in his common presence his own I enters one of the streams of the river of life; and the man who has not, enters the other.

[...]

In other words, it is necessary to become dead to what has become for you your ordinary life.

It is just this death that is spoken of in all religions.

[...] 'If you do not die you will not be resurrected.'

The death referred to is not the death of the body, since for such a death there is no need for resurrection.

For if there is a soul, and moreover, an immortal soul, it can dispense with a resurrection of the body.

— G.I. Gurdjieff

All and Everything

Serious stuff, I agree, but also exciting. The implication of those paragraphs, for me, is that there really is a way out of this mortal coil — all you have to do is work; and I also happen to think that the daily process of living and working hard is a lot more exciting than any TV program.

The greatest difficulty would appear to be to begin to work, with or without some sort of leader. It is not unlike the problem of the novelist faced with that first, dreaded blank sheet of paper and the knowledge that — at least potentially — what is written there may some day be read by an infinite number of readers. How is it possible to convey an exact meaning to others, all of whom interpret language through their own life experience? How define a specific aspect of the word “love”, for example? It may end up being necessary to write an entire paragraph in order to achieve precision.

The same thing is going to be true of anyone beginning work on oneself. How can we begin to destroy the habit patterns which have been acquired through our lifetime, and try to replace them with

intentionally useful and harmonious habits. How do we become “dead to what has become for you your ordinary life”?

It involves a kind of punishing effort that could almost be called brute force, and mercilessness. The despair that some people experience in the emptiness of their lives can only be altered by a discipline that is — in the proper sense of that word — ruthless. One exercise that may sound simple will serve as a good demonstration of the way our weaknesses can and do prevent us from ever beginning work:

Make a program for yourself every day; make it thoughtfully, trying not to be overambitious and also avoiding the trap of not giving yourself enough to do for that day. Write it down, hour by hour, trying to estimate thoughtfully exactly what you will be able to accomplish in a given period of time. Depending upon one’s outer life circumstances, it is important to allow for whatever interruptions your life style or your profession may impose on you in any given period of time. A telephone call, for example, can disrupt an entire day, unless you are determined to be in control of the call (and the caller). It is a good idea to allow some “free time” to help with just such contingencies as the telephone, unexpected interruptions, and the like.

At the end of the day, review in detail exactly what you did do as opposed to what you set out to do, and don’t be depressed by results. Depression is just another form of letting one’s emotions get the upper hand. But *punish* yourself for the things you did not accomplish, and then forget it. How punish yourself? Make the punishment fit the crime. If you are a smoker, do not allow yourself that cigarette with your coffee after dinner; if you drink skip the evening cocktail. But do these things *consciously*, in the knowledge that you are giving up these small but necessary pleasures because you have failed in something you set out to do. Punishing yourself this way may sound childish and even idiotic. But remember that what you are dealing with — the mechanism that is you — is like a child who has acquired messy habits and who behaves, in general, completely unconsciously.

Children are (or at least should be) punished for infractions of the general rules of life which make life bearable among other human beings. In this case you are the child. The exercise can be boring and seem useless, and it is important not to expect results. Expect what you get and learn how difficult it is to discipline the machine. It may not sound very “esoteric” or “occult” to perform this sort of seemingly mundane exercise. But it will do a great deal more for the eventual discipline of the body (not to mention the emotions and the mind) than any amount of prayer or meditation.

Chapter 6

What I think most of us came to understand (and I am not speaking primarily of the children at the *Prieuré*) is that life is an incredible adventure and that death — whatever else it may be — is also at least a potential miracle. Man's impulse to fly into outer space, climb Mount Everest, hunt man-eating sharks, go around the world in a sailboat alone, dive to the bottom of the sea, etc. seems to me to be only the physical counterpart of the search for and development of a higher self. So I find the daily risks of life *anywhere* (why freeze to death in the Alps, when you are just as likely to drop dead if you fall off a ladder in the bathroom?) as exciting as any other hazardous occupation; and it's a lot less expensive.

I do not know — how could I — if there is an afterlife but I am certainly going to find out whether I want to or not — because the only way I can find out is by dying. Also, if there is an after life, it has at least a fifty percent chance of being a miracle. If it is simply going to be the end of everything, then at least I won't have to go through the process of earning a living at some dreary job and paying for the antics of the federal government every year. Also, given the possibility that death is just the end, then my only alternative is to “get as much” as I can out of this life while I am living — to enjoy it fully, in the philosophical sense:

To be immediately aware of... not as an object of thought, but as a phase or ingredient of one's own conscious state or activity.”

— Webster's Third New International Dictionary

In other words, an acceptance of the fact of one's own death, is a

potentially winning ticket; that it may be, at least fifty percent, a losing ticket, is also true. Perhaps this is simply the difference between optimism and pessimism. Whichever view one takes — and it is difficult to believe that anyone interested in philosophies which may lead to greater development of one's potential ability to achieve an harmonious state of consciousness (which is surely the main aim of Gurdjieff's teaching) is a pessimist by nature — the view of the possible afterlife or after death is something that can be self-instilled. It is not an automatic result of one's heredity or conditioning. And the recognition — the awareness of death — is one of the first necessary steps in what Gurdjieff tried to convey to his students.

Admittedly, it is easier to convey a concept or an idea to children than it is to adults; children are not only more receptive, but they do not have all those associative, habitual reactions to new ideas. They are curious, usually eager to learn and they have not surrounded themselves with the emotional, mental and physical attitudes that make it difficult or even impossible to reach their essences.

For all these reasons, I feel that it was the children at the *Prieuré* who were the most fortunate. I, for one, was not yet numb with despair, or embarked on that perilous road to wisdom or development *through the mind* which so many people of all ages seem to be taking today. Wisdom, if that is the correct word, is of different kinds: physical wisdom is transmitted physically, emotional wisdom emotionally, and intellectual or mental wisdom is transmitted through the mind, and through the transmission of ideas from one person to another. But when all learning is confined to *thinking*, it only makes the process difficult. It is comparatively easy for one to learn how to plant a rosebush by watching the gardener. It is a great deal more difficult to plant that same rosebush if one has to first learn *mentally* what a spade is, how to use it, etc. If one has never seen a spade, it is really hard work to translate the mental concept of a spade into an actual spade so that the body will know what it is and how to use it. My

body understood, without words or explanations, how to work at all kinds of things at the *Prieuré* simply by the process of physically watching other people do those things.

Watching someone fry an egg for the first time makes frying eggs easy. On the other hand, if you have never seen an egg or a frying pan, and your only weapon is a cookbook, it is much harder to learn how to do it. Gurdjieff taught us by *example* always, which was invaluable training. To have to approach the problem of creating new physical habits by reading a book about how to do it, is much more difficult. And I often think that is the crux of the problem which faces sincere seekers today.

Since there is no “place” (like the *Prieuré*) for them to go to, they go to group meetings and read books, which forces all the discipline to come through their intellect, rather than through their bodies. The same is true of emotional training. You can learn in an instant the reason for human conflicts and emotional misunderstandings if you are in a position to see people going through them — and Gurdjieff created “friction” at the *Prieuré* in order to produce just such conflicts. Yes, we were fortunate... I might even admit to the word lucky.

Finally, I think there is an emotional attitude that seems to me healthier as well as proper to mankind — certainly preferable to continually bemoaning one’s fate in this “vale of tears”. It is a vale of tears only if we decide — emotionally — to think of it as such. I learned to like life when I was a child, often simply because Gurdjieff managed to make it seem ridiculous and therefore amusing. The conscious use of humor — at which he was an expert — reduces the greatest human drama to something absurd. Great human drama does not lose its dignity in the process, but it is put into perspective: it is still tragic, perhaps, but tragedy is only the other side of the coin, comedy.

Life, to me, is a gift and a privilege, and perhaps the most important thing I learned from Gurdjieff was that there is nothing wrong with

“having a good time” by, first of all, just living to the hilt. Since life itself is a potential daily miracle, what reason is there to be solemn about what may happen when it comes to an end?

Chapter 7

In a purely personal sense, I think I can say truthfully that I have a special and perhaps unique problem with anyone who questions me about my association with George Gurdjieff. My first two books, *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* and *Gurdjieff Remembered*, are “different” from most of the books that have been written about Gurdjieff and his teaching for one simple reason: they are personal recollections and did not aspire or attempt to be dissertations on his method or his teaching. Therefore, people rarely approach me as someone who is enlightened about the philosophy behind Gurdjieff’s life, but rather on the basis that my childhood relationship with him set me in a special category — I made him seem *human*. The other books, according to the readers I have met, concentrate on the “higher” aspects of Gurdjieff — the seriousness of his teaching; his mission in life; his role in “saving the world”. In a comparative sense, my books are regarded as simple: they are readable; they are humorous (he was, among other things, a very funny man); and, at least I hope this is true — they are not pretentious. These facts make me somewhat more *available* to my readers when they meet me. I am unavailable to the extent that I am purposely hard to find. I am not in the telephone directory, I travel a lot, and I don’t have and never will have a group. But I do meet people because I like people, and I’m approachable because they usually, at least at first, like me.

There are, of course, problems about being available. I don’t look like an *author*, or at least so I’m told. I don’t look serious enough, or some thing. This is slightly rough going for me since I don’t *feel* like an author and I haven’t a very good idea of what an author is supposed to look like. I almost never have any money, because when I do, I

spend it. In any event, it all adds up to the fact that I don't fit the preconceived notions of the reading public.

For this reason, I think, once people meet me and find that I drink, smoke and in other ways act like an ordinary human being, they feel no qualms about asking questions about Gurdjieff that have little or nothing to do with his school or his work, but — unfortunately — are the kind of personal questions that fascinate most people:

1. What was Gurdjieff's sex life like?
2. What did he tell you about sex?
3. What did he do in his bathroom that made it difficult to clean?
4. Did he ever make a pass at you (me)?
5. Was he physically attractive, or repulsive, and what did he look like naked?

My reaction to such questions is a complex one and I will make an attempt to describe those reactions accurately. First off, they don't alarm me, since I understand and admit that all — or at least most — of us are curious about other people physically, and I also understand that by asking such questions the questioner is usually — even if unconsciously — trying to bring the Messiah down to a comprehensible level. High-purpose, “serious” or grim literature about development, the intensity of events, the need to improve oneself, the need to make life better, or the overwhelming need to save mankind or the world becomes — as an unrelieved and steady diet — boring. On the other hand, I am somewhat disappointed that people confine themselves to personal questions.

