

THE LIVING WORK

Gurdjieff's Teachings in Action

Brian Earl

Fourth Way Group

Box 301 Elsternwick Victoria Australia 3185

Published by the Fourth Way Group
P.O. Box 301, Elsternwick, Victoria 3185, Australia
January 1984

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Cover design by Anthony Riccardi

Typeset by Spectrum Publications Pty Ltd
127 Burnley Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121

Printed by Brown Prior Anderson Pty Ltd
5 Evans Street, Burwood, Victoria 3125

National Library of Australia
cataloguing-in-publication data

Earl, Brian
The living work

ISBN 0 9491337 0 4

1. Gurdjieff, G.I. (Georges Ivanovitch), 1872-1949
 2. Self-realization
 3. Self-actualization (Psychology)
- I. Fourth Way Group (Melbourne, Victoria)
II. Title

158.1'0924

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Acknowledgements

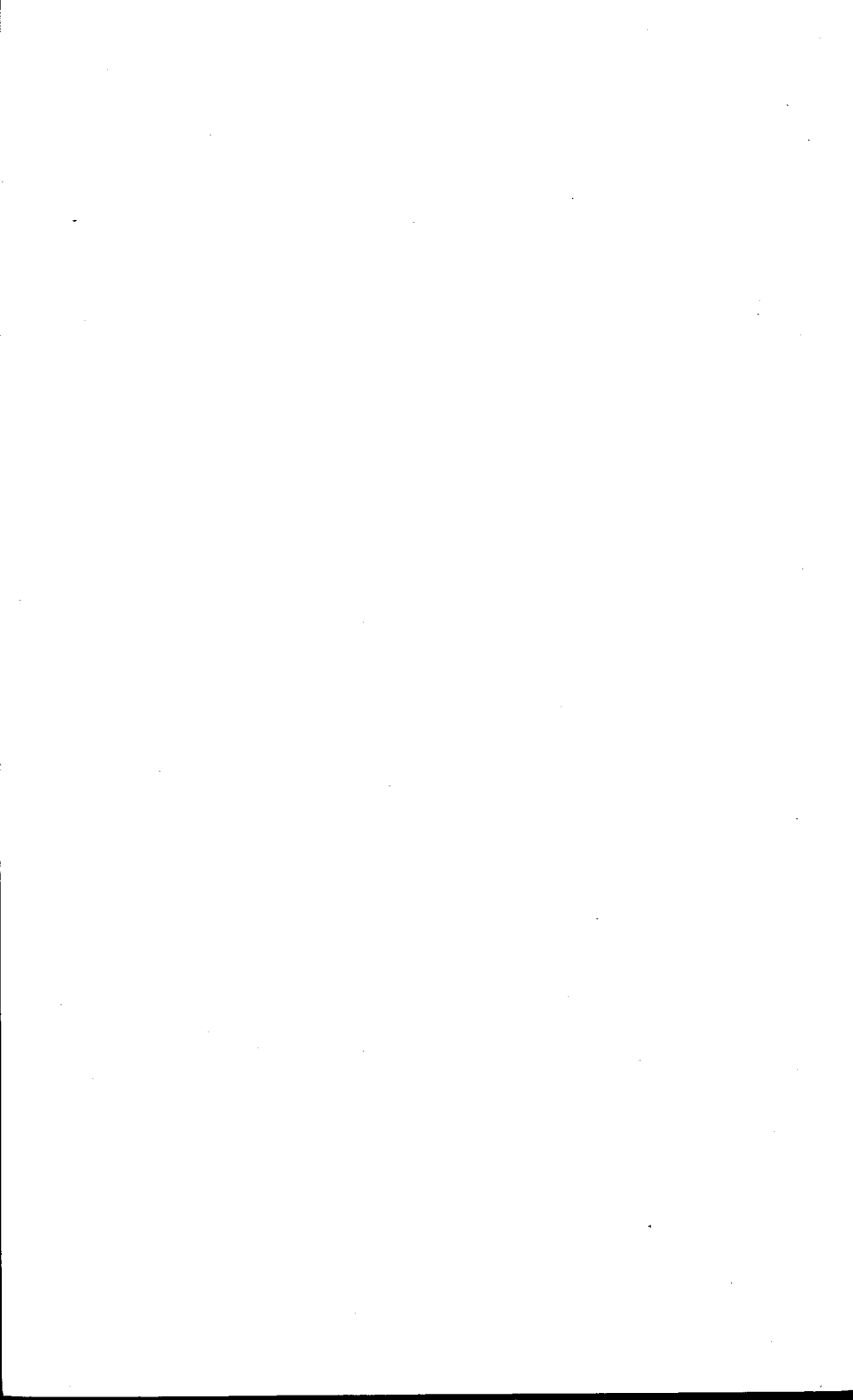
I wish to express my thanks to all those who in various ways have participated in the preparation of this book, and especially to:

my wife Nina for helping and encouraging me at every stage of its creation, from its first inception through to the final layout, and for all that typing;

all members of the Fourth Way Group who contributed in so many ways, and particularly Cliff and Anne Woodward, Tony Riccardi, Steve Todd, Karen Schoen, Lorna Macartney, Wendy Tolissaint, Wolde Korol, Kevin Brophy, Reg Kaspiew;

Mrs Elizabeth Bennett for her encouragement and for permission to reproduce part of a talk entitled *Other People* by her late husband;

J.G. Bennett for providing our essential contact with this Work during our time at his Fourth Way training centre at Sherborne, U.K.



Introduction

What could be more important or more interesting to us than understanding our own nature and developing the latent possibilities hidden in each one of us? Yet there can be few subjects about which there is such widespread ignorance and misunderstanding.

We are each seeking in different ways to improve our lot in life. Those of us who are easily able to obtain the essentials for survival may express this urge for self-betterment in a striving to acquire more material possessions, money or power, or in efforts to change and improve our environment. But, whatever we do and wherever we go, we take our faults with us and soon we find that our problems remain essentially unchanged. Those who have discovered this seek ways of personal transformation because they know that if their life really is to be different, there has to be a change within.

This book is addressed to such people. It is an account of an ancient knowledge of human nature and a way of life which corresponds to human needs and aspirations. This way of life includes a change inside us, it is a different way of being.

The present formulation of these ideas is based upon the work of G.I. Gurdjieff and his followers; P.D. Ouspensky, J.G. Bennett and others. These writings are an account of Gurdjieff's teachings in terms of the personal experiences and experiments of a group of people.

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Gurdjieff was born near the end of the last century in Armenia at Leninakan, close to the Turkish border. When he was quite young his family moved to the nearby town of Kars in Turkey. Living in Kars as a young man, he was fortunate to have access to the best of a declining Middle-eastern culture, as well as gaining a Western scientific education at pre-revolution Russian military and religious schools. In his youth, Gurdjieff avidly studied Western writings in the hope of finding practical knowledge of human nature and potentialities. He was convinced that such knowledge existed but he failed to find it in the books he studied. In his teens, Gurdjieff set off on travels which continued intermittently over a period of twenty years. He travelled in Europe and Africa and especially in Asia, from Turkey to Tibet; and wherever he went, Gurdjieff sought out people who might be able to give him some clue to discovering the meaning of human life.

He travelled at a time when the pattern of life in western Asia was being greatly altered due to Western influences — particularly the spread southwards of Russian domination. Communities in these areas, which had been repositories of secret knowledge and training methods, knew that their security was threatened. No doubt they saw that their knowledge, if it was not to be lost, must be transferred to the West. For that to be possible, the ideas had to be reformulated and adapted so as to be acceptable to people brought up in the Western traditions of society and education. Gurdjieff was ideally suited for this task; he was highly intelligent, well educated, exceptionally persistent and he understood both Asiatic and Western attitudes of mind.

Gurdjieff devoted the latter part of his life to passing on to others the training and ideas that he had received during his travels. He taught in various cities, finally settling in Paris. In France he published his ideas in allegorical form in his great work, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. However, because of the difficult and disturbing way it is written, this book is

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not easily comprehensible to anyone untrained in Gurdjieff's approach to understanding human nature.

Gurdjieff said that he did not teach psychology, he said, 'Man is a machine and when we study man we study mechanics, not psychology'. This is a fundamental principle of his teaching; that man is a machine, a very complex machine but a machine no less. This seems at first sight to be a discouraging start, but if we can apply this idea to our own lives and accept that we are ourselves machines, it destroys, in a single stroke, much of our illusion about ourselves. By so doing, it offers us a door through which we can escape from the fixed attitudes and opinions which condition all our interactions and experiences. It is this conditioning which renders us machine-like in the way that we respond to events.

This brings us to an essential difference between Gurdjieff's ideas and academic psychology. His ideas were strictly practical and intended for application to ourselves in our daily lives. Gurdjieff considered that the value of his knowledge of human nature was in the benefits that he and his students derived personally from it. He sometimes referred to his students as 'broken-down cars in the workshop for repair'!

As soon as we try to know ourselves and understand what motivates our behaviour, we enter the realms of religion as well as philosophy and psychology. Gurdjieff's teaching is not a religion but it is a means of changing ourselves in a particular direction and it is, therefore, a *Way*. Gurdjieff himself referred to his system as the *Work* or the *Fourth Way*, the other three Ways being based upon devotion, meditation and dominion over the body. The Fourth Way combines elements from all other Ways together with ingredients uniquely its own.

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Over the past eight years there have been meetings in Melbourne based upon the Fourth Way principles and practices. Many of those who attended these meetings were very talented and dedicated people and this book has been largely constructed from their questions and comments. I hope it will help others, who have not the good fortune to work with such a group, to acquire a practically oriented view of Gurdjieff's ideas on the nature of man and his hidden possibilities.

In putting the book together, items have been grouped under common themes. Chronology has been completely ignored and contributions which were made several years apart sometimes appear together. Some of what is written was said in evening meetings, some on group weekends, others during holidays together when we experimented with a lifestyle more isolated from ordinary commitments and values.

* * *

In order to avoid possible embarrassment, the names of participants have been changed. In fact, each name represents a composite personality made up of two or more people. Otherwise the 'cast' would have been inordinately large.

* * *

1 *Essence and Personality*

They were a varied group; men and women in about equal numbers; ages from late teens to perhaps sixty; worn jeans mingled with suits and briefcases. It would be difficult to imagine what common interest could draw people together from such different backgrounds and stations in life.

People were still arriving and everyone sat in silence, apart from an occasional whispered comment between neighbours. The last person sat down and we continued to sit silently for some minutes before I spoke.

After introducing myself and welcoming everyone, I made some general comments about our meetings and other activities, and then invited questions. Again there was quiet. Eventually a smartly-dressed, middle-aged man spoke:

John: I should like to know what is the central feature or central idea of the Fourth Way.

Brian: Thank you. Let us take as our starting point the principle that we need to know ourselves. *Know yourself* – you must have heard or read this before, probably more than once, but have you seriously considered what it means?

The obvious side of this is that we should strive to understand our own character. Until we do so, we may imagine ourselves to be something quite different from what we really are. Most of us have a very fanciful picture of our own virtues and fail to acknowledge the extent of our deficiencies. One

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of our aims here is to bring our own view of ourselves gradually nearer to reality. But this is not all that is meant by self-knowledge.

The approach which we will be taking to understanding the nature of man, and towards finding an ultimate meaning in our lives, is derived from the unique combination of ideas and methods taught by George Gurdjieff. He learnt these from groups of seekers, training centres and individuals in Asia, Africa and Europe, especially the Middle-eastern learned men known as Sufis or Dervishes. Therefore, we can profitably consider what the Sufis have to say about knowing ourselves.

There is a Sufi saying: 'He who knows himself, knows God'. By *self-knowledge* here, the Sufi is not only referring to our need to understand our own character. He also has a less obvious meaning. We do not know ourselves in the sense that we are out of touch with the deeper part of our own nature, which has become buried under an artificial character imposed upon us by the pressures of life. Virtually all our actions, words and thoughts are determined by this superficial part of our nature whilst the other part, our *real self*, hardly ever participates in our lives.

Let us take as our central idea of the Fourth Way for tonight, this concept that we each have a twofold nature in the way I have described.

Victor: Are you talking about essence and personality?

Brian: Yes, Gurdjieff used the terms essence and personality to refer to these different parts of the psyche. By *essence* he meant our real nature, and by *personality* the part of our character which we have acquired. This duality in our nature we experience, from time to time, as an inability to be ourselves or as a feeling of living behind a mask — which we often blame on our circumstances or on other people.

Our personality is what our friends and acquaintances know. It is the part of our character which we can more easily see in ourselves and others. It determines the way we think

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and it controls all our actions, our posture and gestures and the way we interact with people. Our essence plays little part in all this.

Janet: If I never experience my essence, how do I know that it exists?

Brian: I did not want to suggest that we never experience our own essence, but rather that it plays no significant role in ordinary life. We do experience this deeper part of ourselves but only fleetingly, and generally do not recognise the significance of such experiences.

We experience our essence when we notice something in a particularly vivid way, perhaps something which we may have seen or heard or tasted many times but without really noticing: This morning I was passing a bush in bloom which I walk past most mornings and no doubt have often looked at, but this time I really saw it. I noticed the colour and form of the flowers and leaves. The plant had a wonderful radiance about it.

There had been a sudden change in me from noticing nothing to noticing. In that instant I feel different; my body is more alive. My thoughts and feelings seem more connected with my surroundings. This is the sort of rare occasion when we are in contact with our own essence — it is experienced as a sudden openness to impressions from outside.

I cannot prove with words that you have an essence, but we will work together to awaken this inner self. I hope you will be able to see that we have these two parts to our nature and that each has its own quite different consciousness.

Harry: I read somewhere that only essence could become conscious but personality could not?

Brian: Gurdjieff sometimes used the word *consciousness* to refer only to essence experiences, but I am using the word in the sense that we use it in ordinary conversation.

The consciousness of essence and personality are experienced quite differently. The consciousness associated with my

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personality is what people ordinarily mean by consciousness. It is mostly in the head, in thoughts, dreams, plans and memories. The consciousness of my essence is more direct and vivid, immediate and satisfying. It is really higher consciousness compared to which our ordinary state is sleep-walking.

Steve: I have often noticed things the vivid way you said, well, I mean at times I have. I remember some time ago I was hiking and as I came over the brow of a hill, I saw this incredible view. It did feel as if I woke up then. Are you saying that we could be like that all the time?

Brian: You are right that we experience such moments brought on by a breathtaking view, or a sudden glimpse of the sea. In such cases it is especially vivid — the strength of the impressions can be almost like a physical blow. But an essence experience is not always so vivid as that.

Janet: In that case what difference would it make if we could be in our essence more of the time?

Brian: When I live in my essence life is very, very different. In contact with my essence I experience myself as a distinct entity separate from the world around me, yet, at the same time, part of it and in harmony with it. I see and at the same time I know that I am seeing. I have an inward sense of self simultaneously with my seeing, hearing, smelling and touching the outside world. In our ordinary state, living in our personality, we experience the world as clouded or made hazy by thoughts and feelings, habitual attitudes and expectations. Ordinarily we all live this way — through the personality — and this unsatisfactory way of relating to the world seems the only way possible.

We know about everything around us; we learn, think and talk about everything imaginable, important or trivial, but we do not know ourselves. It is this void in our lives which leaves us dissatisfied and seeking for something, though we know not what. We feel that life is meaningless and we have to search for a purpose. What we seek is ourselves.

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Victor: But Gurdjieff said that if our essence were exposed it would be an unbearable experience for us.

Brian: The essence is a great deal more sensitive than the personality and, in fact, this is one of the primary reasons for the formation of the personality, to protect the essence against emotional impacts which are too strong for it. This function the personality continues to fulfill, as a kind of barrier to incoming impressions. But the problem is that the barrier is up when it is not needed — we have erected a barrier and do not know how to take it down. All incoming impressions are censored, diminished in intensity, distorted or cut off altogether and much of the time this is very undesirable. It gives a dim quality to our lives, a feeling of being only half-alive.

It is quite true that the exposure of our essence can at first seem frightening or disorienting. I remember on one occasion when we were attending the Fourth Way School run by J.G. Bennett. He called me to his office and asked me how I felt about the course. I told him that I felt confused and he unexpectedly replied, 'Very good!' I said, 'I feel as if I have been picked at random from the crowd to be painted a different colour'. This was an attempt to put into words the peculiar state of confusion and detachment that I was experiencing.

Paul: That reminds me of the strange state I was in after the weekend that the group had together. Normally, when driving my taxi I have a sort of mental map of Melbourne so I know the route without thinking. On Monday after the group weekend I was kind of disoriented. For a time I was not sure which road to take.

Brian: That was because your personality had lost some of its grip on you, but you had not found how to do things from your essence. So you were in an in-between state and naturally felt confused. Did that last for long?

Paul: I don't think so. Later that morning I realised that I

had forgotten all about it. I think it all went back to normal when I picked up my first passenger.

Brian: Over a period of time you will come back to your essence many times so that you will learn to be more comfortable in it. As a result of repeated exposure of your essence you can also acquire an inner strength which will enable you to sustain a more conscious state for longer periods.

Victor: Are you referring to the development of Being?

Brian: Yes, this strength in ourselves is what Gurdjieff called *Being*. He said that we were born with an essence but no *Being*. Through living a certain way of life, which Gurdjieff said was simply the normal way for people to live, our *Being* grows. Life as we generally live, however, does not offer much chance for *Being* to develop. You could say that the purpose of a Fourth Way School is to help people to rediscover for themselves this 'normal' way to live and be.

Going back now to the earlier comment that exposure of our essence without long preparation would be unbearable, I should add that this inward part of our nature is sensitive to the underlying feelings and attitudes of other people. It is easily hurt by compulsive actions. Without preparation our lives can then be badly influenced by contact with people who are centred in their personalities, because we receive too many stimuli and pick up the emotional states of others. This can result in an inner turmoil for no apparent reason. Gurdjieff expressed this by saying that there are two freedoms; freedom from inner influences and freedom from outer influences. First I must become free from the forces within me which bind me to my personality and deny entry to all outside influences. When I have inner freedom I am connected to the outside, I live! But then the doors are open for both good and bad factors to enter me and I begin to seek the second freedom, the freedom from unwanted external influences.

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Karen: How do I know that when I get the first freedom I will be able to find out the second freedom? From what you say, if I don't, life could be worse for me than it is now.

Brian: This is negative imagination. You are worrying about how to come to the second freedom when you have not taken even the first step towards acquiring the first freedom! When you come to that point you will have available the techniques you need. Life will be quite different from your life now, and by no means worse — you will experience a fuller, longer life.

For the present, concentrate your efforts upon improving your situation now. Otherwise you will achieve nothing before old age and death are upon you.

Anne: You said a *longer life*, do you mean that the Work enables people to live longer?

Brian: You may live longer, but this was not what I was referring to. Time is experienced differently by the personality and the essence. Time passes quickly for our personality, slowly for our essence. This difference is just a result of the number and quality of impressions entering us. In the personality we get caught up in things, but without fully experiencing them, and time passes quickly.

Perhaps I can make this clearer with analogies: Life in my personality is just my habitual routine of work and home. Life in my essence is the experience of visiting a new place or a different land, or leaving forever somewhere dear to me. I notice more and feel more in contact with myself and all that is around me.

Helen: I have just been connecting together several ideas in my own mind. You said that time passes more quickly for the personality, and I wonder if our personality becomes more of a dominant factor in our lives as we age? As I have got older I have noticed that time seems to be passing more quickly. This troubles me sometimes. I feel as if I am being cheated because I don't get the same value out of my days and weeks

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anymore. December comes and I think to myself: 'Goodness, another year gone already'. If my personality is gradually taking over my life as the years pass, this would make sense. Do you follow me?

Brian: Yes, indeed. As we get older our personality does become more and more dominant and we experience our essence less and less often. Even before middle-age, several days may pass between the most fleeting moments of contact with ourselves. This being so, time passes quickly, just as you have said.

Helen: So work on oneself reverses the tendency for time to pass more quickly as we age?

Brian: Yes.

Karen: It seems to me that without our personalities life would be very dull, like a lot of automatons. I prefer interesting people, real characters. Is this bad?

Brian: It is certainly true that the essence is rather non-competitive and non-aggressive, but by no means does this make life less interesting. People I have known who have achieved much by their inner work have all been very interesting people. They seem to have done more things, to have more ideas and to be interesting people to deal with in every way, though sometimes a little unpredictable. This last, of course, is because our personality is what makes us so predictable. People who have worked on themselves seem more real and more alive than others.

As for how it feels to be centred in ourselves — a wealth of experiences flows in. I have met no one who found it less interesting than ordinary life.

Olaf: Was there ever a time in the history of mankind when people were only essence, when they were really themselves all the time?

Brian: Gurdjieff suggests in *Beelzebub's Tales* that there could

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have been such a period in history, but we cannot conceive what society might have been like then.

Olaf: Was there a time in our own lives when we only had our essence? Maybe before birth?

Brian: Yes. If, as Gurdjieff says, our personality is not really part of us, is something false or artificial, and that is how it seems, then it follows that we were born without it. Children are born with an individual character, as many a new parent has been surprised to discover, but this character is their own essential nature. These traits will remain with them for life, though perhaps overlaid by acquired features.

In each of us there remains a trace or a memory of a more meaningful life. This is because we were born with an essence but no personality and until the personality developed we had a more direct and satisfying relationship with life.

Colin: Are you suggesting that newborn babies live from their real selves and hence must be fully conscious?

Brian: No, because the essence alone is not a sufficient condition for consciousness, something else is needed. There has to be some maturity and the intellect and feelings have to be developed; a requirement which is not fulfilled until after puberty.

Of course, there can be different definitions of consciousness. Is a rabbit conscious? Or a tree? Or a stone? I am referring to a consciousness quite different from these.

Anne: How did our personality evolve?

Brian: As soon as we emerge from the womb, perhaps even from the moment of conception, influences act on us to affect our behaviour. From birth, children need to protect themselves from the world around and so they tense up against the painful shocks from outside. If you look at newborn babies in hospital you may see this happening.

Soon, our 'betters' begin to teach us new habits and we

learn to perform to please them, to get what we want or simply through the instinct to imitate.

Observing our own personality we can see that the different parts came from one or other of these sources; as a withdrawal or barrier against the harshness around us, as a means to the pleasure and comforts we want, or from imitation.

During childhood the personality becomes dominant. The essence gradually becomes overlaid, passive and hidden. By the time we become adult we no longer know ourselves and nor do others know us. People may be clever, foolish, wise, humble, arrogant, timid — but these are all manifestations of their personalities. In the ordinary way, every adult lives almost entirely through the personality. Sometimes young children are themselves, but adults almost never.

Mike: I would like to know if something I have seen in myself is an example of personality. I have noticed that with certain people I cannot help exaggerating. Afterwards, I get annoyed with myself because it is so absurd. Usually, there was no reason to alter the story and I could have told it just as it happened. Do you think this is due to my personality?

Brian: Yes, the personality has this compulsive quality. Indeed, it goes much further than your example. In one situation we pretend that we are always successful in what we do, but then, on another occasion and with other people, we may become helpless and frozen. Today I insist that I have a bad memory but yesterday, in different company, I did my utmost to convey the opposite impression.

Everything we say or do is distorted to fit the mood or to make an impression. We have to say we are practical or impractical, knowledgeable or ignorant depending on whom we are dealing with at the moment, when really the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. Frequently this passes unnoticed but sometimes we experience it as living a lie or unable to be ourselves.

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Rose: I have a subservient attitude towards some people, especially at work. I think this is a personality weakness. I resolve not to let it happen again, but it makes no difference. I soon start agreeing with people and doing what they say although I know better.

Brian: Because of the automatic way that the personality functions a particular situation tends to bring the same response from us time and again.

Of course we behave differently with different people: In one relationship I am irritated or annoyed, in another I dominate, and in a third I comply with the wishes of someone else. These different responses can even give an illusion of free will and choice, but the truth is that each type of situation can elicit only one type of response from us, no matter what we may decide beforehand. If we examine situations, and think about them, we can often see that the outcome of a given situation was predetermined by the interaction of the various personalities without regard to reason or the uniqueness of the situation.

Sally: I have exactly the same problem as Rose but in reverse! I tend to dominate my friends and some people dislike me for that reason. I try to be more restrained but then I get impatient and take charge.

Is there some way we can change ourselves?

Brian: Undoubtedly change is possible but it does take time and we have to approach the problem indirectly. We start by changing our attitudes towards our personality. When you see something in your own behaviour that you do not like, you must try not to become emotional about it. If it is a characteristic that you cannot easily change there is no value in becoming annoyed with yourself or embarrassed. If you are able to resist these emotional reactions that is the first step towards accepting your own personality. Only by so doing will you change yourself. This is something which will

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become clear to you later when we have studied our own inner states and energy exchanges.

Colin: Where does our self-image fit into all this?

Brian: Our self-image is part of our personality; the essence has no self-image — it relates directly to its environment without any interference from preconceptions or expectations. Our need to maintain our self-image whilst we are centred in the personality, however, acts to filter or distort all the data coming to us. Our impressions, as soon as they begin to touch our self-image, have to be modified or censored so as to be acceptable to us, though we do this, for the most part, without noticing it.

Paul: I have been wondering whether our bodies are part of the personality or the essence?

Brian: The essence and the personality meet in the body. It is naturally related to the essence and at birth was part of it and in harmony with it. But later the body is required to support the personality and to behave in accordance with its needs. This means that conflicting demands are made of it. Our personality then gives rise to chronic body-tensions and unnatural postures. However, this is not a one-way action. The personality distorts and limits the body and interferes with its natural freedom of movement but, at the same time, chronic tensions are the seat of the personality and make it what it is. They maintain the personality structure and, more importantly, they keep our centre of consciousness in the personality. They are the physical means by which we are kept in our personality and prevented from being ourselves.

Eric: Is our aim in the Work to smash our personality? I got that impression from a book I read about Gurdjieff.

Brian: Definitely not! The aim is not to smash anything in ourselves or anyone else! But, you must understand that the personality has become too dominant and it has to be more controlled and at the same time our real self has to take a

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more active part. This way our lives can become more meaningful and creative.

The personality is not totally bad. What is bad for us is that it plays too large a role in our lives. The personality should be secondary to our essence, it should be a tool, so that we can operate through it when the situation demands but be free of it at all times. This is the real difficulty in our situation — we are totally enclosed and dominated by our personality, we live only in this artificial outer layer and cannot get back to ourselves.

Sally: Can you explain how we can operate through the personality but be free of it? I cannot relate to this at all.

Brian: We can look upon our personality as comprising a number of roles, any of which we assume according to the situation we are in. At home with my family I have certain roles; husband, father, etc. At work my roles are different and which one is operative depends upon whom I am dealing with at the time. In one situation I am the boss and behave accordingly but later in the day, when faced by my superiors, I behave differently; my posture alters and my manner and the way I speak.

As the situation and people change, so do I or, rather, the role I am in changes. But none of this is intentional. My environment alters and I automatically adopt a different role. In the ordinary way I can do nothing about it because the role is entirely determined and directed by external events.

However, we have all occasionally chosen to behave in a predetermined way. If you can recall an occasion when you were able to keep to your intended role, perhaps simply an intention to be cheerful or positive in a difficult situation, you will remember that there was a better flavour about that experience. You felt on top of the situation. This is what I meant by operating through the personality. If it is rightly done it brings a strong sense of inner freedom.

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Jeff: Are you suggesting that we can consciously play our roles all the time?

Brian: Only if we can be conscious all the time!

Leanne: Why do we need to play these roles? I thought the whole point of the Work was to be ourselves.

Brian: When we intentionally play a role we are outwardly acting but inwardly we are ourselves. Sometimes it is necessary to behave in a certain way to get things done or get what we need. A role may be needed to protect our essence in emotional situations or with negative people, or we may simply play a role in order to make other people comfortable. When we are playing a suitable role we appear to others to be 'normal' and 'predictable'. The important thing is to remain inwardly separate from the role.

There is a Middle-eastern story illustrating this. The hero is a popular fiction character, Mullah Nasredin. He is asked: 'Mullah, you claim that you can see in the dark', (meaning that he is self-realised or enlightened), 'so why do you carry a lamp at night?'

Nasredin replies: 'So that other people will not bump into me!' We have to fit in with the needs of other people.

Sean: Is it that we need to alter our personality, not to do away with it?

Brian: It is rather that we have to find a way to curb its power. In the conscious state, the essence state, the personality is more subservient or passive. In our usual state of waking-sleep the positions of personality and essence are unnatural; the personality is dominant, active, and our essence is hidden and passive. What we are seeking is to re-establish a right relationship between the more real part of our nature and the outer show, the personality.

Ingrid: So we have to bring our essence out of its state of sleep? How can we do that?

Brian: There are many things which can bring about an

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essence response from us. We should learn not to waste these opportunities. Firstly, as I mentioned before, some natural things can evoke contact with our essence; the sight of a field, a tree, a flower, a sea view, a certain smell or taste. Often this experience of oneself is associated with a feeling of awe or amazement. In front of a natural vista of unusual beauty we experience awe — and come back to ourselves. But it lasts only a moment and then our habits reassert themselves. We remember that moment in a special way, however, because we were in our essence then. It is at first difficult to observe in ourselves, but it can be done. On a cliff-top viewpoint we stop the car and get out and for an instant stand silent and in awe. We experience ourselves and the view. But within seconds we turn to speak or are spoken to and the moment is lost, or our hand reaches for the camera and the magic is gone.

We can experience the same thing in connection with food. We face a beautiful spread — we take a mouthful — so delicious! Then we speak or a thought intrudes and the next we know the meal is eaten. But no one was there in us to taste it.

You can see that here we have opportunities which occur from time to time, and perhaps more often than we realise, but we fail to make use of them. We must observe how we waste these chances and perhaps we will find ways to prolong such moments.

Len: On a previous occasion with you we were working together in silence and for a time I felt different, more in contact with my job and more collected. Was this contact with my essence?

Brian: Silence can bring us back to ourselves. In fact, silence, especially a mutual agreement to work in silence with a group of others, is a very powerful means for establishing contact with one's essence and for experiencing one of the important characteristics of this state. Apart from a certain peacefulness, most people who have experimented with working in silence as a group notice that they have a more direct and immediate

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relationship with each other and with the task. This has to be experienced to be understood, as you obviously have. We feel somehow connected with others from *inside* and more in harmony with one another. This experience does not last all the time and often is quite brief but it is valuable. Silence is used by Trappist monks to bring them 'nearer to God' — another way of expressing the condition of being centred in oneself.

Sally: Why don't we do everything together in silence?

Brian: Especially the discussions! Seriously, it is a great mistake, having discovered the value of a particular technique, to imagine we have the complete answer. One must be wary of putting too much reliance on any single technique. Any technique which is over-used will cease to give proper results. It can simply cease to work, or a more subtle change may occur, where we think all is going as before, not realising that the technique has been absorbed by the personality and is perhaps even strengthening the hold of the personality. When this happens the technique for awakening ourselves becomes merely a part of the act we put on, but this may only become obvious to us very much later, perhaps never.

Colin: There must be other techniques we can use?

Brian: There are many. Certain efforts of attention bring us back to ourselves, which is one reason for the Movements that we study. Awkward situations, embarrassment, developing a new skill or any change of situation for which the personality has no ready-made formula for coping, may shake us out of our personality for a while. Shocks to the body such as fasting, radical change of diet or unaccustomed work can bring us back to ourselves. Though such effects are quite short-lived they may bring about a breakthrough to our essence which we have failed to achieve by other means.

Janet: But earlier you said that contact with our essence happens when we notice things especially vividly. So why is all this effort, struggle and so on, necessary?

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Brian: How often do we notice something with the vividness which I spoke of? Certainly not even once a day. And if it should happen, how long does it last? Generally the experience is a very brief one. It is a spontaneous essence contact but it does not last long and the total fraction of our waking hours each year spent in that more wide-awake state is negligible.

The problem arises when we are not satisfied with such chance events and we seek to be in an essence state more frequently and for longer periods. Then we find that almost whatever we do our personality adapts and does not allow our essence to function. Some of us have to go to extreme lengths of exhaustion before our personality will suddenly let go and allow the essence to take charge for a while. You can read accounts of such experiences in books on Zen. In fact, the same traumatic experience is necessary for many people, whatever the Way they are following. An example of this happened to a participant on one of our summer courses. Her name is Joan and she is an artist.

I had asked her to give a talk to us on the enneagram. This was a difficult subject for her because she always avoided intellectual thinking. She gave her talk to everyone including a visitor, who was a leading figure in Gurdjieff groups in another city and was visiting us for the day.

Unknown to me, Joan had stayed up all the previous night preparing her talk. It was a personality feature of hers that she had to prepare for everything thoroughly. That evening we worked on the Movements for some hours until our visitor left and then we began a reading. I had decided that we should stay up that night and complete our reading of Beelzebub's Tales in order to be able to read through the other two series of Gurdjieff's writings in the remaining period of the course. Naturally, no one was obliged to stay up all night but most stayed with the reading until the small hours. Joan, with several others, stuck it out right through until the morning. She is a very strong person who does not shrink from a

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challenge. I noticed she momentarily fell asleep and began to slide off her chair several times in the night.

At breakfast I asked her if she would give all the students an art class immediately afterwards. She said, 'Yes' to my request and smiled but looked a little pale — no time to prepare! I saw her finish her breakfast quickly and dash to her room to do what preparation she could in the remaining minutes. She is a very talented artist and part of her role there was giving us all painting lessons.

At the end of the painting class another student came up to me: 'Have you seen Joan?'

I said that I had not. He said: 'She looks really different. She's beautiful!'

In a suitable environment, we can put progressively greater difficulties in the way of the personality until it is no longer able to maintain its pattern of behaviour. It is forced to let go and allow the essence to manifest. When this happens we experience a deep feeling of freedom and physical relaxation and our entire appearance may change.

It is interesting to notice that all these difficulties were due solely to Joan's own personality — she made all the difficulties herself. She was not obliged to stay up all night preparing her talk, but her personality made her do so. She need not have stayed at the reading or agreed to take the art class. In the circumstances, both were quite unreasonable things to do. But the personality is not reasonable and in this case that caused its downfall.

Olaf: So difficulties and hardships are the way to contact our essence?

Brian: They are methods which can be effective if rightly used but they are by no means the only methods.