The end result of such questioning usually informs me that readers like anecdotes. I like to talk, and I talk a lot: it's a legitimate form of communication between people — assuming, of course, that they understand the English language (which is somewhat rarer than you

might think: just ask someone to tell you the difference between “uninterested” and “disinterested” and you may find out what I mean).

To question No. 1, I must regretfully inform everyone that I don't know anything at all about Gurdjieff's sex life. Since he had a few children, I am forced to the conclusion that he had one — unless (which I doubt) he invented a personal and early form of artificial insemination.

Question No. 2 is a little more difficult to answer. The only time I ever talked to him directly about sex was in 1946 — the last time I saw him. And, basically, I talked *to him*, not the other way around. But he did touch on sex frequently during my time at the *Prieuré* and, of course, he had a storehouse (see *Boyhood with Gurdjieff*) of so-called obscene or dirty jokes, primarily sexual in nature, as most such jokes are.

I no longer remember with literal accuracy his exact words when he was questioned about sexual “problems” but the gist of his answer to such questioning was that if you could not solve such problems yourself, it would be difficult for him to do so, and that until such problems were solved, there wasn't much of anything he could do for anyone. I think I can safely say that most of the children at the *Prieuré* got the basic impression that sex is the source of all energy, that it is the *highest* function of the physical body and that when it is combined with the enormous emotional drive of love, in the best sense of the word, it is a very powerful force. The definition of love is important here: and the definition he gave me was that real love is understanding another human being to such an extent that you can really help them, even if your assistance goes, temporarily, against that person's nature. It is a “caring” for another person that exceeds any personal desire for gratification or self-fulfillment. It means that when you do something for another person your aim is to give them what they need and want — not what you need. It is comparable to the difference in buying a Christmas present that someone you

love really needs, although you “ personally — may hate the thing you are buying. So *consideration* becomes the operative word. If you can put yourself in the place of another by objective *considering*, you probably know some thing about real love.

Sex, in the purely physical sense, that is the simple driving force that brings people together physically, is something I can only understand as a *man*. It is an urgent and compelling need that must be given full sway; if it is repressed or suppressed it can cause havoc. It does not necessarily have anything to do with feeling or with any kind of love. It is a function — on that level — that is comparable to eating, elimination, or any other need of the body that absolutely has to be satisfied.

The curious thing about the human animal as opposed to any other physical organism — is that sex, in humans, is not seasonal, but is constant — or has become so. I have heard a great many theories about what sex is, but there is only one that makes any real sense to me: the basic function of the sexual drive is procreation. I refuse categorically to argue about anything sex unless and until that fact is admitted. I am also willing to concede that sex may also be — to various people — a lot of other things: gratification, diversion, a “relief from tension”, and anything else — in addition to the fact that it often appears to be the great human preoccupation. It is also becoming big business.

Anyone reading this might justifiably ask why I am writing what may sound like a lecture on the subject. My answer is simply that what I am trying to convey is what Gurdjieff made me understand, more by osmosis than in actual words. When I did tell him specifically, in 1946, that I had a lot of good old middle western guilt about my own rather checkered sexual career, he brushed the entire subject aside by telling me that what I had done in a sexual sense was unimportant and irrelevant. What was relevant and important was *not* to have emotional reactions to it: guilt, particularly. And what was still much

more important was to be able to use sexual energy in life in other channels. In that sense, sex *is* energy. You can't write a book, paint a picture, compose a symphony, or do anything *creative* without sexual force: that's where the energy comes from.

Being *continent* is not impossible. In spite of the myriad stories about the sex life of monks, there is a reason why abstinence is a part of the monastic life. That the reason may have been lost in the shuffle through the ages does not mean it never existed. The way to God, to a better life, to "goodness" was considered to be necessarily *sexless* because the energy was being used to develop one's spirit or soul. Sublimation seems to have become a dirty word, largely thanks to the connotations which have been given it through psychoanalysis. But the root of the word is after all *sublime*: to raise, exalt and uplift. Animals, from my observation of them, don't seem to need to sublimate anything. Men do, and being a good lawyer or doctor or businessman takes an awful lot of hard work and energy, but none of those professions require abstinence, unless some aspects of them can be considered creative by nature. Art, religion, philosophy sometimes do require it; so *creativity* is — my guess — the link. Sex is *procreative*. *Pro* as opposed to *Anti*.

Regarding what went on in Gurdjieff's bathroom which seems to fascinate so many readers: he used it for all the purposes for which a bathroom was intended. He was an extravagant human being in the sense that he did just about everything in a big — or perhaps grand is a better word — way. His aim (need I say more?) was not always perfect which made some of the cleaning chores a little arduous, and he seemed to like to throw things around: towels, sponges, washcloths, anything. He lived abundantly — in or out of the bathroom. It was one of the things I liked best about him.

As for making any passes at me — there seems to be a special category of readers, particularly in England where the "traditions" of boys' schools are reasonably notorious, which more or less assumes

that some form of homosexuality is almost proper. In addition, he was Greek (that is, his parents were Greek) and everyone seems to know about “Greek love”. One English reviewer referred to me as “Gurdjieff’s faggot”, a word which was seized upon by some readers. It does not necessarily mean “fairy” or “queer”; it is a common term in England for lower-class boys but since lower-class boys are frequently the sexual targets of older boys, maybe the words are synonymous.

To answer the question about passes... my immediate impulse is to tell anyone that it’s none of their business. But, for Gurdjieff’s sake, let me set that record clear. He was puritanical, even a fanatic, about homosexuality, and condemned it vigorously. I am still somewhat surprised when I remember that attitude, it didn’t seem particularly appropriate for him, but my own conclusion is that he felt that homosexuality — as a career — was a dead end street; and perhaps, further, one of Nature’s defenses against over population. He did not *say* that to me, that’s my conclusion based largely on the fact that he frequently reminded me that Nature would manage to “get even” with Mankind if we continued to fight against rather than with the laws of the Universe. He never told me that manufacturing the atom bomb was evil — but when he asked me what I thought of America now that it had dropped the bombs on Japan “in order to save 150,000 American lives”, my final conclusion was that since men are part of both Nature and the Universe (not the other way around) maybe Nature was working through man to decimate and destroy some of the overpopulation; it is one answer to the question about why men have wars, plagues, hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes and all the similar disasters. I also feel reasonably sure that Nature would be impartial and objective about who — what race, that is — was destroyed.

As to his physical attractiveness, he wasn’t attractive to *me* in any sexual sense of the word, but given his tremendous magnetism and what people like to call “charisma” he was very attractive to anyone who could stand being magnetized. He had an aura (that’s the only

word that comes to mind) that was obvious to anyone. He was also sensual, earthy, charming, devious, funny and glowed with an emotional and physical warmth. As for his body, if someone insists on knowing about that, he was not very tall, rather swarthy, not particularly hairy, and had a pretty well developed pot belly, plus all the requisite number of limbs. And, specifically, he did have sexual organs that looked like perfectly normal ones to me. The only physical peculiarity that struck me was that his bottom didn't protrude much: his back was a straight line from his shoulder to the base of his buttocks, as if his legs were placed slightly forward of his spinal column. I got to know his body pretty well in the Turkish bath because one of my intermittent jobs was to rub his back and then *walk* not only on his back but also on his pot belly. I considered it quite an honor.

Chapter 8

I had a curious experience not long ago in a bookstore that deals mainly in “occult” books. I happen to know the owner and his staff fairly well and the manager of the store asked me if I would like to autograph the copies of *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* and *Gurdjieff Remembered* that were on the “Gurdjieff shelf”. I was happy to do so but when I replaced the books, a young woman — dressed rather appropriately, disciple-fashion, in a toga-like gown — seized my books and began inserting bookmarks in them. I asked her what she was doing, and she said: “If you want to know, why don’t you buy a copy of the book?”

I took it upon myself (since I had assumed that the young lady was an employee of the bookstore) to ask the manager what she was doing. He confronted her at once and pointed out that she had no right or authority to come into the store armed with bookmarks to insert in all of the books that have been written by or about Gurdjieff. The particular bookmark she was inserting that day was decorated at the top with a couple of flying angels and read:

GURDJIEFF
OUSPENSKY
CENTERS
ACCEPTING
STUDENTS

and then listed:

Carmel 408-624-0621
Portland 503-281-3539

Sacramento 916-422-2999
Los Angeles 213-454-0798
San Francisco 415-526-3825

The young woman was what I guess could be called *contrite* and more or less (lying through her teeth) promised not to come into the store again. What is remarkable to me is that she was just one of a series of, presumably, disciples who go around advertising Gurdjieff: a manifestation which I seriously doubt he needs. Prior to her attack on his books, some other outfit had been doing the same thing, but their bookmark was decorated (in color) with a reproduction of the Enneagram, and read:

OUSPENSKY
GURDJIEFF
CENTERS

Carmel 408-624-0621
Fellowship Farm 916-962-9920
Honolulu 808-261-9084
Lake Tahoe 916-541-7598
Los Angeles 213-454-0798
Portland 503-281-3539
Sacramento 916-422-2999
San Diego 714-753-3475
San Francisco 415-526-3825
Santa Barbara 805-969-5715
Seattle 206-329-5751

The *following day* (and I am not making this up) the manager and I came across a new one in my books and in *All and Everything*. This book mark had a silhouette of Gurdjieff and also one of Ouspensky as

well as a diagram of the Enneagram, and gives a telephone number in Las Vegas. I assume they are referring to Las Vegas, Nevada, not Las Vegas, New Mexico, but I think it would have been a little more realistic to have included the area code — some people have heard of the New Mexico Las Vegas, but perhaps the “Las Vegas group” assumes (maybe mistakenly) that an anxious student would try both states. In case you are tempted to get in touch with them, the proper area codes are 505 for New Mexico and 702 for Nevada.

Why do I even mention this? Well, it seems to me that it is presumptuous for anyone to put a bookmark in a book that I wrote, and I think that it is completely unnecessary to “advertize” Gurdjieff to anyone.

Perhaps the question is open to argument, but I am sufficiently exercised about it to be fairly certain that I could win the argument hands down. The only conceivable, logical and rational reason for distributing bookmarks which proclaim that they are “accepting students” is to make money. Gurdjieff is good business these days. People stare at the “occult” shelves in bookstores and seem to be pondering a solution. I think I am capable of understanding the dilemma of modern man: many, many people seem to feel an urgent need to find *something* different and better — which brings us back to the *seeker*, the eternal *student*.

My first, and rather immature reaction to these advertising bookmarks was that I was *offended*; I felt as if the perpetrators of the bookmarks had trespassed on something that was important to me. On reflection, I no longer feel that way; it was only a *reaction*. When I regained my perspective, it seemed to me that something Gurdjieff said many years ago was actually coming to pass. He stated, and I am paraphrasing, that if everyone who studied with him went out into the world and influenced at least ten other people, then the purpose of his work would have been achieved. He did not specify what he meant by the word “influence”. And while many of these “groups” that are “accepting students” are run — or so I am informed — by

people who never knew him and have done little more than glance at *All and Everything*, I am not at all sure that their inexperience matters. Whatever else they may be doing, they are “spreading the word” and attracting interest to what Gurdjieff and Ouspensky and others did in the past.

There has always been a certain amount of mystery surrounding the work of Gurdjieff, a mystery that he may well have helped to create, and one that has certainly been perpetuated by many of his followers. On the other hand there is something new in the wind. I find now that it is practically impossible to get away from some form of the Gurdjieff work. The “followers” are legion. I don’t really know how this can be a bad thing. For some people, I think inevitably, the work is going to become some sort of crutch — something to do that at least seems to be better than doing nothing. But, hopefully, something is going to rub off on everyone involved.

In thinking about these developments, I also began to think about the fact that what was appropriate for Gurdjieff in the twenties and before that may not be appropriate now. The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man was his way of disseminating what he had acquired in the course of his life. But I believe that it is important to realize what has happened in the world since that time. I think it would be realistic to say that the establishment of a lot of “Institutes” or “Prieurés” would not be the way to do it today. The revolution that has taken place — and continues to take place — since the post-World War I era has changed all that. Among other things, we now have airplanes (Lindbergh had not even flown the ocean when I first knew Gurdjieff), radios, television, computers, and all the rest... life goes so fast that it is hard to maintain any kind of equilibrium in one’s daily life. The roles of men and women are being altered on an almost daily basis: just look at ERA¹ and Women’s Lib, Unisex, Gay Liberation

¹ Equal Rights Amendment.

Movements, the massive trade in pornography. In one sense all of this is nothing more than the swing of the pendulum, and perhaps some equanimity will be restored when the pendulum starts swinging back again. In the meantime we are where we are and we are the way we are — I am speaking primarily of America, since I live in America and do not know whether this wildfire of occult lore has taken over the rest of the world to the same extent.

What impresses me about all this is the intensity, I could say avidity, with which people have become involved in either the Gurdjieff work or some similar work. Everywhere I go people are reading the *I Ching*, wearing yellow robes and dancing in the streets, meditating, reading ponderous tomes, and so on. Well, why not? Some of it, surely, is a defensive and self-protective reaction to the incredible nonsense with which we are surrounded in our daily lives: television, Muzak, *noise*, progress — you name it.

If anything disturbs me on an immediate basis it is perhaps that when one encounters group members or seekers, they do appear to be possessed of a great deal of information about wisdom, etc. But they also seem to find it hard to apply it in any manner that is going to “do them any good”. Many of them will confess that they feel, regardless of the knowledge they have acquired through reading and/or working with some self-proclaimed leader, that they are basically fairly worthless. On the whole, that is a pretty good reaction for them to have. It is a first step. Knowing that you are rotten may be the first stage in getting down to doing something about that state; it may even end up helping the world if everyone begins to understand that we are not the fine, upstanding people that we are often led to believe.

If there is a disturbing element in all this, it is the impulse in man that causes them to destroy their “Gods” or prophets by making them into symbols. St. Patrick’s Cathedral is a tomb to Jesus Christ, at least I think it is supposed to be. And I also think that it is a great place for pomp and ceremony. But what, I ask, does that have to do with the

teachings of Jesus Christ? Instead of really learning from great men, we seem to have to sublimate, elevate and, as it were, evaporate them. I wonder how many “temples” are going to be erected in Gurdjieff’s honor? I have no answer to that, but I hope the energy will be used in other directions than building *buildings*.

Chapter 9

I have avoided one major question that is not only asked of me, but which I also frequently ask myself: Why was I, an American born in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1913, *selected to* be a “son” or “heir” of Gurdjieff. Possibly, the whole thing was an accident, although I gather that Freud (a man whose theories I tend to distrust) says there are no accidents.

Much as I dislike “personal” history, perhaps it is only fair for me to do a little revealing of why I, for one, think my association with Gurdjieff was not entirely accidental. I don’t think that I am significant enough to consider myself part of a “grand design”, but I think that certain individuals are destined to meet.

According to the parental folklore that has been passed on to me, I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, on Sunday, March 2, 1913 at 4:12 p.m. (the hour is not folklore; it’s on my birth certificate). I left Madison, under my parents’ power when I was about six months old, and I seem to have been travelling ever since. But early in the game, and this is significant to me, I became the subject of various disasters.

The first disaster, so I’m told, was that my’ mother put something called antiphlogistine on my chest because I had a chest cold. I gather that I must still have been in Wisconsin (therefore less than six months old) when this particular disaster occurred. I apparently cried a lot after the application of this remedy and it turned out that she had put it on too hot (“It was a very cold night, and my hands were cold,” she explains) so that I have on my chest what passports like to call an “identifying scar”. I still have it, although it is no longer as prominent as it once was, thanks to the growth of some hair on my chest.

Disaster No. 2 was that my brother stuck a crochet hook in my right eye when I was still pretty much of a baby. Sibling rivalry might be the

reason for this — I neither know nor care. My mother (who, according to her version of the incident, had left us alone for some urgent and justifiable purpose) removed the crochet hook when she returned to the house, but no one called a doctor or examined my eye.

Disaster No. 3 occurred when I was left in the tender care of my maternal grandmother who was, *among* other things, a Christian Scientist. As the story goes, she put me in the bathtub and then went to answer the telephone (or to make a telephone call) and I turned on the hot water and was unable to turn it off. Since my grandmother was also deaf, my screams did not reach her and it was not until a neighbor in the same apartment house in Chicago came down to our apartment and got Grandma to open the door, that I was discovered at least partly parboiled. My mother tells this story with a certain indignation, because her mother then placed me on a bath towel and telephoned her practitioner in Indianapolis. The unnamed Good Samaritan who had interrupted the first telephone conversation had the foresight to rub something — Unguentine, butter or something like that — on me which prevented me from being just one large scar. I am glad to be able to say that none of these events are things which I can remember personally.

Omitting such trivial traumas as my mother's divorce from my father when I was aged eighteen months or so (I don't think it really matters how old I was), and set up housekeeping with a young English patent attorney, the ensuing disasters are ones that I do remember. In 1919 we were living in Chicago and I developed influenza — it was *the* epidemic. I was locked in a room and while the doctor did make it (I can remember his being there at least once) it was more or less a foregone conclusion that I would not survive. I did, but when I recovered I put on what was called an "Indian suit" with fringe on the sides of the trousers and a feather head dress. For some reason, the electric wiring in our apartment had not been completed and while leaning out of the window in an attempt to drop a metal bank on some

innocent passerby, the fringe on my pants became entangled in some open unconnected wires in an as-yet-to-be installed electric outlet and I caught on fire. With great presence of mind, my mother instructed my brother (6 at the time) to roll me up in a rug and put the fire out.

We moved to Ravinia, Illinois shortly after this episode and I remember vividly the day I came home from school with a very sore left eye. I was taken to a doctor this time, and was told that I had an ulcer in my left eye and would have to wear a patch on it for about a week. I rather liked the patch (it made me look like a pirate) but since my right eye had been blinded by the crochet hook, I couldn't see anything. Nothing much was done about that — maybe there was a shortage of good medical help in Illinois in those days — and it wasn't until I was about 21 that I rediscovered the fact that I had only one good eye.

The character of the various disasters began to change at that point. I was about eight or nine (I can pinpoint that only because my half-sister, Linda, who is eight years younger than I am, was a baby at the time). My mother had a nervous breakdown (I think that was the term in those days) and was sent to some sort of sanatorium in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. When they took her out of the house clamped to a stretcher, I asked my stepfather what had happened and he said (I will never forget the words): “Your mother might as well be dead — she's lost her mind.”

Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, who were then running *The Little Review* in Chicago, intervened — it must have been about 1919 or 1920. Due to my mother's illness and the fact that my stepfather (who was not as yet actually *married* to my mother) didn't have any need for two stepchildren, Jane and Margaret decided to adopt my brother, Tom, and myself. I didn't consider this a disaster at the time: perhaps it wasn't, but there were times when I have thought it was. I will not belabor the fact here that while Jane and Margaret were interesting, vital, amusing and sophisticated women, they were slightly miscast for the roles of mother and father.

We (Tom and I) were taken to New York by Jane and Margaret (Jane was the *parent* in an active sense; Margaret had other things on her mind which are related with considerable style in her autobiographical books: *My Thirty Years' War*, *The Fiery Fountains*; and *The Strange Necessity*) and the formal procedure of legal adoption was initiated. This became complicated when my father decided to get into the act and made some sort of objection to the adoption proceedings. The judge (and this is more hearsay than memory) decided that the case was a complex one and that Tom and I should decide between our various alternatives:

1. Remain in the technical care of our stepfather (which was actually impossible since he was not really a step anything; he and my mother were not yet married);
2. Live with Jane in New York (Margaret was by this time out of the house and involved in her great friendship with Georgette Leblanc); or
3. Live in Washington, D.C. with my father's great-aunt (or perhaps she was my great-aunt, she must have been in her sixties) because she had enough money to provide for us, which my father did not.

My decision was a fairly obvious one: I *knew* the perils of life with Jane Heap and had coped with them for at least a year or so; life with my stepfather was *legally* out of the question, and a new life with an aged (at least to me) Native was unknown, *i.e.* perilous. I chose to stay with Jane and Margaret — although Margaret was only a flitting presence, her name was necessary on the adoption papers because, I believe, she was a blood relative.

Life with Jane and Margaret turned out to be a major change for both of us. New York City helped. Having been accustomed to a rather hayseed style of life, more or less in the country, we found ourselves

abruptly transplanted to one of the great cities of the world, living in an apartment where *The Little Review* was being turned out every month, going to theatres and operas, and meeting people who were reasonably famous at the time: Otto Kahn, Mabel Dodge (Luhan), E.E. Cummings, and so on.