There are many other things which can bring the results we seek. Simply focusing the attention can do the trick, work on the Movements, relaxation. Later we will practise sensing, which means placing the attention in various parts of the

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body. This is a very powerful technique and a key to much of our later work.

We can develop associations which are conducive to our return to ourselves. Choosing a place for regular meditation, so that when we approach that place and sit we may immediately come back to ourselves.

Finally, the presence of an individual or a group of people who are able, at will, to be centred in themselves is a great help. In the presence of such people one may at times experience a certain kind of confusion corresponding to the advent of the essence state. Mr Bennett's behaviour at Sherborne was sometimes eccentric and could shock us into this state of confusion. This happened to me on one occasion. At that time I was a smoker, but Mr Bennett had introduced a rule which forbade smoking in the coffee room after meals. About ten days after he announced this new rule, I noticed the odd person or two smoking there. Over a few days the number of smokers increased until the room was filled with a blue haze at coffee time. Mr Bennett took no notice so I assumed that the rule had been rescinded at some meeting which I had missed. One day I lit a cigarette. Within minutes Mr Bennett came thundering across the room towards me, pushing his way through the crowd. In a loud, angry tone he said, 'Why are you smoking? Don't you know you are not allowed to smoke in the coffee room? Can't you see that no one else smokes here?' All around the room thin plumes of smoke rose ceilingwards from behind the backs of onlookers!

The kind of confusion which I experienced then, which was really only personality confusion, can help free our essence and enable us to wake up.

So you see there are many ways in which we can be put in contact with our essence at least momentarily; things in nature, efforts of attention, encounters with special people!

Janet: With so many possibilities I should have thought we would have no problem finding our essence.

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Brian: There are also many things which strengthen the hold of the personality. Study of these is another side of our work. We will find that some man-made objects, notably machines and certain buildings, steal our awareness, as also can the presence of people who are more deeply lost in their personalities.

There is a story of an educated Chinese traveller who comes across a peasant laboriously lifting buckets of water from a well to irrigate his land. The traveller says there is a device whereby this could be done using a great deal less time and effort. The peasant is very interested at first but, after the gentleman has described it to him, he says that he knows about such machines but he also knows that whoever uses them becomes like a machine himself and loses his simplicity.

Paul: Why is it that we are out of touch with ourselves?

Brian: Adults have so long-ago lost the habit of being centred in their essence that they do not know how it is done. The technique has to be relearnt from someone else who has himself been shown how to re-establish this connection and has experimented and experienced over a period of time, so that his or her contact with the essence is very firmly re-established. In theory, each of us could find the way back to ourselves but the practical hurdles are such that few, if any, people are successful alone.

Paul: What sort of hurdles?

Brian: I shall say more on this later, but in simple terms it is that our sense of what is *right* has been confused by wrong living or wrong habits. We have on the Way to do some things which seem at first not to be right or necessary, so why would we do them except because we are advised to do so by someone we trust? Perhaps you have heard the story of the person who for a long time has had a crooked spine. After treatment he is visibly straighter and more upright but until he becomes familiar with his new state he feels more bent than before.

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For a time his posture feels uncomfortable and *unnatural*. It is much like this with attempts to change ourselves — we are up against the problem that what is habitual to us feels most comfortable and natural.

Our habits are established by and for life as it is ordinarily lived through the personality, and therefore maintaining contact with ourselves must involve making some changes in our habit patterns. However, associated with our habits is an internal mechanism which tends to return the system to its usual condition whenever that equilibrium is disturbed. This mechanism strives always to return us to our personality.

Colin: It seems to me that being with others with similar interests is a great advantage.

Brian: It may well be so. It is encouraging to know that others are working towards the same aims. However, there is a plus and a minus in this. We can be distracted from personal efforts by the feeling that what the rest do is good enough. Such groups can easily lose their way and, for example, become no more than social occasions.

There is a story of a 'teacher' who points out to someone in the street that he is about to step in a puddle. The man replies that it does not matter; only *his* feet will get wet. He says, if the teacher treads in the mud, many others will follow him into it and push him in deeper! We can as easily encourage each other to pursue the wrong direction as the right one.

There is a need for us to be vigilant, but it is stimulating and encouraging to be with others with a common aim. We are all very easily influenced and it is important that a sufficient number of the influences to which we are exposed encourage this tenuous contact with our essence. There are plenty of influences trying to bring us back to our ordinary condition!

Another necessity is for us to have time for ourselves, and meeting together is one way of ensuring that some time is set

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aside for this Work. If all our time is taken up by external activities, leaving us no time to come back to ourselves, we will sooner or later lose the ability to do so. This applies to any kind of external activity, whether physical or mental. If it takes too great a proportion of our waking hours and, especially, if it exerts too great a pressure for achievement, we cannot maintain our inner contact.

Olaf: Are these ideas that you have been talking about something new or has it all been known before? It seems to me that this is largely what religions are about.

Brian: Certainly these ideas are not new. In many religions such ideas have been the central core of the teaching at some time. They also appear in folk tales or fairy stories around the world, perhaps preserved from generation to generation because they appeal to a deeper need in us:

Sleeping Beauty and all her attendants remain fast asleep until the Prince, who is awake, comes. He can awaken her. We need help to awaken to ourselves.

Cinderella is kept indoors by her ugly sisters but when the Prince has met her he wants no one else. When we free the essence from its domination by the personality, the taste of the experience remains with us for a long time and it can become the most important thing in life.

People read books, listen to talks, travel the world, worship gurus, and all to find that which is missing in their lives, to find God, to gain enlightenment. As one Zen master put it:

'I sell water by the riverside. What the seeker seeks is right here — it is himself!'

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2 *Our Threefold Mind*

Ingrid: Last week you spoke about *knowing ourselves* meaning awakening to our essence, but I wonder if you would speak about the ordinary meaning of the expression? When I think of self-knowledge, I think about knowing myself in the way my friends know me; being aware of what my own character is really like. How can we get a true picture of our own character?

Brian: Very much of what we will be speaking about will deal with this question. We have to observe our own behaviour in a methodical way and from different angles, so as to piece the picture together. We start with general observations and then work towards the details.

It is clear that whatever we do is a reflection of something happening inside us, in our inner world. So let us begin by speaking about the major divisions of the mind and relating our actions to them.

Gurdjieff taught that man is a 'three-brained being', unlike all other creatures which are 'merely single- or double-brained'. By this he meant that the human mind can be thought of as having three parts; intellect, emotions and instinct. He referred to these parts as brains, functions or centres.

It is helpful to look at our experiences and behaviour as having three parts. In this way we can bring some order into our observations which otherwise seem just a mass of shapeless and conflicting data. If we observe ourselves we soon find that everything going on inside us fits into one or other

of these three categories — either it is thought or emotion or sensation.

Anne: Would you say a feeling is an emotion or a sensation?

Brian: That depends upon what feeling you are talking about. Some feelings are emotions and some feelings are instinctive. When I feel happy, bored, disappointed, joyful or jealous, these are emotional feelings. Feelings of hot or cold, hunger or thirst are sensations and belong to the instinctive centre. Perhaps we need to think more about the sorts of activities in each of the three brains.

We can all recognise the emotions; joy, fear, amazement, gloom and many others — when they are strong, we feel them in our chest or the pit of the stomach.

Secondly, there is the instinctive function which has to do with all our bodily sensations such as pain or physical pleasure, touch, taste and the other senses, but also with control of our body chemistry and heartbeat, breathing and instinctive reflexes. Gurdjieff grouped with these, as part of the same centre, sexual urges and learnt skills, such as our ability to write, talk, walk or drive a car. This broader concept of a body-control function he referred to as the *moving-instinctive centre* or simply *moving centre*.

Finally, the intellect, which is the source for all thinking, visualising, planning, daydreaming and the stream of associations. Gurdjieff used to say that every stick has two ends, and this is certainly true of the intellect. On the one hand it is a non-stop source of thoughts and daydreams which prevent us from experiencing life. At the same time it has given us power to survive and to adapt the world the way we want, a power which no other animal possesses.

Walter: What is wrong with thoughts? Isn't that what the mind is for?

Brian: Of course, thoughts and associations are useful but our intellect has not been trained to focus and hold to a single

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thought when we want it to. If you sit quite still and let your thought rest on a single idea — perhaps simply the fact that you are sitting, you cannot. The thoughts flash from idea to idea uncontrollably. Each time you set yourself to hold the single idea that you are sitting here, the thought lasts awhile and then the associations take over again. We have insufficient power of attention to hold a single thought for more than a few minutes at most. To me this is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs — we have a potentially powerful tool in our head but it does not perform as it should.

Jeff: How can we learn to switch off our associations and daydreams?

Brian: It is possible, temporarily, to stop associations by giving the intellect something simple to occupy itself with. This is the principle of the mantra or repetitive prayer — by repeating a word or phrase over and over, we can stop the stream of associations for a while. But most people find that this is not effective for long. The fact is that we lack attention and when our attention lapses the moving centre takes over the mantra. This lack of attention is the fundamental weakness of the intellect and it is just one aspect of a more general malfunctioning of our mind. This malfunctioning shows up in each centre and in the relationships between our centres.

Walter: Of course, none of us is perfect. But I think it is not fair to say that our minds are that bad.

Brian: I have already referred to the uncontrollable associations in the intellect. In the moving-instinctive centre, examples of wrong working are muscle tensions, habitual bad posture and nervous movements — and these are more universal than most people realise. The emotional centre is full of anxiety and fears and many other unpleasant emotions which mar our joy in life. This is all symptomatic of a chronically bad condition in the whole mind.

If we are to take this study any further we have to agree to

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observe our own behaviour so that we will have something definite to discuss, not just opinions. We can begin simply by labelling our actions, whatever we are doing, according to which brain they seem to be issuing from. For example, if I am walking along the street I know this corresponds to my moving centre. And I know that it must be my intellect which is thinking these thoughts as I walk.

Leanne: At different times in the past I have read about this idea and felt inspired to do as you say and try to decide which brain is controlling whatever I happened to be doing. It sounds strange, but most times I could not be certain which brain I was using.

Brian: A good observation. Initially this exercise is unexpectedly difficult. We have to begin by ignoring the situations where we cannot be sure which brain is operating. In some situations it is clear; if I am daydreaming that must be my intellect, or if I get angry I know that must be my emotional centre. Simply ignore the occasions when you are uncertain and make a mental note of examples which are clear and your skill will soon increase until there are few doubtful observations. The secret is to persist, not to give up.

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Harry: I have an observation about the speeds of the different functions. I noticed that the thinking centre is much slower than the moving centre. An example is in typing. When I was first learning to type I would think to myself, where is the 's', where is the 'u', etc., then there came a time when, once in a while, my finger had moved to the key before I had thought out which one it had to strike. Now that I type quickly I try never to think about it because if I do I am slower and make more mistakes.

Brian: Yes, the moving centre is a great deal faster than the intellect. Once you have learnt to type, your knowledge or skill in typing resides in the moving centre, which is able to type very much more quickly than your thinking brain.

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The same thing happens when learning to drive a car or learning to read. The moving centre does the job faster and better.

Another point from your observation is how much more reliable the moving centre is than the intellect. Not only are you slower when you think about which letters you must strike, but you make more mistakes too.

However, the intellect may be slower and less reliable but it can do what the others cannot — it can compare, plan, visualise or hold a pattern. Most important of all for our work, it can observe and note what is happening and bring those observations into awareness. It is through my intellectual part that I know that I am here now.

Olaf: I had classified reading as intellectual activity, but you say it is the moving centre that reads?

Brian: The moving centre reads but the intellect grasps the meaning. Have you ever had the experience of reading something which required a lot of concentration and suddenly realising that you had read a whole page without taking in a single word? You were still reading, but only with your moving centre.

Graham: I found out from the task that the emotional centre is quicker than the thinking centre and that the moving centre is quicker still. I was riding my bike and being aware of my body and that my moving centre was in control, and I nearly hit a parked car. I saw it just in time to swerve out and miss it. Feelings of anger welled up in me then and I started thinking about what happened. My moving centre reacted first, then came the feelings and the thoughts followed.

Brian: A good example, but not worth risking your life for! You should be careful where and when you do these tasks. Until your attention has developed sufficiently you should not attempt this kind of task where it may expose you to danger. Later it will be perfectly safe to be aware of your body whilst riding a bicycle or driving a car.

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Your observation of the relative speeds of the centres is very interesting.

Ingrid: I also found that observing myself interfered with my functioning. I was driving to work and the thought came to me that my moving centre was in control. Then I seemed to lose control of myself for a moment. That was frightening. And I saw that most of the time my moving centre drives and I don't have any conscious awareness of it.

Brian: At this stage you must not observe yourself if your safety depends upon concentrating on what you are doing. Later you will be able to observe and be more awake in any situation and benefit as a result. But, for the present, limit yourself to safe situations.

Your feeling of 'losing control of yourself' indicates that this attempt to observe momentarily disrupted the operation of your personality. That is one purpose of the task. In this way it can enable your essence to participate.

Len: I was being aware of my body as I walked along the street and almost bumped into a lamppost!

Brian: This is not the kind of awareness we are looking for! You are using your attention wrongly. When I ask you to be aware of your body, you must not lose contact with the outside world. Be aware of your body but be aware of its surroundings at the same time.

Jeff: After the last meeting I went home feeling very wide-awake. I didn't want to go to bed so I decided to wash a shirt. I sat on the edge of the bath with only shorts on and I watched myself reach across and pick up the soap. I saw my reflection in the mirror and I don't know if it was the light but my tan looked faded. Next moment I found that I had soaped the shirt collar. It was surprising to me what a complex series of actions my moving centre must have gone through to do that. And I had not even known I was doing it.

Brian: That's nothing! Ingrid drives all the way to work

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without knowing what she is doing! And, of course, we all do the same thing, whether we realise it or not.

Rose: I have two observations about my emotions: The first thing is that most of them seem to be unpleasant, like anger or hurt pride or boredom. Not all the time, of course. I don't want you to think I never have happy feelings! But during the past week I made a mental note whenever I especially noticed my feelings, and a surprising amount of them were bad feelings. If I take yesterday as an example, the event that I remember best is when I almost had an accident in the car. A man swerved in front of me and I was barely able to avoid him. That made me angry.

The other thing I noticed was that after I get emotional I feel drained.

Brian: It is true that the majority of our emotions are unpleasant. This is another aspect of what I referred to as our malfunctioning mind.

And the other thing you said — they leave you drained of energy. Yes, a violent outburst of anger or a feeling of hopelessness and despondency can, each in their different ways, sap our vital force. This is because emotions have the property of collecting our force. They can exhaust us, just as you say, or they can get things moving. More often than we realise, the force which pushes us to get things done is an emotion — a point which we will consider again when we discuss Gurdjieff's *Law of Three*, which deals with why some things get done but others do not.

Olaf: If the emotions collect our energy, where do they get it from?

Brian: What happens to your body and thoughts after an outburst of anger? Do you feel physically and mentally exhausted? That is where the emotion has drawn its strength.

John: I have been thinking about the purpose of each of the three brains. You already said that through the intellect I

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know what is going on and am able to solve problems and make plans. The emotions are very forceful and make me get on with things, such as when I feel guilty about something I have not done. And it seems to me that the special thing about our moving-instinctive brain is that it is actually my point of contact with the real world.

Brian: Can you explain what you mean?

John: I mean that all I know of the physical world has come through my senses, which are controlled by the instinctive mind. I only know what I see, hear, etc. That could apply to inside my own body also. And all of my reactions go through bodily movements, which are controlled by the moving-instinctive brain.

Brian: What you say is correct. All of our interactions with the physical world are under the influence of the moving centre.

Janet: I wonder whether this three-centres idea is an artificial division? Is there really any separation between the centres? I ask this because I know that if I do something that affects my moving centre, it affects the other two. I can think better after a cup of coffee and after a good meal I am generally in a good mood. This suggests to me that they are not really separate.

Brian: They are parts of the same mind. In fact there is quite a peculiar interrelation between them. As you say, there can be an obvious interaction: I straighten up and as a result I feel positive. Then I remember my worries and my posture sags. Our moods are very much connected with the state of our body. Less obviously, so are our thoughts.

Bob: Last week I noticed a time when my feelings affected my body. One evening I was digging in the garden and thinking about a friend who lives in England. My digging was going with a swing and I had pleasant memories of England. Then I remembered that I had a very unpleasant confrontation

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to face at work next day. At the same time my mood changed to anxiety and the ground seemed to become harder to dig. In fact, I decided not to finish the whole patch after all and went indoors for a cup of tea!

Brian: What a fine example. That is just how it is; a different thought or feeling and the body is immediately affected. Your example also illustrates another point — the seeming disconnection between the three brains. At the time you were digging your thoughts were 12,000 miles away!

It is hard to grasp this apparent contradiction that the three parts of the mind sometimes behave as if there were no connection between them, yet a moment later one part is interfering with the others. I like to compare the mind with a house in which three people are living. These three are quite different types with different interests, attitudes and abilities. Anyone who has lived in such a household will know well that the people either go their own way or interfere with one another. Because of their differing aims and interests each person's intentions tend to be frustrated or deflected by the others. Life can become so muddled that little gets done beyond the needs of the moment. Our inner life is much like this.

Anne: All week I have been trying to see situations in which one brain interacts with another, but I did not find a single one. I wonder if this is going on all the time unconsciously but we only notice when our emotions get heated?

Brian: With practice one is able to observe more. That is part of your problem — you have not yet had sufficient experience in observation. But it is also true that unless there is a certain intensity we are not able to notice what our centres do. This intensity most often comes from an emotion.

When we are not noticing, our three functions go on churning out automatic thoughts, automatic feelings and automatic movements incessantly. As Christ put it: ' . . . seeing, they do not see and hearing, they do not

understand . . .' I think he was speaking of the automatism of the moving-instinctive centre. Let me give you an example: At this moment I am aware of the clothes on my body, contact with the chair and a slight itch on my right leg — but for how long had these sensations previously existed without my noticing?

Physical tensions are another sphere in which we are largely unconscious of what is going on in our bodies. People do not suspect how tense they are until they are taught relaxation. Everyone of us is afflicted with chronic muscular tensions which are indicative of an unhealthy state of the moving-instinctive centre. We are continually acquiring bodily tensions from the things we do, from reaction to stress and by imitation, but if our centres were operating as they should, each tension would be released as soon as the situation producing it had passed. But this does not happen and tensions become fixed. By practising relaxation we correct, to some extent, the wrong working of the moving brain and at the same time the other brains benefit because associated with our physical tensions are emotional and intellectual tensions or blockages.

An astonishing example of the interrelation of these three parts of the mind is the connection between physical tensions and mental associations. Whoever has tried meditation will know that it is impossible to stop the thoughts jumping from one thing to another. They are quite uncontrollable. But, surprisingly, if we seriously work on relaxation our thoughts begin to leave us in peace.

In the ordinary way thoughts go on continuously but we are unaware of them unless they happen to touch on something which is important to us or affects our feelings, I could be unconsciously thinking about one thing after another for a whole hour until, suddenly, I recall a scathing comment aimed at me by a lady in the supermarket. Immediately the feeling of hurt pride which I experienced then, returns. At this point I notice my daydreams.

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Rose: Since we have been practising relaxation each day I have begun to notice how tense I am, yet previously I had not realised I was tense at all. In fact, people have often said how they envied me being always so relaxed. I used to believe them — it was quite flattering — but I do not believe them anymore.

Brian: It is hard to see our tensions and we are almost as blind to them in other people as in ourselves.

Colin: The hardest of all seems to me to be aware of our emotions. Generally, I cannot tell whether I am feeling anything or not. I suspect that I am feeling something most of the time, but am not sensitive enough to be sure what it is. These emotions are probably affecting my behaviour in some way.

Brian: Everyone who has tried to observe themselves has found this. If we ask, 'What am I feeling now?', we often find that we cannot answer the question.

Other people can more easily see our emotions than we can ourselves. If you are the boss, your staff will notice your mood and behave accordingly — or react to you!

Jeff: What can we do to become more sensitive to our emotions?

Brian: There is no instant solution — the whole mechanism of the mind has to be put right. That is a lifetime's work. Little by little we see improvements — we discover that we are able to see or do things which we could not before. One of the things which we gradually become more sensitive to is our emotions. We begin to notice the emotions changing in us, where previously we had not been aware that any emotions were there at all.

Karen: Isn't that rather unhealthy, dwelling on one's emotions?

Brian: I am not speaking of dwelling on our emotions, quite the opposite in fact. We learn to notice more of what is going

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on inside and outside of us. One of the things that we notice more is our emotions. The more we are in touch with our system, the more healthy we can become. To dwell on our emotions is something different. Part of this Work is learning how to let go of our emotions so as not to be caught up in every passing feeling, which is quite the opposite of dwelling on them.

Victor: People all seem to be experiencing these fantastic emotions, but I don't! If the others have these emotional experiences, why don't I?

Brian: To me, it sounds as if your question is charged with emotion, though you may not realise it yourself. In fact, you are not the only person here who is suffering from an inability to fully express or feel emotion. It is quite common, especially in men. With some people the feelings have been repressed in early life until they almost cease to participate in daily life. There is also an inability to acknowledge one's own feelings, just as you expressed in your question. In people who have this disability, one is often aware of an underlying emotional weakness, as if emotion is trying to burst out but fear prevents it. At other times it may be sensed as a thinly disguised violence.

Victor: What you say is right. I don't trust my emotions.

Brian: You are fortunate to be able to accept this. In some people it can go so far that the emotional content is lost from all their experience. Then it becomes impossible to talk of real experiences because they can only speak of intellectual concepts which have neither interest nor reality, except perhaps to another person burdened with the same condition.

Our emotional centre experiences situations quite differently from our intellect. It can see the finer points much more than the intellect and can make a judgement which is based upon a much fuller understanding of any situation. This is why theorists so easily lose contact with reality, no

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matter how logical they may be. If my emotions are repressed or traumatised, I will be unable to see that the same state could be described as *detachment* or as *connectedness*. These two words, though seemingly contradictory, both describe the feeling of one experience. The intellect is unable to cope with such subtlety.

Olaf: Are the theorists that you spoke of the same as Gurdjieff referred to as 'intellectual types'?

Brian: That's right. In each of us the three functions have developed to differing degrees and in general one function predominates in our attitudes to life and the things we value most. One of these types is the intellectual, but he or she is not very common amongst humanity.

Anne: I have read that the moving-instinctive type is the most common but when I look at people, and especially myself, I cannot be sure whether they belong to this type. How can the three types be distinguished?

Brian: To some extent the body shape and the type of face give us away. But the crucial question is what we value most.

The moving-instinctive type probably likes physical activities and comforts, but this is not unfaillingly true. The characteristic feature of such a person is in valuing practical things more than ideas and ideals. This may be expressed in terms of seeking quantity rather than quality, though not always.

The second most common is the emotional type in whom everything is ultimately valued for the feeling connected with it. Such people can be very intelligent, of course, and very practical but they always trust and value their feelings and, though they may think things out, they mistrust intellectual concepts and they underrate the value of material things.

The least common type is the intellectual person. He tries to make a theory for everything but lacks feeling and often does not perform well at practical tasks. Such people tend to

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believe that only ideas and theories have real value in life.

Jeff: Is it possible for a person, by work on himself, to balance his centres? I mean to escape from his type, so that he has a more reasonable value pattern?

Brian: In each category there are more or less extreme people. In this sense it is possible to establish a relatively balanced state. This is one aim of work on ourselves. I doubt if we can ever be entirely free from our type but certainly we can polish up the other two brains and learn to see other values. For example, the feeling type can learn to appreciate the value of material things and ideas. I suspect, however, that he or she will act on a feeling when under pressure, though I am by no means certain that this has to be so.

Mike: You say the intellectual type is the rarest, but is it not true that in the Western system of education we have all become too intellectual and that we need to open our feelings?

Brian: The Sufis, from whom these ideas came, say the Work is in turning from the head to the heart. This means that the purpose of work on ourselves is to learn to live from the heart instead of the head. This sounds like a contradiction of what I said before, but it isn't. It means that our view of things and the way that we relate to people is superficial — we do not see what is going on below the surface. It is true that the emotional centre can see more deeply into situations, but for that to happen we have first to achieve a relatively balanced state in ourselves. For the instinctive and intellectual types this does include opening up the feelings, but for the emotional types it means freeing themselves from their domination by emotion.

Harry: Do you think this division into types is really just a question of habits? I wonder if we acquire certain habits of mind for coping with situations early in life which leads to our becoming more developed in one centre?

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Brian: I suspect we are born with a tendency to greater strength in one of our functions. But a big factor is our upbringing; what Gurdjieff called our 'education'. He included in this what we learnt at home, as well as at school, in fact all the influences exerted upon us by other people. In childhood we were permitted, even encouraged, to develop our strengths and ignore our weaknesses. For example, if a child is predisposed to intellectual pursuits, he is generally encouraged to concentrate on them and neglect to acquire manual skills, for which he has less natural ability. In this way the innate imbalance in his nature becomes established and magnified.

Maria: You once told me that I think with my feelings. At the time your remark mystified me, but I know that I haven't a brilliant brain. Perhaps this has something to do with what you have been saying?

Brian: Not a brilliant brain? How could your music be so good without a good brain? The point is, which brain are you talking about?

You are an emotional type and your intellect has never been called upon to play a very great role in your life. In every situation you act upon a feeling, that was my meaning. You need to be more theoretical and to think things out.

Maria: I do feel a lack here. But I cannot see why it matters.

Brian: I think you have excused yourself for years with just such an expression! We have a strong desire not to do anything about our areas of weakness because of the effort and a sense of inadequacy. If we cannot see why it matters, we can legitimately forget about doing anything to put things right.

There is something special about having three centres which all operate as they should. Gurdjieff referred repeatedly to man as a *three-brained being* in his book *Beelzebub's Tales*. This expression appears over a hundred times in the book. Why do you think he put such emphasis on the fact

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that man, unlike other organisms on Earth, has three centres? The extra function, which man alone has, is his intellect. Because we have three brains, we can be and do what other living things cannot.

All living organisms are transformers of energy. Plants convert the sun's energy into chemical structures for their own growth. Animals convert the chemical energy of plant structures into all the forms needed for their activities, both outer and inner. We are just like other animals in this respect but, because of the threefold nature of the human mind, we can also participate in a transformation which goes beyond the needs of ordinary life. What I am saying is not just theory or a flattering philosophy of man the superior being, but an actual way of experiencing life.

Jeff: Are you referring to higher states of consciousness?

Brian: With the reservation that we may mean quite different things by 'higher consciousness' — yes, I am.

Harry: I don't see why three centres are a prerequisite of higher states.

Brian: Each of the three has a necessary and quite different part to play to enable me to experience myself sitting here with you, talking to you and seeing you. This is a conscious state only because I have an awareness of myself and my body at the same time as I talk and experience all the things around me.

What part of me can I identify as *I*, as myself? Is it not the emotional centre? Though it is true that emotions come and go and are not *I*, nevertheless, my feeling centre represents my central point. I say *I* and place my hand naturally on my breast, my feeling centre, not on my head! So the role of the emotional centre is in providing the *feeling of I* which is a part of the conscious state.

Victor: But I have read that true consciousness is a feeling of

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'not I' or 'nothingness'. Can you reconcile this with what you are saying?

Brian: This is for you an intellectual concept. What you say precisely exemplifies the limitation of the intellect which I spoke of earlier.

I have no need to reconcile my feeling of 'I' with your author's feeling of 'nothingness', because they are two descriptions of the same experience.

Colin: You said that I identify my emotional centre as being the real me. What you say feels right to me but, at the same time, my thought is also part of the experience of me.

Brian: This is the second part of the experience. I not only feel aware of myself but I *know* that I am. My intellect is recognising or confirming the feeling of myself, here and now.

John: I think the moving centre provides the *here and now* of the experience. As I said before, the moving-instinctive centre generates the sensation of my own body and the points of contact with the world around through sight, hearing and so on. That seems to be an important part of being conscious.

Brian: Yes, without this strong contact with the sensations of our own body and surroundings we merely dream that we are conscious. In fact, higher consciousness can be thought of as just an altered interaction between our three functions. Recently I asked one of our students what she had gained from the classes and she replied: 'I've learnt to change gear in my mind'. She was trying to express that there has to be a different relationship between the parts of the mind. The analogy of changing gear in a car is an attempt to express that experience.

If you remember my own analogy of three people living in one house, it is as if all three need a common purpose. Then

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everything is as it should be and there is co-operation and harmony.

Gurdjieff wrote that 'every really conscious perception and manifestation of man can result only from the simultaneous and co-ordinate working of the three aforesaid sources, which make up his general individuality.' The *three sources* are, of course, the three parts of our mind. When our three functions are in harmony we become conscious. If we are conscious we are in the truest sense, individuals — we have a sense of our own presence, of *I*.

Gurdjieff liked to compare the human psyche with a carriage, horse and driver. The body is like the carriage — it is the vehicle which carries us. The driver is the brains of the team and he represents our intellect. The horse corresponds to our feelings because they generally provide the force which gets us moving. If the carriage is too broken down or always requires attention, if the driver is too weak or lazy or if the horse insists on going its own way, the whole unit cannot operate as it should. Until the carriage, horse and driver work together as a team, they will not get a passenger. In our psyche, the passenger also has his counterpart; it is the sense of 'I' which enters us as a result of this Work.

Harry: A while back I said that when typing I try never to think about it because otherwise I make mistakes. This seems to contradict what you are saying. I mean, surely, if we are more conscious we do things better, yet I know quite well that my intellect or feelings must not be involved in my typing. It seems to me that in many things we do, only one or perhaps two centres are needed to do it well.

Brian: Again this is thinking about the words, not the experience. Let us not get caught up in mental constructions but come back to the reality of the situation, in this case the typing. We can say that, whether we notice or not, there will be activity going on in all three centres. We can type like machines or we could, in theory, type consciously. In the

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former, our moving centre is occupied with the typing and, as you say, that is all. But is it all? Would it not be more accurate to say that meanwhile the other two centres are busy with their fantasies? Now consider the other situation; typing in a self-collected manner. The activity is not limited to typing, it is you sitting in a particular situation and typing. The awareness which you have of yourself there typing requires that all three centres participate, but the feelings and thoughts must not get caught up in the typing. When it is right, the experience has a feeling of balance or poise in oneself. Experiences may be pleasant or unpleasant, but they do not have this special quality which we are seeking unless our whole mind is in harmony and one part is not interfering with the others.

Karen: Do you think it is a good thing to practise remembering ourselves even when doing household chores? It seems better to me to plan out my day whilst I wash up the breakfast things.

Brian: Try to be present to yourself during every activity. Nothing could be more worthwhile or interesting.

Steve: Yesterday I was washing up. I was doing it in a heavy sort of way because my feelings were still affected by something that happened before, but at the same time I was thinking about what I would do next! All I want to do is be here now, but I don't know how to unhook my feelings from the past or stop my thoughts shooting away into the future.

Brian: When you notice this you have a chance to do something. Immediately, without thinking about it, stop, sit down and keep absolutely still for five minutes. Don't move a foot or a finger in that time. That way you make use of the opportunity — and more similar opportunities will arise as a result.

Walter: I had an experience of higher consciousness this morning when I shut a door on my finger! Normally, hurting my finger like that would make me resentful. But because we

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had been thinking about our three brains, the thought came to me immediately that it was senseless to get emotional just because my hand hurt. That made me feel different. I did not get tense and the finger did not seem so painful. Actually it changed the pain as if I was less concerned with it.

Brian: Your example illustrates the great practical value in this principle of dividing the mind into three parts. My thoughts say 'this pain is in my moving centre', or my thoughts say 'this feeling of anger comes from my emotional centre', and immediately something very significant happens to the nature of my experience. This is because I have created a polarity or separation in my mind. My thoughts are no longer fully caught up in the pain or the anger.

As Mr Bennett put it: 'When we permit this polarity or tension between two parts of our nature to remain in us, we become open to the entry of the *spiritualising force*.' We can be suddenly raised to a higher state, wherein new insights and a purer action, which is also a purifying action, can begin. It happens just as you have described.

There are various other ways that such an inner separation can come about. Often it takes the form of one centre saying 'yes' and another centre saying 'no'. To illustrate what I mean I shall give you this story from Sherborne:

When Mr Bennett directed the Sherborne courses there were periodic Visitors Days. On these days there was a standard programme consisting of general work in the gardens until lunchtime and for a short time after lunch, then an opportunity to work on a Movement — exciting for newcomers — followed by a talk from Mr B, and a demonstration of Movements by the students. In the evening, after the demonstration, we had dinner in the magnificent dining room and often there would be so many visitors that some had to eat in the coffee room next door. Dinner was followed by a concert, usually consisting of music and singing by students

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and sometimes other acts, and the evening ended with a meditation in the great ballroom, led by Mr Bennett. Participation in these activities was entirely voluntary, and, for the visitors, it was a very interesting and relaxing day.

On my first visit to Sherborne, I eagerly took the opportunity to join the visitors' class for Movements. However, it turned out to be not at all what I had expected and I remember feeling rather frustrated and a little humiliated. Some of the time I did not understand what we were expected to do and, when I did find out, I kept falling several steps behind and losing the sequence. All in all, it was not an uplifting experience. After about thirty or forty minutes of this confusion, Mr Bennett came into the room and stood watching for a while. Without saying a word he walked to the front of the class, faced us smilingly and raised his arms straight up. The Movements teacher copied him and little by little we all followed suit. Next he held his arms extended sideways and we copied. Then forwards — and we did too. Up, sideways, forwards, up, sideways. Then he began to beat out a peculiar rhythm with his feet in a strange stiff-legged form of marching on the spot. We copied him. He continued this for some minutes, facing us and still smiling in a friendly way, apparently having forgotten that his arms, and ours, were still extended sideways; a fact which was beginning to be painfully unforgettable to us! He stopped the foot rhythm for a while and, still holding out his arms, told us a little about his activities at Sherborne and his plans for the future. All our arms were out but not everyone of us appeared as unconcerned as Mr Bennett. Faces contorted and red, strong young men twisting their shoulders this way and that to keep arms up as long as him. He was seventy-four at the time. Then he said, 'for children and ladies who are pregnant, it would be better if you let down your arms!' The rest of us struggled to keep our arms up like him — pride was at stake now! After a few moments he said, 'You say Yes but your body says No'. With this he began another foot rhythm and we

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followed, in a rather ragged way. He stopped again and said: 'The struggle between two opposing parts of our own nature is valuable to us in our work'. Still smiling, he gently lowered his arms to his sides and left the room. A gasp went through the class as we lowered our arms, but not so gently!

* * *

3 *Start with the Body*

Janet: I am very confused about how I am supposed to relate to my own body in this work. There seem to be so many opposing attitudes pushed onto me. I was brought up to believe that the body is the root of evil and I should not pamper it. Later I mixed with a crowd who thought that if we want to be more spiritual, we should eat health food. Recently, I read that Mr Bennett claimed that if we are working to perfect ourselves, we can eat anything and transform it for our body. Yet, Gurdjieff wrote that we have a duty to give the body what it really needs but he himself indulged in large quantities of coffee, alcohol and tobacco as well as exotic foods, all of which seem to be far from the real needs of his body. So does that mean he was failing in his duty? With all these conflicting ideas what are we to believe?

Brian: I think you have been saving this up! I sympathise with you because for years I was not able to see my own way through this morass of conflicting attitudes and opinions. Ultimately, we each have to find our own understanding of what is a right relationship with the body. All the same we can examine the problems together from different angles and thereby clarify the situation for ourselves.

What you have said expresses clearly the many-sidedness of the problem. I think we can only tackle this by looking at each of the points you have raised and seeking the basis from which it came. There is probably a practical reason underlying

each of your points, but expressed as you have done we are dealing only with words. I think if we can get back to the realities of each situation the problems will begin to disperse.

Janet: Can you explain then the contradiction between what Gurdjieff taught and what he did? In the first volume of *Beelzebub's Tales*, he put into the mouth of *Ashiata Shiemash* a statement to the effect that a person's first duty is to give his body 'everything satisfying and really necessary' for it. Yet his own behaviour conflicted with this. His eating, drinking and smoking habits could hardly be considered as 'really necessary' for his body. There are even reports that he said his digestion had been ruined by too much alcohol.

Brian: It is not my duty to explain away the behaviour of Gurdjieff. We have to accept that he was a very contradictory personality.

Olaf: He did not actually state any rules for care of the body. He left us to find those for ourselves. Maybe his habits were based upon his own understanding of what was healthy. That could be different from our ideas on the subject.

Brian: How profitable is this discussion? We do not know his situation so we cannot explain his behaviour. It would be more valuable to look at our own habits and attitudes. There must, in everyone, be a difference between what he is and the ideals that he sets himself. The five strivings or duties given by Gurdjieff in *Beelzebub's Tales* are ideals to aim towards. Of course, they are impossible to achieve because they are in some respects contradictory.

Helen: Can you say what the five duties are?

Brian: These are given in *Beelzebub's Tales* in the chapter called *Organisation by Ashiata Shiemash*:

1. To provide the body with everything it really needs.
2. To strive constantly to perfect ourselves.

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3. To endeavour always to increase our understanding of the laws of the universe.
4. To strive to pay for our existence.
5. Always to help others in their efforts to perfect themselves.

Ingrid: Where does caring for the body begin and end? There must be limits. What food and how much sleep do we really need?

Brian: We have to keep within a range of behaviour limited by indulgence at one extreme and asceticism at the other. Of course, the definition of these terms is a personal matter. To someone who habitually is very self-indulgent, even the smallest self-denial is asceticism and as such is alarming. However, most of us are over-indulgent and this conflicts with the needs of Work and it means that we do have to give up some things if we wish to participate in this Work.

Karen: I don't see why we should have to do without pleasures for the sake of the Work. I don't see that it is necessary. As a mother of young children I am forced to give up enough already.

Brian: It is true that children often provide our greatest opportunities for work on ourselves. To bring up children requires a great deal of self-denial. People who have conscientiously brought up their children are better people because of the struggles and sacrifices they have had to go through.

But that is not the point that I am trying to make, which is that we each have to find our own balance point between asceticism and self-indulgence.

Colin: Though I am a health-food person in moderation, I have always been suspicious of the idea of health-food, though I could not really put my finger on why. Now I see the pitfall – it turns into self-indulgence so easily.

Brian: Concern about what we eat soon becomes an obsession

to protect the body from any food which it could have difficulty dealing with. In *Meetings With Remarkable Men*, Gurdjieff recounts that one sage told him to eat meat with bones and all, in order to prevent his digestive system from becoming weak!

Olaf: Is this the same principle as Mr Bennett's idea that we can transform any kind of food provided we work on ourselves?

Brian: I think that this is a misquotation and that what he said was that a perfected man could transform any food, though I am open to correction on this. Whatever Mr Bennett said, remember that Buddha died of food poisoning from eating bad pork.

Sally: In the past week I have taken note of just how much of my time is used up in serving my body. Apart from sleeping, such a big proportion of time is involved in feeding or preparing food, washing, dressing, talking about food or clothes and so on.

Brian: Quite right. Very much of our thoughts and day-dreams also are directly or indirectly concerned with the body. And how much effort and money do we expend on ensuring that we get the physical comforts we want?

An aim of this work is to achieve balance in our lives and we need to look closely at what this means in relation to our body. It is foolish to neglect the body because everything else depends upon it. When the body ceases to function properly that is likely to bring an end to any inner work. When the body will not go on any more, we die. So it is obvious that we need to establish the needs of our body and endeavour to provide for them.

But in so doing we have to keep a balance; the body must not be allowed to dominate our life. This requires a great deal of self-discipline. You can see that in our present society

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many people fail to meet the needs of the body by providing suitable food, air, exercise, rest, etc. Yet we also fail to discipline ourselves so that the body and its wants tend to rule our life.

Victor: There is a saying of Gurdjieff's, which I read somewhere, 'start with the body'. I took that to mean if we want to work on ourselves we have to begin by going against bodily habits. Do you agree?

Brian: I think that is what he meant. Our three centres are interrelated so that if there is a change in one, the others must be affected. If we intentionally alter our posture, our thoughts and feelings will be altered too. By working on one of our centres, we can bring about deep changes in the whole of our nature over a period of time. Our body is the obvious place to start because it is much more stable and accessible to us than our thoughts and feelings.

Harry: Surely our thoughts are accessible and we can introduce new ideas by reading books or talking with people.

Brian: Introducing new ideas does not produce any change in the way that the thinking centre works. It does not increase our power of attention or steady the mind. We discover how limited are our mental powers when we are asked to hold a pattern in the Movements or when we try to grasp the meaning in some passages of *Beelzebub*.

Harry: That's true.

Brian: We cannot discipline our thoughts by an intellectual effort and, generally, nor can we intentionally change our mood by thought alone. We have to tackle both of these in a round-about way, through work on our body. By practising keeping still or avoiding nervous movements, by relaxation or paying attention to our breathing we begin to change the way that we think and feel.

Victor: I did not begin with the body; what first interested

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me was the ideas. So you could say that I began with the intellect and I know that the same is true of many others here.

Brian: No doubt you are right. But what is work on oneself? Does it mean thinking about the ideas or is something more implied? The ideas are interesting and, to some extent, they can change our attitudes, but other ideas can easily come along and replace them so that no lasting result remains from reading books. On the other hand, when a person has made attempts to put the ideas into practice there can be a real change in him. When we wish to change ourselves we have to do more than read or talk.

An experiment that you can try for yourself is to go against a habit. Here I am not speaking about anything particularly difficult or esoteric — choose something simple, such as trying to walk differently or stand differently. Or even set yourself to work through a job at a quicker pace than usual or to eat your meal more slowly than usual — follow through the whole task at this new speed and I promise that you will see something of yourself.

Jeff: What about doing without much sleep?

Brian: Gurdjieff said: 'sleep little without regret'. It is hard to part with the idea that we need eight hours a day, or whatever figure we personally cling to. Of course, the sleep habit is a perfectly good one to experiment with.

Colin: Would fasting be a way to confront the body? I have fasted a few times and each time I was amazed what a great void not eating left in my day. It was as if I was more dependant on food psychologically than physically.

Brian: Fasting is a traditional means for finding oneself.

Bob: The mention of that sort of dependence on food reminds me of the time I tried to do without stimulants. It was astonishing to what extent my world centres on stimulants.

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Brian: Do you mean tea and coffee?

Bob: Well, that's just the point. Over a period of weeks I gave up tea and coffee and I found that meat and other protein foods were giving me a boost so I stopped eating them too. Then I discovered that cereals, I mean bread mostly, were stimulating too. So I stopped eating them and lived for a while on fruit and vegetables.

Brian: You must be mad! What did you find out?

Bob: I was very up and down. I would be very detached, almost stoned for a while, then filled with gloom. And I felt very vulnerable. People's attitudes and behaviour hurt me.

Brian: No doubt these experiments teach a great deal, but they are more than I had in mind when I introduced the idea of confronting the body. We can even learn about ourselves by such small things as practising sitting differently or holding a pen differently. Not that I wish to discourage such 'super-efforts', I certainly do not. But if you do make them, you should beware that the results do not bring harm to you instead of the benefit that you expect. There is no good in making such efforts and then feeling proud of oneself.

Sally: I notice that kind of thing happening when I have fasted. I feel more awake but then I start to feel superior. That worries me.

Brian: That is the problem. The point of fasting, if it is for inner work, is to become more conscious and this means to transform or by-pass our egotism. Afterwards if we look at other people in the street and say proudly to ourselves: 'Look at them — they probably never went without a meal in their whole life!', then the effort of fasting has simply fed our egotism — the opposite result from what we intended.

As Gurdjieff put it, every cause can bring either of two opposite results. So beware!

This is why it is sometimes better to attempt seemingly more mundane tasks such as standing differently or walking

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differently. We gain from such experiments but they are hardly likely to make us feel like supermen!

Rose: When I try to relax I feel, in a way, as if I am going against my habits. I relax a little but as soon as my attention wanders I think the tensions come back. I straightaway lose the special sensation that I get when I have really tried to intentionally relax myself.

Brian: Let us all try this for ourselves now. Each time you exhale tell your body to relax. Let an impulse of relaxation flow down through your body as you say to yourself, relax . . .

Now, can you say more about the sensation?

Olaf: I feel more open.

Anne: I feel calm and within myself.

Brian: Tension is a barrier between ourselves and the world. It makes us unreceptive and insensitive. Tensions have become chronic because of the emotional shocks that we have been exposed to and also from contact with other tense people, by imitation or exchange of energies.

Steve: I feel as if energy is flowing into me when I am relaxed now. It makes me feel more awake. Yet, when I relax on the beach I feel less awake, more sleepy than normal. That seems odd.

Brian: What are your thoughts doing when you intentionally relax here and when you relax on the beach?

Steve: Oh, I see! On the beach it all goes to daydreams.

Brian: Relaxation is considered by many people to be too mundane to be work on oneself, but, it is a very straightforward and very valuable form of work.

Olaf: You just referred to our picking up tensions by imitation. Is this also because our centres are not working right?

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Brian: Not at all. It is a natural ability of the moving-instinctive centre to imitate. We can see this happening in many other creatures. If you watch a field of sheep, when one runs off the rest will follow. Or watch birds perched on a fence; for no reason one flies up and immediately the others do the same. Most young animals learn by imitating adults and this ability to learn by imitation remains with us throughout life. It is unfortunate that we also unconsciously imitate each other's tensions.

Maria: More than anything else, my relationship with my body has been altered by the exercises that we have been doing with sensation. I feel as if I have got in touch with my body, which I was not before.

Brian: Yes, when we put our attention in various parts of the body, it becomes noticeable to what extent we have neglected some of them. Many of us expect our feet to go on walking without problems and, in the ordinary way, we hardly ever give them a thought, beyond washing them once in a while and changing our socks.

Colin: For me it was a revelation how little I considered or noticed my spine and neck, yet the whole body hinges on them.

Brian: Practising the sensation exercises encourages the blood to flow in the various parts, and over a period of time releases tensions and eliminates emotional problems associated with them. In this way we work towards healing body and mind.

It has many other effects too. We can put our awareness into the whole body, or a single part of the body, and the benefits are different in each case and also, of course, depending upon what part of the body we choose.

There is another valuable property of this technique. By correct use of sensation we can isolate ourselves from negative attitudes — thoughts and feelings — of people around us.

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Without this, as our sensitivity and openness increase, our life can become a turmoil because we can pick up the feelings of whoever comes near us. Sensation gives us a measure of immunity to this if we know how to apply it.

Karen: It seems to me that this could be developed into something very unpleasant if it can be used to isolate us from people.

Brian: You are just taking words at their face value and ignoring what they represent. Try the experiment yourself. Use sensation in the presence of other people. Far from isolating us from them, it brings us more into contact with their needs and problems. Yet, at the same time, if correctly used, it prevents us picking up unwanted emotions.

Use of sensation and relaxation slowly dissolves our tensions. These tensions are what ordinarily protect us from being over-sensitive to the emotional states of other people. Muscular tensions are the armour behind which we have learnt to shelter. Tensions really do isolate us from people. Without them, I cannot conceive it is possible for humans to commit the atrocities to one another which we read of daily in our newspapers. Relaxation slowly dissolves the armour and leaves us vulnerable. Then we have to learn to use sensation to continue to dissolve our armour but, at the same time, provide a form of protection which does not freeze us inwardly and make us unfeeling to others.

Gurdjieff said that we have representatives of the devil standing at the door to prevent outside influences from entering us. When we remove the doormen, influences flood in and we have to find a means to free ourselves from these new influences from which we were previously shielded.

Victor: I think Gurdjieff was talking about pride and self-love when he spoke of representatives of the devil, not muscular tensions.

Brian: What is the difference? I think they are connected.

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Bob: It seems to me that any form of deep relaxation helps us to cool emotional situations. I had an astonishing experience recently which demonstrated the power of relaxation. I was driving along the beach road and trying to remain relaxed in the heavy traffic. A truck tried to overtake on the left but there was not room enough. I thought no more about the event until, several minutes afterwards, I turned onto a quieter road and stopped at a red light. Suddenly, this truck overtook me very close, swerved in front and stopped. The driver jumped out and ran back to me. He opened my door saying: 'I'm going to punch your face in!'

Somehow I was able to remain relaxed and not react. I said quietly: 'What do you mean? What's the matter?'

At this, he seemed rather at a loss what to do as if my lack of reaction had taken the wind out of his sails. He said: 'You cut me in and made me smash my mirror. So I am going to break your mirror. That's fair, isn't it?'

I replied: 'Well, if you say so. But that won't repair yours'.

The lights changed green and he said in a threatening tone: 'I'll let you off just this once', jumped into his cab and drove away.

Brian: Relaxation has hidden depths!

Colin: I wonder if the body has a dual role in the Work. You have been speaking about the part played by relaxation and sensing as a means of maintaining our awareness and for transforming negativity, but, on the other hand, it often seems that work on oneself mostly consists of struggling against the natural tendencies of our bodies. In one way it helps us but in the other way its wishes conflict with our aim.

Brian: Part of Work is indeed struggling against the wishes of the body, but does this mean that the body is a help or a hindrance? Can you see that much of our Work depends upon this conflict? In that sense the habitual tendencies of the body are not a hindrance but a help.

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Janet: This fact that we have to struggle against the wishes of the body could be the origin of the attitude which I mentioned earlier, that the body is the root of evil.

Brian: I am sure that is so. The body often opposes us in what we intend to do and we have been taught to think of denial as an inherently bad thing. Although the body hinders us it is indispensable.

Sally: An example of this came up yesterday. In the afternoon I had half-an-hour free and I lay down on my bed for a rest. I was not tired but just felt lazy. Then I remembered that we had run out of firewood and I realised that I had time to cut some. Normally I would just stay on my bed and let the time pass, but on this occasion I got up and went outside. When this happened I felt so different in myself. It seemed as if I was in charge of my lazy body for once; and my body was very happy about it. It came to me then, this was such a rare state and that my usual condition is immersion in sloth. Really that is not true. It is that my thinking and my whole being is under a spell and not fully awake.

Brian: And what do you think casts the spell on you?

Sally: I think it is just my own laziness that takes the edge off life.

Helen: I notice a similar thing in doing the Movements. I never want to practise Movements or come to a class and I find excuses for not coming sometimes. But when I come I feel uplifted and I think that this is how I should be always. Most of the time I am in a dull state and it seems as if that effort to overcome my physical reluctance raises me out of it.

Brian: The key to this better state is that the thinking brain is overriding the natural tendency of the body. Then the spiritualising force enters us and life is as it should be. You have all experienced this, I am sure. To illustrate what I mean, I should like to tell the story of the day at Gracedale when we built a bridge:

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We had held one-day fasts at Gracedale previously, but this occasion turned out to be a memorable day. I suppose it was partly because we had become accustomed to a day without food, so it came as less of a shock. But, undoubtedly the main reason for the special quality of that day was the work that we did. The landowner, Dr Scholes, an octagenarian philanthropist, wanted a little bridge built over the Uri Creek. It was to be made of stones from the Yarra River a kilometer or so away. The bridge would be part of a public walking track across his land and would be called Gurdjieff Bridge.

We decided to do the task entirely by hand, just for the experience. The basis for the bridge would be a thick, heavy concrete pipe about a metre and a half in diameter and length. We began our day by rolling this monster piece of pipe about a kilometer from where it had been resting unused since some earlier project. Much of the distance was uphill, but with twenty of us pushing and pulling, heaving and struggling — and laughing — we moved it to a point just above the creek. From there it could, with a push, be sent trundling free, straight down to the appointed spot in the water. With a great shout we set it in motion. It headed faster and faster towards the creek, right on course until, suddenly, it hit a rut and turned sharp left! With horror we watched it race onward and land in the creek twenty metres away from its intended resting place and at a totally unsuitable spot for the bridge.

It was impossible to get the pipe back up the bank so we had to roll it along the creek, knee deep in the ooze. This would have been easy, except that the creek was narrow, twisting and partly clogged with tree roots. We widened the Uri Creek as we went and partially straightened a nice little meandering S-bend. By noon the pipe was where it ought to be and construction could begin.

We dug mud and pebbles from the river bed and set the pipe in deeply, so that it was only half-visible above the water and would not be an eyesore when the bridge was

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finished. Then the real work started. We split into three groups: One group collected suitable rocks from the Yarra river and piled them together on the bank. One group mixed cement and constructed the little bridge. The remainder, most of us in fact, trudged back and forth, from the Yarra to the pipe, all afternoon. Some wheeled barrows of rocks, some carried buckets of rocks, some came with armfuls of rocks, and the 1½ kilometer walk back to the Yarra empty-handed in the warm sun was bliss!

Taking no breaks, except for an occasional drink of water, we worked on and finished the bridge early in the evening. It had been a very memorable day, a day with a special clarity about it. It was a day that all of us will remember for the rest of our lives. Owing to the special efforts we had all made, the spiritualising force had entered us, so that we were able to experience that day from our essence.

When we have done all we can to *be here*, something extra may enter us which, in a subtle way, changes everything. To remember ourselves is good, but this, which I am referring to, is much more. A big factor in opening ourselves to this kind of experience is in having the right relationship with our own body.

* * *

Bob: In a small way I have found the same effect even from just the effort of sitting still. When I decide to sit quite still and relaxed, there is always a temptation to adjust to a more comfortable position, or else I get an itch. If I remember to keep still it sometimes happens that I feel very strong or solid in myself, as if made of stone. I am master of my own body instead of it being master of me.

Brian: Unless we confront our body in such ways, we will never see to what a great extent our body dominates our life. This does not just mean inertia, for the body dominates in

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many more subtle, hidden ways. If you practise going against the wishes of the body in small things, you will begin to see more of yourself and the hidden motives to which I am referring. But it is important to beware of asceticism, as I said before, and to be careful that such efforts are not merely strengthening our egotism by making us feel superior, clever or strong.

If you are uncertain whether the results of your efforts are bringing wrong results — as they commonly do — limit yourself to necessary tasks. If there is a job which needs to be done, particularly if it is your duty, get on with it even if you don't feel like it or have very good reasons for leaving it for someone else to do. This is a simple form of work open to all of us.

Graham: I entirely agree with you. I believe in being active and getting on with the job. I don't think it is right to just sit around when there is work to be done.

Brian: You are a compulsive worker. This is sometimes called 'working to avoid Work'. You need to look more at your motives, to stop working and consider where you are going.

To come back to what I was saying before, the thinking mind can be active or passive in the sense that it can determine what is to be done or the thoughts can be under the influence of lower forces from the body — lethargy or self-indulgence — this is what I mean by *passive thinking*. It is hard at first to see this distinction. When the intellect asserts its active role and the body fulfills the passive role, we feel uplifted, more alive, more in control, and we can all recognise that this is a higher state than our usual condition.

Anne: What do you mean by *lower forces*?

Brian: I can say something about this, but it is necessary for you to acquire the 'taste' of it for yourself if you are to understand it. Lower forces can act through all of the centres.

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Examples are: anxiety, laziness, sloth, negative doubt and negative thinking. Expressions often indicative of lower forces are: 'It isn't worth it' and 'I don't feel like it'.

Until we have discovered for ourselves just what is meant by lower forces we may even confuse them with intuition or even 'Guidance from Above'! When your intuition tells you that it is 'not right' to do something today (which you happen not to like doing) but that you 'should leave it until a more suitable day', that is lower force.

Or if, in the morning, you feel that you ought to stay in bed a little longer in case your body needs extra rest, that is lower force!

Ingrid: I think I have an example of a different kind of lower force. My brother asked me to explain to him what we are studying here and the purpose of it all. Foolishly, perhaps, I keenly told him some of the ideas and how I had benefited. He said that it was just a weird sect that I had got into which could do me a lot of harm, and I soon began to have doubts myself about whether I was doing the right thing. I began to ask myself whether it was all worth it, too.

Brian: That is a good example.

Olaf: Can I come back to the things you were saying earlier about the body? I have read in various places that one of the purposes of work on oneself is to acquire freedom from our own body.

Brian: You should ask yourself what it is you have in mind — what it could possibly mean to be free from the body. What is going to be free?

Olaf: I suppose to have something in me which is not affected by what happens to my body and is in control of it. Like we said earlier, but I mean a permanent state.

Brian: I do not know. However, I do know that nothing which I have experienced, or know of, is permanent. Everything is subject to other influences; mountains are eroded by

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the weather, plants grow according to the climate and soil. So the permanence that you are asking for does not exist in our experience. How then can we hope to have something in ourselves which is permanent? Of course, a permanent state means neither forward nor backward movement so no progress would be possible either. I do not think the Work produces anything permanent in us, though it does have a stabilising effect and brings other benefits.

Just now I spoke of lower forces and I believe that this question — which appeals to everyone of us — is motivated by these lower forces. We can be either active in ourselves, that is, awake to some degree, or passive in ourselves and totally mechanical. Of course, this is relative. What is an active inner state for me may be passive for another person who stands on a higher rung of the ladder of inner work. However, we all wish to be passive or, I should say, only a tiny part of our nature wishes to be awake and the rest, in each of us, prefers to sleep. To be in a more active state necessitates effort, struggle, suffering, attention and self-denial, and all of these things we wish to avoid. To wish to be free of our own body, means to wish to get round these unpleasantnesses; to have the joy of higher states without having to pay.

Olaf: Well then, can I ask a different question? Can we through the Work learn to control the body.

Brian: We can learn certain things. We can influence blood flow and some other physiological functions too. But who or what is in control?

I think that the concept of control is a misunderstanding. One can never control one's body or mind in the way that a car is controlled by its driver. It is more a question of right relationship between the parts, right aims and understanding.

Perhaps the ideal to set ourselves in dealing with our body could be the attitude of the benevolent owner towards his work animal. These days it is hard to find examples in our

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city environment because most working animals have been eliminated from it. All the same I think you can grasp my meaning. We should be kind to our body but make it work and generally give it what it needs rather than what it wants. Sometimes this means accepting necessary discomforts or giving up something we wish to have or do if that might harm our body. Perhaps this sort of attitude is what you meant by learning to control the body. I think it is also what Gurdjieff meant by the first striving: To give the body everything it really needs. It is a relationship with our body that we experience from time to time but is extremely hard to maintain. It is easy to have a right attitude to animals but very difficult with our 'own animal'!

Mike: Can you say something about higher bodies?

Brian: Gurdjieff taught that we have higher bodies which suffuse our material body. These are generally in a nebulous state but can be structured by work on oneself. Incidentally, he also claimed that these higher bodies naturally develop in people, except when they are prevented from doing so by wrong conditions of living such as ours.

Certainly, as a result of Work something appears in us which was not there before. It changes our view of the world and makes possible what was impossible before — to be awake, to remember ourselves for more than a moment.

John: I read that the chakras are points of contact between the physical and higher bodies.

Brian: That may be so. Certainly there are places in the body where if we focus our attention we are drawn back to ourselves more strongly than at other points.

Leanne: Putting together some things which you said earlier; if the body is the denying force needed for work, it can never be suppressed so that we are free of it, because then no work would be possible. It seems to me, in a way, that being in the Work is like being married — you need to have a partner to

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marry, even if that does mean inconvenience and sacrifice!

Brian: It is conceivable that other things could fulfill the denying role, however, I agree with you on both the points that you made. Essentially, the question of freedom from the body is one of freedom from the denying force and stems from our inertia or passivity; unwillingness to pay, as I said before.

The other point that the body is essential to us, also needs consideration. All of our impressions come via the senses, i.e., the body.

Olaf: Therefore, without a body we must be unconscious?

Brian: Unless we have some means of cognition without recourse to the senses. Perhaps without ears and eyes we could in some way still hear and see.

Also, all our actions in the external world are carried out through the agency of the body. Whatever we decide to do can only be brought about by bodily movements.

John: But without a body we couldn't have sensations, so we couldn't be conscious. Or could we?

Brian: I think we are getting rather far from the practicalities of work in this discussion. Perhaps I could end by telling you another anecdote from Sherborne:

We had just been shown this technique of putting attention in a part of the body, the technique we call 'sensing'. At the time we were taught it, great stress was put by Mr Bennett on the wonderful usefulness of the method; how we could sense a limb and thereby transform a negative state into a higher energy, etc.

In the gravelled parking area behind Sherborne House there was a great pile of sawn trees for firewood. This pile was five or six feet high. One morning I walked out into the yard and saw Len, a man from Brisbane, standing on top of the pile rearranging the logs. At that moment another man came from a doorway and began to shout at him: 'You

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should be working in the garden. Leave that wood alone, it's not your responsibility. You're not allowed to climb on that woodpile'! And so on.

Len just stood there looking down at him from the top of the heap of logs. When a break in the tirade came, he said, without a trace of malice: 'Sense yer bleedin' left foot'!

* * *

4 *The Movements*

The Movements are sequences of precise gestures which are performed to special music. Some of the Movements are gymnastic, some are dances, some are marches, others are rituals or prayers. They constitute a very important part of our early training in the Fourth Way, and are complementary to the mental techniques taught by Gurdjieff.

Like any technique, they can lose their effectiveness if abused or used to excess. To avoid their abuse, the choreography of the Movements has never been published. In fact, it is probable that correct use of the Movements can only be taught by a lengthy period of instruction from someone who has undergone years of experience and study of them. There is, as in all such techniques, only a very subtle difference between right and wrong performance. The teacher, in order to be right, has always to be re-examining and refining his own understanding of them.

Some teachers advocate that Movements only be used during the first year or two of study, in order to maintain their content and a right attitude to them. After that time, they are practised only to teach others or to prepare a performance for showing outsiders. The Movements are particularly valuable in the early stages of study, because the unaccustomed gestures and sequences and the efforts of attention cause the mind to be stilled. This is otherwise a difficult thing for most people to achieve initially, but is an essential starting point in the Work.

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Leanne: Can you say something about the origins of the Movements? After working on them, I have become quite fascinated by them and would like to know more about where they came from.

Brian: About the turn of this century, Gurdjieff wandered throughout much of the Middle East, south into Africa and east as far as Tibet and India. He collected the Movements during these travels. Mostly they came from Turkey, Turkestan, Afghanistan and Tibet.

His achievements were amazing for two reasons: The first is that he should obtain admission to the monasteries and training centres where they were taught. Secondly, having learnt the Movements, he was able to re-construct them years later, together with the music which he had also committed to memory.

Paul: Did Gurdjieff say whether these were connected with any particular religion?

Brian: Apparently they were not connected with any single religion. He said that the schools which preserved them, had kept alive an ancient system of knowledge about human nature and the path toward self-perfecting. This knowledge is contained in symbolic form in the Movements. As we work with the Movements we notice, from time to time, a meaning in a particular gesture or a sequence of gestures.

It is obvious from some Movements, which you will learn later, that they are of Sufi or Dervish origin, though some appear to be Muslim, some Christian and others possibly from other religions.

Janet: Is there any evidence to confirm that Gurdjieff did not just make up the Movements himself?

Brian: Not a great deal, as far as I know. Mr Bennett told us that he had come across a group of dervishes performing one of the Movements, though I cannot recall where that was.

No doubt some of the Movements were largely his own

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creation but it is probable that he taught others just as he had learnt them in the various monasteries or centres where he stayed.

Anne: Do you think it really matters where they came from, so long as they are effective?

Brian: That is a matter of opinion, however, they certainly are effective. When we have put on performances of Movements, many in the audience have afterward commented on their effects. As one said: 'They strike a basic chord'. The Movements speak directly to a religious or psychological need in us. People who do not wish to have this part of themselves aroused may even find the Movements unpleasant to watch. For others there is a strong feeling that they have found something they have been searching for.

Graham: I had a strange, marvellous feeling watching the Movements in Carlton. I felt just as I did during my Confirmation, when I was fifteen. I felt elevated. Hard to describe.

Brian: Yes, there is a projection of energy towards the audience, so that some of the people briefly return to their essence. They are brought back into a deeper part of their nature than ordinarily.

Karen: I thought they were just beautiful. I could have sat all night watching them.

Walter: Whilst doing the Movements on Monday, I had a peculiar feeling, as if I was not quite myself.

Brian: This was, in reality, contact with *yourself*, your essence, but we are so unaccustomed to being ourselves in this deeper sense, so used to living in our personality, that it can be experienced as something strange, unusual, even alarming. Would you say this was a pleasant experience?

Walter: I am not sure. I think so. I felt a bit separate from myself, if you see what I mean.

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Brian: Yes. The Movements have this effect on some people, though not all. With others the change is almost imperceptible. Everyone who sincerely works at the Movements is brought sooner or later to his real self but not everyone has this strong experience.

Maria: As much as anything, the music affects me. It is haunting.

Brian: The music is very unusual. Gurdjieff said it was composed in past times, when a great deal more was known about the effect of music on the psyche of man. He said that the music was designed to have precise effects on the sensations and feelings of the hearer and that the music corresponded to the particular Movement. When I first heard the music it had a very strong effect on me.

When we practise the Movements the music combines with the body gestures and the required efforts of attention to produce a total effect which you expressed as 'feeling not quite myself'. This is the rare event of being in contact with a deeper part of ourselves.

Janet: Actually, my reason for coming on this course, was that I thought the Movements might improve my co-ordination, which has always been poor.

Brian: It is said that all reasons for being drawn to the Work are equal! I think you will see an improvement in bodily control. They develop our attention too. They can correct many defects, both physical and emotional and also harmonise our thoughts, feelings and sensations and bring us towards a total inner harmony.

In order to perform the Movements correctly, the body has to be in a high state of consciousness which unifies the action of the different parts of the mind. Sensations, feelings and thoughts are brought together in an integral act of expression.

Colin: Why do you insist so much on precision of the gestures?

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Brian: For several reasons. Associated with each gesture is a feeling which is aroused both in the performers and in those watching. As yet, you have not developed the sensitivity to know what feeling is stimulated by most of the gestures, but in due course you will begin to notice them more. You will see that a small change, perhaps an arm at a different angle, can change entirely the feeling of the gesture. Even a displacement of two inches of an arm, or a thumb out of line can spoil the gesture.

The Movements change our way of feeling and also transmit a message to the audience through the feelings. This happens because the sequence of feelings has been carefully chosen to give the required effect. If you then change a gesture and hence the feeling, what will result? Only a random sequence of feelings. What is worse, if everyone in the performance transmits a different message the net effect on the audience will be nil. For that reason alone, it is necessary to strive to make your gestures as accurate as possible.

Another reason for insisting that they be accurate is because they are part of a program designed to help us break loose from our habits. Over the years each of us has unconsciously selected a repertoire of a relatively small number of gestures. For this reason our friends can recognise us by our gestures and posture even when we are too far away for them to see our face. In choosing these gestures each of us rejected very many others. The gestures that we did not retain represent for us a segment of life and experience which is locked away from us. The gestures which we did choose, set limits to our life to an extent much greater than we usually realise. This happens because there is some degree of association between gestures, thoughts and feelings. However, in all this the problem is that we unconsciously always seek to return to our habitual gesture pattern, so that, if we do not strive always to maintain the precision, the gestures soon deteriorate to something nearer to our habitual positions.

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Consequently, they lose their power to free us from our habits of thought and feeling.

Movements develop the power of attention, too. One of the ways this is done is by demanding that we make the effort always to make accurate gestures. This requires attention and it develops attention.

Finally, precise gestures are only possible when we know precisely what our body is doing — without looking, of course! If you think you already know just what your body is doing without needing any special training, you have a surprise in store! To take these gestures correctly requires an exact knowledge and adjustment of muscular tensions and relaxations. This knowledge stabilises or earths our awareness.

Leanne: Why do we have to stand still between Movements, and why is it that I often find myself moving about without realising it?

Brian: I have just been speaking about the association between postures, thoughts and feelings. If at some future time you perform the Movements before an audience, you will need to be still between Movements, otherwise what do you think will be the message that you transmit when you fidget about? Something quite different from the message in the Movement.

There is an even more important reason for keeping still. It is connected with energies. The efforts and the strange gestures generate in us quantities of higher energies that we are not accustomed to. The body seems to wish always to disperse these by scratching, moving about, adjusting clothes and a multitude of other nervous movements, including talking! If you do not resist this you will never acquire the energy needed for your work. This energy is also connected with attention. If we have the energy, we have greater attention and, therefore, only by resisting the temptation to disperse this energy will you be able to do the more difficult Movements which demand more attention.

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Olaf: It must take a long time to reach the standard that you achieved in the Carlton performance. How long had those people been learning them?