Where the money came from I do not know, but we had a duplex apartment on 11th Street, complete with grand piano; Jane made drapes out of black linoleum, built tables, painted paintings (she could do anything) and we lived in what I thought of as a rather high style. My brother and I went to a private school and to my astonishment (never having been much good at things physical) my country upbringing stood me in good stead: I became captain of the basketball team, a good baseball player and I could outrun anyone in the school.

In spite of all these things, the negative side of Jane Heap was predominant. The next disaster, if that is the correct word, needs a little explaining. I quote the following from Margaret Anderson's book, *My Thirty Years' War*, in order to explain something about Jane:

[...] I had come upon an element in Jane's nature with which it was impossible for me to cope. That is, I can cope with it whenever I find it. Anyone can. No one should.

I refer to that tendency to live life on the basis of personal conflict — that drama of compensations — which to me is entirely devoid of interest. It is so simple to live without these confusions. Much too simple, says Jane.

For all her intelligence Jane acts upon an ancient instinct that life without dramatics is likely to become bovine. This was particularly unjust in relation to me.

I am no partisan of the simple life. I adore personal manias. No relationship could interest me that hadn't a long pendulum of manias, moods, exploited foibles, a thousand dramatized reserves. These are the conscious dramas — the charming unrealities that I demand. The unconscious dramas are the

realities that I avoid — the small vulgarities known as bad humor, the disagreeable answer, the distortion of the impersonal into the personal, those capacities known as brooding, sulking, pouting, the necessity to assert one's domination, the preoccupation with one's self-importance, the egoism which conceals its wounds by being lofty about something else... I wish to state that all these manifestations of the human animal bore me, bore me, *bore* me. Jane hasn't them all — she doesn't need more than one or two of them since she possesses these to such magnitude.

I don't know what poor human being first discovered the fact that the surest way to hold people's interest is to subject them to torment. It is true. But it's so obnoxious a fact that one would be ashamed to act upon one's discovery. If you have an imagination you don't need induced drama. Just once to have realized that the person you love will one day die and what you can do about it; just once to have understood that you will die and will in all probability have found out nothing either of life or death — that is enough drama for a lifetime. But people don't reflect on these things. They achieve a great sense of living thoroughly those conflicts known as 'scenes'. Men, even when bored, are flattered under such ministrations. Women are no better. In fact the human race declares that it hates scenes and is in reality enamored of little else. My freedom from scenes gave Jane no freedom for power. It became irresistible to her to see if I couldn't in some way be drawn into the attraction of the human whirlpool.

— Margaret Anderson
My Thirty Years' War

Margaret and I had, as I hope I have indicated, a great bond, and I am in total agreement with her when it comes to human, compulsive "scenes". I think she and I both suffered in the same way from Jane's particular tyranny — the need to dominate; to have "power" over other people — and to create continual and compulsive melodrama in life. Jane's compulsion to adopt children was and still remains a mystery to me. But Tom and I were certainly not spared any scenes

or emotional dramas, although Tom shared Jane's predilection for them, since he appeared to enjoy many of them.

The first thing that Jane apparently decided (although that may be too objective a word) was that it was unfair to Tom that I was ahead of him in school. She enrolled us in the City and Country School on Twelfth Street in New York. It was a very good private school but it had a curious system of entering children in grades by *age* rather than grades such as the sixth, seventh, eighth, etc. I was ten; Tom was eleven and a half-so that I went into the "tens" and Tom into the "elevens". I had always been ahead of Tom in school: I was in the third grade when I was seven, and Tom was still in the first grade. I felt this imposition (which Jane carefully explained to me as being *good* for Tom, since it would benefit his ego to be ahead of me for a change) to be both unfair and senseless. Why did I have to be sacrificed to Tom's ego? The head of the school soon found out that I was a problem: she had, so I am told, agreed to the psychological experiment of developing Tom's ego at what seemed to me to be my expense. The fact that Tom and I were not the best of friends didn't help matters at all and Jane's proclivity for creating dreary human dramas came into full play. When the school informed Jane that I would have to be promoted to a higher grade because I was just too active, mischievous and bright to be held back, Jane's reaction was, first of all, to insist that I not be promoted and, second, to try to solve this fundamental difference between the two of us by *combat-physical*.

Tom was older and liked to fight. I didn't. I was not much smaller than Tom, but I was reasonably strong. Psychologically, however, Jane certainly fastened on an unconscious drama that satisfied all her — and perhaps Tom's — needs.

We were ordered to have a fight, dressed only in shorts, to see who could beat whom up. I refused to fight. I explained — in a rage — that it was no solution to fight physically and that I wouldn't. This seemed to please both Tom and Jane and the result was that I was

beaten up. Jane finally stopped the “fight” when I was bleeding badly, led me to the bathroom where I could bleed into the bathtub and when the bleeding stopped, ordered me to clean the bathtub.

Physical prowess has never impressed me. And Jane, to her and Tom’s later regret, found that nothing had been accomplished. From a rather puzzled child who took life more or less as it came, I turned into a vengeful human being: a result that anyone with common sense should have been able to foresee. The real result was that I had done, by simply following my own nature, something really devastating to Tom. I had “turned the other cheek” and his victory was certainly Pyrrhic. I didn’t really care much one way or the other. I was enraged, bitter, furious and simply decided in my own unconscious way that life was a battleground — and I was, what ever else I might also be, a winner. It was not so much that I was determined to win. I did win. I won because I refused to lose anything.

The final so-called disaster occurred when Jane, in a fit of anger — I was eleven — struck me with a board from a crate with nails in, it. Jane lost that one (or I won it, depending on how you look at it) because although the nails went all the way into my back and I was bleeding, I did not break down, cry or otherwise participate in the scene. Jane was more than contrite, fell to her knees, hugged me and begged for my forgiveness. I think that was the first time that my born “rage to live” turned into active hatred. I told her that I would not only not forgive her — it was not my province was one of the things that I said — but I told her that I would get even. I regret, in the long run, to have to admit that I did. On the same compulsive, unconscious, dreary level.

All of this is preliminary to my meeting with Gurdjieff in July of 1924. I met him some two months after the incident with the board and nails. He told me much later — in 1946 — that I was “necessary” to him for two reasons: I came to him as a *wounded* animal (he advised me to research the word “wounded” and suggested French; I think

the advice was significant, the French word for wounded is *blessé*, which comes finally from the word *blessed*) and I needed him badly. As it turned out, he also “needed” me.

Chapter 10

I think Gurdjieff needed a lot of people, but when he introduced me to a group of his students and friends as his “real son” who had been at his “real school” it began to dawn on me that he had needed me in a rather special way. When I talked to him about it, he told me that because of my particular heredity and conditioning, plus the fact that I had managed to remain “open” in spite of the various disasters of my *Prieuré* life,

I had been an appropriate receptacle or “garbage can” in which he could “dump” some of the accumulation of his life’s work.

I think that kind of *need* was epitomized by the permanent inhabitants of the *Prieuré*; permanent in the sense that his family was always there even when he went on trips to America. Tom and I had spent the summer of 1924 in Fontainebleau, and then went back to New York for the winter of 1924–1925. We returned in May of 1925, and apart from trips to Paris or the south of France in the summer — I was there all the time from May of 1925 to October of 1929. The first summer, if I remember correctly, Jane paid something for our stay — ostensibly for both of us but actually only for Tom — as I wrote in *Boyhood with Gurdjieff*. In the later years, again as far as I know, we paid nothing. We, like the other permanent inhabitants, basically ran the place; working in the gardens, the kitchen, taking care of the animals and the chickens, cleaning the house, waxing the floors, washing the windows, chopping wood for the fireplaces, standing duty in the little Concierge house, and so on. We were more or less like a corps of servants, which was the big difference between us and the summer visitors who came from England, Paris and mainly America to “experience” something of the life at the *Prieuré*. Most of

them stayed anywhere from a long weekend to a couple of weeks or even as much as three or four months, but even a few months could not give them the same feeling about the place as we, particularly the children, had. I reiterate that we hadn't come for any reason; we were all brought there under circumstances that were fairly simple: Jane and Margaret thought it would be the "great experience of our lives" (correct, at least in my case) and the other children were there because they were either relatives or the children of the various people who had come with Gurdjieff from Russia, Germany and elsewhere.

It did not really occur to any of us that we were in a particularly unusual school. It was obviously a great change from American schools, but it took some time for me to realize that it was all that exceptional... in fact, it took hindsight. I had no basis of comparison, and the fact that I had been told that it was a unique place was really meaningless. Having nothing with which I could compare it, it only seemed to me to be a perfectly normal place — and with some great advantages. I was relieved of having to go to classes at specified hours, I had a formidable working schedule — usually from about 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. — and I learned, as Jane used to put it, like a *shark* ("Fritz is a shark at languages and everything else he does", she once wrote to my mother). I was not so shark-like about some of the physical things I had to do; I could be pretty lazy about work in the kitchen or the gardens and I did a certain amount of day-dreaming, but the habit of work was definitely instilled in me. While I admit to a certain laziness — particularly when Gurdjieff was away — I had a very guilty conscience about it, so that I gradually and almost automatically learned to work hard and to try to do whatever I was doing as efficiently as possible.

One aspect of the *Prieuré* that is neglected (in addition to the lack on the part of most writers to write about the enormously humorous side of the place) is the *discipline*, just plain pure and simple physical discipline. We had to do our daily assigned tasks in the same way that servants would have had to do them. The place would have collapsed

if we hadn't; it certainly would not have fallen apart had there been no "seekers" (temporary visitors) who did participate in the work in the gardens and other group projects, but generally they did not do the slaughtering of animals, cleaning, cooking, and other such chores. Also, their temporary status plus the fact that they were there for the good of their souls, set us apart from them. Jane may have thought that I was there for the good of my eternal soul, but I certainly didn't — it never occurred to me. I was there instead of being in some other school — children went to school.

The discipline and the moral aspect of the *Prieuré* were things that most people do not seem to have written about. Although there were articles in many papers and magazines about the strange and reportedly orgiastic activities which went on there, nothing could have been further from the truth. There was no "loose living" that I was aware of at any time, and any breach of the ground rules of behavior and obedience was always punished. I agree that some of the "punishments" turned out to be unusual and even hilarious but we all behaved with great respect and even a kind of fear of what would happen to us if we broke any rules. When Gurdjieff bawled you out, he meant it, and that was a good deal worse than any other punishment could have been.