Brian: All of the performers had been working on the Movements for at least four months. This sounds a very short time, I know, but at that time we were making great demands on our students. We also took measures to raise the energy level of the group so that, even with such relatively inexperienced performers, the audience could feel that these people were working on themselves and that what we were doing was real and effective, not just words and ideas.

Olaf: Even so, when I look back, it is astonishing what an impact they had on me.

Brian: This brings to mind something which happened a few years back. We had two groups separately meeting in Melbourne at the time. It was the only occasion that we ever arranged a private performance of the Movements in costume with one group performing for the other. This was an experiment which for various reasons we did that once and have never repeated.

That very day a group member, Michael, phoned me to say that John, a mutual acquaintance from Sydney, was unexpectedly in Melbourne on business and could he come to the meeting? As far as I know that was the only occasion that John came to Melbourne during the years we have been here.

John had himself been teaching the Movements for some years, so he was keen to see us in action. It was a peculiar coincidence that his work brought him here on that particular day. Naturally, we said, yes, he could come.

I took part in the performance and we did six or eight fairly difficult Movements. Afterwards, I gave a brief talk and we taught everybody a Movement called Six Positions, which was done with great gusto.

We ended the meeting with a short meditation. Afterwards,

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John came up to me and placing some money on the table beside me, said: 'Please accept this; I know that your group has financial problems'.

I could tell by his tone that he had been deeply affected by the Movements. He paused and then added: 'The Grace of God descended upon me this evening. Thank you'.

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5 *Energies*

Olaf: I'm curious to know how you first heard of the Work and how you got to Sherborne. Could you tell us about this?

Brian: Alright. To satisfy your curiosity I'll tell you briefly about the events leading up to our time with Mr Bennett. I think this will also provide a lead into the subject I want to discuss with you this evening:

In 1957, whilst living in Cyprus, I met a man who had what was for me an entirely novel approach to questions which had interested me for years. I mean such questions as *whether we have free will and is there a God? or does our life have a purpose?* His answers were very original because they shed new light on the questions. It transpired that in England he had been a pupil of J.G. Bennett, a follower of Gurdjieff.

Bennett had a centre at Coombe Springs near Kingston in Surrey, about six miles from my home, so I went there as soon as I returned to Britain. Coombe Springs was a very fine old house, with outbuildings for accommodating pupils and for workshops, surrounded by about nine acres of garden with fine lawns and large trees.

I visited Coombe frequently over a period of about five years, but did not seriously involve myself in the activities because I had taken a strong dislike to Mr Bennett when I first saw him. This dislike grew as time passed. Eventually I drifted away. Coombe Springs was given to Idries Shah who sold it for sub-division and I lost contact with Bennett's

people. I retained my interest in Gurdjieff's ideas and continued to read the books and try to practice what I had read was 'self-remembering' and 'transforming negative emotions'.

Ten years later, at a guitar recital, I chanced to meet a man whom I had seen at Coombe several times. He invited my family to dinner and we became friends. One Saturday, he asked me to come with him to Bennett's new school at Sherborne on an Open Day. I was very reluctant to go because of my negative attitude towards Mr Bennett, but he was persuasive, so I went.

The students at Sherborne did not impress me, but the atmosphere of the house attracted me strongly. Something was there that I wanted, though I could not define precisely what it was.

In the afternoon there was a performance of Movements by the students. It is hard to describe the effect they had upon me. I found the Movements fascinating and the music compelling, though previously I had never been much interested in music or dance. When I saw the Movements I knew that what I was seeking was there.

Afterwards, at dinner, I sat with an American couple and told them of my feelings. Suddenly the lady said: 'Quick, there goes Mr B! Go tell him!'

I dashed out of the dining room as Mr Bennett strode away at high speed. (He was well over six feet tall.) Half-running, half-walking, I caught up with him: 'Mr Bennett, can I speak to you, please?'

He apparently did not hear me and continued walking. He came to the door of his flat, stopped, looked down and, as if surprised to find me there, said: 'What do you want?'

I replied: 'I want to come to Sherborne', and he told me to go in and sit down.

Inside, he crouched at the fireplace and began fiddling with pieces of paper and wood, trying to light a fire. He seemed to have completely forgotten me. The fire eventually

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lit and he appeared suddenly to notice me in the armchair beside him. Rather testily he said, 'What are you doing here?'

I told him again that I wanted to come to Sherborne and he answered 'What do you want to come here for?' in a surprised tone.

I said, 'I don't know. I just knew when I entered the house and when I saw the Movements that I had to come.'

'Yes. You're accepted', he said quietly.

I was rather taken aback. I had not expected it to be so easy. 'What about my wife and children?'

'They're accepted. Naturally!'

But that was not the end of the story. Later he claimed that he had no recollection of ever meeting me. He suggested that I was confusing him with someone else!

However, the atmosphere of Sherborne House and the effect of the Movements stayed with me. In spite of my aversion to Mr Bennett and my feelings of suspicion toward him, I had to go. Something there was very important to me, so that I was willing to leave our comfortable home and interrupt my career for it. Incidentally, my wife had stayed at home with the children that day and I said nothing to her about what happened until three months later when we visited Sherborne together.

Sally: Why do you think Sherborne had such a magnetic effect on you?

Brian: Energy! Because of what was happening there, higher energies were accumulating in and around the house. The same was true of Coombe Springs — that is why I kept going back — though I was not able to involve myself deeply in the activities there.

Since then I have had similar experiences in other places where, in past times, individuals or groups have worked intensively.

Mike: Can you describe the experience you had in these places?

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Brian: A certain sensation in my body. A feeling of being present.

Bob: I visited Rumi's tomb and saw the Mevlevi Dervishes whirling in the Sema and I had a similar experience.

John: Did you feel the atmosphere of Sherborne to the same degree on your second visit?

Brian: Yes. Nina also felt 'something' there, though it did not draw her as strongly as me.

During that second visit a group of students put on a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the garden between some big larches. The performance had an uncommon quality about it that I could not define but I knew it was connected with the work at Sherborne. Now and then during the performance some crows cawed loudly.

At that time I was employed by a research company. My laboratory was on the top floor of an old converted house and the windows looked out onto the tops of some high cedars. Crows were living in these trees and, though I had never really noticed, they cawed frequently. For my remaining months in that room the sound of their cawing would give me that peculiar sensation that I had experienced at Sherborne.

Jeff: How can we accumulate that energy?

Brian: By work on ourselves. It is the purpose of all our techniques and rules.

Len: I must say that I object to the use of the word energy in this context. I wonder if it is best reserved for physical science where it has a precise meaning.

Brian: Certainly we often hear people interested in 'higher things' use the word very loosely, and frequently they mean nothing more than a change of mood. However, I hope you will see that this word does have a definite meaning in this Work and that these energies have demonstrable effects. I

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think when outsiders visit us they may well notice the energies acting here more than we do, who are here all the time. The effect then is not just a change of emotional state, though that may occur too, but an enhanced quality of experience. People are made to feel more awake.

Len: My point was that energy in physics conforms to scientific laws. In principle, all energy exchanges can be exactly foreseen and their results predicted.

Brian: To a great extent these inner or psychic energies obey the same, or at least very similar, laws. We have to study these laws and understand how our energies work.

It is crucial for each of us that we do observe and learn about energies because our future in the Work depends upon this knowledge. We are not able to direct our own work until we have sufficient knowledge of energies and until then our work depends upon being told what to do by someone else. Though you are asked to question every idea here, it is essential that you accept and abide by the rules and practise the techniques that you are taught. Only in this way will you do the things that you need to do in order to observe these energies and begin to understand their action. On the one hand it is useless if you accept everything you are told. On the other hand you will learn mostly by doing as you are told. But keep your eyes open, be critical, ask yourself what it is all for.

The key to understanding it is energy. Here we are manipulating our energies in a special way and for this to happen we have to impose certain restrictions on our behaviour and make certain efforts.

Ingrid: Can you explain how this works?

Brian: Perhaps we can best begin by thinking about ordinary everyday events and seeing what different kinds of energy we use. Let me illustrate this with my journey to work one morning:

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Leaving my house, I step outside and think to myself, 'What a fine morning!'

It had been raining earlier but now it is clear and bright. I notice the sweet smell of the moist grass and the droplets glistening on the leaves of the shrubs in my garden. I get into the car and drive to work in the city by exactly the same route as I take most mornings. I park the car, and whilst locking the door, up comes my friend, Norman. We walk to the office together, chatting, and then into the building and upstairs. As I enter my office, I notice a strong smell of floor polish.

That is the end of the story, except for one thing. When I sit in my office chair, because I am early I give a few minutes to thinking about the events of the morning so far. I remember leaving the house, seeing the garden and feeling 'what a fine morning'. Strange that I did not notice it any more afterwards. I wasn't thinking 'what a fine morning' throughout my drive to the city. And when I try to recall that drive I really cannot bring any part of it to mind. I know that I drove to work but yet I cannot actually remember any details of the drive. Then I parked, and I do vaguely recall seeing Norman. Do not misunderstand me here! Of course, I know very well that I met him but I can recall the experience of meeting him only generally, without any great detail. We walked to the office and I remember we were talking about a new project that we are both involved in. But, once again, apart from knowing what was said, I am unable to bring back to mind the details of the walk up to my office door. At this point there is something I can recall clearly — that smell when I opened the door.

This story illustrates how our experience can vary in quality. We can equate the quality of our experiences to the kinds of energy we are working with. Mr Bennett called the energy we operate on most of the time *automatic energy*. This was the energy I was using when I drove to work and when I

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walked into the office building. We spend most of our lives using automatic energy and with this energy we think, talk and walk and do all of the things that we do each day. As you can see from my example, this energy does not give us a vivid experience that we can recall. In fact, the feature of automatic energy is that it gives us no experience at all.

There were three times in the story when things were different: Leaving my house, meeting my friend and entering my office were different because, to varying extents, I can recall those moments and remember details of them. At such times, I was running on *sensitive energy*. The property of this energy is that it enables us to notice things.

Janet: How do you know that what you call automatic and sensitive energies are not just different intensities of the same kind of energy?

Brian: There is a big difference in the way we experience things in these two states. It is not just a different intensity of experience but a different kind of experience. This is why I say it is a different kind of energy rather than a different intensity of energy. Later you will see that this enables us to clarify our understanding of our own states and see how our experiences are interrelated.

There is a third energy which we can call *conscious energy*. The inner state conferred by this energy is one of *detachment*. When we are acting under the influence of conscious energy we feel a detachment from what we are doing. This word *detachment*, unfortunately, will give a false impression to anyone who has not had the experience. In this state we do feel detached, with a sense of ourselves as separate individuals isolated from all that is going on around us, but, at the same time, we feel at one with our surroundings, part of the total situation, and more deeply in contact with whatever and whoever is with us.

Rose: Twice in the past week, I had a strange experience. I actually saw myself walking and watched my thoughts and

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feelings at the same time. I felt in control, yet not in control, if you see what I mean. Each time it only lasted briefly. Was that conscious energy?

Brian: Yes. That is another way we can experience conscious energy. There is an inner separation associated with it, just as you say.

Karen: Recently something similar happened to me. I was waiting for my husband near the entrance of a city store. All the people passing were like a great vivid mass of movement and I was not part of it. That lasted quite a long time because it carried on until Doug came, which was about half an hour. It gave me quite a surprise when he arrived so soon.

Brian: What you describe is a conscious experience, but only in the beginning. Initially you experienced a conscious state but, quite soon, this changed to a vivid dream that you were conscious. Your description of Doug's arrival would have been different if you were still awake. Do you remember what I said previously about how time is experienced differently by the essence and the personality?

Conscious energy passing through our bodies is rather akin to an electric current in a wire. Electricity spontaneously converts to heat and, similarly, conscious energy readily changes to lower forms of energy. This analogy is an apt one because the opposite change is much more difficult in both cases. Heat can only be converted to electric power with the aid of complex equipment and, similarly, to change lower energies to higher also requires special knowledge.

It can happen that a moment of consciousness is followed by a dream that one is conscious. This is because the energy has deteriorated but we are not aware of it.

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Olaf: Am I right in saying that in our work we are trying to change more of the automatic energy into sensitive and then into conscious?

Brian: Right.

Jeff: How can we change automatic into sensitive?

Brian: What have you noticed that rouses you out of your usual condition of sleep?

Jeff: Well, I lanced a boil a while back, and I can still recollect the moment when I held the point of the needle poised in front of the boil. I can remember bracing myself to stab it in, and the pain when I did! So I think pain can convert automatic energy into sensitive energy.

Brian: In that kind of situation it can even go further and generate a little conscious energy. Then you feel as if the boil is not really part of you.

Yes, pain can sometimes convert lower energy to higher.

Anne: I feel we ought to be able to make use of that in some way.

Brian: By lying on a bed of nails? I don't think that would appeal to many of us! All the same, it is worth remembering, when faced with a painful situation that there can be this hidden benefit in it if we have a right attitude to the pain. This is the principle behind the ancient Stoic philosophy of indifference to pain or pleasure. The Stoics were not masochists but they knew that there was good and bad in both pleasure and pain. As Gurdjieff put it, every stick has two ends, but we generally see only one of them.

Leanne: Is it just pain or any suffering that does it?

Brian: What do you think?

Leanne: Well, I think any suffering does it. When I am suffering, it is much more of an experience than at other times.

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Brian: What sort of suffering? Give me an example.

Leanne: Well, at the dentist. No, I suppose that's pain again. Okay then, when I don't get my own way.

Brian: *Bearing the unpleasant manifestations of others.* Is that familiar to you?

Olaf: That's right. Gurdjieff said something like: 'We work on ourselves by bearing the unpleasing manifestations of others'.

Karen: Conscious effort and intentional suffering. That is what Gurdjieff said we have to do. By intentional suffering we transform energies upwards.

Terry: What a horrible thought!

Brian: Yes, put like that, it does sound horrible. But think about our activities here, working together. Could this not be called intentional suffering? And, if so, is it really worse than ordinary life?

Colin: It's different. Usually suffering is a small part of life and I try to minimise it. It doesn't have a purpose. Here it seems to have a purpose.

Brian: This all started with a pin-prick! Can we get back to the main theme now? You remember we were talking about energies.

In the anecdote that I gave, there were the three points where I noticed and was able to recall the events later. But they were not all of the same intensity. When I stepped out of my front door and saw what a bright, clear morning it was, I was compelled to stop for an instant — it was a vivid experience. The second moment of noticing was not so bright, in fact it was quite grey; I remember meeting Norman but it was by no means a strong experience. Meeting him, I did not feel that it was a joy to be alive! So there was a great difference in intensity of sensitive energy in the two experiences.

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You can see that these inner energies do have many similarities with physical energies. For each inner state we need the correct kind of energy, just as we need electrical energy for the vacuum cleaner but the chemical energy in petrol to drive the car. The inner energies can also vary in intensity and we can change them from one form to another, just as heat, light or electrical energy can be changed from one to another if we know how. Of course, they are also similar in the sense that some energy transformations happen easily but others are hard to do — it is easy to convert the energy of attention into daydreams, but hard to do the opposite!

Olaf: Can we store energy in any way like a battery?

Brian: Yes. After working on the Movements we store the higher energy that we have generated, by moving our attention about the body in a controlled way, whilst we calm down. It is like a wage packet; we can either put it in the bank or spend it. With these energies we can put them in store, so to speak, or allow them to be burnt up in talking and excitement or euphoria.

Eric: I don't get the point of storing the energy. How is that useful?

Brian: It is like electricity. When the generator in my car is producing a surplus of electrical energy, I don't just let it run to waste, I put it into the battery. There it is stored until it is really needed. Without storing some in this way, I could not even start the car next time so I would not be able to generate more electricity for myself. I could only start the car if someone else with a full battery let me use some of his surplus.

What goes on in us is very analogous to this. We need some higher energy available if we are to generate more. This is quite easy to see. If I live always in an automatic state there will be little possibility of ever changing anything in my life.

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Everything then depends upon chance. Accidentally, small amounts of higher energies are momentarily produced but these quickly return to their original form and do not change anything for me. If a store of higher energy is available the situation is quite different because my state can be raised long enough for me to do whatever is needed to generate more energy and, as a result, to change myself.

Maria: Do you mean that if we waste our energy we gain nothing in the long term?

Brian: I wouldn't go so far as to say that. But it is possible to waste much of the benefit from our efforts. One can meditate frequently but each time dissipate the results by eating or empty chatter, so that the only lasting result is in being a little less nervous.

Olaf: So talking and eating are the ways we lose our higher energies?

Brian: And unpleasant emotions, mechanical thinking and reading, daydreams, fidgeting and many, many more! Each individual has his or her own favourite ways of spoiling their energies, though many things are common to us all. One aspect of studying energies is finding out how we unconsciously reduce higher energies to lower. Unnecessary fidgeting is a common habit that we can immediately work on simply by stopping some of our nervous movements. But even that is easier said than done because people fidget without knowing it. Until you have made some changes in your habits you may find that you fidget, scratch yourself and adjust clothing unnecessarily whenever you are exposed to more than your customary levels of higher energy. At the stage you are at in the training, you may often only realise that you have been doing these things when it is pointed out to you. But I must stress that you must not tell someone here that he is fidgeting when he should not, unless he or she has asked you to do so. If you break this rule it will create a wrong atmosphere for working together.

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Walter: You mentioned unnecessary talking and eating. You don't mean, do you, that we must avoid talking unless we really have to and eat just enough to keep body and soul together?

Brian: Not at all! I fear we are beginning to stress these too much. Let us eat and enjoy our food, chat and enjoy good company. But there is a time for discipline. You have to develop a certain 'taste' for this. There are times when we eat and talk to neutralise our experiences and these are the times to stop. There is a certain compulsive way of doing things which is always destructive.

There are many other such habits; mechanical reading is a common one, and justifying our actions to ourselves or to other people. If we interfere with people by explaining things to them which they really need to work out for themselves we spoil our own energy. All these take the edge off our experiences, that is to say they change higher energies to lower, a process which happens very readily.

There is a personal element in all this. There are general rules that we can establish to help ourselves from needlessly destroying the results of our work but, in addition, each one of us has his own personal weaknesses which spoil his work. These we have to find for ourselves by months and years of noting the results of our actions.

Helen: Can we return to your example of going to work in the morning? It included three events which you noticed especially; leaving your house, meeting your friend and the smell in your office. None of these involve suffering of any kind. But I know that what you say is right, that things like that can wake you up a little bit. If it is not suffering how does it fit in?

Brian: Suffering is not the only way for this to happen. Any message received by the senses can produce sensitive energy, but it has to be an impression which can get through our

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defences, either a strong impression or one which has particular meaning for us.

You remember that Gurdjieff said we have three kinds of food; ordinary food, air and impressions? In order to be food, the impressions have to enter us and bring higher energies, that is to say, we have to notice things. If, through our work, we already have enough of the higher energies to *be present*, to be aware, many impressions will flow in and our state is continuously reinforced by the energies transformed in us by them.

Janet: This sounds wonderful, like a perpetual motion machine, but does it really work? If what you say is correct, why is it that our conscious states never last long?

Brian: Simply because we have not dealt effectively with the mechanisms in us which make the energies revert to automatic. The body and our egotism are the great problems, though, at the same time, they are also our greatest assets. Bodily habits and wants are the first hurdles we come to, but when to some extent we have freed ourselves from these we discover that our egotism is feeding on higher energies. On the other hand, without egotism what would we have to bring us here! At first we are attracted to the Work by what we hope to get from it. That is egotism.

Terry: How does working on the Movements produce higher energies?

Brian: It is because of the particular kind of attention without tension that the Movements demand. Certain efforts of attention can generate sensitive and conscious energy.

Helen: When I practise the Movements alone, I don't get the same results as in a group. On my own the Movements are flatter. I don't get uplifted in the same way as can happen in the classes. I wonder why this is?

Brian: There is mutual support when we do the Movements with others just as there is with anything else we do with

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friends or in a group. Mr Bennett said that there are *group energies* as well as *individual energies*. When we work together as a group, we can become like a single organism, perhaps of a higher order than individual people, just as the cells of our body live and work together.

There is another way that we can understand this phenomenon in terms of the energy which individuals radiate. Energy exchanges, without direct contact by word or touch, play a big part in our interactions with others. When our state changes for no obvious reason we may find the explanation is a pick-up of energies radiated by other people. If we are awake enough we may see it happening.

Steve: This happened to me earlier in the week. I was walking in the main street towards the shopping centre with a feeling of presence. A sort of physical rejoicing almost, it was so strong. The sun was shining and I was very much aware of the things around me and my own body walking. Three people passed me on the pavement walking in the opposite direction, chatting together. A quarter of an hour later I 'woke up' and realised that as the people passed me, I had switched off.

Brian: That is just how it is. There does not need to be any threat. A person, with whom you may feel quite at ease, can walk into the room and your state changes for the worse. I believe this happens due to energy exchange over a distance.

Anne: Are you saying that we radiate automatic energy and higher energies?

Brian: Yes. Gurdjieff wrote that *consciousness is a relatively transferable arising*. That is to say, it passes from one person to another.

The point in connecting this with the group effect in doing the Movements is that if each of us radiates energy all the time corresponding to his or her state, practising in a group would feel different from practising alone. When we work

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In a group we receive radiations from all sides. If everyone in the group is making efforts of attention and attempting to maintain his own presence, the quality of radiations we each receive from the others will enhance our state.

Leanne: Something that I noticed early on in our Movements classes was a feeling of helplessness and confusion which I did not experience in practice on my own. Is this due to an exchange of energy?

Brian: I believe it is. Emotions are not the same as energy, because we can experience any of a variety of emotions in a given state. The energy which we radiate may be altered by our moods perhaps like a radio wave is modulated by the sounds that it carries. Thoughts, feelings and sensations can be transferred from person to person in this way.

Paul: Is this all connected with your earlier comment that each of us is responsible for everybody here?

Brian: That's right. If one of us acts in such a way as to spoil his energies we are all affected adversely.

This is why we have certain rules, such as not showing the techniques to other people outside of the group and not talking, except in a general way, about what we do here. That would simply be a leak, a drain on all of us. Of course, the greatest loss would be for the person who succumbed to the temptation to tell it all to a friend.

We have the rule about not going off the site without permission for the very same reason. If you walk out whenever you fancy you take away and lose energy which is really communal property. So there has to be some regulation of people's movements in and out.

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Eric: Can you speak about *baraka*?

Brian: This is a Sufi term. It is another word for higher energies applied to the teacher-pupil relationship. You see, in this Work, there is the obvious function of a teacher to demonstrate techniques but there is also the hidden function of giving to the pupils extra higher energy to help them make their work more effective. This energy is called *baraka* in Sufism. Gurdjieff had his own word, *hanbledzoin*, and I believe Grace means the same in the Christian church.

Victor: Gurdjieff could transfer conscious energy because of his advanced development, but I don't think there are other people who can do it. Except perhaps a few advanced saints.

Brian: This is a matter of degree. In every interaction between people there is an energy exchange. But we cannot justifiably use the words *baraka* or *hanbledzoin* unless the energy has a major component of 'higher'. The group's effect on its members is partly dependant upon the extent to which higher energies participate in the exchanges.

Perhaps I should state it more strongly: without some component of higher energy there cannot be a genuine Work group or a genuine teaching.

Harry: Are you suggesting that this transfer of energies is a more common phenomenon than I had been led to believe from books?

Brian: Not that the transfer of *hanbledzoin* is common — it depends upon people who have some to spare. There are groups where this is not the case and these are not genuine Work groups. They are imitations.

On the other hand, some teachers pass on more *hanbledzoin* than others. Often the group leader does not think of what he is doing as giving energy to the members but it happens just the same.

Rose: Is it really a matter of giving energy or is it more a case of being a channel for higher energies?

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Brian: Call it what you like. A certain preparation is needed and without this preparation the group does not give the required results. The experience of teaching a group is what it is. If you ask, is it a transfer of energy, I will say 'yes' and if you ask, is it a channelling of energy from some higher source, again I will say 'yes'.

There is another aspect to this. At a certain stage in the Work we have to give our energy away somehow. This may surprise you, but it is true. Early in our contact with the Work, our problem is that we cannot hold what higher energies we have. We have to find the leaks and stop them up as best we can. But this is only one stage in the Work. Later when we have found how to generate more energy and how to stop some of the leaks, then it is necessary for us to give away this energy. This becomes our work. This we do as a service to the world, because only in this way can we develop our own mechanisms for generating and conserving higher energy. More importantly, it becomes our role in the Work. If we fail to perform this role, we become stuck, just as we can get stuck at any other point on the Way, and slowly we begin to regress.

Len: You have to empty silver from your pockets to make space for gold!

Ingrid: How can we know if a group is what you called a 'genuine teaching'? Is there some criterion by which we can assess a teaching?

Brian: Many people wrongly imagine that they can visit a group briefly or talk to some of its members and assess intuitively whether it is genuine. In general, such people are deluding themselves because an unprepared person does not have this ability.

A common mistake is to judge a group by the feeling that it conveys. If a group enthuses, exhilarates or amuses us, that is no criterion of its genuineness. To believe so is an indication that you are unable to discriminate between emotional states

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and levels of consciousness. Equally, if the members are grimly 'remembering themselves', with never a smile, they are probably not in touch with the Work. The problem is that these are manifestations of the personality not the essence and so have no relevance to inner Work.

The best advice on this came from Christ: *By your fruits ye shall be judged*. That is how you must judge any teaching. How can we measure the fruits of our time together? Only in ourselves. Is this taking you the way you wish to go, or in some other direction? Are you going anywhere at all or are you stagnating? Each one of us has to try to assess these things for himself and be as objective as he can.

Paul: When I was staying at Gracedale I sometimes had doubts. Sometimes I felt enthusiastic and then everything seemed alright but at other times I felt depressed and a failure and began to question the whole thing.

Brian: That is exactly what I meant by confusing emotional states with higher energies. You went to Gracedale because you were seeking the extraordinary but very soon you got caught up in your ordinary states so that when you felt good you wanted to stay but when you felt bad you wanted to leave.

Paul: I realise now that what you say is right, but I couldn't see it then until something happened to remind me that we had something there which usually we don't have. It was on the day we all went into town after three weeks at Gracedale. It sounds like a small thing but it made a big impression on me. The people in town all had a dull, glazed look in their eyes. That gave me quite a shock. I noticed this as soon as I got to the shopping centre but after a few minutes everything went back to normal.

Sean: My experiences that day were strange because of the different energy. It was like everyone in the street was a puppet — me too! We were all mindless. That didn't last long but it seemed real, even though it was weird.

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Brian: Do you feel that was a valuable insight?

Sean: Oh yes! I got out of my dreams for once. For a moment I saw what is there all the time though I am not able to see it.

Brian: These experiences are a direct result of a build-up of conscious energy. Higher energies free us from our usual blinkered state. They enable us to see ourselves and other people with fresh eyes and what we see then is astonishing.

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6 *The Thinking Machine*

Len: Is it possible to stop all thoughts completely? I ask this because I read that it is impossible to stop thought and that we are always thinking about one thing or another, whilst we are awake at least. This contradicted my own experience that it is possible to stop thinking and hold the mind empty.

Brian: It depends what you mean by *thought*. If you are referring only to mental associations, the random string of thoughts which usually occupies our minds all the time, it is possible to stop this. You have experienced this yourself. But what is going on in our thinking centre then? Something or nothing?

Len: The associations stop when my mind is focused on a particular object.

Brian: But then your mind is occupied with the thought of that object so you cannot really say your mind is empty. You experience this as mental stillness because the intellect is no longer flitting from thought to thought. In reality, what has happened is that the quality of your thought has changed. You have not stopped all thinking.

Rose: How can we stop daydreams and associations?

Brian: This is the real question! Ordinarily, our day is filled with continuous random associations and daydreams. These flow through our mind entirely automatically and we are barely aware of them much of the time. They are just one

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aspect of the operation of our automatic thinking device which Gurdjieff called the *formatory apparatus*.

Associations and daydreams cease whilst we intentionally think about something. If we are trying to solve a problem or recollect the details of a past event, associations stop. In meditation we try to hold to a single thought or repeat a mental formula and these also prevent associations. This is one purpose of repetitive prayers and mantras. But, as we all know well, as soon as the attention weakens, the associations start again. So we must develop our power of attention.

John: It is like a computer which can be employed on calculations but when this useful work stops, it flashes up random numbers until it is given another problem to solve.

Leanne: Does the difficulty of holding back the stream of associations depend in any way upon our environment? I ask this because here I have been free of them much more often than usual. Normally these thoughts go on all day with rarely a let-up, but here I have sometimes found myself mentally quiet almost without trying.

Brian: What you say is correct. Most jobs and interests, reading newspapers, chatting and many of the other activities that fill our day encourage the flow of associations. One could say they feed the process of association and daydreaming.

Paul: Daydreams seem like mechanical thinking but they seem to have to be backed up by feelings. In the course of my job I meet quite a lot of people and there is one person that I meet sometimes who I especially dislike. Twice recently he has come out with a clever remark that made me look silly. A couple of times since then I have caught myself fantasizing about meeting him and making a smart reply when he says something. That must be because my pride was hurt.

Brian: Formatory thinking can be motivated by feelings, just

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as you say, or by the wants of the moving-instinctive centre, such as food or sex.

Harry: Could you say more about what the formatory apparatus does?

Brian: The formatory apparatus is the source of all thoughts which are not connected with direct perceptions. Apart from daydreams its functions are to label things, to theorise about them and to name and classify them, it also fits different ideas into patterns and sequences. The latter is what we call 'understanding'. When we read or hear an idea, we sometimes get this immediate feeling of confidence or satisfaction, and we say that we 'understand'. It means simply that our formatory apparatus has been able either to fit the ideas into a pattern or to relate them to our previous experience or opinions.

These various functions of the formatory apparatus are all useful to us. Whatever we are doing we need facts to guide us and we need to be able to relate different facts together. Learning is speeded up by labelling, categorising and simplifying our ideas. These are all useful work which the formatory apparatus does. Perhaps associations and daydreams also have their value?

But this mechanical thinking device has its weaknesses. Much of the data stored and supplied by the formatory apparatus is not fact. It includes ideas and theories which we have read or been told. Because this material was not derived from our own observations, but is just hearsay, much of it is incorrect, but the formatory apparatus does not distinguish between this data. As far as it is concerned all is 'fact'.

At first it is difficult to distinguish which of our thoughts come from the formatory apparatus. This is the reason why, without special training, few of us can separate our ideas and opinions from our experiences. In the ordinary way we have very little need to do so but in our discussions it is essential that we speak only about our experiences and take

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care to make our accounts very accurate. If we only talk about what we have actually experienced we are fairly safe from deceiving ourselves. Eventually we will learn to differentiate between what we experienced and our thoughts and opinions about our experiences. This really amounts to developing a greater sensitivity to when our formatory apparatus is dominating our thought.

Bob: I think the tendency of the formatory apparatus to put labels on things is a problem. An example of this happened recently. A government official asked me what work I did and I said that I used to teach physics. His reply was:

‘Good, so you are a physics teacher.’ He was about to enter this on his paperwork until I said that I originally trained as a research scientist.

‘Oh, I see, so you would really be a scientist?’

‘But I have been teaching dancing for some years.’

In exasperation: ‘Well, what *are* you then?’

Brian: It is amusing to see how other people mechanically categorize things but it is much more valuable to see this in oneself. We put a name to something, and when we know the name we say we ‘understand’. When we understand there is no further need to think about it.

Everyone has had the experience of noticing the beauty of a wildflower with a feeling of wonder, and then being told by a companion: ‘It is just a kind of daisy.’

Immediately the situation is spoiled. The wonder is gone. We lose interest in the flower because now we know what it is.

Can you see that this habit of labelling and categorising takes us away from reality and into a dream world?

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Eric: In my medical practice I sometimes become too concerned with just putting a name to the symptoms. This morning I examined a patient who complained of pains in the chest and shoulder. When I confidently made my diagnosis I quite forgot that he expected me to cure it, not just name it!

Brian: You are fortunate to see this trap. Labelling is needed but this should be a tool not an end in itself. That is the error that the formatory apparatus will make if you allow it to.

This is one side of the tendency of the formatory apparatus to simplify things. It can also reduce what may really be quite a complex situation down to a choice of two alternatives: either it is good or it's bad. Either you like it or you dislike it. Either it is right or wrong. The reality is perhaps somewhere between the two opposites, which are all that the formatory apparatus can see.

Sally: There is a certain kind of salesperson who uses formatory attitudes to make a sale. One of these came to my door recently trying to sell me an encyclopaedia. He said: 'You wouldn't want your children to fail at school just because they haven't got the best reference books at home, would you?'

Brian: He wants you to think in terms of a yes or no answer when the issue is really not so simple.

Another aspect of formatory thinking is that it offers us a very simple and superficial way to understand things. And we may mistake this for real understanding. One can hear an idea for the first time, fit it into the general framework of one's knowledge and say that one 'understands'. This is not real understanding. True understanding can only come when we are thoroughly familiar with a subject. It requires experience and insight.

Olaf: This is the difference between book-learning and experience on the job.

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Brian: Yet, people sometimes even consider that theoretical knowledge is superior to practical understanding.

Rose: There are several books on Work ideas which explain them very clearly. Would you say these are formatory?

Brian: Yes. However, we must not condemn them for that. Books which are written in the style to which we are accustomed must be formatory to a large extent. Nevertheless, books have their value. They provide a starting point and a source of ideas, but whilst we are limited to books as our source we cannot have a balanced view of the Work. We can attempt to put into practice what we have read and this is a step toward making the ideas less formatory. But I should stress that practice solely from books always gives unbalanced or wrong results if pursued for too long.

Olaf: What sort of wrong results?

Brian: The problem is that when we read, we do so through our personality, just as we do everything else. As a result we inevitably feed the personality, even though we try to practice what we have read. The Work ideas become completely misplaced since their purpose is to provide us with a means for circumventing the personality, not strengthening it.

The Work ideas are interesting and powerful. When we read about them they have a distinctive appeal. But that is not what they were meant for — they were intended as guiding principles to help us carry into our lives the essential relationship with Work which can only come from personal contact with a teacher. Without that essential essence contact they become diverted to feed our personality and our egotism.

Misunderstandings about how to put the ideas into practice have caused a number of problems in the past. Misguided attempts to 'remember themselves' have caused people to develop muscular tensions which are difficult to

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eliminate, have caused repression of feelings, an unhealthy introverted attitude or — worst of all — a strengthened illusion that they are special. A trained guide has the responsibility of helping people over and around these hazards as well as providing their unique contact with the Work.

John: Your suggestion that books, and the superficial kind of knowledge that learning from books brings, can be a starting point for real knowledge and understanding seems an important comment. This is one useful aspect of the formatory apparatus. Perhaps I can use your example of naming a flower to illustrate another. I have had the experience which you spoke of when my sudden appreciation of a flower was spoilt by being told its name, but the opposite has happened too. When someone tells me the name of a plant and some of its characteristics, I may see it with fresh eyes. Its existence has meaning for me and I *notice* it.

Brian: This is true and it illustrates once again that every stick has two ends and nothing is entirely bad. However, the problem arises when too much of our thinking is formatory and we do not make the effort or are not sufficiently wide-awake to have a more active, creative approach in our thinking when that is needed. There is a great value in reading or hearing a new idea but it is quite worthless to be presented with idea after idea but never to incorporate them into one's life. This is what commonly happens.

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Brian: Can we return now to considering the nature of thought? There are three kinds of thought; formatory thinking, intentional thinking and holding a simple mental image or idea. This last includes what is sometimes described as 'no-thought' or 'no-mind' but is in reality a single thought, the thought of whatever we are perceiving here and now.

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The second type of thinking Gurdjieff called *active mentation*. An old fashioned word was pondering, which meant thinking about something intentionally, trying to mentally sort it out and understand it fully.

Pondering and formatory thought are comparable to a question and answer. What is our state of mind when it is occupied by a question? It is active. But when it has got a sufficient answer what then is its state? It becomes passive and centred in the formatory apparatus.

Mulla Nasredin is a Middle-eastern story character and many of the stories about him are aimed at bringing us into an active mental state.

'Why do you answer our questions always with another question, Mulla?' He is asked. His answer is: 'Do I?'

What sort of mental state does he leave us in? And in a very entertaining way too. What if he had answered the question with an explanation — where would that have gone?

Victor: Straight to the formatory apparatus.

Brian: Gurdjieff has written in a very picturesque way about the difference between formatory and intentional thinking in his story of two old men who travel between four monasteries widely separated in Asia. The Brothers travel separately and when either arrives at one of the monasteries he stays awhile teaching the residents. When Brother Sez speaks, it is a great pleasure to listen — everyone understands well what is said and greatly enjoys listening. However, after listening to Brother Sez, the wonderful knowledge soon fades away until little or nothing remains in the minds of the listeners. Conversely, the talks of Brother Ahl are difficult to hear and hard to understand, so everyone finds him quite unpleasant to listen to and people afterwards feel uncertain that there was any benefit from the talks. Strangely, though, as the days pass, things said by Brother Ahl and only half-understood become more and more meaningful and eventually are deeply implanted in the minds of the listeners.

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Colin: Are we to take it that Brother Sez' words are received by the formatory apparatus, but Brother Ahl's words are not?

Brian: Yes.

Colin: What is it that determines to which part of our minds the information comes? I had imagined that would have depended only on the state of mind of the listener — whether he tries to understand and examine critically what he is hearing. This story suggests that the speaker's attitude can cause ideas to enter the formatory apparatus of the listener.

Brian: The state of mind of speaker and listener are both important. Gurdjieff wrote that '. . . the quality of what is perceived by anyone when another person tells him something, either for his knowledge or his understanding, depends on the quality of the data formed in the person speaking'. This is a very strange fact — our mental attitude, or the quality of our thoughts when we speak tends to determine the quality of thoughts engendered in the listener. If I speak about a subject in a formatory way, as inevitably I shall at times, this will be just information for your formatory apparatus.

Sally: Does this apply to anything we may talk about to others?

Brian: Yes, hence we each have some measure of responsibility for the mental state and development of those with whom we come in contact each day. This is particularly important when we are with children. Unlike adults, whose minds are more or less closed to new influences, children's minds are still open and if we talk to them in a way which is backed by a more aware or intentional attitude towards the subject, we may have a good influence, however small, on the quality of their later lives.

Victor: You suggest that our minds are more or less closed, so what difference does it make to us? Actually, I cannot accept what you say about adults having closed minds.

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Brian: Your first comment comes straight from the formatory apparatus: 'If we are more or less closed, what difference does it make?'

I did not say totally closed forever, just more or less closed. There is a big difference. It means our situation is not completely hopeless but it also means that any change cannot be easy or quick. And any change may be unpleasant because of our fixed attitudes and habits.

Also, your comments have emotional undertones which are totally irrelevant and indeed a hindrance to clear thinking. If you are confident that you are quite open mentally to ideas and ways of thinking, why are your emotions affected?

As with all these ideas, it is essential that we neither react to them nor accept them unthinkingly. From time to time there will be opportunities for each person to see a situation which either confirms and develops an idea or refutes it. No doubt, in time, you may discover that some of my ideas are quite wrong because they are a part of the conditioning to which I have been exposed and merely opinions and not based on fact.

Karen: You spoke about our responsibility towards children. This interests me.

Brian: As I said earlier, formatory thinking closes us from the real subject of our thoughts. Formatory talking can similarly close the hearer from contact with the reality of what is being spoken about. Children have a natural ability to be in contact with things around them, though they do not have much power of attention. This ability to see things for what they are needs to be developed but, regrettably, is often suppressed by adults. Speaking in a formatory way to children is one factor which leads to them being almost totally mechanical when they become adult.

A child is curious about something which catches her attention but the parent explains it with such authority and

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finality that no mystery remains. When wonder is destroyed the subject is closed.

Karen: Is education formatory?

Brian: Regrettably, it is almost entirely formatory. Education mostly involves learning ideas and theories which are simplifications of reality. These ideas are usually presented as being completely buttoned up and indisputable. This does not encourage openness of mind, as becomes apparent when an unconventional idea is presented to schoolchildren. For example, in a local secondary school, a lecture by a qualified and experienced naturopath evoked, from almost every child, angry comments that it was nonsense and that the practitioner was stupid and knew nothing about proper medicine.

This is all conditioning. It is comfortable for those in authority to ensure that we have been conditioned to believe and behave in certain ways.

'Education' is itself an interesting word derived from Latin roots meaning *to draw out or lead out*. So we might imagine that education would be based on developing innate abilities. No doubt a part of education is development of natural talents but much more of it is conditioning, training.

Janet: Were you saying that when we are asked a question, we should refuse to answer it? If so, why do you answer us?

Brian: Not that we should refuse to answer. The important thing is *how* we answer — what is our mental state? If we consider our answers, especially with children, and take care not to let the answer just come out automatically, that will make a great difference to the questioner. He is asking a question and this denotes vitality in the mind, so let us not destroy that mental state by an unconsidered reply.

John: It seems to me that this superficial type of thinking has its rightful place in our lives but due to our laziness we don't always make the effort to use other kinds of thinking where they are needed.

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Brian: Because of our upbringing we have lazy habits of mind. The formatory apparatus does almost all of our thinking. This is another example of imbalance in the operation of our mind.

The formatory apparatus deals in names, classifications, simplifications, theories, words, associations and daydreams. All of these have their legitimate place in our lives. The problem is not that this superficial or undirected thinking has no place but that it happens too often. It is the easy way to think so we do it all the time.

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7 *The Law of Three*

Colin: I read that Gurdjieff said we are 'third force blind' and lately I have heard reference several times to the 'Law of Three' and the 'third force.' Can you explain what these mean?

Brian: *The Law of Three* is a new approach to understanding and defining the necessary conditions for any event to take place. It is a principle which applies equally in psychology and in physical science. I think it is best introduced by reference to an ordinary everyday example:

On Sunday I watched a woman working with clay on a potter's wheel. She earns her living by making and selling vases, pots and mugs. It was fascinating to see her skill in action, creating useful and attractive forms from a lump of clay.

As I watched her, it occurred to me that her work entirely depends upon the ability of the plastic clay to harden when it is heated. Without a kiln to fire them, her creations would lose all their value. If she could not fire her pots, she would not make them and she would probably not be much interested in clay.

I saw her work as an example of the law of threefoldness, an interaction between three factors; the potter, the clay and the heat of the kiln which between them result in the creation of her work.

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Colin: What about the wheel — surely that is a fourth component? Why stop at three?

Brian: The wheel is not a fourth factor because it does not contribute anything essentially different. It is, if you like, an extension of her hands, which helps her to manipulate the clay more easily and effectively. Without a wheel it would be quite possible to make clay utensils but without the potter or the clay or a means for firing the pots, none could be made. Do you see the basic difference — the wheel is not an essential part of the creative act but the other three are?

The Law of Three states that for any action or relationship to happen, three factors are needed.

John: Presumably, the third force is the kiln?

Brian: That's right — the kiln is the third force because it brings meaning to the work of the potter. The potter is herself the first force because she is active — she does the work on the clay which is passive. Always the first force is positive, active, affirming and creative or destructive, the second force is passive, denying and conservative.

Sally: This sounds just like yin and yang.

Brian: They are similar principles but the people with whom Gurdjieff studied had developed the ideas in quite a different direction, as you will see.

Paul: Is there a connection with the three gunas?

Brian: Again, there is a connection with the principle of the three gunas; rajas, sattwa and tamas in Hindu philosophy. The principles are similar but the application is different.

I believe the concept of the Trinity in Christian theology is also connected with the Law of Three. God has three parts; Father, Son and Spirit. Gurdjieff taught that everything has three components, corresponding to the Law of Three.

Ingrid: Can we go back to the example of your potter friend? Surely, if she makes pots to earn her keep, another factor is

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the money? She creates pots to make money — where does that fit into what you have been saying?

Brian: Every real situation is made up of a number of interacting triads, each of which has its three parts. You are right that the money she will earn influences her, so also does her mood or the preferences of her customers. But these combine in different ways to make different triads. In order to see what is going on, we have to focus on each aspect of the situation separately, whilst remembering that this is a simplification.

We can take the money from the sale of her work as the third force. The potter and the completed pots are two factors which combine to make the triad. She is active, the pots are passive and the money which she gets for them is what makes the finished pots important to her. Why is the money attractive to her? Perhaps that is a question which we also need to consider at some time. However, here we have another triad; the woman, her earnings and her need for money. We can go on endlessly finding different groups of three interacting together within the single total event. But none of these triads is quite the same as the one I started with, the mechanics of making the pottery which require the potter, the clay and the kiln.

This sounds difficult to understand but really is quite simple. It is a question of learning to clarify for yourself what part of the situation you wish to analyse. Any real event is made up of many similar events which interact with each other, a point which is quite well illustrated by this discussion about the lady who made pots!

Rose: I am not at all clear about what you have been saying. Today I made a chocolate cake. Where would be the three factors in that?

Brian: Why did you make the chocolate cake?

Rose: Because my husband likes them.

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Brian: So now we have the complete triad. You were active — you made the cake. The materials that you made it from were inert, they just had things done to them, so they were the second factor, the passive force. The third force was what motivated you — your wish to please your husband.

The third force is what provides the drive to get things done or it gives meaning or connects things together. As with many of the Work ideas, this concept of a third force has to be understood from practical situations. It is quite a new and valuable way of looking at events.

Rose: You see, there you're being inconsistent. You did not include the oven. You cannot deny that the oven was essential for baking the cake!

Brian: Believe me, it is not my inconsistency that is the problem but the inability of the words to convey this particular experience of seeing an action in terms of three fundamental factors, each of which fulfills a necessary but different part in the action. The three each have certain characteristic features, whatever the details of the event and it is these features that you must look for.

To come back now to your comment. You made a cake to please your husband. It is as simple as that. The factors are; you, active, whatever goes into the making of the cake, the materials and equipment including the oven, passive; and your wish to please your husband is the third factor.

Janet: I cannot see why we need to know all this.

Brian: Firstly, any approach which gives us a different view of things from our habitual, mechanical attitudes must be useful until it too becomes mechanical. But the great value of this principle is something quite different. It is that if there is no third force, what we intend to do will not be done. If we wish to do something, we must look for the third force or it will not get done.

Jeff: Isn't that true of all three forces?

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Brian: No, because we always have the first and second force. When something does not get done it is because the third force is lacking. Here of course, I am speaking primarily of inner work, though the same principle applies whatever the task.

I should like to leave this point for the moment and come back to it later. We have some more basic things to speak about first.

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Graham: I have been thinking about my job. Would labour, materials and finance be a triad?

Brian: Correct. Can you label the three factors, active, passive and reconciling for us?

Graham: Labour is obviously active, materials passive and the finance is the third force that gets people moving.

Brian: This example is a rather theoretical one but it does illustrate another fundamental characteristic of the three forces or factors: Can you tell me which of the three you consider the most important for production; labour, materials or finance?

Graham: Obviously, all are necessary.

Brian: In this example it is easy for us to see that all three are equal and equally necessary. Do not misunderstand me, I do not consider that machines or money are as important as people but from the unfeeling point of view of the economics of production, they are equal.

The significance of my comment is that whatever they may be, the three forces are always equal, but in practice we are rarely able to see this so clearly as in the example that you have given us.

Perhaps I can put this fact together with what I said before about the inherent nature of the three forces. The first force

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is active, positive, creative and destructive, affirming and outward looking. The second force is passive, negative, conservative, denying and introverted. The third force relates, connects, reconciles or brings meaning to the situation. And all three of these forces are equal and just as necessary as one another.

Harry: It is hard to see how passivity could be equal to activity, or a negative attitude could be just as useful as a positive attitude.

Brian: This is precisely the point I am trying to get across: It is not generally obvious to us that the second force is equally as necessary as the first. The reason we cannot see that this is so, is because of our Western education and way of life, which puts an undue value on being positive, active, outgoing and innovative, but denies the value of the opposite characteristics. We must beware of our inherent tendency to look upon the first force as 'good' and the second force as 'bad', or at least to see them as superior and inferior.

If I can return briefly to the lady who makes pots, we will see again that all three factors, though quite different, are equally necessary. The idea of creating the pot is in the mind of the potter and constitutes the first force. The clay brings reality to her ideas — brings her down to earth, if you like. These two aspects of pot-making are equally necessary and complementary — the ideas and the practicalities — they come together in the creation of the pot. The fire makes her work useful and durable and so is just as essential as the other two.

Anne: Previously, you spoke of active and passive, but now you are talking of idea and reality?

Brian: These are different features of the two forces. The important thing here is to obtain a feel for the Law of Three. This is why I have spoken of the three parts in different ways.

Jeff: You said once that the Law of Three shows why some

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things get done but others do not. I am beginning to see what you mean but I should like you to say what are the three factors in this example:

For years I have wanted to learn a musical instrument. I particularly would like to play the piano. We had a piano at home for a few years and I sometimes decided to practice regularly but I was never able to keep it up; after a week or two I would drop it. Until the next time! A year ago I felt I really must do something about this so I found a music teacher. Since then I have been practising fairly regularly.

Brian: What can you say about relating all this to the Law of Three?

Jeff: Well, one of the forces must be my intention to learn. That fluctuated but it was more or less always there. The rest is not really clear.

Brian: Your wish was the first force, quite right. But what stopped you, until you hired a teacher?

Jeff: Different things. It usually got crowded out or I could not make the effort to sit at the piano some days.

Brian: That was the second force. The teacher provided the third force, the drive to get on with learning, without that nothing much got done.

If you wish or intend to do something, that provides the first force, and when we have this the second force will arise naturally, often by reason of our own inertia. When a suitable third force enters the picture something can happen.

Walter: My example is pretty similar. I wanted to build a boat but did not get far with it until I joined an evening class for amateur boatbuilders. I finished it at the classes.

Brian: I hope you can see for yourself where the first, second and third forces were in that example.

Sean: I have been thinking about chopping wood. This morning I was chopping wood for the fire and, afterwards, I

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thought about it and realised there were two ways that I did it. I have been trying to connect this with what you have been saying. The first force seemed to be me actively chopping. The second was the wood, I think. What I cannot get clear is the third force?

Brian: Why were you chopping the wood?

Sean: I was asked to chop the wood. Was that the third force?

Brian: Yes. An instruction from someone else can provide a third force whereas our own intention cannot. Can you say more about your two ways of chopping?

Sean: It was just that when I was asked to stop, I carried on for a while to finish the pile. It was hard to stop, but with no third force? How does that fit?

Brian: Gurdjieff called it the 'Law of Catching Up'! You got caught up in what you were doing and could not leave it. That was the third force!

The two difficulties in all this are, firstly that we are not accustomed to crystallizing in our minds exactly what action we are thinking about. Whilst we are unclear about the nature of the triad or action which is under consideration, we will never be able to isolate the interacting factors. Secondly, we may see the first or the second force but, ordinarily, we rarely see the third force. If we generally focus on the first force we are 'optimists' and if we prefer to focus on the second force we are 'pessimists'. We tend to be blind to the third force.

The significance of all this comes in its application to our own lives. Now we know that three things are needed for any action we are in a stronger position to achieve our goals. Whatever we wish or intend to do cannot happen unless there is a third force which gives the extra meaning or motivation. When we feel it is important to do something we have to look for a possible third force. If we do not find one and are

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unable to generate one we can expect that nothing will happen.

This is another reason why the group can achieve more than its members are able to do alone. In different ways the group can provide a third force by mutual stimulation and encouragement or the feeling that if one does not make some effort one is letting down the rest of the group. As Gurdjieff said: 'One hand washes the other'.

It is very hard for one hand to wash itself, but two hands easily wash each other. In a similar way, a group of people can progress faster than solitary individuals. Part of the reason for this is that in different ways the group can provide the third force that we need.

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There is another big area of influence of the Law of Three which so far we have not considered; relationships. Every relationship requires three factors, two being related to each other by a third. It is quite obvious, I am sure, that if two things, two people for example, have a relationship there must be some relating force or factor. Two friends share common interests and common experiences, husband and wife are held together by their sexual relationship, you and I are connected by our common interest in the Work and also by the words and ideas we exchange.

Once again we are selecting one triad amongst many each time we look at a particular relationship. You and I are joined by the words that I am saying, but we are also joined by our past shared experiences, and these form two distinct triads. In this way, a given relationship is in practice made up of a number of triads simultaneously.

Anne: If this is another aspect of the same law, can we assume that the three parts are active, passive and neutral again? I say this because as you speak, it appears that you are active, I am passive and the words are the third force.

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Brian: That was so until you spoke, then the roles were reversed; I became passive and you became active. In the example of a father, a mother and a child, perhaps the father is active, mother passive and the child is the reconciling factor.

Anne: Could the positions be reversed between mother and father?

Brian: Yes, but the qualities of men and women are such that the husband tends to channel the first force and the wife the second force. Men tend to be carried away with ideas and projects and lose contact with reality, whereas women are more concerned with practicalities. They are closer to their own bodies and to the necessities of life. These, of course, are exactly equal roles, neither being in any way superior to the other because they are complementary.

Janet: I think we have to be careful not to relegate women to the passive role. You can no longer get away with that sort of attitude, and quite rightly so.

Brian: Do you remember what I said earlier about active and passive being equal? I meant what I said. Women and men have different qualities and this can be expressed by saying that women naturally more often channel the second force and men the first force. The problem is not one of placing women in an inferior position but of our misguided attitudes towards their inherent capabilities. Our society puts too high a value on masculine traits. This is a very unbalanced attitude which causes women to be unsure whether they want to be masculine or feminine.

Leanne: I was interested in what you said about the relationship between mother, father and child, where the third force is the child. Does that mean that a person can be active, passive or reconciling?

Brian: That is so. If I am active, you must be passive. On the other hand if I am passive you will be active. This is an important point to remember in our relationships with

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people. We should ask ourselves whether, in a particular relationship, we are channelling the proper force. If not, what steps can we take to put the relationship right? Can you see that this gives us some degree of inner separation from our relationships with people?

Leanne: I have noticed that I do this unconsciously, though. When I want my husband to do something, it often works best if I arrange for him to think of it himself instead of telling him directly.

Actually, I see myself sometimes active, sometimes passive in relationship with him. There are even times when I am reconciling. For example, a few days ago, my mother wanted him to cut her lawn and I was immediately cast as mediator.

Brian: Any of the three forces can flow through us. As you observe this more, you will begin to notice how differently we feel according to which force we are channelling.

Olaf: Previously you spoke about essence and personality and I suppose these two are reconciled by our body. Essence and personality are very different but the body serves both.

Brian: Yes, the body does have to accommodate both. There is another thing about this triad. As we ordinarily live, the personality is active and the essence passive but the natural roles of these are quite opposite. The inner state which is required by this Work, and is the aim of Work, is for the essence to be active and the personality passive.

Maria: Is there any connection between our three centres and the Law of Three?

Brian: This is a good point. Gurdjieff said that of all the animals only man has three brains. Other creatures have instinct and emotions but none have a developed intellect as humans have. Associated with the superior intellect of man is the possibility of a higher consciousness, but this only comes when there is a right relationship between the three.

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Victor: I read in one of Ouspensky's books that it is a misunderstanding to think that there is any connection between man having three brains and the operation of the Law of Three. He said it is a common mistake to believe there is some connection between these two. It all arose from a misunderstanding of something Gurdjieff once said.

Brian: If Ouspensky had read *Beelzebub's Tales* he would not have said such a thing. However, we can quote 'authorities' and 'references' to prove either argument but what good will it do us? Better to look at our own behaviour. What is the nature of the three brains? The thinking brain has grandiose ideas; sailing around the world in a small boat or spending months in a monastic retreat. And through all these elevated thoughts, what is my body doing? Sitting in an armchair in my comfortable lounge. Why doesn't it get up and start these projects, so attractive in my thoughts? Which part of me is providing the initiative for action and which part is bringing me back to reality? So there is stalemate. Then one day I realise that six years have passed in this dull suburb and in all this time my dreary job has not improved. I feel that I must do something about it! So my third centre has entered the story and if the feeling is strong enough and lasting enough, there will be a change — I will begin my new adventure.

I suggest that there is a very definite connection between the Law of Three and the three centres.

Rose: You mentioned that everything has three parts, a positive, a negative and a neutral and this division of the mind into three parts is an example. When you spoke about the intellect I recall that you said it too had three parts.

Brian: I spoke of three kinds of thought; formatory thinking, intentional thinking and simple attention.

John: Are these also active, passive and reconciling? And can we go on splitting up the parts in this way?

Brian: Intentional thought is active, formatory thought is

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passive and 'no thought' is the channel for the third force.

We can go on separating into three parts. Because formatory thought is our principal mental activity it is easier to discover its subdivisions than those of the other two qualities of thought. But I shall leave this for you to do yourself if you are interested.

Jeff: If I understood you correctly, the intellect has its three parts each of which carries one of the three forces and we can subdivide each part again. At the same time each centre can transmit a single force. Or the whole of us can be active or passive when dealing with other people. I should have thought that some of these would have cancelled each other?

Brian: No they don't cancel each other out! Rather than theorising like this, you should try to recognise the qualities of the three forces and the relationships between them. The active force is positive, creative, destructive, optimistic, aggressive, mental and extroverted. The passive force is negative, conservative, pessimistic, receptive, physical and introverted. Both of these have equal 'good' and 'bad' qualities. They are complementary and neither can exist without the other.

The third force relates or reconciles the other two; it enables an action to take place or else gives it meaning. We can only understand these by looking at real phenomena: the earth is apparently hot metallic liquid in the centre covered by a layer of solid mineral rocks. This could not support the life of plants and animals if there were no intermediate layer, which we call soil. The soil reconciles living things to the mineral nature of the planet.

In whatever we do we may be restless, enthusiastic and forceful or we may be restful, peaceful and lazy. These correspond to us channelling the active or the passive force. Of course, these are only a few of the multitude of ways in which we may experience either of these two forces.

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Leanne: How would we feel the third force?

Brian: In one way or another we will be in an in-between position. This could mean indifference or it could mean an objective, detached attitude. You could merely be an intermediary — perhaps delivering a message the content of which is no particular concern of yours. Or it could bring a higher state of consciousness, a state when you are neither active nor passive but poised between these two; you are aware of the situation but with no need either to impose yourself upon it or to withdraw.

Study these three forces in action in yourself, in other people, in events and in relationships. You will soon see how the forces are interrelated and learn to recognise the feel of them. This will clarify many of your problems, enable you to do more of the things you wish to do and help you in your dealings with other people.

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8 Identification

Janet: Gurdjieff said, 'Man is a machine. Man cannot do'. Do you agree with this?

Brian: Have you not at times felt that something you did yourself was done like a machine? Associated with this feeling is often the thought that unhappiness or misunderstanding could have been avoided if we had behaved differently or that we could have saved ourselves so much trouble if we had only stopped and thought about what we were doing.

Janet: Yes, I recognise the truth in what you are saying but this does not happen every day so I don't see how it proves anything. In fact I would have thought it shows we are not usually mechanical, otherwise it would happen all the time.

Brian: On the contrary, when we notice that we have done something in a mechanical way, we are less machine-like than usual. Our ordinary state is more mechanical, so mechanical that we cannot even see its mechanicalness. Most of the time we are just machines with no mechanism for observing or recording how we act. This is the condition which Gurdjieff called *identification*.

Identification is one of Gurdjieff's special terms. His use of the word is quite different from the usual meaning of sympathy or compassion. Identification is a certain automatic way of relating to everything which affects us. Our attention is attracted by something and only later do we

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realise that when that happened we were, in a sense, lost. All of our attention was taken up and there was none left over for us to be awake to events around us. When we are identified we have no freedom and cannot see things objectively because we are too much personally caught up in them.

Identification is when we listen to music or to someone speaking and though we are staring at the window, we see nothing of the view outside. It is when we eat a meal without really tasting it because we are thinking about something else. It is when we walk along the street but don't see anything because of our daydreams. It is when we cannot listen to her because we are angry at someone else. It is when you sit in a chair but do not notice the pressure of the seat because you are identified with what you are reading.

Identification is our usual state. Identifying is often considered a good trait and is called *enthusiasm*, *dedication*, *spontaneity*, etc., but in all these moods we are machines. If I am totally immersed in what I am doing, thinking or feeling, my actions can only be mechanical; I simply react to whatever happens to me.

Karen: This morning you asked me if I was identified with arranging the dining room. I didn't understand.

Brian: Why did you want to carry on with the job when you had been asked to let someone else finish it?

Karen: I wanted to make the table pretty and I knew that Steve wouldn't take the trouble.

Brian: You wanted to arrange flowers and the condiments and all the rest nicely. But what was not nice was that *you* were not there. I saw a machine doing those things, not a person.

Karen: I just wanted to make the table nice.

Brian: Yes, and we all appreciate such efforts, but something extra is needed here. You have to remember why you came

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here. You can arrange the table nicely anywhere, but here you can do something for yourself at the same time. Where were *you* when you arranged the table? What were you thinking about?

Karen: I suppose I wanted to make the place as nice as I could. I was thinking that people would notice that I had done it well.

Brian: That is very honest. You wanted to carry on with the job because you wanted to do it well and to make an impression on us all.

This is a form of identification — concern with what others may think. We are all subject to these things and we can become identified literally with anything inside or outside of ourselves.

I will give you an example of how it can happen. I begin cleaning my room and soon all my attention is drawn into some aspect of the job. Perhaps I see a door handle needs attention; it is dirty and a screw needs tightening. Immediately, where am *I*? I have no separate existence apart from that handle that I am fixing. I don't notice what has happened because there is nothing separate in me to notice. This is identification. Whilst I am identified I am a machine. Only when something in me, some part, remains separate, keeping an overall view of what is happening, can I say that I am not a machine. When we are in that identified state there is nothing in us which is truly free to choose. Without that inner freedom we merely react to things.

Olaf: Yesterday, I was cleaning my room and I know that there was *no one there*, as you put it, but I was not specially concerned about any one thing, like the door knob that you spoke of. As far as I can remember, I just did the cleaning.

Brian: What were you thinking and feeling?

Olaf: I can't remember anything in particular. Except for a while I was thinking about a Movement — Number 17 actually.

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Brian: So you were lost in your associations. Would you agree?

Olaf: I guess so.

Brian: Each of us spends a major part of his day identified with thoughts and daydreams. Mostly, these have no intensity about them and then we do not have any remembrance of them. As a result we do not realise how long we have been in this state. These are just grey periods from which we do not remember much at all, but they are still identification.

Let us say I spend an hour mixing concrete and throughout this time my thoughts wander from subject to subject. I am lost in those thoughts. Am I a man or a machine mixing concrete? Gurdjieff would answer, 'A machine'. On the other hand if I retain an awareness, a separation in myself, so that I know that I am mixing concrete as I do the work, do you see how different this is? Then every moment has the extra quality which comes with that sense of presence.

Anne: Yesterday I spent most of the afternoon weeding in the garden with two other people. The sun was shining and it was very pleasant and afterwards I could see that we had made a thorough job of it. It was very satisfying. Was I identified when I was weeding?

Brian: Well, first let me ask you the question that I asked Olaf. What were you thinking about whilst you were weeding?

Anne: Oh, different things.

Brian: What sort of 'different things'? Can you be more specific?

Anne: Well, I can't remember. At one time I was thinking about my brother, who is in India.

Brian: So, do you think that you were identified or were you aware of your movements and what was going on around you?

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Anne: I suppose I was identified. But I also wanted to make a good job of the weeding.

Brian: So you were identified with the weeding some of the time and carried far away to India by your thoughts at other times?

Anne: It doesn't seem bad to be identified with what I am doing. It's the way to get it done well.

Brian: Where are *you* when you are immersed in a job? Do you have any sense of yourself? Or are you just an automaton mechanically doing it?

Anne: But I think I do the job better that way, when my whole attention goes into it.

Brian: There is another way to put quality into what you are doing and that is to be free from identification.

Anne: But when I am not immersed in the job, I usually don't do it so thoroughly.

Brian: In practice we are identified all the time. Only the object of identification changes. It is because you are identified with something else that you cannot do the task thoroughly. It is because you are thinking about something else you want to do or that you want a rest, or you feel that another person ought to be doing the weeding. All these are identification. Whilst we identify with something else we cannot do the job well because we are enslaved by the other thing. If we are identified with the job we do it more thoroughly as you said. But to put real quality into what we are doing requires that we identify with nothing.

Walter: But you just said we are identified all the time.

Brian: Quite right. It is possible not to identify, but for practical purposes we can say that never happens. I want to make it clear that all those times that we think we are doing meaningful things as individuals, when we imagine we are making a choice or an unbiased comment, we are, in reality,

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totally enslaved by whatever it is that we happen to be involved in.

That is the feature of identification — it is a condition of slavery. We begin to worry about something and cannot in any way be free from this worry; whatever we do, it dominates our actions, thoughts and feelings. Can you see that this is slavery?

Rose: This evening I was worrying about being late here. I was rushing anxiously and got quite het-up about it. When I got here I was on time and as it happened the meeting started a little late and I felt how stupid it was to get so concerned. I felt drained and a bit annoyed with myself.

Brian: This is a very clear example of identification with emotional states. First you were identified about coming late, but then you got annoyed with yourself for being identified! This is what I mean by one identification following another — only the object by which we are enslaved changes. In the beginning you were caught up in the worry about being late, but when you discovered that you were on time, you immediately got trapped in the annoyance at your unnecessary rushing and worrying. Can you remember how you felt as you came into the room and discovered that the meeting had not started?

Rose: For a moment I felt relieved not to be late. Is that what you mean? I thought, 'Phew! I made it after all', when I saw people still arriving.

Brian: Do you think that you slipped from a higher state to a lower one a moment later when you began to get annoyed with yourself? Let me put it like this — do you think you noticed more about the people around you before or after you began thinking that you need not have rushed?

Rose: When I first came in, I suppose. Before, I mean.

Brian: Do you remember our talking about energy transformations?

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Can you see that this is an example of automatic transformation of energies — from a higher state into an emotion. This is what usually happens and it is the reverse of what we aim to do in this work. Our eventual aim will be to do the opposite; to change emotional states into higher energies intentionally.

If I can come back now to your original observation, there are other interesting points raised in it. For one, the question of whether we should trouble to turn up on time. What does it matter if we are late, anyway? I know you were brought up to be on time. That is why most of us try not to be late, but that is not the point. If that were the only reason, I should say it is better that we find a way to dissipate that kind of conditioning.

Rose: I think it is bad manners to be unpunctual.

Brian: Yes, it is a long-established custom in our society to accept that it is rude to come late. Often, though by no means always, such customs have become established for a valid reason. In this case I believe we do harm if we ignore this custom. The meeting has started and everyone's attention is focused on the subject, and when someone else comes in, attention is disrupted. In some situations the result can be quite extreme; because of the efforts of those present, an energy can become concentrated amongst us and the advent of a newcomer dissipates that energy. One can even notice the effect on people's postures and their voices — they return to the condition in which they first arrived.

John: I have noticed sometimes when someone comes late I lose the thread, but a few days back I was speaking when it happened and I didn't lose the thread but I felt awkward, tense for a moment.

Brian: So we have a responsibility to each other to be on time. Better still, come a little early and try to prepare yourself for the meeting by sitting quietly or thinking about something relevant or in any other way you know.

The other point you mentioned which I did not pick up was the sensation of being drained after rushing to the meeting. This shows how identification squanders our vitality. It does so by producing body tensions and causing us to do everything inefficiently.

Len: Does this mean that we cannot truly relax until we learn not to be identified with things?

Brian: Relaxation is a big subject. Certainly what you say is true but we have deep-seated and chronic tensions which are difficult to relax, even if we find how to remain free from identification. Besides, nobody can remain separate all the time. We are surrounded by forces which strive to return us to the identified state and, in any case, it is our habitual condition, so we must expect it to be hard to escape.

Steve: How can we tell if we are identified with something?

Brian: As I said before, we identify all the time. At first we see identification in relation only to strong experiences and we wrongly imagine that at other times we are not identified. It is safe to assume at any time we are identified. Freedom from this is so rare that, if we stand in a city street and watch one thousand people walk past, we can be confident all will be in this state. And, of course, at the very time that we are looking at others and thinking these things, we too are identified.

We identify with literally anything. With feelings, as we have already seen, but also with sensations and thoughts. One friend, who is now dead, used to say, 'I am hungry. What does this mean? It means that hunger exists. *I do not*'.

We identify with every pain or pleasure and every passing thought or feeling.