One of my punishments (which may not seem like an appropriate word) was the aforesaid back-rubbing and walking on Gurdjieff's body in the Turkish bath. I no longer recall what particular mischief I had done in order to "merit" this punishment, but it certainly had some odd results. The punishment, basically, consisted in the fact that while everyone else was relaxing in the bath and getting other people to wash their backs, massage them, and so on, I had to work — wash Gurdjieff's back, spray him with a hose, and then walk on him. One particular Saturday he announced that he had found a product called (as I recall it) "Neet". It was a foul smelling depilatory and he lathered himself all over (with my help) with this product. It made the

subsequent walking on his belly quite tricky. He was as hairless as a newborn babe and I slipped and slid all over him in the process. We all began to laugh so hard that I was then bawled out and made to leave the bath early to go and wait on the tables and help in the kitchen in preparation for the usual Saturday night post bath feast. I, of course, regaled all the girls and women in the kitchen with my story and didn't consider having to work in the kitchen a particularly onerous chore — I liked to work in the kitchen, and waiting on tables was an honor — since it singled me out from the other children. Not that I did all of it alone, but I always did it and I was, largely because of my selection as his room-cleaning slave, *chosen*. Very good for the ego, since almost everyone knew — somehow without any reaction of jealousy — that I had a special position. They also assumed, often mistakenly, that I was privy to a lot of secrets of the “Master's life”. Maybe I was, but I don't at this point know what the secrets were, unless it can be called a secret to have seen him in bed more often than anyone else, or to have known that he drank and smoked a lot in his room.

Chapter 11

A great friend of mine who had read *Gurdjieff Remembered* told me that the “trouble” with that book was that it changed in character completely at the point where I record the visit to Paris when Gurdjieff called me his “real son”. As far as I was able to understand the criticism, I believe that what my friend meant was that up to that place, I had not really participated as a protagonist. I felt the criticism was faulty and would have been proper to a novel, but not to biography. Biography, by its nature, records some thing or things that actually happened, and while I agree that the general tone of the book does change with the beginning of chapter 12, in that, in a sense, I become introspective and introduce myself as a “character” in a book that is, up to then, mainly reminiscence about Gurdjieff — there was an obvious reason why I had to do just that: the event did take place and I did not feel that I could remain at a distance once having described that visit to Paris. My reaction to being called his “son” could not be passed over or omitted.

There have been many times when I have thought, inevitably, that I wish I had never heard of — let alone met — Gurdjieff. Life, in the usual daily sense, is sometimes burdensome enough without having to carry around the load of being — or thinking that you are — anyone’s son or heir with the automatic obligation of any heir: to carry on some kind of tradition, to “honor” the memory of your father.

The automatic assumption of most readers or people who know that I had a relationship with Gurdjieff, is that I have some special knowledge or information that I, in my turn, have either the obligation or the need to pass on to them. This assumption may or may not be true — but whatever it is — there are a good many “holes” in it. People

who meet me for the first time — this is a good enough example — more or less take it upon themselves to offer me Armagnac on the assumption that I automatically like Armagnac because that's what Gurdjieff habitually drank. This is both inaccurate and presumptuous. I drink it once in a while, but I am an American and what I like to drink is whiskey. This is not a digression — it is an attempt to point out a misconception that many people fall into unconsciously: that Gurdjieff in some way cast his pupils or students into what might be called his “mold”.

Nothing could be further from the truth, in spite of the fact that many group leaders are imitative in that they “act” like Gurdjieff in many ways. Jean Toomer, who led a group in Chicago for many years, began to speak in a Russian accent — an extreme example of being imitative. What is sad to me about such manifestations is that while Gurdjieff taught by example frequently, the imitation of him is nothing more than just that: it is outer and pointless. Gurdjieff, again, in *my* opinion, taught something very different. He wanted me to be my “own man” not an imitation of him. I didn't cross the Gobi Desert on stilts; I didn't study in Tibet; I know nothing about the Middle East, the Caucasus, etc., etc.

It seems to me that it should be almost blatantly obvious that what Gurdjieff really transmitted was knowledge — not physical, habitual behavior. Some people think it would be more appropriate for me to have a bald head and a beard. In other words, I don't fit their conception of what a “son” of Gurdjieff ought to look like and my behavior also puzzles them so that they had a hard time getting used to me, as I am. This is a roadblock in human relationships. So far as I know what I received — at least in part — from Gurdjieff was a certain discipline, a capacity for hard work, the ability to concentrate, a sense of humor, a mania for truth, and so on. But these things are part of *my* equipment, not a version of his.

What seems to trouble people who have pre conceptions not only

about Gurdjieff, but also about me, is that I am not sufficiently *reverent* for them. Well, I suppose I did go through a phase of revering him. Suppose? I can remember one time, when I was in my twenties, when someone asked me if I thought he was “God” and my answer was *yes*, I thought he was. For all I know, he may have been (I don’t really care one way or the other), and if he was not, I’m pretty sure he knew “God”. This makes sense to me if only from the point of view that God is, in any case, a concept, not an actuality. No arguments are going to hold up on that score: just remember such clichés as “God is within us” or “God is love”. So I do not mean that Gurdjieff was (another concept) a man with a long beard who lives up in the sky. I mean only that, again in my opinion, he was more fully *developed* — in the sense of understanding how to use (and using) the full potential of his human capacities — than any human being I have ever met. There may be others who are as well or even better developed; I have not met them, and I don’t intend to seek them out. I have no desire or need to be a perpetual student of anyone, master though he may be. It is a good idea to remember the name Gurdjieff gave himself: Beelzebub, a synonym for the devil. Since he always emphasized the fact that good and evil are simply opposite sides of one coin (the human coin); one side of him was Beelzebub. Turn the coin over and you get Beelzebub’s opposite: God.

The key word in the name of his school was *harmonious*. No one, to my mind, was supposed to become *like* Gurdjieff. The harmonious development of mankind does not seem to me to imply that we should all be identical or even similar, any more than I would expect zinnias, ideally, to turn into rosebushes. The cornerstone of his teaching, as I understand it, is to become your *self* and to develop your individual capacities and potentials to the fullest extent — not to emulate his mannerisms as if by such emulation you would be “developing”. If I am supposed to be, in any sense, “wise” or “learned”, it will be in my way... not his. One group leader I knew learned how to eat sheep’s

eyes (a favorite dish at the *Prieuré* was roast sheep's head, and the eyes were considered a great treat) because Mr. Gurdjieff thought them a delicacy. I fail to see in what way this exercise in overcoming a repugnance contributed to that person's development, unless there is something about baked sheep's eyes that makes a person wiser and/or better. There may be some disciplinary value in achieving sufficient control to enjoy such food; but it remains a rather slow and somewhat tortuous road to "salvation" if that is the goal.

Salvation is another word that should be examined closely. Salvation from what? The human condition? Hardly. The whole idea behind Gurdjieff's "method" was to become more human — not less.

Chapter 12

The blurb on the back cover of the paper back edition of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* quotes the following passage from the book:

To possess the right to the name of 'man,' one must be one. And to be such, one must first of all, with an indefatigable persistence and an unquenchable impulse of desire, issuing from all the separate independent parts constituting one's entire common presence, that is to say, with a desire issuing simultaneously from thought, feeling and organic instinct, work on an all-round knowledge of oneself — at the same time struggling unceasingly with one's subjective weaknesses — and then afterwards, taking one's stand upon the results thus obtained by one's consciousness alone, concerning the defects in one's established subjectivity as well as the elucidated means for the possibility of combatting them, strive for their eradication without mercy towards oneself.

— *Third Book*

That seems to me to be in plain enough English — at least for anyone who has developed some need or urge to look for something better. It could be reduced to the simpler Americanization of “driving oneself with everything in you to get rid of bad habits” after having become sufficiently aware of one's habits to know what they are. The ability to concentrate, to work hard and to be objective towards oneself is not necessarily or primarily a “mystical” task, and such abilities are not acquired by meditation.

One of the stumbling blocks to many people, although they have a thirst or a vague desire or impulse to be what they think of as “better” people, is the motive. What good will come of it? Is this *the way*?

Isn't there an easier way? Why can't I see any results after reading all of his books? ... and so on. Results become a problem, a real problem. What kind of results? What is a *better* person? I think such people want to "get to Heaven" in a hurry because they hate their jobs, think the world is in a mess, can't stand the daily pointless grind of living, having mixed-up sex lives, getting too fat, bringing home the bacon and all the rest of it.

The simplest way to attack oneself is on the lowest level — just ordinary common variety, daily, social habits and rotten manners or lack of consideration for other human beings. You can do this in Kankakee, Paris, Rome, or anywhere else without ever getting near a Gurdjieff group or any other kind of group. Stop being rude. Just *stop* it. Let your wife or husband have the newspaper first. Force yourself, even if you feel lousy, to be considerate in relation to whatever people you may encounter. Be polite and mean it.

Be charming to your mother-in-law. The fact that she will not be charming in return is beside the point. You aren't trying to change her, you are trying to change yourself. I can guarantee one immediate result: you'll be able to say with satisfaction (even smugness — which is also *human*) that you made an effort. Having made that initial effort, keep it up until you have acquired the *habit* of being nice to your mother-in-law even though her behavior makes you want to knock her block off.

This course of behavior may seem a long way from becoming a latter-day saint who lives in sweetness and light all the time, but it's a step in the right direction — and, in any event, sweetness and light is not your aim; changing your habits is — and you have to start walking some time if you are going to get anywhere at all.

As to "getting to Heaven" in a hurry, another quotation (also clear enough) from *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* seems pertinent:

And now, before beginning work on the second series of my writing, [...] I

intend to rest for a whole month, to write positively nothing, and for a stimulus to my organism, fatigued to the extreme limit, s-l-o-w-l-y to drink the still remaining fifteen bottles of ‘super-most-super-heavenly-nectar’ called at the present time on Earth ‘old Calvados’.

This old Calvados, by the way, twenty-seven bottles of it, I was thought worthy to find, accidentally covered over with a mixture of lime, sand, and finely chopped straw, several years ago when I was digging a pit for preserving carrots for the winter in one of the cellars of my now chief dwelling place.

These bottles of this divine liquid were buried in all probability by monks who lived near by, far from worldly temptations, for the salvation of their souls.