At Sherborne, Mr Bennett would often create situations where the Work principles were shown to us in a practical way. This happened many times in connection with identification. On one occasion it was announced that a 'Special

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Movements Group' was to be selected and trained especially to put on a performance in honour of Gurdjieff's relatives who were to visit Sherborne.

The list of performers appeared — nearly half of the students — and practices began. Nina was one of those chosen, but I was not. We who were not selected were expected to devote our whole day to cleaning, cooking, all the other household chores and gardening. We did this all day everyday until the arrival of the special guests. You may imagine how we felt, being relegated to doing the chores day after day, whilst the other students were receiving 'Star Treatment'! Throughout the days of practice there was almost no contact between the two groups. Little did we realise how the Movements Group felt! They were learning new Movements and practising from breakfast until lunchtime, from lunchtime to dinner and in the evening until bedtime — and later! With muscles stiff and aching they yearned to join us at the weeding or the washing up! This went on for about a week and a tremendous tension built up between the two groups of students — each imagining that the other group had the better deal! Each person was identified with his own problems and his imaginary picture of what the other group was enjoying. No one was able to have an objective view of the whole situation — a fact which showed up quite clearly from the comments of the two groups when they were together afterwards.

Incidentally, Gurdjieff's relatives showed little interest in the performance, making only the briefest appearance in front of the group before leaving the room with Mr Bennett. You can imagine how the performers felt!

Olaf: If we accept that man behaves like a machine the majority of the time, what about the other expression 'Man cannot do'? What did Gurdjieff mean by that?

Brian: What do you feel about it?

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Olaf: I feel in two minds about it. In a way, I feel that Gurdjieff was right, that often I cannot carry things through just as I intended to. But then again, when I look around and see the buildings, the technical achievements and the scientific discoveries, I feel different about it. Then I say to myself that I just need to think more positively.

Brian: What do you think were the driving forces behind all the achievements that you mentioned?

Olaf: Money, mostly I suppose.

Brian: Yes, money or fame or prestige. Sometimes there are other reasons, but always connected with a compulsion or inner weakness. This is what Gurdjieff was talking about — we cannot choose to do something, and then press on to the end of it, without there being some more compulsive force than our own intention. This is because we are subject to identification with thoughts and, more particularly with feelings. We can choose to do something in one mood, but a day or an hour later our mood has changed and what we had intended to do before no longer seems important or necessary, so we don't do it.

Ingrid: But in small things we can choose to do what is right regardless of personal gain and then do it. Don't you think so?

Brian: Good comment. In small things we can *do* as you say. This seems to happen when the job gets done whilst we are in the mood. It is a very valuable observation.

It is one reason for the principle that we should never neglect the easy changes that we can make in our lives and the simple forms of work in favour of more difficult or exotic tasks. If we concentrate on difficult and interesting tasks little may come of our efforts because we over-estimate our capabilities. There is a Nasredin story which illustrates this pitfall:

When a young man wished to become a disciple, Nasredin

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asked whether he preferred to start his discipleship with an easy task or a difficult one. Hoping to make a good impression on his new teacher, the young man requested the difficult task. Unfortunately, this proved impossible for him and when he failed the test he was not given a second chance. As a result he gained nothing from his opportunity with the wise mullah.

When Gurdjieff said, *Man cannot do*, he was trying to destroy our illusion that we discover or invent great things or create great art through the action of our own Will or intention unaided. This we cannot do. In fact, when we try to think of doing something without financial profit or some other compelling reason, it is hard to imagine such a situation.

Helen: But what about people who campaign to ban the bomb or to save species in danger of extinction? Surely this is from higher motives?

Brian: This is, for us, a hypothetical situation. We cannot look closely at a particular individual or group of people who are campaigning to save the whales and find out what really does motivate each person's actions without being personally involved with them. What we can do is look at the things which happen around us. We must question what motivates us and those we know well, and find out what is really underneath our own behaviour and the behaviour of people around us. You can be sure that the people who are driven by what appear to be higher motives to march and demonstrate to ban the bomb or stop uranium mining, are driven by the same forces as we can see in ourselves and the people we know. Of course, that is not to say that what these people struggle to achieve is not valuable. No doubt they can be a beneficial influence on society. But that is not what we are concerned with here. At this moment we are discussing motives not ideals.

Maria: Earlier you spoke of identification with feelings and I wonder what we can do about that?

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Brian: We can imagine Gurdjieff saying, 'What can *do* about it?'. In a surprised tone and with eyebrows raised. 'Not can *do*!'.

The problem of identification with feelings is that we decide to do something in a particular mood, perhaps compassion or enthusiasm, but by the time we come to carry out our decision, for one reason or another, our state of feelings can have changed to dislike, anger or boredom. When this happens we see no further point in doing what had previously seemed so necessary and may even think that it would be more sensible not to do it. Often we forget our intention, but if we do remember we wonder how we could ever have considered doing such a thing.

Janet: I really feel this is all rather exaggerated.

Brian: Not at all. However, I understand your attitude because I can remember reacting the same way when I read Gurdjieff's story about the *Free Man* in the last chapter of *Beelzebub's Tales*. The man in the story is pulled this way and that by his changing moods. When I first read the story it did seem very exaggerated. I know now that was because my egotism reacted against the inference that my own moods could carry me to and fro like a leaf in the wind. This is true of us all but our lives are arranged so that we do not see it.

Leanne: I had an example of this recently when staying with friends. I thought I would befriend an old man whom no one in the street speaks to. Next afternoon he came staggering up to me, very drunk, and I felt sickened and a bit frightened. After that I tried to avoid him. I know he is a human being like the rest of us, yet I didn't want to associate with him anymore. If I could be free from my feelings I think I should be able to accept him as a person whatever his weaknesses.

Brian: We do as our feelings direct even if we know it is not the right thing.

Victor: I think her reaction to the drunk was perfectly natural.

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Brian: It is easy to believe that our mechanicalness, because it is our established way of life, is natural. In this work we seek to be free from domination by feelings. She knows that with greater inner strength she would not have to react to the old man's behaviour. When she is away from him she wants to be kind to him but when she meets him she cannot because she is disgusted by him.

Perhaps we can return to the question of what we can do about the problem. Before you can *do* anything you have to examine your own behaviour and be convinced from your own observations that what I have said is correct. It is pointless trying to do something on the basis of my observations with none of your own to confirm what I say.

If you do see yourselves being influenced by changing emotions, already you have taken one step towards freeing yourself from them. We have to remember all the time that feelings come and go. When we decide upon a course of action we need to remember that it could be hampered by another mood. When it does happen that an intention is frustrated by an unexpected change of mood, we have to remember again that this mood will not last forever and that to be governed by our feelings is weakness.

One certain way to carry out our intention is to commit ourselves sufficiently. Perhaps a promise to someone that we would not wish to let down, or a public statement which we would be too embarrassed to go back on. You have to choose some commitment relevant for yourself.

Victor: When I am identified —

Brian: It is easy to see that you have entirely misunderstood what I have been saying. You imagine that there are times when you are not identified. As you speak you believe it does not apply to you.

Colin: Are there degrees or levels of identification?

Brian: What prompts you to ask this?

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Colin: Sometimes I have been so immersed in reading a book that I have not heard what people said to me. Other times I heard when someone spoke to me, but was not able to give up my reading. Again, sometimes I make the effort, or is it a sacrifice? Then I put down my book.

Brian: So can you answer your own question? Are there different degrees of identification?

Colin: Yes. I think there are.

Brian: There is another side to your observation. It is that we do not wish to give up pleasant identifications. Reading gives you pleasure that you do not want to forgo. As Mr Bennett wrote in one of his books, we seek for both realisation and enjoyment. Sometimes these two are in opposition and then it is easy to forget about self-realisation.

During the course of a lecture that he was giving at Sherborne, Mr Bennett paused to apologise for talking too long about historical aspects which were only of marginal relevance to the topic. Nina suddenly spoke up: 'I think it is very interesting'.

Mr Bennett's reply was, 'You are not here to be interested!'.

John: I read somewhere that first we have to learn not to be identified with ourselves. Was this what you were referring to when you spoke of bearing in mind that whatever mood I am in, it will not last forever?

Brian: That is part of it. We have to look at our situation and ask ourselves what we are. Am I my thoughts which are changing all the time? Am I my feelings? They certainly provide the driving force for many of my actions, but there is nothing stable in them that I can call *me*. What then about my body? I cannot accept that this is *I*. This is the least changing thing I can find, except perhaps my habits; the way I move and the things that interest me, but are these me? Or am I just my experiences? Or my name? Perhaps it is all

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these things together? Or is there some other 'controlling factor' behind my manifestations? If there is, it is hard to find.

Each one of us has to see for himself that these thoughts and these feelings will not last; they replaced others which were in us a short time ago and in their turn they will soon be replaced. When we become involved with our feelings about something we can ask ourselves:

'Is this identification? Will this be so vitally important to me in a week's time? Will I still feel the same?'

Harry: How can we struggle against identification?

Brian: Struggle? Either we are identified and no struggle is possible or, on rare occasions, we are not identified, in which case no struggle is necessary.

Colin: But could we be between one of these two extremes? I gave the example where I thought sometimes I was more deeply identified than others.

Brian: Are you referring to the times that you spoke of being engrossed in a book? Sometimes you struggle against the power which the book has over you, but then you are identified with the struggle! Or you may be concerned that the person who spoke to you will think you rude if you do not answer.

Colin: All the same I wonder if, at times like that, we could get out of the state of identification if we knew what effort to make.

Brian: You know about this idea now. Knowing about this kind of slavery can help. Suddenly you wake up for an instant. At that moment you are trying to put over your own point of view whilst ignoring the opinions of your neighbour with whom you happen to be discussing, in somewhat negative terms, the behaviour of the garbage collectors. You say to yourself, 'Now I see! This is identification'. And you mentally step back and let him have his say.

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This is not a matter of struggle. There may be a choice or a sacrifice when you momentarily see what is happening but do not want to give up the pleasure of the situation. When that happens either you stop inwardly and make the sacrifice, or you carry on as you were.

Rarely is struggle against identification possible because as I said, we straightaway identify with the struggle.

Rose: To me, the awful thing about identification is that it prevents me from seeing people as individuals and not just objects. As you were saying about the discussion with the neighbour — it was a case of getting your own point over, not relating as a human being.

Mike: It seems to me that identification could provide a solution to whether we have free will, or whether everything is predestined and can happen in only one way. Neither is entirely correct. The truth is somewhere between these two extremes.

Brian: In general our actions are all reactions and there is no problem of 'free will' — our Will has no part in the action. But this is not always so, sometimes choice enters into the situation.

Mike: Cannot one say that the choice, however conscious, is predetermined anyway? Our choice has to be based on something. That 'something' is the total of our knowledge and experience together with our inherent nature. Nothing else can enter into the choice, so that also is not really free will because the Will can only operate within the limits of the data available to it.

Brian: Perhaps. But there are two fallacies in such arguments. The first is that it is an intellectual idea and not based on observations. Your thinking has become divorced from the experience upon which all thought has to be based if it is to be meaningful. Observe the act of choice in yourself and produce evidence that it is based upon 'available data' as you

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suppose. This brings us to the second fallacy in your argument, which is that all parts of our nature receive impressions of a similar order. We forget that the human organism is a total mystery in its manner of operation. How can we possibly know what data is available to the mysterious regions of ourselves from which comes a decision? The achievements of dowsers are alone sufficient to show that parts of the psyche 'know', or have access to, very much more data than we are able to experience. The same applies to astrology and many psychic phenomena. We have been brought up to think that what we do not see, or cannot see with available tools, does not exist. The universe contains more than that.

Victor: Earlier you spoke as if we are our body, thoughts and feelings and nothing more, but now you are suggesting that there are other parts to us?

Brian: Yes.

Leanne: While all this talk has been going on, I have been identified with thoughts about how society runs on identification. It seems to me that the jobs we do, films and T.V., religions, politics, industry; the very structure of our society is based upon identifications. If identification ceased to exist our society would collapse.

Brian: I don't think there is any likelihood of that, do you? In reality it would not collapse, it would just change a great deal. But this is really hypothetical and is only of value in so far as it may stimulate us to be concerned about our own situation and to see the reality by which we are surrounded.

* * *

In all this talk about identification no one has brought up any observations on good or useful aspects. It is hard to believe that such a powerful and all-embracing phenomenon can have no positive attributes.

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Sean: In a previous discussion you pointed out that, in the example of my chopping wood I carried on chopping because I was identified — what you actually said was that I was *caught up* in the job. Identification provided the third force to chop the wood. I wonder if this is useful?

Brian: I think so. Because we lack strength of Will we need to be identified in order to get things done. At every moment there is an array of distracting influences trying to act upon us. Our protection from these is identification.

Work on oneself can bring about a weakening of our identifications. When this happens we feel the multitude of everchanging forces which act upon us all the while, continually pushing us this way or that way. Then we realise that identification is what ordinarily keeps us heading in the same direction. Until the object of the identification changes.

We spend all of our lives in this condition we call identification. Everything trivial or important which catches our attention, enslaves our Will. We identify with anything inside or outside of ourselves; fear, something we want or dislike, an idea, a plan, a dream, material objects, a car, a book, a pen, our own body, people, places. Literally anything. It is our usual condition. Because we are identified we have no attention to spare for the reality which surrounds us, here and now.

* * *

9 Emotions

Colin: Somewhere I read that, according to Gurdjieff, *the last thing that a man will give up is his suffering*. I remember thinking that was ridiculous but, at the same time, I wondered what he was getting at. Since then I have been thinking about it and, though it sounds crazy, it seems to be true. Not only do I refuse to give up my suffering – but I have discovered that I actually enjoy it!

Something which happened at the hospital was a typical example. One of the doctors had made a comment which cast doubt on my competence as a physiotherapist. I was very angry but could not say anything to his face. I went away and started telling other people about it. 'Who does he think he is, questioning my ability?' I had spoken like this to three friends and was just about to tell another when I stopped myself. I realised that I was enjoying telling people and wallowing in hurt pride. I think of myself as a reasonable, rational person and there I was, making the most of this insult. I was enjoying suffering and really did not want to give it up! It astounded me.

Brian: Yes. As soon as a strong feeling arises, all reason flies out of the window. This whole subject of emotions and their power for good and evil is astonishing.

Harry: Are you referring to negative emotions? If so, I must say, I cannot see any 'power for good' in them. As far as I am concerned they are entirely evil.

Brian: For the benefit of those here who are not familiar with this terminology, I need to say something about negative emotions before answering your comment. The concept of negative emotions is frequently referred to in the Work books and it has come to be a central idea of the Gurdjieff Work. Negative emotions are all the unpleasant emotions; hatred, fear, self-pity, indignation, envy, boredom, gloom and so on.

It is a common belief amongst Gurdjieff's followers that negative emotions are entirely bad and should never be expressed. Certainly we can learn and benefit a great deal from intentionally not expressing negative moods. I suggest that you try this for yourself. But, be warned of the danger of training oneself to withhold all negative emotions. This is very inhibiting and unhealthy and it is not what is required. Occasionally we need to express negative attitudes and reactions. Gurdjieff sometimes gave vent to his feelings in a manner which left no one in doubt that they had done something they ought not have!

The negative emotions do have their value. However, let us begin our discussion by considering their negative effects, since these are more apparent. One obvious property of these emotions is that they all close us to the world around. What do we see of the flowers when walking in the garden if we are full of anger or hurt pride? What a deadening effect they have upon life!

There is another thing connected with this: to a greater or lesser extent, our views of everything are altered by negative emotions. How different our attitude and way of working is when we become bored or dissatisfied with something that previously enthused us. What was so easy, now becomes a long, hard, uphill struggle.

Rose: Negative emotions can leave us physically and mentally exhausted. After a burst of anger I usually feel drained of vitality, as if that outburst took all my reserves of energy.

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Brian: True. That is another bad feature of them.

Maria: Is anxiety a negative emotion? My reason for asking is that I was preparing a talk and got so anxious that I could hardly think about my subject. It seemed so silly to be anxious but I could not help it and it practically froze my mind.

Brian: Yes, negative emotions do interfere with the intellect. Not just anxiety but all the rest; gloom, anger and so on, affect our thinking.

Maria: But I also realised that in another way my anxiety helped me prepare the talk. Because I was anxious, my mind kept coming back to it and I felt I had to leave other things and give time to it.

Brian: So here we have a benefit from negative emotions. Emotions are very often the third force which gets things done. In the analogy of man as a horse, driver and carriage, they are the horses which move the carriage. Negative emotions do have their positive aspects, and this ability to drive us to action is one of them.

Steve: I have an example of a good effect from what is basically a bad feeling. When the two groups were working together on Saturday, on several occasions I found myself working next to someone whom I had not met before. Each time I should have made the effort to speak and make contact, but I didn't. Afterwards I was annoyed with myself for my own weakness in not being able to speak up. I think those negative feelings are really a positive reaction to my own failure because they made me determined to speak next time.

Brian: I think if you look more closely you will see that the results of this feeling are not positive. It distances you from the direct experience of the situation and acceptance of your weakness. Remorse can enable us to see ourselves but the

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expression of it in the way you have done, destroys that possibility. You feel ashamed and angry with yourself but this soon passes, leaving nothing changed in you, so that in the same situation you will behave as before.

Steve: What should I do then?

Brian: The observation that you were afraid to speak to a stranger is a valid one. So accept it. Try not to get emotional about it and spoil everything.

Terry: I have an example of a negative feeling which prompted me to get on with something when otherwise I would not have done so.

We have just moved into a new house and the garden is very rutted and trodden down. On Sunday afternoon I thought I would dig the whole garden over to tidy it up. The ground was terribly hard and before long I realised that it was going to be a much bigger job than I had bargained for. So I stopped and went indoors for a rest.

My father, who had been working in the garage, came in. He said, 'I thought you wouldn't get far with the digging'. The way he said it was a challenge to me.

I didn't say anything, but I thought, 'I'll show him!' I went outside and dug until it got dark and I almost finished the garden. I got a great feeling of satisfaction from seeing how much the garden had changed and from proving my father was wrong!

Brian: Your story clearly illustrates how we can get things done if there is an emotion to spur us on.

Janet: Not only negative emotions provide this drive. Surely, pleasant emotions such as enthusiasm and optimism are at least as effective?

Brian: Quite right. It is interesting to note that these pleasant emotions have most of the properties of negative emotions, except, of course, for their unpleasantness. Anticipation, enthusiasm or elation are just as capable of enslaving our

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Will, of trapping us in the magic circle of identification, as are the less pleasant feelings. In just the same way they can narrow our view, prevent us from seeing reality and determine our behaviour.

Another property of these two types, the pleasant and the unpleasant emotions, is their infectiousness. Let us say I have been reading a particularly gloomy magazine article. I start to tell you that the world situation is hopeless, mankind is polluting the world and there is nothing we can do about it. Obviously it cannot be long before someone will start the nuclear war . . . You soon begin to be affected by my state. On the other hand, if I come in with a cheery smile and an uplifting comment, your spirits rise.

Harry: You are talking as if enthusiasm and cheerfulness are on the same level as fear or despondency. I cannot accept that.

Brian: I am simply pointing out the positive and negative aspects of each and their similarities. People often do not realise that, though it is pleasant to feel enthusiastic about what we do, this is identification. We can be enslaved by our feelings of keenness or optimism just as easily as by a negative emotion, but the slavery is more pleasant that is all.

So now we have considered two groups of emotions; the unpleasant and the pleasant, both of which can spur us to action but at the same time they close us to reality and dominate our behaviour. There is yet a third group which we could call *conscious emotions*: remember the awe you feel when confronted by a beautiful view, or the amazement when you notice the infinite detail and beauty of a flower or the wonderful complexity of the mechanisms in the tiniest living organism. Or there is the feeling of our own insignificance when we stand on the sea-shore and realise that these waves will still be coming in when everyone we know or ever heard of has long, long since been forgotten

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together with all his works. These are emotions of another category.

Olaf: Why?

Brian: They bring us back to reality. To our own significance, our essence.

Now, can we come back to thinking about practical steps that we can take to improve our situation? In particular, what changes can we make in our own behaviour, so as to reduce the harmful effects of our negative emotions?

Leanne: I feel we could all go outside and contemplate the stars more often on clear nights. This is a method that I discovered for myself for dealing with worries that will not go away. I just go outside, look up at the stars and think about the immense distances out there and ask myself: How big are my problems really?

Rose: It seems to me that any contact with nature helps to moderate my negativity. If I am feeling depressed I go and work in my herb garden, and it soon passes.

Brian: These are genuine, valuable ways to transform negative feelings. There are other ways too. What about the injunction not to express negative emotions? Gurdjieff said it is a useful exercise not to express them.

Paul: I think we are bottled up enough already. It would be healthier if we could give vent to our anger once in a while, not intentionally repress it more. From childhood we are taught it is not done to be angry, especially in public. Mother says to little Johnnie, 'Don't you dare stamp your feet at me like that'. I feel we need to express our emotions more, not less.

Brian: I agree that sometimes it might be a useful form of work on oneself to let our anger rip! But can we do so intentionally?

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And what do you think about boredom or despondency? Is it healthier for us to express these? What about self-pity?

Paul: Perhaps I have to restrict my comment to anger because at the moment I cannot see other negative emotions which ought to be expressed. But we need to express the pleasant feelings more openly too.

Brian: I think every negative emotion probably has its use and needs to be expressed sometimes. Many a stressful situation remains unresolved only because we do not let others know how we really feel. However, I do agree with you that we need to share our positive feelings more freely. The important thing is that we aim to become free inwardly from all our feelings.

Harry: I still believe that we should never express negative emotions. That is behaving like an animal.

Brian: This is weakness masquerading as strength. You are unable to express your emotions, so you see non-expression as a virtue. Do you see that this could be so?

Harry: Perhaps.

Brian: Let us return to the previous comment about the little boy. 'From early childhood we are taught not to be angry.' Is that really so? Or is it that your small boy must not stamp his foot or slam the door in his mother's presence? What if he goes next door and picks a fight with a neighbour's child in his anger and frustration? Is that acceptable? Will his mother say, 'Well little boys always fight', and, 'It takes two to make a quarrel'. Or what if he just grits his teeth, tenses his shoulders and clenches his fists? Are these really the same as not expressing anger?

I think we have to differentiate between anger, hatred and the rest when they are really not expressed — a difficult thing — and when their expression is diverted into less spontaneous behaviour. I entirely agree with you that we are

far too inhibited in our behaviour and that 'non-expression of negativity' reinforces our inhibitions and multiplies them if we only see the obvious manifestations of emotion and let the others pass. We may even justify our inhibitions and fear of manifesting spontaneously and dignify it by the title 'work on ourselves.'

Paul: That puts a different slant on things. I can see that this is not easy. How can we avoid expressing anger without it coming out in some other way?

Brian: If it is in me, it will try to come out. If I do not show anger perhaps it will change into gloom or hurt-pride and get out that way. We have to remember that to make it a habit, that is to say, an automatic reaction, not to express anger will not succeed and it is not work. It is worse than useless — it just poisons us.

Helen: This clarifies something which has slightly troubled me for a long time. I had read that we should not express negative feelings, but accounts of Gurdjieff relate how he created very emotional scenes.

Bob: I am reminded of an encounter that I had with a notable Buddhist monk, an Englishman who had become a Theravada Buddhist in Bangkok. He claimed that he had proof that Buddha was 'more advanced' than Jesus. His proof was that Jesus got angry at the traders in the temple, but nowhere in the vast Buddhist literature is there any reference to Buddha showing anger at any time!

John: I could say the same about my solicitor. In all the years I have dealt with him, whatever happened he has always been cool; never ever showing any manifestation of anger — except for the slightest tinge of sarcasm!

Brian: From the Work viewpoint, automatic repression of negativity is useless. To be meaningful, the non-expression must always be intentional. This way the emotion changes into something else; we become more awake.

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Rose: On the way home after you had spoken about consciously repressing our negativity I had a chance to put it into practice. Another driver carelessly came too close and scraped my front wing. We both stopped and got out of our cars and as we did so I realised that I was about to fly into a temper. At that instant I remembered the task not to express negative emotion and immediately I had a feeling of detachment from the whole event. I went through the ritual of exchanging information with the other woman without feeling anything. I think I looked quite stern at the time but really I was completely indifferent to it all. I noticed that she was shaking.

Brian: If one can give up one's negativity consciously only good can come from it.

Bob: On Sunday afternoon I was lying under the car making some adjustments. My neighbour is fond of pop music and that afternoon had it on at full volume. After a while it irritated me. I remembered several times about not expressing negativity but could not break away from my feelings of annoyance. Then I stretched out on my back and relaxed for a moment. My attitude towards my neighbour and his music improved then. I cannot say that I enjoyed the music but when I relaxed it did not upset me and I felt more pleasant.

Brian: Working under a car is a very difficult position in which to remain separate from mechanicalness!

Sally: I had to give a public lecture last week which I was quite anxious about. On the way there I noticed my heart thumping and realised that I was scared. I remembered what you had said about this and I realised how stupid and unnecessary my feelings were. Somehow I kept this thought in mind and I began to feel very much awake and aware of things. The talk went well.

Brian: These are nice examples. I feel that they illustrate the

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value of conscious suppression of negativity but also how difficult that can sometimes be. We are fortunate if we can instantly give up our negativity, but it is not always so easy.

Olaf: I do not think I can avoid expressing disappointment. I say nothing, but people notice from the way that I am quiet. Perhaps sometimes I could pretend some other feelings, but it would be hard to be positive when what I really feel is anger or hatred. I do not think anyone would be fooled.

Brian: You have fallen into the trap of forgetting the purpose of this work. We are not aiming to 'fool others' about our feelings. Our work is inward and its external manifestations, though important, are secondary.

This is part of a basic error which we must always guard against — we must beware of a materialistic attitude to work. If you are too concerned with results your work becomes directed towards egotism and the personality.

Can we return now to considering in what way we can transform our negativity?

Sometimes we can argue away our negative attitude. The way we do so depends upon the feeling, but for self-pity or hurt pride, set pride against pride: 'What sort of person am I to be hurt that easily?'

Or I can argue with myself: 'He behaved badly and made me upset, but why did he do it? Only because his wife was nasty to him just before.' Thinking this way, I weaken the hold that feeling has on me and am able to let go.

Harry: For the past two weeks an old friend has been staying at my house. His wife died two years ago and he was very lonely so I had suggested that he live with me for a while. The problem is that he cannot stop talking. He talks continuously, passing from one subject to the next without a break. This is especially irritating because he speaks in a loud, forceful and authoritative manner as if what he is telling me is very important. Most of what he says is very trivial and, what's more, often is not true. It's very annoying. A number

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of times I have interrupted him to say that he's wrong and I can prove it. I bring out books to prove that what he said was not right and this subdues him briefly. But shortly afterwards he forgets about it and starts talking again. It's very exhausting.

Brian: Your friend has an emotional need and you cannot satisfy that by an intellectual dispute. Feelings are more powerful than thoughts so it is useless to prove him wrong. He craves to be appreciated as a useful human being so he needs the company of people who will accept him and this is what you must encourage him to seek.

For yourself it is essential to have some form of defence against the negative feelings which he is projecting. This you can do by keeping away from him for a while to allow your feelings to quieten and then setting yourself to be aware of your own breath as he speaks to you. This will help him as well because he will feel that he is receiving more of your attention.

Steve: At the factory I was looking for the manager in the stores area. The storeman, who is an aggressive man, told me the boss was out but I was not convinced so I went to another part of the site and called his name. The storeman appeared quickly from around the corner of a building: 'I told you the boss is OUT!' I returned to my machine feeling hurt but trying not to show it. I wanted to forget it but could not escape my feelings. I was still under this cloud when the manager came along with my wage packet which happened to have a few more dollars than usual due to a tax cut. My feelings changed like magic! Instantly my heavy mood turned to joy!

In a way, it's humiliating to think that what someone says and being given some money can have such an effect on me. However much I tried I couldn't escape from my feelings yet an envelope with a week's wages transformed my mood.

Brian: This is a good illustration of how weak our Will is. It is extremely difficult for us to resist the pull on our

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feelings which external events can have. Notice, too, that you were identified with your negative feelings but after receiving the money you were no less identified with the happy feelings which the money produced. Did you try to escape from those feelings too? It is easy to remember that we want to be free in relation to negative feelings but to be free means not to identify with any mood — unpleasant or pleasant. Enjoy your pleasant feelings but at the same time try not to be totally caught up in them.

If we can return now to our discussion of what can be done to free ourselves from negative emotions, I think there is a technique which you may find useful in the sort of situation which you described. You can sometimes resolve the negative state by deliberately and analytically thinking over the events which led to it. You may have to go through them mentally several times but the important thing is not to justify yourself or make any judgements. You must continue recalling the events until the feeling is entirely gone.

These are just suggestions and it is up to each of us to work with whatever techniques we can devise and individually find to be effective. Essentially it is a problem of letting go of these feelings, which with time and long practice becomes easier.

Our aim should be a balance wherein we feel and express emotions according to the needs of the situation. Sometimes this requires that we express our negativity, but very, very much more often it means being positive. In our usual mechanical state we err in the other direction — our reactions mostly are negative. If you are not convinced of this, make a list of all the emotions you can think of. You will find that the great majority of them are unpleasant.

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Mike: It occurred to me that perhaps in our emotions we have another example of the Law of Three, because as well as negative emotions we have positive ones like enthusiasm and conscious emotions like wonderment. Do these three kinds of emotion correspond to the three forces?

Brian: That is so. In fact your idea is very relevant to the present discussion.

When we are caught up in negativity it is because our organism is channelling only the denying or passive force. In order to restore a balance of forces in ourselves we must intentionally introduce an affirming or active force. We do so when we set ourselves not to express our anger, irritation or hurt-pride or whatever our bad mood happens to be. We also right the balance when we endeavour to behave in a positive way in spite of our mood. If all else fails, the solution is physical activity, playing music or work in the garden.

The most difficult of negative emotions to transform are the very passive ones such as gloom, boredom or despondency. When they come along you have to do something active.

Len: Can you clarify for me what are the advantages of avoiding negative feelings. In terms of the Work, I mean.

Brian: Let us consider energies firstly. Higher energy can degrade into emotions and this is proved by the fact that when we get emotional we notice little of what is around us. So it follows that the opposite process must be possible — we can change emotions into higher energy if we know how to. One way is intentionally not to express them. This is a way of obtaining the energy we need for our work.

Secondly, unwanted negative emotions interfere so much with our lives; they influence the way we think and the way we do things. In one mood we decide something, but when the mood changes, we want to do something different. We are too much at the mercy of these changing feelings.

Finally, if we obtain some freedom from emotions we can break a chain of negativity. I will give you an example: At

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work, the project you are advocating is rejected by the Board of Directors. This upsets you and as a result you make a slighting remark about the amount of time I have spent writing a report on my current work. This annoys me because I feel that it is not your concern at all. I go home under the influence of this negativity and complain to my wife that the meal is not hot. A little later she flares up angrily at our daughter. And so it goes on, passing from one person to the next. All of this is totally mechanical. It is Work to break this chain and do something creative with the negativity that others pass on to us.

Janet: You said we have to become free from negative emotions. If you don't mean never to experience them, what do you mean?

Brian: With practice we are able to be less dominated by our emotions. That is what I meant by *freedom* from them. A moment of anger comes and we express it or don't express it, and then we let go and it disappears. I should stress that this is not the same as passing it to someone else in the way I just described. Letting go raises our state — it is the means for changing the sensitive energy of the emotion into conscious energy.

There is something else in this. An intentionally expressed emotion, whether pleasant or unpleasant has a different effect on others than the same emotion expressed mechanically. Its properties are altered. For example, anger loses its viciousness.

There are other aspects to freedom from negative emotions. For one, they do not have the profound effect upon our thoughts and actions that they had before. As a result, though I am angry now, I remember that I did not feel this way a while ago and again soon I will not feel it. Maybe even whilst feeling negative I can recall how it felt to be joyful. Certainly I know always that it will pass, and this helps give the strength to resist being enslaved by each passing mood.

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Eric: Can you say anything about the various therapy groups which enable people to express their pent-up anger, frustration etc.? They seem to be valuable but at the same time appear to be heading in the opposite direction to us. We are trying not to express negativity and they are attempting to do the opposite – to get it out of their system.

Brian: I am sure that much good is done by such groups. There can be a release of tension and people experience higher states as a result. But I do not think that always to express one's feelings, whatever they may be, is a practicable or profitable way to live. The aim of such groups is more towards relief of the emotional tension which is preventing individuals from dealing with life situations effectively.

The Work, if rightly practised, eventually brings about a similar result whilst, at the same time, working at a deeper level in our nature.

We can compare the flow of emotions with a stream. In most of us this stream has become blocked and the water has stagnated. Not a healthy condition! We can try to break through the dam and open up the flow, and this will have beneficial results. It is the aim of the sort of therapy groups you are speaking of. But, as we all know, the stream will tend to get blocked again, in time. Alternatively, we can use the water which is stagnating and poisoning the land. It can be diverted to flow into useful channels, to generate power and to irrigate the soil. For this we need special skills and technology. It is this skill and know-how which we are working together here to acquire.

Jeff: What is your opinion of Gurus who never express any emotion but joy and love, and who advocate living in peace and tranquility? This seems so different from Gurdjieff's approach that I wonder if their objective is the same as his?

Brian: In every one of us there is a strong wish to live in tranquility, but this is not Work. You must have noticed by now that when everything is in peace and tranquility we cannot

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learn anything about our own nature, in fact we fall asleep and become more mechanical. If there is nothing to disturb our peace, to point out to us that we are not as we would wish to be, we can easily forget that all is not perfect inside us. We can fool ourselves that we have been purified when we have simply learnt to conform to this peaceful style of behaviour.

Jeff: I can see what you mean, but all the same Gurdjieff's emotional outbursts referred to in the books, have always made me feel uncomfortable. I have an image of a conscious person as being someone who never experiences any emotions other than joy and love, except perhaps occasional enthusiasm! Perhaps I have been taught that anger, hatred, gloom and the rest are bad and I imagined a perfect person would be entirely good and so not have these in him.