It now seems to me for some reason or other that they buried these bottles there not without some ulterior motive, and that, thanks to their what is called ‘intuitive perspicacity’, the data for which particularity of theirs, one must assume, was formed in them thanks to their pious lives, they foresaw that the buried divine liquid would fall into hands worthy of understanding the meaning of such things; and now indeed this liquid stimulates the owner of these hands praise worthily to sustain and assist the better transmission to the next generation of the meaning of the ideals on which the cooperation of these monks was founded.

I wish during this rest of mine, which from any point of view I fully deserve, to drink this splendid liquid, which alone during recent years has given me the possibility of tolerating without suffering the beasts similar to myself around me, and to listen to new anecdotes, and sometimes, for lack of new ones, old ones — of course, if there happen to be any competent raconteurs.

— *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*

“[...] the possibility of tolerating without suffering the beasts similar to myself around me [...]” is a key phrase. He often said that the world’s most formidable human task was to “learn to bear the unpleasant manifestations of others”. So go back to the example of your mother-in-law (not really a fair example, some of them are fine people), if you

behave towards her with courtesy and respect, *your manifestations* will have become more bearable and/or tolerable — not only to her, but to yourself, and a side-effect is that you will sleep better as well.

Mr. Gurdjieff continues:

[...] I have set myself under essence-oath; a task which consists in this: ultimately to prove, without fail, theoretically as well as practically, to all my contemporaries, the absurdity of all their inherent ideas concerning the suppositious existences of a certain 'other world' with its famous and so beautiful 'paradise' and its so repugnant a 'hell'; and at the same time to prove theoretically and afterwards without fail to show practically, so that even every 'complete victim' of contemporary education should understand without shuddering and know, that Hell and Paradise do indeed exist, but only not there 'in that world' but here beside us on Earth."

— *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*

I may be wrong in saying that I believe the language is comprehensible. I find the entire quotation funny, sad, touching and very much to the point. I became used to his rather complex language — being a writer. I might put it more simply — but I think any intelligent person should be able to get the real message: give up your dreams, your illusions, your aspirations for something illusory and in the dream world. Heaven and Hell as he says exist here. The message is, at least to me, starkly clear and in no way painful. The fact of life is a simple one: we are here and living. With a certain amount of effort — tempered with drinking, play and perspective — let's try to live as if each day is what it *is*: maybe our last moment on earth. Don't let the sun go down without saying good night to it. Life IS a miracle, after all. Let's live it.

Chapter 13

The following are some quotations, selected at random, from various persons who were involved with Gurdjieff and then later wrote about him:

Orage, one of Gurdjieff's assistants, called him the 'Pythagorean'. This emphasizes very well Gurdjieff's strangeness in the heart of our civilization, which could hardly be compared to the great period in classical Greece. How can one explain the interest of all these Western people in Gurdjieff's oriental ideas? There is a simple explanation — they appeal to all who seek relief from personal unhappiness in psychoanalysis, pseudoreligious cults and mass movements such as fascism and communism. The ideas have a therapeutic interest which attracted many people to the groups. [...] The answer is that Western culture is going through a crisis; [...] All thinking men must have been profoundly disillusioned by the hope placed in 'progress'. [...] The idea of 'progress' has had to give way to the tragic feeling that Western man has come to a dead end. All efforts for good have produced nothing but evil. Gurdjieff, and with him Ouspensky and Orage, while confirming the general despair, and destroying the little faith we have left in the resources of our Western culture, have given us hope.

— Louis Pauwels, *Gurdjieff*

But Gurdjieff is not only unknown. Perhaps he is unknowable.

A Gurdjieffian I know puts it this way:

'Gurdjieff's failure was that he produced no single disciple who understood what was wanted of him.'

Perhaps this is true. I suppose it must be, I suppose it is inevitable. But I

wonder why I don't quite believe it, why I think it is close to, but not totally, the truth.

'If what you say is true,' I argue, 'why do the Gurdjieff groups continue their efforts today? Why did Gurdjieff make his effort? We can't believe that he was without foreknowledge of his failure (if such it was). Why then did he work with his pupils? More for his own sake than theirs?'

'In a way. The pupils are as necessary to the teacher as the teacher to the pupils; the teacher is obliged to give back what he has received. But Gurdjieff never found a man who was able to raise himself to "the step below the master". Yet thousands, due to Gurdjieff, took one, even two, steps up that stairway of the "Fourth Way", and their lives were vitalized and purified, even with a minimum of work.'

This I *know* to be true. So instead of saying that no disciple understood what was wanted of him, I would say that several may have understood but that they found it too difficult to do what was wanted.

The only thing one KNOWS is that if Gurdjieff's theory of human evolution were understood and practised, our planet would be freed of hate, madness and war. But since these states are, apparently, the conditions through which men are destined to struggle, it seems superfluous to try to change them.

The conclusion therefore would appear to be that nothing can be done, that nothing should even be attempted, to release humanity from its sad, savage, repetitive fate. [...]

My conception of an understandable book about Gurdjieff is that it should be addressed to the two types of influençable (sic) aspirants, and written as far as possible (at least in the beginning) in words of one syllable.

I would pass over facts (biographical) and concentrate on teaching. I have little interest in the facts that people seem to want most [...] where was he born? What were his circumstances? His education? Was he the *précepteur* of the Dalai Lama? etc., etc., etc. Gurdjieff himself has written about his childhood, his parents, his teachers, his travels, his experience, his knowledge. What matters is the knowledge.

— Margaret Anderson, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*

'Man,' said Jane (Heap), 'is the highest possible development of the *self-evolving* form. Nature can do no more. All further development requires conscious effort.' The Gurdjieff work she described as 'a method of effort — conscious effort, not mechanical automatic effort.' The start towards such consciousness was neutral scientific observation of one's self to discover from which center, physical, emotional or mental, most of one's reactions flowed. Reactions, not actions. We must keep in mind that *as we were*, everything was done in us from outside, that we took no part in our activity because we had no unique central I, only a crowd of 'personality I's' in continual argument between centers, fighting for their turns in the driver's seat. This, I realized, had been my state ever since I could remember, but I had thought it a condition peculiar to me — the writer who had to live multiple lives in order to understand Life. I had even thought it admirable to have such a capacity for varieties of expression.

— Kathryn C. Hulme, *Undiscovered Country: In Search of Gurdjieff*

Finally, the following is quoted from a letter written to me on May 23, 1964, by Miss Ethel Merston (named, for reasons known only to an editor, 'Miss Madison' in the American edition of *Boyhood with Gurdjieff*) after she had read the English edition of *Boyhood*:

My dear Fritz:

Your book just to hand in India. You do give a wonderfully vivid a/c of those *Prieuré* years, & pleasant or unpleasant, make one re-live them — I nearly said revalue them, but that is done already. I rather squirmed at your picture of me, outwardly to you all so cold and dictatorial, inwardly under the cold mask, an acute fear of the responsibility Mr. G. put me into — he knew that in giving it to me — accentuating my feeling of loneliness — but you couldn't know that, or that things like the 'little black book' & reports were by his orders; as also — the restrictions on leaving the *Prieuré*.

Also, what you could not know since it was done in private; several of the old students did not worship blindly, but stood up to him, including myself, using our own judgment, as you did when you decided to leave.

Gurdjieff, as you say he himself said, was no God, but was himself learning — we were often his guinea pigs. But that he knew far more than we did was unquestionable, he was a marvellous instrument, even with occasional mistakes, for making us more awake, a necessary preliminary stage before real work; that he did fail sometimes for himself and others is for me equally undoubted.

Miss Merston went from Gurdjieff to other teachers, and her letter continues:

Many years later, [...] I realized how invaluable G's training of self-observation on the physical centre was, & how it had prepared one for the Maharishi's teaching of self enquiry — both have to be impartial, but both are the same one more exterior than the other — G's at the *Prieuré* was exoteric leading to mesoteric (as he said). The Maharishi's is mesoteric leading to esoteric. [...] I realized that but for Gurdjieff I should never have understood the Maharishi's teaching & the same time that until I met the Maharishi's I had never really understood Gurdjieff.

There is, I presume, at least a kernel of truth in all of the above quotations, but I am somewhat disturbed by most of them for the following reasons:

The quotation from the Pauwels' book uses such phrases as “profoundly disillusioned”, “efforts for good have produced nothing but evil”, “destroying the little faith we have”, etc. The book is probably interesting reading because it is one book which — whatever the author's intention — turns out to be a diatribe against Gurdjieff.

Margaret Anderson's *Unknowable Gurdjieff* is very well worth reading and gives a picture of Gurdjieff that is only equalled, in my opinion, by Kathryn Hulme in *Undiscovered Country*. But Margaret talks about “the conditions through which men are destined to struggle”, and releasing humanity “from its sad, savage, repetitive fate”, so that I find a

final, negative tone to the book. Perhaps the best of the lot is Kathryn Hulme's book, and the quoted passage is in a sense, unfair to her book in that it is out of context and does not give the flavor of the book, but it is, at its best, a *positive* book about an extraordinary man.

As for Miss Merston: she incorrectly assumed that I was unaware that *everything* was done by Gurdjieff's orders (nothing could have been more obvious or apparent at the *Prieuré*,) and finally her letter tells me only that she decided — for reasons which I do not fully understand — to be a perpetual student. The concepts of “exoteric”, “mesoteric” and “esoteric”, quite frankly, do not interest me at all. Where are you when you have finally arrived at the proper label for something? I can tell you exactly where you are: you have a label... period.

In the meantime, what has happened to *living*...? recognizing that each day is a new beginning, being willing to be elated, to suffer, to weep, to laugh... in short, to *live*? Gurdjieff lived all the time, and I sometimes wonder if his books were not destined to be some sort of revenge for the stupidity he encountered everywhere in his life.

That Gurdjieff was enormously human in every possible way, and that his “role” (whatever it was) was a complex, difficult and perhaps incomprehensible one, is expressed in *Meetings With Remarkable Men*:

While I am here among people who have not undergone the catastrophic consequences of the last great war, and through whom I shall suffer considerable losses — of course without intention on their part I will once again, by myself alone, without other people taking the initiative and, of course, without resorting to any means which could one day give rise in me to remorse of conscience, make use of certain capacities formed in me thanks to correct education in my childhood to acquire such a sum of money as will clear up all my debts and in addition enable me to return to the continent of Europe and live without want for two or three months.