Brian: I know Gurdjieff did not claim to be a perfected man, in fact students have said that he told them late in his life, that there were many others who had worked on themselves more than he had. But this is all relative; perfection is an aim, that is all. But perfecting in the sense we use it does not mean loss of emotions! It is something quite different from the popular conception of human perfection — a conception based, of course, upon our weaknesses. We like to imagine Jesus as a 'perfected man' in whose company we would experience security, continuous joy and unruffled peace. I suspect the reality of Jesus' company could be very different.

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Our emotions bring intensity to our lives. When we experience strong emotions life is more vivid, when life has

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no feeling we are dull. The memorable moments in life are all associated with strong feelings. But they bring intensity in another way, too. We do things either from habit or because of an emotion; almost always the driving force to do something different is an emotion. As a result, people with weak emotions are dull and predictable, people with strong emotions are erratic and impulsive.

In accordance with the Law of Three, man experiences three types of emotions; unpleasant emotions, pleasant emotions and conscious emotions. All three of these have a rightful place in our lives. But there is an imbalance. Just as our body (which amongst the functions is the channel for the denying force) is our dominant centre, in an analogous way our feelings are dominated by negative emotions.

The unpleasant emotions, like anger, self-pity and boredom predominate amongst our feelings. A smaller number of our feelings are positive emotions such as enthusiasm or pleasant anticipation. Apart from their pleasantness or unpleasantness, the properties of the positive and negative emotions are very similar. In particular, they are equally capable of enslaving our Will by identification. The least common feelings are the conscious emotions; awe, wonder and feelings of our own insignificance.

The aim of this work is to be inwardly free from emotions and not to identify with these passing feelings. As a preparation for this we try not to express our negativity. But this must every time be a conscious effort. If we make a habit of not expressing our feelings we will emotionally poison ourselves.

We try to approach a balance between positive feelings and negative feelings by expression of the positive and non-expression of the negative. But it is important to realise that negative emotions have their value. In this work they are valuable because by their non-expression we may open

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ourselves to a conscious state. They are also essential to us because their unpleasant intensity can expose to us the truth about our own character.

We can be thankful that in the Way of self-perfecting, the road to higher consciousness, we do not lose our ability to experience negative feelings; they are a most valuable property, they are our means for uncovering our own nature and working on ourselves. What a terrible thing if they were taken from us!

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10 *Other People*

Paul: When we are dealing with other people is it right to take into account their feelings and opinions or not? I am speaking particularly about living here together. We are all supposed to be working on ourselves, so is there any need to apologise when I interfere with people's plans or upset someone? Sometimes I have apologised and then felt that I was making things too easy for myself and the other person, but at other times I have not apologised and afterwards regretted it.

Brian: There are different ways of apologising — we can apologise either just to feel more comfortable ourselves or so as to make others more comfortable. These are two quite different situations because the reasons for the apology and the results of it are different.

Gurdjieff said that the Work cannot begin on a lower level than ordinary life. In ordinary relationships with others we have learnt to be polite and to consider their feelings and wishes. To give up all that when you come here is irresponsible. Because of the special situation here it is already very difficult for some people and it is not right to make this worse by not taking into account their weaknesses in your dealings with them.

Karen: It seems to me that it is work to think of others and not just ourselves, so if we are really in the Work we will be more considerate towards other people, not less.

Brian: Quite right. We must never try to 'make someone work on himself' by being needlessly unpleasant. Our intention is to bear the unpleasing manifestations of others, but not to expect that people will put up with our unpleasantness.

John: Love your neighbour. Or as Gurdjieff said, 'Don't do to others what you would not like them to do to you'.

Brian: Gurdjieff used the word *considering* to refer to our state of mind when we deal with situations and especially with people. He said, 'Consider externally always, internally never'.

Previously one of you asked what Gurdjieff meant by learning not to identify with oneself. Internal considering is identifying with oneself. When we internally consider we see everything in terms of our own worries, fears and wants, and identify with ourselves to the exclusion of all else. This makes our attitude to everything a very subjective one.

Externally considering means looking outward, being more objective and seeing the needs and weaknesses of people and the inevitability of events. It is a more objective frame of mind.

In the ordinary way we live mostly in a state of internal considering; mechanically reacting to the behaviour or imagined behaviour of people and automatically striving to make an impression or to gain benefit for ourselves. I have to be more awake if I am to remember your weaknesses and problems when I confront you. Gurdjieff said, 'Remember that he too has a family to feed'. When we are able to consider the situation of other people we feel differently in ourselves, but it requires a more positive attitude and a special effort from us.

Helen: I know that concern about what other people think is slavery but I still do it all the time. At work someone asked what I had for lunch and I told a lie because I felt that they would not approve of what I had eaten. Yesterday evening I

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wrote a letter to an acquaintance and when I read it through I felt awkward in case she would think it was not well written. Even when I speak here to you I look at the people's faces because I am wondering what they are thinking about me.

Brian: To varying degrees we are all subject to this slavery because of an automatic need to make the right impression on everyone. I am sure that you can see how inefficient this is. So much time and energy goes into unnecessary acts to impress people who generally neither notice nor care. This spoils the quality of our life because whilst our attention is being drawn into concern about what others may think we lose the force which we need to be aware of ourselves.

If any of you believe that this does not apply to you, you are very much mistaken. If you do not see yourself internally considering, that is because of your inability to see yourself, not because you are free from this kind of slavery. We have in-built devices for reducing our ability to see our own faults and weaknesses.

Colin: I was teaching a certain technique to a student who never shows openly what he thinks about things. I know this is because he is too fearful to speak his mind, yet, when he gave no indication that he saw value in the technique, I found myself making exaggerated claims to make him believe in what I believe in.

Brian: These examples of internal considering show just how completely senseless it is. Whenever we consider internally, our judgements are totally unreasonable. If I am at an important meeting and I notice dandruff on my jacket, I lose track of the subject under discussion because of my distress about the others noticing. If I am concerned about the dandruff it should be concern for my own health, not what other people will think of me if they happen to notice.

Bob: I was working in a city store, as a temporary salesman for the Christmas period on a counter selling shirts and ties.

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On one particular morning the shop was almost empty when my first customer came along. She chose a tie and offered me a fifty-dollar bill. At that time there was insufficient change in the till and no other salesperson nearby to help me out. Although it was forbidden to do so, I made up the customer's change with twenty dollars from my pocket, intending to take back my money as soon as there was enough in the till. However, soon after this the daily Christmas shopping crush began and I was continually surrounded by customers clamouring to be served. At every slack moment I went to open the till and then noticed that one or other of the staff was watching me, so I waited. This went on all day until, just before cashing-up time, I guiltily took the twenty dollars and quickly put it into my pocket. An older saleswoman seemed to have been watching me, so I blurted out the story. She replied, 'Oh, I hadn't noticed you take it. It is against the rules but I often do the same myself'.

How much nervous energy I had expended, needlessly worrying what people would think about my taking the money!

Brian: We waste half our lives because of concern about the image we are presenting.

Some of you rarely express an opinion because you feel that what you have to say is not important enough. In reality this is fear of what the others may think. You justify your silence to yourself by thinking what you have to say is not important. Other people like to speak often because it proves to us all how clever and self-observant they are. These are two different manifestations of the same slavery.

Janet: Do you want us to speak or don't you?

Brian: Perhaps we could hear more often from those who rarely have anything to say?

Colin: I was guilty of completely obvious and senseless internal considering in the week. I was sitting on a very

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crowded tram one morning reading a book. The tram stopped and I looked up and saw that it was my stop. I jumped up, hastily elbowed my way through standing passengers to the exit and got off. As soon as I was off the tram I saw that I had mistaken the place and still had nearly a kilometer to go! I stood there a moment, hesitating, reluctant to push back onto the tram because of what people might think of me. Then I set off to walk the rest of the way.

Brian: Concern about the impression we are making is not the whole of internal considering, there is much more to it. For example, feeling offended or unjustly treated are internal considering.

Bob: I work with a man who seems to enjoy being offended by what others say. He can interpret the most innocent remark as a veiled insult. He likes to tell others how people unfairly dislike, ridicule and abuse him. The result is that many people do ridicule him — behind his back, of course. It is quite hard to like him; even his own son stays away from him.

I notice myself thinking negatively about what someone said or did and I think, 'Watch out, you could get like that too'. There seems to be a sort of inadequacy and self-indulgence in thinking that others are being deliberately unfair to me.

Brian: That is true. There is an element of self-indulgence in permitting ourselves to identify with negative feelings. It is almost impossible to free ourselves from identification with feelings but, at the same time, there is this aspect of indulgence. Do you remember Colin's previous quotation that 'the last thing a man will give up is his suffering'? I think when Gurdjieff originally said this he was talking of self-indulgence.

It is even harder to see that our identification with good moods is also self-indulgence. If we can give up this self-centred attitude towards our feelings we will be able to

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separate inwardly from them and enjoy our pleasant emotions and some of our unpleasant ones too.

We have to look more objectively at every situation. Certainly it is weakness to feel insulted or unjustly treated.

Jeff: I have just started a new job and when I was shown around the firm on Monday, for no reason at all I took a dislike to one person. The next morning money was missing from my pocket and I immediately inwardly accused that person. Shortly afterwards I realised the stupidity of my attitude. Though he knew nothing of what I had been thinking because I had not even seen him that morning, I felt that I should make amends. So I deliberately went over to speak pleasantly to him. After that I felt okay towards him.

Brian: If we can see these kinds of inner nastiness for what they are, we can let go of them. If we make that effort we obtain a feeling of inner release.

Jeff: Incidentally, I found the money that evening in another jacket!

Rose: My daughter went to a theatre with her English class from school yesterday. When she came back I asked her whether she enjoyed it. She started to tell me about the parts that she liked and other parts that were boring and what could have been done to improve the show. I was anxious to get on with cooking, so I said, 'All I asked was whether you enjoyed it'. She shrugged and said, 'It was alright' and wandered out of the room.

The truth is that I was pretending to be interested but was really only thinking of myself.

Brian: I don't think that is entirely true. Quite often we begin a situation by considering externally, being concerned about the other person, and we end by internally considering. This is due to inability to maintain our own state and it happens very commonly.

Sally: Recently my family were out shopping and I was at

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home alone. I thought it would be nice to prepare a meal for them as they were sure to return hungry and tired. After some hours in the kitchen the meal was ready. Another hour passed and I was beginning to be annoyed that they were spoiling my meal by being so late. When eventually they did return, they gobbled the food down with neither a word of appreciation nor any apologies for being late. I felt angry and hurt because they did not appreciate my efforts for them!

Brian: That is how it is. We begin an encounter by wishing to be helpful or understanding towards someone and end up miserable or feeling unjustly treated! I hold the door open for you but when you walk through without thanking me I am angry because you were not polite!

John: I should like you to comment on a fracas I had with a policeman. I was driving in the city and I turned from Flinders Street into Elizabeth Street behind a truck in a row of vehicles. I was not paying proper attention as the policeman was directing the traffic gave a funny little flourish with his arm, which I took to mean 'come on'. As I turned, his signal changed into a 'stop' sign, so I stopped there, blocking the traffic and uncertain what to do. He signalled me to the roadside, came over obviously quite angry and asked me why I had ignored his signal. I told him that I had misunderstood, whereupon he said, 'That's the first time anyone ever mistook a stop sign to mean go. I try to keep the traffic moving and you ignore my signals'. This was said in a tone suggesting that I had deliberately broken the law. For a moment I felt there was no way we could contact each other or understand each other. We looked at each other and I knew that whatever I said would go against me. He noted down the registration number of my car and returned to his traffic duty. As I drove away I felt angry at being unjustly accused.

Brian: The intensity of the situation automatically put you into an external considering state. That is why you could see

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that it would be unwise to speak. As you drove away your state degraded and you began to internally consider. Up till then your observations were objective but the feeling of being unjustly treated was absurd. You had seen two machines were confronting each other, yourself and the policeman, so how could there be any question of justice? But you could not see this because you had turned inwards, you were considering inwardly, and no longer able to see reality.

Maria: I know I don't speak up as often as I should. I should like to know — is shyness a form of internal considering?

Brian: Shyness results from internal considering. If you practice external considering you will lose your shyness.

Our two defences against internal considering are practicing external consideration and knowing ourselves. As we learn more about our own reactions and what motivates us, we understand others more. We see more clearly what motives are beneath people's behaviour and cease to blame and fear other people because we see that inside they are just like us.

External considering means being attentive to the needs of others. Often a person cannot express his needs directly so we have to see beneath the outward show. In general, external consideration means making things easy for others; if they want to be appreciated, do so; if they need help, give it. But it does not mean helping people when they do not want help. Being considerate toward others requires from us a rather positive, detached attitude. It is not the same thing as habitually giving way. Our ableness to consider externally is a measure of our achievement in this Work.

Can you simply listen to what she is saying without a compulsive urge to put your own viewpoint? Listening to others is external consideration.

Karen: External considering doesn't always work. Sometimes I tell people things they really need to know but they will not listen to me.

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Brian: This is not really external consideration. If it were, you would be able to see the situation from your friend's point of view and then you would either not say anything or put your information in an acceptable way.

Teaching another person for his benefit is a difficult thing to do. One often has to approach emotional subjects indirectly. This is part of the skill of a teacher. Both Gurdjieff and Bennett used the trick of telling things, not to the person directly but to someone else in his presence. This gets around the problem of the target person becoming defensive and unreceptive. Mr Bennett used this technique often at Sherborne. On one occasion in a meeting with about one hundred or so students and staff, he suddenly started to berate Nina and me about the way we looked after our children. He said we fussed over them to the extent of being almost psychopathic. This did not affect me emotionally; I just thought to myself, 'What is he raving about?' The whole event seemed to me unnecessary and irrelevant, and I could see from their faces that most of the students felt the same. Later that day we were approached by an American couple who apologised to us! They said the attack on us was actually intended for them. Tearfully, the lady told us that Mr Bennett was right — they were ruining their child by the way they treated him.

There was a sequel to the story. A few days afterwards I was approached by another older American, who was apparently quite agitated about the 'injustice' done to us. He said that he felt it his 'duty' to tell me that what went on had nothing to do with our children, who were 'fine kids'. Mr Bennett was giving 'special training' to us and his other older students. That scene had apparently been part of our special training!

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Olaf: I think that part of external consideration is in not expecting of others more than we could do ourselves. A trivial incident in the office brought rather strongly to my attention how I judge myself and other people with different criteria.

In the building where I work, all of the offices on one floor share the same washing-up facility. I went into the washing-up room when another lady was using the sink. Without waiting for her to finish, I rinsed my cup. When she looked annoyed I said, 'Just rinsing off the detergent, it has been washed already', which was not true. I realised that if someone else had done the same to me I would not have been pleased. It seems a small thing when I tell it to you, but at the time it struck me forcibly what double values I have — one set for myself and one for other people.

Brian: I think if you had been able to remember that she was a person just like you, you would not do such a thing and nor would you be upset when she interfered with your work. That is the secret in our dealings with people, to remember that they have needs and shortcomings exactly like us. This has been very well expressed by Mr Bennett in a talk which he gave entitled, *Other People*:

'When I am in front of you I am in front of a person. I am a person and you are a person, and a person means a being who has an inner life. As long as we depend just upon the outward show to recognize other people, then this is definitely a secondary thing. But if we can contrive to meet them directly as people, then it is a primary thing, then it is no longer going out from our solitude to meet somebody else coming from their solitude; it is a meeting in a company where we are not alone. We are only alone when as a person we are unable to meet other people as persons. Of course this is a very difficult thing, and we recognize only too well that even with those who are nearest to us — parents with children, loving husbands with loving wives — there is still some gap

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between person and person, perhaps only to be bridged in moments. This is partly because we do not give enough importance to this truer kind of relationship in our lives and we expect or imagine that we can be people with people without having done anything special about it. And yet experience shows us that something quite special has to happen so that this meeting of person with person can be a reality.

Now it is possible for us all to strengthen that kind of relationship. And one way is to remember when we are in front of people that each one is an individual person with an inner life of his own. This act of recognition is something that is in our own power, whereas it is not within our power to break through this barrier by thought or by feeling. This does not mean that the kind of exchange that comes through the outside — through our senses, through seeing and hearing and touching — is not important. But none of them by themselves do that particular thing which is to take our inner life out of its solitude.

It is to be taken very seriously that in our conversation with people, in our exchanges of every kind, we should try to add to the outer, visible exchange also an inward movement, an inward awareness that we are in front of a person and that this person is the same as we are in this fundamental thing: that he has an inner life, an inner experience which is in the process of transformation. With some people this transformation may go very weakly, with some perhaps even not rightly; perhaps it may be a transformation which is a disintegration. With others it is a transformation which is certainly a creative integration. But whatever it is, with everyone — whoever they may be — there is that unseen inner life. Maybe all of us accept and do not question the reality and importance of the inner life in other people, but we forget it, and a great many of our actions, behaviour, thoughts, feelings — hidden or visible — would be different if we remembered always that when we are dealing with

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people, we are dealing with *people*. We forget this obvious thing, and therefore we expect from them something which there cannot be — a degree of integration which we ourselves do not possess.

By remembering that people are people we become free. When we forget it we fall into a slavery of fears and cruelties. We know perfectly well that there is something within us which is quite different from what other people are seeing and hearing when they talk to us, and this is what we should remember about them.'

* * *

We tend to think of internal consideration solely in terms of the way we relate to other people because this is the easiest aspect of it to see in our lives. But it is not the whole story. All forms of identification with ourselves are internal consideration so it enters into our attitudes, not just to people but to everything around us. For example, we tend to value other living things, plants and animals, in terms of their value to ourselves or to other humans. We assume that we have an inherent value and that the value of other species derives only from their usefulness to us. If we assume that we have an inherent value, why should not other living things have inherent value? They have life like us.

Can you see that the attitude which we usually have towards other life is internal considering? If we have land or a garden we probably think of everything in it just in relation to what we like and want. We should remember that we have no indisputable evidence that in the universal scheme of things we are more important than the weeds we pull.

The great risk in this is sentimentality. When you feel it is wrong to kill the dear little caterpillars, which compete with you for the biggest share of the cabbages, the higher energy which once enabled you to separate from your own needs and see that other creatures also have life, has turned to sentimentality.

11 *Self-calming*

Leanne: In our readings from Beelzebub's Tales, Gurdjieff has several times referred to our 'inner evil God, *self-calming*'. Could you explain what he means?

Brian: 'Self-calming' is another of Gurdjieff's technical terms. In Beelzebub's Tales, Beelzebub, who is portrayed as a benevolent being from another solar system, tells his grandson regarding the strange three-brained beings who inhabit the Earth: *Self-calming is for them almost the chief evil engendering and evoking all the abnormalities of their psyche as well as of their ordinary being existence.*

From this we can conclude that it is an aspect of our nature which is not at all helpful to us. Rather than say more I would prefer to hear what others here can say about self-calming. I hope you can show me some new angles on this.

Steve: I think it is when we justify ourselves so that we do not feel so badly about something. It makes us feel more comfortable.

Brian: Quite right. When we excuse our actions we lose force, this is the meaning of self-calming. We know it is weakness but we still say something in case people think badly of us. Has anyone another example of self-calming?

Helen: When I think about it, everything I do seems like self-calming.

Brian: That is far too vague, you have to be much more

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specific in your example if we are to learn something from it. Is going to work in the morning self-calming? Or is washing your car, or eating a meal?

Helen: No. Well, they could be. It all depends how you do them. If they are done to make things easy, it is self-calming. I mean if they smooth the situation over so that you don't feel as bothered as you did before.

Brian: So you are making the same point as Steve — self-calming is something which eliminates discomfort.

Ingrid: A recent example happened at work. In the hospital I am usually kept very busy, but on this occasion a doctor had been delayed for two hours owing to an emergency and I had nothing to do. I just wasted the time wandering about the hospital drinking coffee and talking to people. When the two hours was almost finished I realised that I had been self-calming all the time.

Brian: Why do you say it was self-calming?

Ingrid: I felt at a loose end because of having no work to do, so I filled the time mechanically chatting to anyone I could find. It was not what I did, it was more the feeling of the way I did it. I wanted to get over the uncomfortable break of routine by chatting to people.

Brian: When you realised what was happening did you do anything about it?

Ingrid: No, there was only five or ten minutes left so it was not really worth it.

Brian: I hope you can see that was self-calming too! Why not make good use of the remaining time even if it is short?

Harry: I have an example. A few weeks ago my daughter dropped out of college to get a job (which she failed to do). Instead of being tough with her and telling her she had to go back to school, I just said, 'You must do what you think is

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best'. I was telling myself that I was an enlightened father, letting her decide her own future, but really I was avoiding my responsibility. She needed to be told to ask the college to take her back. Covering up the truth from myself seemed like self-calming.

Brian: Covering up our own weakness by renaming it as a virtue is another aspect of self-calming. You knew that you were not facing up to your responsibility to your daughter, but instead of acknowledging that failure, you called it a virtue — being an enlightened father and allowing your daughter to decide her own future.

Self-calming can be a very subtle matter, but there is a danger of our over-intellectualising it. Self-calming has to be observed and felt, not thought out. If you think too much about it, you will get tied in knots and there will seem to be no way out of self-calming. The important thing is what we observe; we must recognise self-calming by its *taste*.

Harry: I could say something else connected with my daughter dropping out of college. That week I smoked a lot. Also there seemed to be an unusual number of important things to do so that I did not really give time to thinking about her as I should. When I realised what I should have done, it was too late for her to go back to the college.

Brian: Self-calming upon self-calming! This is just how it happens. Smoking to calm yourself. Being 'too busy' to think about the problem. And finally deciding that it was 'too late' for anything to be done, and I will guarantee that you did not phone the college to check if it was too late for her to go back!

Rose: This is an example which happened last week. All my family were sick during the week and because of this I did not keep on at my young daughter to practise her music. When her music teacher came he was very angry that she had

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not practised. After he went I was so upset that I phoned my husband at work to tell him about it.

Brian: Did you feel better after ringing him?

Rose: Yes, a bit better. I think that was self-calming.

Brian: Quite right. But how do you think your husband felt after he put the phone down? Upset as you had been before? This is really evil you know — calming ourselves by passing on our negativity to someone else.

Rose: Well, then I invited my next door neighbour in for coffee and told her about it! Yes, I know it was a wrong thing to do.

Brian: It is wrong. But it is very common. We all fall into doing this sort of thing.

Leanne: I have an example very similar to that. On Friday I came home after a day shopping for gifts in the city. I felt tired but did not notice anything else wrong. When I got home I flew into a rage at my children because of some small things they should not have done. My reaction was so extreme and unnecessary. Shortly afterwards a fight started between them. All of a sudden I realised what had happened — I had used up my negativity on them, calmed myself at their expense! I did not even realise what a bad state I had been in until after my outburst at them.

Brian: It happens very often like that and I fear that most times we never notice what happened — the negativity travels from person to person as each one calms himself by giving to someone else.

Colin: I have a way of compensating for my inadequacy, to calm myself. When I get less satisfactory results with my patients, I find that I talk more to them and am especially nice to them. It is because I feel guilty, as if I am not doing what I am supposed to do.

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Brian: This is self-calming because you are trying to ensure that they like you and have a good opinion of you. Otherwise they might consider you ignorant or incompetent and the risk of that is unbearable to you. Of course, I am not saying that there is anything inherently wrong in making a good impression upon people or being nice to them. There certainly is not. What I am criticising is that mechanical, compulsive way of smoothing things over.

Brian: Is there any one of you with a different example?

Walter: I self-calm because of fear. I have deep fear of something, so I calm myself.

Brian: What do you mean? What do you fear? Can you give an example?

Walter: I do not know what I fear. All the time I have tunes going on in my head from the moment I wake up in the morning. And I generate a continuous internal conversation with myself. I am afraid of what might happen if it stopped.

Brian: One of the results of self-calming is to prevent us contacting our real self. It is *yourself* that you are afraid of discovering — very strange perhaps but very, very common.

But you have experienced inner silence, absence of tunes or interior conversation?

Walter: Yes, and it has been enjoyable but still I fear letting it happen again.

Brian: You must let go more often.

Sally: I throw away the benefits after I have been working towards a better state. I practised a tai chi sequence one day in the week and afterwards I stopped myself from self-calming. Usually I put on the kettle and make tea straight away, but this time I didn't. I just stayed outside a while feeling the breeze and listening to the rustling of the leaves on the trees.

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Usually I am afraid of that state and I drink tea or busy myself to get rid of it.

Brian: Another one who is afraid of herself!

This is just how it happens over and over again; we come almost to the point of awakening and this mechanism comes into action. If we can foresee where self-calming is going to start and make the necessary effort and sacrifice, we awaken to the sights and sounds around us.

The self-calming mechanism always acts so as to prevent any disturbance of our habitual state. It operates all the time without us noticing it, until strong feelings become involved — then we have the possibility of seeing it in action.

* * *

What kinds of activity are self-calming? How can we recognise it in ourselves? As someone said earlier — anything we do can be self-calming. But it is not what we do, it is how and why we do it that matters. The feature common to all self-calming is that it is in some way unnecessary. Sometimes it is right to explain what we are doing and why, but at other times we do it because we cannot bear to make a bad impression — then it is self-calming. Sometimes we eat because we feel hungry, but at other times we eat to calm our nerves. Sometimes we put things off because we really are too busy, but more often that is excusing our laziness. Giving unwanted help when we just cannot bear to see others struggle on alone, is another form of self-calming. Fidgeting is always self-calming. The list is endless, but few of these things have to be self-calming, they mostly have a necessary function too.

Sometimes we are aware or half-aware of what we are doing; we face a confrontation and become nervous, so we light a cigarette, pace up and down, fidget, have a drink or talk compulsively. More often we fail to see self-calming unless it is pointed out to us.

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We often theorise about events in order to calm ourselves. In fact, the reason why, in general, people do not know themselves is because they analyse their experiences in this way. They observe something of themselves, and instead of simply noting it, they think about it and ascribe reasons why they did what they did. This is the fundamental error in ordinary attempts at observation. Theorising in such situations is really self-deception because the theorising, far from adding to the observation, detracts from it and dilutes it. The point is that real observations are hard to bear because they inevitably expose our weakness but theorising does the reverse, it bolsters our opinion of ourselves.

Self-calming has to do with involution of energies; spontaneous degradation of higher energies into lower. Each day we generate sufficient of the substance of attention for us to be awake much of the time. Yet we fail to remain awake for even a few percent of our waking hours. So the important question is: What happens to these substances, so vital to us, if our lives are to be meaningful?

When I watch a class working at the Movements, I can see people all around the room self-calming. This intensive work of attention being demanded of them produces the energy they need. Yet, strange as it may seem, everyone is trying hard to throw it away! It becomes degraded into nervous movements, fidgeting, wagging toes, scratching, adjusting clothes. Or into negative feelings; embarrassment, anger, frustration, shame and so on. Or, most insidious of all, tension; there is an effort of concentration and the shoulders go up or the face becomes set.

These higher energies are what we need for our Work. Gurdjieff said that we are like sieves in our inability to hold awareness. Many of the holes in the sieve are self-calming. When we notice that we are self-calming we have an oppor-

tunity to raise our state because if we set ourselves to resist this mechanical manifestation, we set up a condition in ourselves into which a higher state can enter. The opposite of self-calming is the generation of a polarity or force in ourselves. We behave in such a way that a force or intensity is maintained in us and we remain awake.

Terry: I have noticed something about not identifying. Whenever I am free from identification for a moment, there is a pull, a force in my chest. Yesterday, I was at the dinner table with my father and brother and the two of them were in a heated discussion. I nearly got immersed in it and then didn't. I felt quite separate from what was going on and at the same time I experienced this force in my chest.

Brian: This force you speak of is associated with an unsatisfied want, or a 'yes' and a 'no' in you simultaneously. Part of you wants to take sides or get involved in the argument between your father and brother but another part of you holds back. When this happens there is a force in you which can even be felt in the breast, just as you say. In Beelzebub's Tales the force is called *elekilpomagtistzen*.

Elekilpomagtistzen ordinarily is wasted but it can be very valuable for our inner work.

This sort of force is generated by our wanting something and not immediately being able to get it. It is the force which makes us strive to take for ourselves what we want and get away from what we do not like.

If we go about our daily lives without any especially strong interest in anything and without any strong wants or aversions we remain totally asleep. But we all know that when we have an aim to strive for, something we want, life is brighter. When, in the end, we get what we want it is often an anticlimax. Inevitably, getting what we want leads to dissatisfaction and this has brought many people to a philosophy

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that the joy of life is in striving rather than in achievement.

In the Work there is a benefit for us in retaining this force of *elekilpomagistzen*. When the desire is satisfied the force field collapses and we return to sleep. Whilst we intentionally maintain the strength of the field, the 'pull in the chest', we can be awake. We can do this by not rushing to get whatever we want with utmost urgency. Or by not running away from the people and the situations which we dislike. Because in the non-satisfaction of desires and confrontation of unpleasantness there are great chances for us to work.

There is a middle path in all this, of course, because asceticism, doing only what we dislike, has no part in this work. Nor is it work to put ourselves into situations where we become overwhelmed by cares and struggles to the point of nervous exhaustion — that is foolishness.

Olaf: I find that when I try to do things I don't like I soon like doing them. Then I don't know whether to do what I like or what I dislike.

Brian: What could be a more perfect excuse for doing nothing! I enjoy doing what I thought I disliked, so I may as well just do what I like!

No! Stop arguing yourself out of doing what you need to do. Someone offers you food that you dislike so you eat it as if you like it. Once in a while, you can even go out of your way to order food that you do not like or to be with someone you dislike. This way you intentionally produce force in yourself for work.

This may be pleasurable, but please do not therefore persuade yourself not to set up the force. The fact is that part of us does not want this force and does not want to wake up. And this can be a very big part of our own nature towards which we are totally blind. An amusing illustration of this was given some time ago, when I asked a group

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studying with us to do without food for one day each week for a month and report back to the group on their observations. A day without food is a simple way to set up a strong force in us, and, of course, the greater the force the greater the result. One member of the group, when it came to his turn to comment, said, 'I love the Work. I would do anything for the Work. But don't ask me to do without my tucker!'

Maria: Does this force only relate to things we like or dislike? It seems as if something very similar happens if I decide to sit quite still. After a while an itch starts or my leg goes to sleep and there is a tremendous desire to move. When I resist this desire it really raises my state.

Brian: That is right. Resist and your state is raised. Give in to the urge to move and the force field collapses so you fall back into a dream state.

There are many other ways this force can be produced — by denying a habit; not having a cigarette, walking or standing differently, intentionally relaxing, being active when we feel like a rest, no doubt you can find many more.

Bob: Last week I started a new job and a very uncomfortable situation has developed there. You see, when I was interviewed before getting the job, I had deliberately altered my dates of previous jobs, so as to miss out one firm I recently worked with for a year. This was because I suspected that I might unfairly get a bad reference from the boss there. On the very first day in the new office, mention was made of the firm I was concerned about. On the second day there were two references, in passing, to people closely connected with that firm, one of whom was going to be asked to take part in a meeting in which I would be included! The net was closing in! Quite by chance, as I left the office that evening, in

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walked a man who had sat in the next desk to me in the unmentionable firm! He recognised me of course, and said, 'Hello. Are they working you hard?' I disappeared off the scene as quickly as possible and hoped he would not mention our previous relationship to anyone in the office. Nothing was said to me next day, but you may well imagine that I was strongly tempted to go to my new boss and confess! I kept quiet though and there was certainly plenty of *elekilpomagistzen* in me!

Brian: Is this still going on?

Bob: Yes, but since I decided simply to wait until I was confronted there have been no more references to that firm!

Jeff: When this idea of developing a force in ourselves came up, I decided upon an experiment connected with talking. I set myself one day, from the moment I clocked into work to the time I clocked off, to speak only when I was spoken to and then only to answer a question or if the job necessitated my speaking.

I was astonished at how much unnecessary chat went on. Once or twice when someone spoke to me I nearly got into a conversation then stopped myself. Mostly I just listened to people speaking but said little. I felt in a very awake state for much of the shift. Nobody seemed to notice that I was not as talkative as usual.

Brian: This is a wonderful example. As I said before the stronger the 'yes' and 'no' in us, the greater the result. Not to talk, like you described, can generate a powerful force. How long were you able to keep it up?

Jeff: Near the end of the shift a friend put his newspaper on my desk and I read it. I immediately forgot everything. When I clocked out I remembered my intention and realised that from the moment I picked up the newspaper I had been chatting to everyone and anyone!

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Brian: Very good observation. Have you any idea what happened to your force, your elekilpomagistzen, when you read the paper?

Jeff: Not really. Somehow it all dissipated.

Rose: I have an example. Normally I always try to tell the truth, so I thought that to tell a deliberate lie would set up a force of 'yes' and 'no' in me. It certainly did too! I tried several times and each time I felt very present and then got quite shaky because I could not do it. At the last minute I told the truth each time.

Brian: How did you feel after you had told the truth against your intention?

Rose: Rather weak. My mind started racing too — my thoughts and feelings were very mixed up.

Brian: You seem to have generated more force than you could hold! When you failed to carry through your original intention it was immediately degraded into lower energies.

Len: I made a task of not talking all day. Friends called in the morning and I wrote a note, 'I am not talking today', which was accepted. Then I did not have much contact with people, except buying some food, which was awkward but I managed. In the evening I went to a pub for a beer and, as I sat outside drinking and feeling very much on top of things, I realised that I was going to make it through the day without talking. Next moment a dog wandered up to me and I spoke to it!

Brian: Food always tends to calm us — and this is especially true of alcohol.

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Some of you have tried the task of setting yourself for a whole week to taste the first mouthful of each meal. This is a surprising exercise which I recommend to anyone who has not tried it themselves. It proves to be very difficult because the act of eating tends to collapse the force field. Without *elekilpomagtistzen* we are unable to be aware of our tasting.

Eric: I tried this and noticed that several times I dug my fork into the food thinking, 'I will taste this'. But afterwards I realised that in the time that it took for the fork to reach my mouth, I had forgotten!

I was defeated several times like this, until one time, I filled my fork and just sat and looked at that forkfull of food for a whole minute. I was thinking that as soon as I raised it to my mouth, I would forget to taste. I slowly brought it up — and tasted it! Afterwards the same trick worked several times more. I think the delay and looking at the food built up force in me.

Brian: What a wonderful discovery!