And in doing this I shall experience again the highest satisfaction fore-ordained for man by Our Common Father, formulated in ancient times by the Egyptian priest who was the first teacher of Saint Moses in the words: *Satisfaction-of-self arising from the resourceful attainment of one's set aim in the cognizance of a clear conscience.*

Today is the tenth of January. Three days from now, by the old style calendar, the New Year will be welcomed in at midnight, an hour which is memorable for me as the time of my coming into the world.

According to a custom established since childhood, I have always begun, from that hour, to conform my life to a new program thought out beforehand and invariably based on a definite principle, which is to remember myself as much as possible in everything, and voluntarily to direct my manifestations and also my reactions to the manifestations of others in such a way as to attain the aims chosen by me for the coming year. This year I will set myself the task of concentrating all the capacities present in my individuality towards being able to acquire, by my own means, before my proposed departure from America about the middle of March, the sum of money needed for clearing up all my debts.

Then, on my return to France I shall begin again to write, but on the sole condition that henceforth I be relieved of all concern about the material conditions necessary for my mode of life, already established on a certain scale.

But if, for some reason or other, I fail to accomplish the task I have set myself, then I will be forced to recognize the illusory nature of all the ideas expounded in this narrative, as well as my own extravagant imagination; and, true to my principles, I will have to creep with my tail between my legs, as Mullah Nassr Eddin would say, 'into the deepest old galoshes that have ever been worn on sweaty feet'.

And if this should be the case, I would then categorically decide to do as follows:

To give for publication only the manuscripts I have just revised in final form, that is, the first series of my writings and two chapters of the second;

to cease writing for ever; and, on returning home, to light in the middle of the lawn before my windows a huge bonfire and throw on it all the rest of my writings.

After which I will begin a new life by using the capacities I possess for the sole purpose of satisfying my personal egoism.

A plan is already outlining itself in my madcap brain for my activities in such a life.

I picture myself organizing a new 'institute' with many branches, only this time not for the Harmonious Development of Man but for instruction in hitherto undiscovered means of self- satisfaction.

And there is no doubt that a business like that would run as if on greased wheels.

G.I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings With Remarkable Men*

Chapter 14

I could continue to quote material that has been written about Gurdjieff, but I think the quotations I have already used are sufficient to make my point. Stanley Nott, Maurice Nicoll, Ouspensky, M. and Mme. de Hartmann, Irmis Popoff, to name a few, have also written about him extensively; about the meaning of his “work”, the strength of his personality, and so on. Why has no one written about him simply as a man?

The only conclusion I am able to reach that seems logical and believable is that people who have some need to search or to find something that will make life more meaningful have a built-in defect; the need to *create* some kind of God. Such people, and they constitute the majority, certainly, of all persons who are neurotic, dissatisfied, questing, etc., have “stars in their eyes”. It appears to be a property of students to *need* Gods. It seems to me that it is because of this that Gurdjieff is gradually becoming elevated to the status of a new “religion”.

Having lived closely with him in the rather rough-and-ready style of a boy with a man, and finding him all too human, the incipient stars in my eyes (and the need to create a God for myself) were eradicated at an early stage. I had the same tendency to make a God out of Gurdjieff. In fact, I think I did make a God out of him. It was an interesting experience. If he is a God, then “gods” are merely that much more human.

In the Third Series of his writings, recently published privately, and not sold in bookstores, Gurdjieff says a very few simple words about mankind.

In the published book *Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*, he writes:

Such is the nature of man, that for your first gift — he prostrates himself; for your second — kisses your hand; for your third — fawns; for the fourth — just nods his head once; for the fifth — becomes too familiar; for the sixth — insults you; and for the seventh — sues you because he was not given enough.

In the original manuscript of the same book, he wrote:

Suffering is [...] a stick with two ends. One leads to the angel, the other to the devil. [...] Man is a very complicated machine. Side by side with every good road there is a corresponding bad one. One thing is always side by side with another. Where there is little good there is also little bad; where there is much good there is also much bad. The same with suffering — it is very easy to find oneself on the other road. Suffering easily becomes transformed into pleasure. You are hit once — you are hurt; the second time you are much less hurt. The fifth time you already wish to be hurt. One must be on guard, one must know what is necessary at each moment, because from the road one may fall into the ditch.

— G.I. Gurdjieff, *Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*

People whose energy, subconscious drives, or search, have led them to Gurdjieff (or Krishnamurti or the Sufis, or ...) seem to feel that it is essential to *suffer* (publicly) in order to acquire any status as a “seeker”. *Look the part. Be devout.* Well, the outer world of man — the presentation we give of ourselves (since we seem to be innately self-conscious) is only one side of the coin. True development is never outer, but only inner. The outer world, given the establishment of good worldly habits (good manners, efficiency, courtesy, regard for others) will take care of itself.

In order to avoid the “disciple” routine (the performance of being interested, serious, self improving, etc.) it might just as well be remembered that the knowledge that Gurdjieff was attempting to “disseminate” has been available in the English language for a long time.

John Donne (1573–1631) knew a great deal about the fallibility of man; in *Devotion No. IV*, he wrote:

It is too little to call *Man a little World*; Except *God*, Man is *diminutive* to nothing. Man consists of more pieces, more parts, than the world; than the world doeth, nay the world is. And if those pieces were extended, and stretched out in Man, as they are in the world, Man would be the *Gyant*, and the World the *dwarfe*, the World but the *map*, and the Man the *World*.

And if those pieces were *extended...*" I simply take to mean *developed...*

Rabindranath Tagore wrote, in the twenties:

The West has misunderstood the East. This is at the root of the disharmony that prevails between them. But will it mend matters if the East in her turn tries to misunderstand the West? The present age has become powerfully possessed by the West; it has only become possible because to her is given some great mission for man. We, from the East, have come to learn whatever she has to teach us; for by doing so we hasten the fulfilment of this age. We know that the East also has her lessons to give, and she has her own responsibility of not allowing her light to be extinguished. The time will come when the West will find leisure to realize that she has a home of hers in the East where her food is and her rest.

— *Letters to a Friend*

Man is only a reed, the feeblest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. It is not necessary for the universe to take up arms in order to crush him: a vapour, a drop of water, is sufficient to kill him. But if the universe crushed him, man would still be nobler than the thing which destroys him because he knows that he is dying, and the universe which has him at its mercy, is unaware of it.

— *Pascal's Pensées*

And what about Pythagoras?

In the *Golden Verses*, you read the following:

Speak not nor act before thou hast reflected. Be just. Remember that a power invincible Ordains to die, that riches and the honours Easily acquired, are easy thus to lose. As to the evils which Destiny involves, Judge them what they are; endure them and strive, As much as thou art able, to modify the traits: The Gods, to the most cruel, have not exposed the Sage.

Even as Truth, does Error have its lovers; With prudence the Philosopher approves or blames; If Error Triumph, he departs and waits. Listen and in thine heart engrave my words; Keep closed thine eye and ear against prejudice; Of others the example fear; think always for thyself: Consult, deliberate, and freely choose. Let fools act aimlessly and without cause.

Thou shouldst, in the present, contemplate the future.

That which thou dost not know, pretend not that thou dost.

Instruct thyself: for time and patience favour all. Neglect not thy health: dispense with moderation, Food to the body and to the mind repose. Too much attention or too little shun; for envy Thus, to either excess is alike attached. Luxury and avarice have similar results. One must choose in all things a mean just and good.

— *Golden Verses of Pythagoras*

Translated and with Examinations by Fabre D'Olivet

One could spend years quoting from writers and philosophers who knew that man had and has potentialities which he does not use or develop; that man has a conscience; that man needs self-discipline; that man has aspirations; etc., etc. My “fixation” with Gurdjieff is, of course, based on the fact that I knew him. Also, while I am in no position to know what the Maharishi did for Miss Merston before she died — and am unable to state with any assurance that what he was (or is) doing in India is not just as important as anything Gurdjieff did during his lifetime — I do know that what was going

on in Fontainebleau during the 1920's was a great teaching based on a great discipline. The western passion for results might lead some people to quarrel with that statement — but I will stand by it if only because, in any event, most of us would not recognize a great discipline if we met one. I am sure from my own experience that I am fairly highly developed, and this is largely due to Gurdjieff. And what do I mean by “developed”? Well, anyone who knows me either thinks that I am self-disciplined, capable, efficient, considerate, thoughtful, sensitive, and a fanatic; or else they think I am crazy. I think it is about equally divided so far, and I couldn't care less about what people think. One clue, however: don't try to judge a man's wisdom, development, or knowledge by his position in life, the clothes he wears, the way he speaks, or his occupation. The attainment of consciousness is not something that advertises itself in those ways. A learned man does not necessarily proclaim it to the world by setting himself up as a teacher (as Gurdjieff did, and as Idris Shah, Krishnamurti and others do now); in fact a learned man does not necessarily want to “set up shop” in order to pass his knowledge along to others. It can be done without all the outward trappings of Ph.D's and scholarly eminence. Knowledge can be passed on in *any* way in which human beings are able to communicate: it is usually *invisible*.

Although the fact is usually disappointing to the would-be disciple of today, the work that Gurdjieff was doing with his students and/or disciples in the 1920's was basically *practical*. To quote Miss Merston again, her words, "I realized how invaluable G's training of self-observation on the physical centre was..." Self-observation is, primarily, a simple exercise. It is not, *per se*, a mystical exercise. It is the best way of becoming acquainted with — that is, fully aware of — the physical body.

As Gurdjieff explained, the body is the best place to start for an obvious reason: it is *visible* to the eye, and we already know something about it: we know how to go to the bathroom, we know something about the use of our hands, and so on. Observe the body, he told us, find out why and how it works.

The only real difficulty with the exercise is that most disciples seemed to confuse self observation with "self-consciousness". When they actually go so far as to observe themselves, they tend to be embarrassed by what they see. Unconscious physical habits are frequently unpleasant: picking one's nose, scratching, grimacing, making meaningless gestures, and so forth. In other words, their *emotional* response almost immediately destroys or distorts their vision. They try not to pick their noses, because it embarrasses them or they are ashamed of finding out that they have been doing this unconsciously for years.

The immediate cessation of a habit; trying to stop it without replacing the physical impulse — the nervousness that created the habit in the first place — is nowhere near the point of the exercise. The essential thing is to let the body — in spite of one's emotional reaction to what one sees — go ahead and do what it does: to see what one is, not to alter the long-established habit and project an image of

what one would like to be in the eyes of others. It *is* an embarrassing process, but if one is able to achieve observation without allowing the self-consciousness to *edit* the manifestations, one will begin to know what he or she is really like. Whether we like it or not, the physical habits, manifestations, gestures which we have acquired over the years are the “uniform” that we wear for the world. When we find out — by a sudden attack of awareness — that we don’t like the uniform, we try to change it at once, through the use of our emotional and mental critical values. On the other hand, if one’s awareness or observation is really impartial, the body will, of itself (and usually rather rapidly), discard unnecessary gestures. The mental and emotional reactions or self-consciousness might be called the gimmick in the exercise.

The best description of self-observation that I have come across is in Kenneth Walker’s *Venture With Ideas*:

‘A little time ago’, Mr. Ouspensky, you told us that we were not to accept what you said, but were to test it on ourselves. I think you mentioned self-observation.’ Ouspensky nodded. ‘Now, isn’t there a danger of becoming too introspective if one does that? Doesn’t one tend to think about oneself too much as it is?’

‘I didn’t say *think*, I said *see*,’ he answered. ‘Thinking — and by this you probably mean an alysis — isn’t wanted, for even if analysis does not begin in imagination, it always ends in it. Analysis comes much later. One simply observes oneself.’

‘I thought you said that one hadn’t got a self. So how can one observe what doesn’t exist?’, said a man who enunciated his words very clearly. He looked as though he might be, either a schoolmaster or a lawyer.

‘You confuse yourself with words,’ Mr. Ouspensky answered. ‘Never mind about theories of having a self or not having a self. When one observes oneself all that one does is to turn the attention inward and become a spectator of all one’s activities. The French verb *constater* describes best what I mean. One

registers everything instead of allowing it to pass unnoticed. One becomes aware of what formerly one has not seen.'

'Isn't that rather like self-analysis?', remarked somebody brightly.

'The very reverse. I've already said that analysis is not required,' answered Ouspensky. 'I say one thing, and then, a few moments afterward, you say another. In the system of knowledge I teach you, use is made of a very exact language, and before we can go any further this language must be studied.' He then proceeded to give very precise instructions for self-study. One was to look at oneself (at Mr. A., or Mr. B., or Mr. C., or whoever one happened to be) as though looking at another person, noting without comment how he moved, thought, and felt. Naturally one would discover in Mr. A., or Mr. B., or Mr. C., things that one liked and things that one didn't like, but bad things should not be criticized, or good things approved. All that was required was to register everything as it happened, to become a spectator of one's various reactions. One thought that one knew oneself, but this was far from being true, and many discoveries would be made if one observed in the right way. Self-knowledge was the beginning of all wisdom, and self-study was a necessary preliminary to self-knowledge.

Kenneth Walker, *Venture With Ideas*

If the student allows his critical faculties to take over and then begins to act out his desired projection of himself — the role in which he hoped others will see him — he will not have learned anything about his physical mechanism.

It is of considerable help to learn to look at oneself with the same impartiality as one might look at any mechanism or machine, say an automobile. No matter how one may react to the car, the car will not change. It will remain a machine with a certain number of physical attributes and parts: four or six cylinders, tires, a windshield, brakes, a motor... and if the car, through negligent (i.e., unconscious) use has developed defects, dents, scratches, a flooding carburetor, brakes that do not work, any sensible owner will note such facts — he will

not pretend that the defects do not exist, or try to hide them from the world with a coat of paint.

That kind of impartial observation (some times Mr. Gurdjieff called it “opposing I to It” — I being one’s consciousness, the thing that observes, and It being the thing — the body — that is observed) is the first and most important step. Once the mind, the eyes and the emotions recognize the parts of the mechanism that do not work efficiently or properly, then the owner of the car — your *self* — will, almost mechanically, do something about the repair work, or go to a mechanic. Gurdjieff, however, was not a mechanic. You are the mechanic, and the only way to become an expert mechanic is to learn how the car operates and how to operate it.

To turn back to the human body as opposed to the car. The function of a car is — whatever else one may think it is — to transport you to some destination. If the car will not run, you can probably trade it in and buy a new one. Unlike the car, however, we have only *one* body. It is the vehicle which we inhabit and it is the only one we will ever have. So it is *essential* — it really is a matter of life and death — to take care of it, and in order to do that well, it is equally essential to admit absolutely truthfully that the mechanism, at whatever age we finally look at it, is in some ways defective.

Once this admission is made, once one has learned the faults, the bad habits, the nose picking, and so on — and the process is not necessarily slow or rapid — then one can begin to make repairs — to replace the bad habits with good ones; good in the sense of effective — habits that help the body to function more efficiently, habits that do not waste energy, habits that will increase the possibility of making a safe and not too costly journey through life. The purely physical habits will be taken care of by the body itself — if you are really concentrating on baking bread, cleaning the house, repairing the roof, or whatever you may be doing, you won’t have time to pick your nose during the process unless it is essential for you to do so at that moment.

The reason for the immensely varied conditions of work at the *Prieuré* — we did everything imaginable — is to provide the opportunity of becoming conscious of and honestly acquainted with what we are, under every possible condition of life. Some kind of *Prieuré* — where life circumstances are reproduced as it were in miniature — is very important to what Mr. Gurdjieff had to impart to his students. But it is not necessary to find or create a *Prieuré* — it is probably impossible for the average person to do so in any case. Some of the present-day Gurdjieff groups, or Gurdjieff-Ouspensky Centers, do make a laudable effort to reproduce working conditions which duplicate life in much the same way as it was done by Mr. Gurdjieff. There is only one missing element, however: Mr. Gurdjieff himself. Valiant as the efforts of some of the present-day groups are (and I hasten to point out that I know very little about them and that my description or observation of them is very limited indeed) I don't think they are available to everyone — not just anyone can be admitted — but, in my opinion, they are not absolutely necessary. The whole world is, after all, the real *Prieuré* — and it is certainly *Prieuré* enough. There is no longer any need to reproduce what already exists. I assume that in the 1920's there was a reason to do so. Gurdjieff certainly thought so or he wouldn't have done it. But... caution! To emphasize the need for caution, I repeat something from Mr. Gurdjieff that I have already quoted:

Where there is little good there is also little bad, where there is much good there is also much bad.

Perhaps the admonition to be cautious is not really necessary. If the world is “going to hell”, “falling apart” or “coming to an end” — try applying the quoted words backwards. Where there is much bad there is also much good. I happen to think that my bet belongs on the good side. I want us to win the race, not lose it. So, in that sense, good and

evil cancel one another out. They are finally *concepts*, and we have to take a stand. I want to be a good man, as good as my concept of human propriety and behavior will permit. So I try to make decisions that are fair, just, honest, and conscientious. I try to respect the rights of others at the same time. The world will become a good place only if each *individual* makes that effort. So while it is, perhaps, depressing to find so many conflicting philosophies and religions hammering away at us and confusing us, I can only suggest making a decision and picking one of them. A “good” Catholic is going to be a more effective and responsible person than a bank robber or a murderer. I am not trying to “sell” Gurdjieff to anyone. But, through circumstances over which I had no control, I was exposed to him at an early age. I don’t think he is for everybody — but he happens to be the right man for me — I had no choice in the matter: he was my father, as he put it.

Balanced Man?

I assume that Gurdjieff was not alone in being what I would call “balanced” but I do know that he is the only human being I have ever known personally whom I would refer to as “balanced”. His centers — physical, emotional and mental — were all on an even keel. He was the only human being I have ever seen or known who was never involved in human stupidities, who was not led around by his physical drives, be they sex, hunger, or whatever. He was sometimes cruel, perverse, difficult and incomprehensible. But what most readers, seekers, and just plain people seem to forget is that they look at him — whether in person or through his writings — with *their* eyes, and not from any objective, moral standpoint. When he was cruel, he was cruel for a very good reason. He was doing something *for* the person to whom he was being cruel: trying to wake them up, most likely.

I don’t consider myself, for example, as “balanced” in the sense that Gurdjieff undoubtedly was, but I did learn one thing that people dismiss somewhat airily: that the basic principle of work on oneself is to be disciplined and to actually do the work. I am told that *All and Everything* is unreadable. I agree, but only in the sense of literature. It was not intended to be a “work of art” in competition with Shakespeare or anyone else. Reading it is a method of work, and if a person believes that Gurdjieff had some “method” that would enable an individual to achieve “harmonious development”, the first step is *merciless* work. If you find that five pages of *All and Everything* put you to sleep, force yourself to read ten. In other words, in whatever you do, acquire not only a second wind, but a third wind. Unless we are severe with ourselves, particularly our emotional center, we are

not going to achieve any sort of detachment from the human bog that we continually complain about. Everyone I know, without exception, is bogged down in some kind of sewer, usually brought on by their physical and emotional drives: they are unhappily married, they have a rotten sex life, they hate their relatives, they cheat their friends, they don't produce a full day's work because they think they are not sufficiently well paid, and so on, *ad infinitum*. What is even worse is that they are often *ruled* by such emotions as jealousy, envy, pride...

The Gurdjieff work, as he pointed out *ad nauseam*, is not for everyone. There is a good reason for that: not everyone is destined to *develop*. I have quoted some people in this book and more or less labelled them as prophets of doom. So let me take my turn at being just such a prophet. If anyone is able to look at Nature objectively and impartially there is one obvious fact that should be seen with great clarity. Man is an organism (whatever we may think to the contrary) and as such, he is much like animals and vegetables: he over-produces. Nature is profligate. For every potential new plant, there are probably hundreds of thousands of seeds. For every animal or human being born, the waste of semen is fantastic. There must be a reason for this: the planet earth *needs* to be fertilized by the organisms which live on it and are, or so it often seems, doing their best to destroy it. So a great many *useless* (from our so-called sophisticated point-of-view) organisms are created. Man, as opposed to plants and animals, is endowed (or cursed) with the possibility of not being useless. But in order to achieve what could be called "usefulness" it is necessary to work for it — consciously and ruthlessly. Look around you: not many people are going to do that. The ones who do have a chance, and the ones who don't... do not. That's really all there is to it. The world, *per se*, does not need "saving" ... there's nothing wrong with it. We, people, probably do, and while prophets and leaders and messiahs can show us ways and means of doing something about this condition: we are the ones who have to do it.

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