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I hope you can see how this is all related to self-calming — our starting point tonight. Self-calming is the multitude of devices which we unconsciously use to prevent accumulation of force, or *elekilpomagtistzen*, in us. By trivial, unnecessary actions and by weak or indulgent ways of doing things, we dissipate our force. These manifestations have become habitual to us to the point where we may be unable to see their results until we have developed greater sensitivity. This cannot happen of itself just by our wishing or imagining ourselves to be different. If we do nothing special about our situation, we can only become less sensitive to what is going

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on inside us. The way to develop this sensitivity is to avoid self-calming whenever we see it in ourselves; to intentionally develop a force by confronting our habits and established attitudes. Everytime we sustain the force by not taking the easy way, whatever that may be, we increase our ability to see reality.

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12 Processes — Inner and Outer

Karen: Can we talk about the enneagram? I read that our understanding of this symbol is a measure of our achievement in the Work. Do you agree with this?

Brian: I certainly don't think we should take that suggestion too seriously. However, I do think that this is a good point in our studies to discuss the enneagram. For those who are not familiar with the enneagram I should explain that it is a simple diagram which expresses in symbolic form the fact that all processes have features in common. Every process conforms to a certain pattern and it is this pattern which is represented by the enneagram.

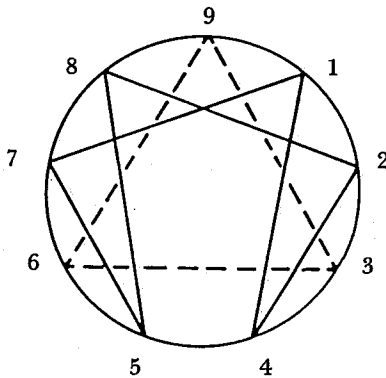


Fig 1. Enneagram symbol

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'Ennea' means nine. The enneagram is constructed by marking a circle at nine equally spaced points. Three of these are connected together to form a triangle which I have drawn with broken lines in Figure 1. The remaining points are connected together to form a six-sided shape called a hexagon as you can see in the diagram. The points around the circle represent the various stages in a process.

In this Work we try to see ourselves objectively, so that we are no longer the centre of the universe to ourselves but simply a tiny part of the whole. This means having more of an overall view of events and processes around us and seeing the patterns in our own behaviour and in the world in general. This is why the enneagram is useful.

Because it discloses the pattern of events it enables us to see each process as a lawful sequence and to avoid ascribing undue significance to any one part of a process.

I think that a good point from which to begin discussing the nature of processes, in relation to the enneagram symbol, is the theories expressed by Gurdjieff in the chapter entitled *Purgatory of Beelzebub's Tales*. There he says that every process takes place by a series of stages and, in fact, that we can recognise seven stages in any process if we know how. This he calls the *Law of Seven* or sometimes the *Law of Octaves* because there are seven intervals just as there are in an octave of music.

He wrote that the Creator had two choices in deciding how this law should operate: either with every part (or 'interval') of a process 'equal' or with intervals 'varying in quality'. Let me explain these terms. A process with 'equal intervals' would go to completion by its own momentum once started but with no need and little possibility for new influences to participate in it once it has begun. The alternative open to the Creator was a universe in which every process, at certain points in its progress, is vulnerable to the entry of external influences and will not continue to completion without input

from outside. This is the law with 'varying intervals' and it operates, according to Gurdjieff, in the universe of which we are a part.

We can illustrate this second law by reference to our own states of consciousness. During the great majority of our waking hours we live as machines which react automatically to every external influence. If you press the right button, I perform. In this condition we notice little or nothing of our environment and we are quite insensitive to the underlying nature of events. But as we know, now and then, for no apparent reason, we wake up. We notice things and we feel different in ourselves because a more conscious state has entered us. This happens because at certain points in our various mental processes we are open to the entry of influences to which we are otherwise closed. Gurdjieff says that this happens because all processes are non-linear and at certain moments in every process there must be a change of direction and entry of new elements.

The alternative law or theory is the one held by science as taught in schools and colleges. According to that view, processes occur linearly so that whatever happens is the logical result of something which went before, and factors beyond our comprehension are prohibited. This corresponds to Gurdjieff's 'Law of Seven with equal intervals' which could cause processes once started to tend to go on by their own momentum without much possibility for new influences to enter. A universe under that law must eventually run down. In it everything tends towards a low state in which the energy and material will be dispersed until there is a condition of maximum disorder.

John: I accept what you say about the universe slowly running down. But you have to remember that whilst that happens there will be chance localised increases in complexity and order. This is how life evolved. By chance, local structures formed which, also by chance, became more complex and

eventually life appeared. This doesn't conflict with the principle that on average the universe may be running down.

Brian: All that you have said corresponds to Gurdjieff's first version of the Law of Octaves in which all the intervals are equal. It supposes a universe in which everything has at some time been set in motion but if this creative act is the work of a mind of some sort, the rules of the game forbid the Creator from participating after the first act.

The concept of mechanical evolution, the development of living things by random interactions between atoms and molecules, is intellectually appealing to the Western-trained mind. It seems a satisfying solution until we walk in woodland or gardens and contemplate the multiplicity and complexity of living things. Could they really have appeared by chance? It is impossible to accept that they did. The problem is that the mechanical evolution theory is formatory — we mentally accept the idea, but when confronted with the real world it is not possible for us to believe that all that complex, intricately balanced wonder of nature — including ourselves — is a meaningless result of the chance bumping together of atoms.

Janet: Are you suggesting that everything was created by some sort of higher intelligence?

Brian: Do you remember previously the question of *free will* was mentioned? We said that there are two opposing popular views; one that everything is predestined and the other that we have free choice in everything we do. Gurdjieff side-stepped this argument by saying that when we are identified we have no free will but on the rare occasions that we become free from identification, we have the possibility of making a choice.

His attitude towards Creation avoided the two extreme theories in a similar way. He did not accept that every situation is solely the result of chance influences, nor did he agree that every situation is overseen by a Creator. Gurdjieff

said that when the universe was created, the Creator realised that he had to structure it in such a way that it ran on its own most of the time but that the laws which governed it would permit intervention by his agents at certain points. One can see in this an analogy with the human situation; the body chemistry and our interactions with the world generally happen totally automatically but there is a possibility for us to have some choice and conscious control. That rarely happens but the possibility of it is built into our system.

Helen: Everything in the universe conforms to definite patterns or laws. Are you suggesting that God also has limits?

Brian: Perhaps so. However, this raises the question of the nature of God, which I would rather leave for the present.

The mechanism by which outside intervention was made possible was the 'modified Law of Octaves'. Gurdjieff used the word *stopinder* to mean interval or component part of any process. He said that the third stopinder was lengthened, the final one shortened and the 'fifth in the general successive-ness' was, as a result, 'disharmonised' and 'changed in its subjective action'. To understand this we have to consider the different spheres of influence of the Laws of Threelness and of Octaves and then have a look at the enneagram symbol.

First we have to resolve the question, what is the difference between a *creative act* and a *process*? Let us take as an example building a house. I think you will agree that building a house is a creative act. But, of course, there are a number of stages in the construction of a house, so we can also say that it is a process. Hence, the building of a house can be looked upon either as a creative act or as a process, and which of these two we see it as depends upon our viewpoint and timescale.

We know from our previous discussion that the *creative act* aspect of building a house is defined by the Law of

Threefoldness. For a creative act there must be three suitable factors present; the active, the passive and the reconciling.

But we know, too, that the building of a house is a *process*, and as such it is describable by the Law of Octaves. Hence, both laws combine in this single activity. The way in which the two laws combine together is illustrated by the enneagram.

Perhaps we can look more closely at this process of building a house. Begin by choosing the triad and this will set the pattern of the enneagram.

Eric: In building a house there is the builder who is active and works with the bricks and mortar which are passive. He is motivated by the payment that he gets for his work, so I suppose money is the third force.

Brian: If we place these three on the triangle of the enneagram we can fill the gaps later:

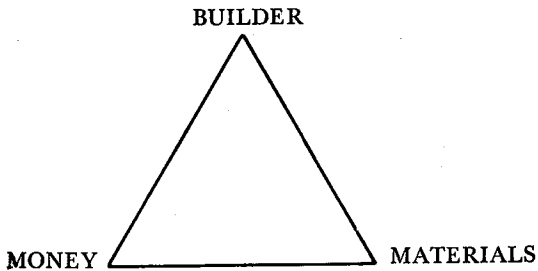


Fig 2. Triad of building a house

So now let us look at the builder as he sets about building the house. First he must buy his piece of land, then he decides just what is to be built on it, he builds the house and eventually sells it:

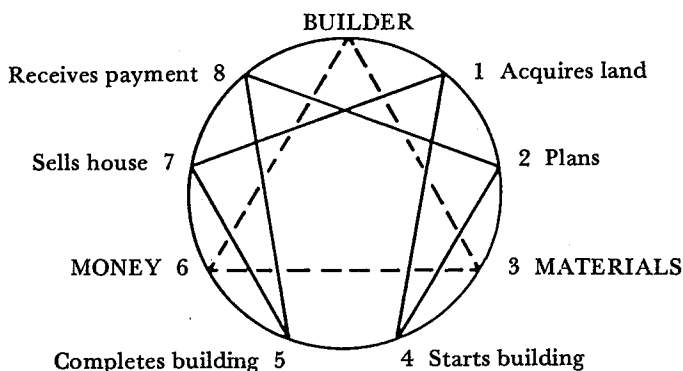


Fig 3. *Building a house for sale*

Ingrid: I am interested by your comment that the triad sets the pattern for the enneagram. What would happen if we changed one point of the triad? For example, I think we could fairly say that the builder is reconciled to his work on the materials by the prospect of someone living in the house. The fact that people will live there gives meaning to his work, so the future occupiers could be considered to be the reconciling factor.

Brian: By changing one or more points of the triad we alter the tone of the enneagram. What you suggest is an equally valid triad. Every event is a combination of triads, any of which we may choose to examine. We can put the occupants of the house at the third point of the triangle and as a result the next two points will change:

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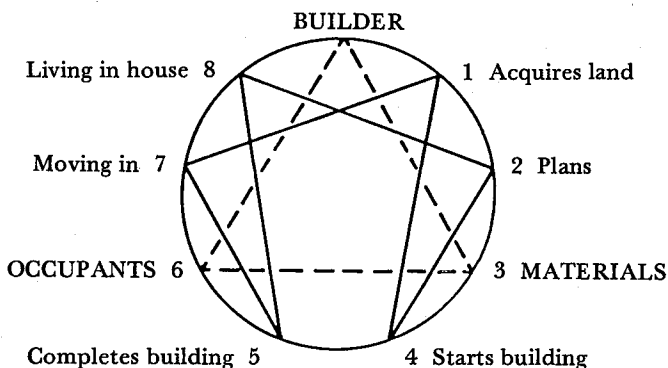


Fig 4. Building a house to live in

Leanne: It is interesting that in the first enneagram the process was completed when the builder received payment, but in the second enneagram the process was only completed by the people living in the house. I would not normally think of there being more than one process there but I can see now that both are happening simultaneously.

Brian: If we looked more closely we would find many more processes in the building of a house.

Perhaps we could note one other aspect of these two diagrams. You may remember that Gurdjieff said the fifth stopinder was *disharmonised* — at other times he described it as a time of *confusion* or *stress*. On these diagrams the fifth stopinder is when the house is being constructed. A *stopinder* is an interval, and the fifth interval is between points 4 and 5 on the diagrams. This is always a crucial point in any process. In these examples the building materials are being transformed into a house, and it is these materials which are in confusion at the fifth stopinder. At 4 they are in tidy piles and at 5

they form a neat house but between those two points is the confusion of the building in progress.

Helen: I cannot connect together the discussion about the enneagram with what you were saying before about the Law of Seven. What do the changes in intervals in the law have to do with the enneagram?

Brian: Do you remember I said before that the third interval was *lengthened*? This is the interval between points 2 and 4 on the enneagram where a new factor enters from the triad.

On our enneagram of building a house it is the period between completion of the planning and commencement of building. When the planning stage is completed the builder cannot enter the next phase which is to start construction until the materials are delivered to the site. Between points 2 and 4 on the enneagram there always has to be an external input, which in this example is the builders equipment and materials. This was what Gurdjieff meant by a 'lengthened interval'.

Gurdjieff also called the Law of Sevenfoldness the *Law of Octaves*. He said that the octave of a major scale in music was constructed in such a way that it represented this law. Do you remember I said earlier that the third stopinder, or interval, was lengthened and the final one shortened? These two points are represented in the musical scale by semitones at *mi-fa* (the third interval after *do-re* and *re-mi*) and at *si-do* (the final interval). The other five intervals are all whole tones:

<i>do</i>	<i>re</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>fa</i>	<i>sol</i> ,	<i>la</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>do</i>
tone	tone	semi- tone	tone	tone	tone	semi- tone	

Colin: But you said that the third stopinder was lengthened and the last one shortened yet both these intervals in the musical scale are shortened. How do you account for this? Or am I being too literal in my understanding of it?

Brian: There was no other way that the difference in quality could be represented. To put a two-tone gap between *mi* and *fa* would have made too great an interval. So the two half tones merely indicate a change of interval, but tell us nothing about what kind of change. In any case, Gurdjieff's use of the terms 'lengthened' and 'shortened' was metaphorical, of course.

However, it might be interesting to construct a scale with a two-tone interval at *mi-fa* just to see what it sounds like! The octave would then contain seven and a half tones instead of the usual six. With the help of a calculator it shouldn't be hard to work out the new frequency for each note. In order to make the octave correspond to doubling the frequency, *re* and *mi* would have to be slightly flat and the other notes *fa* to *si* would all be sharp.

Let us go a stage further now by putting the musical octave onto an enneagram:

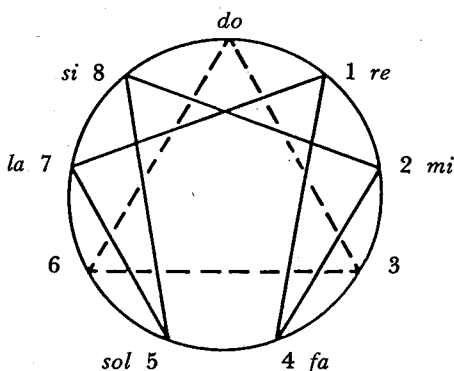


Fig 5. The musical octave

Processes — Inner and Outer

Steve: There's still something I don't understand. Okay, between *mi* and *fa* where the semitone is, the triad enters at point 3. But what about 6? There's no semitone between *sol* and *la*. So how does that fit? How come the triad comes between *sol* and *la* where there's no semitone?

Brian: This is a hard one to understand. But it seems, when we look at practical examples, there is such a big change in emphasis at point 3 that it is as if a fresh process starts here. Point 3 becomes a new *do*, 4 is *re*, 5 *mi* and 7 is *fa* for this 'new process'.

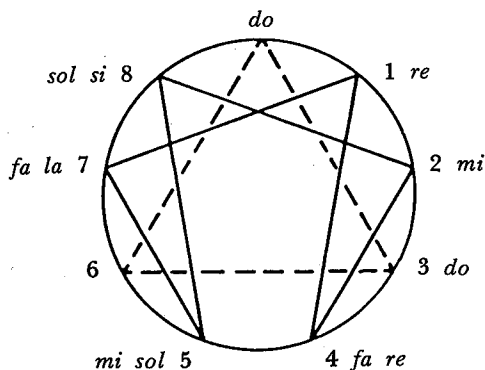


Fig 6. The octave of a major scale

Can you see that point 6 is at the first interval for the new process which has effectively begun at point 3?

John: This really makes sense now — the original process seems to have taken a new direction at point 3 because a new process has taken over. The end result is achieved by overlapping processes.

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Brian: Gurdjieff said that irregularities in the major scale were put there to indicate that in any real process a change would happen at certain points. They are times of hazard. At these times, the process cannot go on as before so therefore it must stop or lose its direction and only if the correct new factor enters at the right moment will the process continue towards its completion. If the process does not receive the corresponding external input it will lose its direction though superficially it may appear to be continuing as before. On the other hand, when the right external *shock* enters, the process may appear, to a superficial view, to change direction.

In a trivial way we can see this exemplified in the building of the house; points 1 and 2 are preparation for the actual work of building and it is crucial that at a certain point we stop preparing and get on with the building work. No doubt you have all come across examples of a project that never got past the planning stage because the people were stuck at that point — many a scheme has ended that way! If the builder just kept on developing his plans and perfecting his preparations but never really starting on the construction, superficially he might appear to be continuing as before — to himself, especially — but in reality he would have lost his direction.

* * *

Bob: I should like to go back to an earlier point in the discussion to clarify one aspect which I find confusing. My question is: Does the denying force help the process to go forward or does it prevent it? My example is this: Some months ago a friend and I decided to develop and sell a new ice-cream because neither of us much liked the ice-creams

commercially available here. So that was the first force; our decision to set to work. Our feeling that there could be a market provided a third force strong enough to carry us through about ten small experimental batches over a fortnight. By then we were beginning to confront the reality of the problems which provided us with a considerable denying force. At that stage we gave up.

I know that a sufficient driving force to enable us to keep going was lacking. If someone had offered to invest money in our efforts and we had in return agreed to carry on, we would have done so because then we would have a fresh driving force. But it didn't happen and we stopped.

Now if we look back at the enneagram diagrams we see that according to them the entry of the second force gives the process a boost and sets it off on its merry way. That was not what we found at all. So does the denying force help the process or does it stop it?

Brian: When the third force is lacking, the denying force appears to frustrate the affirmation, just as you say. However, when all three forces are present, each makes its contribution towards the success of the process. We must not think of the denying force as inherently bad. The denying force is the reality of the situation and it is nonsense to say that reality is bad or that reality stops things happening.

* * *

Sally: Recently, I was sowing vegetable seeds in my garden and I saw that the process of growing vegetables could fit the enneagram. I take the triad as; me as gardener, active; the seeds, passive and the harvest of vegetables as my third force.

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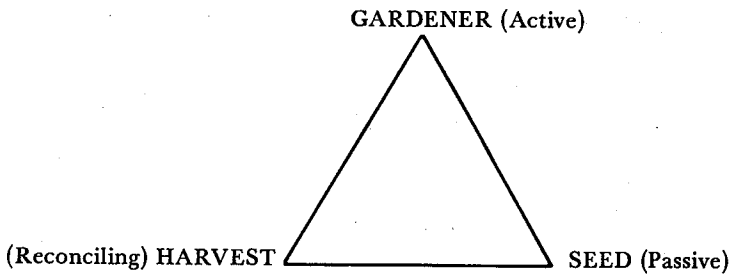


Fig 7. Triad of planting

I found there were two distinct stages in preparing the ground for sowing. First of all a general preparation, getting rid of weeds and large stones and loosening the soil. Later I went back over each area according to what I wanted to sow there. I saw that both of these must be points on the enneagram before the seed entered the story, so to speak. I worked out the other points like this:

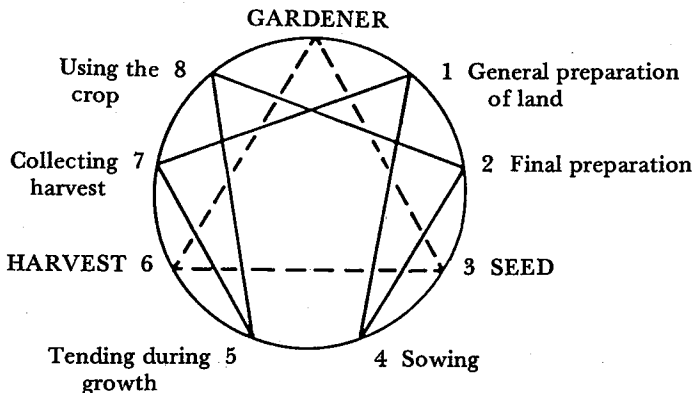


Fig 8. Growing vegetables

Brian: That is a good example. Do you remember I spoke before of the region between points 4 and 5 which is a crucial time in the process — can you see something special there?

Sally: Yes. The time of germination is different from the other stages in the process. At that time I can only wait for the mysterious awakening of the seed, all I can do is water the earth and wait for the miracle to happen.

Brian: That place between points 4 and 5 Gurdjieff referred to in *All and Everything* as the *harnel-aoot*. Those of you who have seen the picture from his prospectus for the Prieure may remember that he put a snake in the place of the circle of the enneagram and at that point at the bottom, the *harnel-aoot*, the snake was eating its own tail. The *harnel-aoot* is a special point on the diagram. It is always a turning point or significant moment of the process, a moment of destruction and creation. At this point the seed is destroyed as the new plant comes into being.

I think we should remember about the *harnel-aoot* whenever we embark upon a process. If the process is something we do, such as learning a skill or a language, there is somewhere in the middle a long, dark period where nothing much seems to be happening and though we carry on working as hard as before, our rate of learning appears negligible. This is the *harnel-aoot*. If we carry it through, there comes a point when we realise that we have achieved what we set out to do and, as a result, in a subtle way we are changed in ourselves.

Colin: I have seen this in practising the guitar, particularly when preparing a difficult piece to present in public. There is a point where it seems impossible to get it right no matter what I do. I go on almost with a sense of hopelessness. Then I seem to break through a barrier in myself and the music is right. I feel as if I have just emerged from a long, dark tunnel!

Brian: Mr Bennett said of the *harnel-aoot*, that the impetus which started the process has died away and we cannot yet see the end and draw strength from that.

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Colin: I should like to fit my guitar practice to the enneagram:

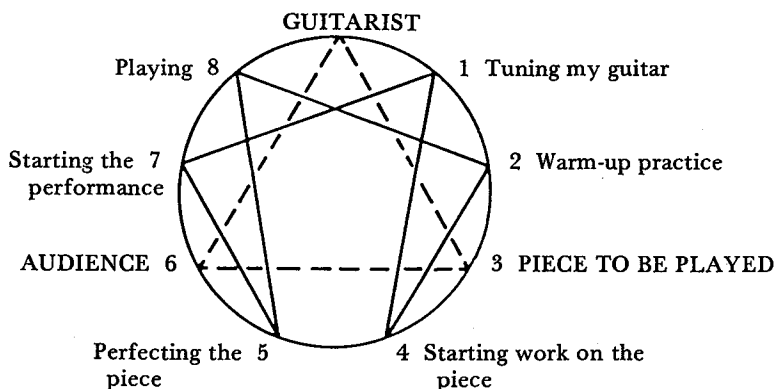


Fig 9. *Preparing a musical recital*

I feel that in this particular example the audience is the third force which strengthens my relationship with the music as far as practising it and playing it.

I should point out that there is a real difference between points 7 and 8 which might not be obvious. The beginning is different from later on because I am not in tune with the audience at the start. Later, there is a feeling of exchange between us and the playing is much freer. There usually is a definite changeover when I start to feel at one with the listeners.

Brian: What you say is quite true. There is a distinct difference between stages 7 and 8 but we are all rather unaccustomed to differentiating between them. The difference is often that which exists between a commencement and a stable condition; moving into a house and living in the house or starting the performance and being at one with the audience.

I should like now to develop your comment about the harnel-aoot. This stage, as you say, has a sense of hopelessness. In spiritual growth it is 'the dark night of the soul' when our efforts seem hopeless and meaningless but we know that all the same we have to go on. There seems to be a rule that the quality of points 7 and 8 is in direct relation to the hopelessness and struggle between points 4 and 5. The greater the difficulty at the harnel-aoot, the greater will be the success when the process is complete.

We could take as an example preparing a Movements performance. We could quite easily construct an enneagram describing the process which we go through in preparing the performance and many times I have noticed that the quality of the performance (at 8) is directly related to the difficulties which we went through in preparing it (at 4-5).

A memorable illustration of this happened when we prepared the final Movements performance before an invited audience at Gracedale. It was scheduled for Saturday, 25th February, one week before the three month program ended. By this time everyone was able to learn a new Movement very rapidly. People's attention had strengthened to such an extent that I could give quite complicated sequences of arm, leg and head gestures and most would be able to put them together and maintain the sequence after practising for quite a short time. The accuracy and feeling of the Movements was better than I have seen anywhere else. With this in mind we chose an extremely difficult program of thirteen Movements.

Each evening we practised for about two hours. This we had done for each previous performance and every time the Movements had steadily improved up to the day of the performance. This time things were different; everyone seemed to have lost the ability to do them well. Even Movements which previously they had done well were now being done poorly. The standard seemed to be deteriorating. By the Tuesday evening prior to the performance the standard of work on the Movements was very poor and

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getting worse so that I began to doubt if it was possible to get them together by Saturday. I asked everyone not to smoke on Wednesday. This introduced a rather grim and gloomy atmosphere to the site and that evening the Movements were worse. On Thursday, we had no smoking and a fast for us all on water only. In the evening we worked longer on Movements; they were terrible but I had a feeling that we had turned the corner. On Friday evening they were very good and so I shortened the practice period. The performance for the audience next day was magnificent. Visitors, some of whom had themselves performed on several occasions and had never missed an opportunity to watch, were astonished at what they saw. I shall never forget that evening.

If the harnel-aoot is very strong there is a great temptation to succumb to the feeling of hopelessness and give up. If one finds the strength to go through these difficulties, the benefits are increased proportionately. We can see from this just how wrong it is to help others when they are struggling and suffering as part of a learning process which they are quite capable of going through alone. The depth of their misery will become the joy of their wisdom later.

Karen: But I remember previously you saying that work on ourselves means making things easy for others.

Brian: Yes, I said we should be considerate towards others. To do this we have to put ourselves in their position. Only by so doing can we know whether to help others and make life easy for them or whether that would be a disservice to them and the right thing is to leave them to struggle, for their own benefit.

* * *

Processes — Inner and Outer

Mike: It occurred to me that there are three parts to the enneagram; circle, triangle and hexagon; do you think that is also the Law of Three?

Brian: I think it is. Which of the three parts represents which of the three forces, do you think?

Mike: I wondered if the triangle is the third force, but the others are not easy to see.

Brian: The shape gives them away. The circle is the real process as it happened — it is real, passive, feminine. The hexagon is male, mind, thought, active — shooting in all directions and only occasionally being brought back to reality where it meets the denying force. As you said, the triangle is the mysterious third force. Gurdjieff drew it as a broken line to show it is different in its nature from the other two.

Olaf: We have discussed the triangle and circle, can you say anything about the meaning of the hexagon? I read in one of Bennett's books that it represents the mental pattern behind the process. Your suggestion that it is the first force interests me.

Brian: 'Mind' in this sense is a channel for the active force, so what I am proposing to you is not much different from Mr Bennett's thoughts on the subject.

Rose: Do the lines of the hexagon have any meaning? There are a number of books which ascribe a special meaning to each line. But I have always felt that these explanations were rather contrived.

Brian: If we look at shapes and areas of the hexagon a meaning comes out quite naturally. The arc 1-2 refers to the early part of the process which is governed by two aims: The first of these is the short-term aim of reaching the condition for point 4. One could say that whatever goes on in the time and progress from 1 to 2 is directed 'mentally'

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towards achieving 4, just as the diagram shows. Secondly, there is a long-term aim to achieve points 7 and 8 which also affects what goes on at 1 and 2.

If you go back now to the two examples of building a house, they will clarify what I am trying to say. In both enneagrams, getting the land and planning the building is directed toward starting the construction work, but the kind of site selected and the particular design chosen could be different for each enneagram because in the one case I am building what the occupants will want to live in, but in the other example I aim to construct what is saleable at the best profit.

Point 5 is totally directed toward the part of the process represented by the arc 7-8. How I finish the house is likely to be quite different depending upon whether people whom I know will be living in it, or whether I shall sell it immediately to a stranger.

Sally: Can we go back to my enneagram of growing vegetables and interpret the hexagon?

Brian: Go ahead.

Sally: Well, it is certainly true that in the time span of 1 to 2, the thought uppermost in my mind is the sowing. The thought of gathering and using the crop is a factor early on, too, because one has to be careful not to have everything maturing at one time or to produce too much of one variety for one's needs. Even the physical aspect of laying out the areas so that harvesting will be convenient comes into that too.

The lines from 5 to 7 and 8 make sense — when I tend the growing plants I am definitely looking forward to picking and eating the results!

* * *

Anne: I have been working on the enneagram of a flowering plant:

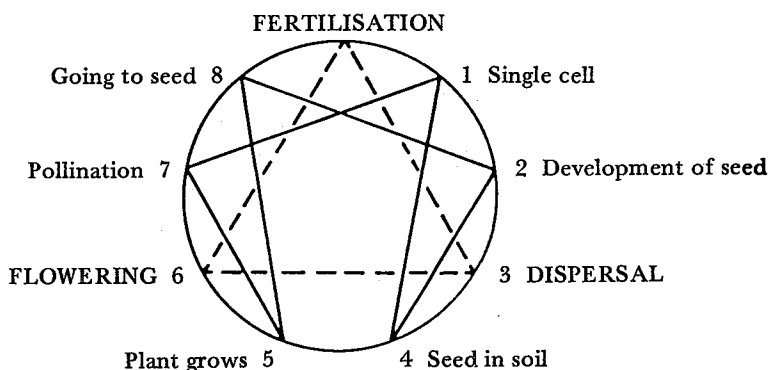


Fig 10. Enneagram of a flowering plant

Between 4 and 5 the plant emerges from the seed and struggles up to the light. I think that is the kind of experience Gurdjieff was writing about at the harnel-aoot. The internal lines seem to more or less make sense to me, the hexagon, I mean. As the seed forms it is preparing to meet the soil and for maturing later on as well. Then at 5 the plant grows in a way which is best for pollination and preparing its seed. All this seems to fit except the triad. Does fertilisation, dispersal of the seed and flowering make a triad?

Brian: This is a triad, but not of a kind which we have previously thought about so it is harder for us to recognise. During fertilisation the organism is receptive and life-force enters, it is active in dispersing itself and the purpose of the organism is achieved at maturity when it flowers.

This enneagram has quite a different feel about it from

those to do with building the house. Part of this must obviously be because of the different subject but I wonder if it is also partly a result of the different type of triad. There are six possible types of triad corresponding to the six ways of arranging the numbers 1, 2, 3 and it may be that there are six corresponding types of enneagram.

Let me try to explain. We number the three forces; 1 the active force, 2 the passive force and 3 the reconciling force and then look at each of the enneagrams to see in what order the forces appear. Our first examples were of constructing a house (Figures 3 and 4). In both of these the active force (1) is at the top, the passive force (2) is at point 3 and the reconciling force (3) at point 6. So we can say this is a 1-2-3 enneagram. If you look at your example of growing vegetables (Figure 8) the gardener (force 1) enters first then the seed (force 2) and finally the harvest (force 3) so again the enneagram has a 1-2-3 structure. The very same applies to preparing a musical recital (Figure 9) so this also is a 1-2-3 enneagram. But the process of the life of a flowering plant (Figure 10) is different. Fertilisation is a passive or receptive condition and therefore is a manifestation of force 2. Dispersal is active (force 1) and flowering provides meaning or purpose to what went before (force 3). So here we have a 2-1-3 enneagram.

You can easily work out for yourself the other possible combinations; 1-3-2, 2-3-1, etc. but it is not so easy to see practical examples. I think we will have to be quite adventurous in our choice of processes to discover all of these.

* * *

Bob: Could one have an enneagram of the human being as an animal life? By this I mean the process of development

and maturing of the body, disconsidering any psychic aspects. I thought about what would be the most significant moments in life and I came up with four points; birth and death, puberty and conception, and based upon these I built up this enneagram:

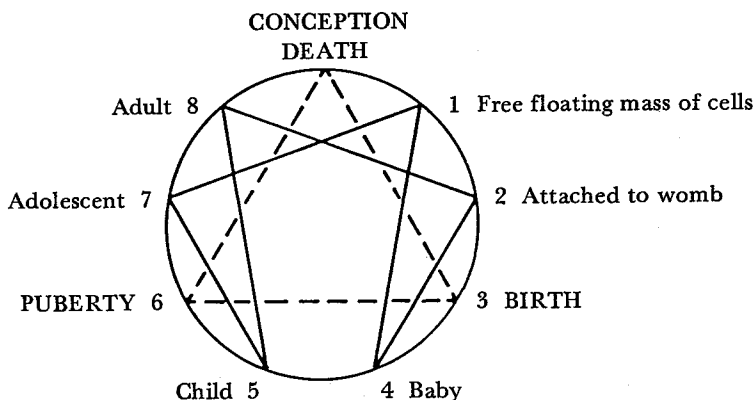


Fig 11. Human life

I cannot say that I found it easy to fill these gaps to my own satisfaction — there was a lot of self-doubt before I settled on the points. Looking through a book on anatomy and physiology, I discovered there were quite a number of definite stages in the growth of the unborn child and it was difficult to settle on two points for 1 and 2. I am not sure still that these two are best — I did wonder if there could be an entire enneagram of gestation!

4 and 5 seemed very significant points. The harnel-aoot is here where the baby achieves some separation from dependance on parents. It really becomes a separate individual. I feel that I learnt something there.

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Brian: If you had worked on the enneagram of gestation perhaps it would have been clearer what to put at stages 1 and 2.

I think if we look at the hexagon in the way I described, we may clarify our understanding of the forces at work. The foetus develops so as to be ready for birth but ultimately its structure must develop into a functioning adult. These two constraints are highlighted by the lines joining 1-4-2 and 1-7 and 2-8.

The child is different from the baby insofar as it yearns for adulthood in addition to its physical development in that direction.

Janet: We are so accustomed to these different phases in life that one almost has to put oneself in the place of a being from another planet to realise what a big change in direction life takes at birth and puberty. I wonder if there could be any organism which does not go through these traumas. What about the amoeba that just splits in two and then goes on living as before?

Brian: In order to understand that process, one of us has to delve into the life and times of the amoeba — I think I shall leave that to you!

If we can come back now to your point that a person's life drastically changes direction at birth and puberty — and as you say, it is hard to see the reality of this because it is so familiar to us, it is only as a result of these definite changes in direction that the original aim of becoming a mature independent individual is pursued. My point here is that every process which reaches completion can only do so after definite changes in direction. In the ordinary way we cannot see this and we imagine that a process can start at A and finish at Z and follow a straight line the whole way.

John: You have spoken about the hazard at point 3 and I wonder if it is true to say that when we get past this hurdle the process is likely to go to completion?

Brian: I think you can answer this for yourself by reference to any of the enneagrams that we have talked about. What happens, for example, if, when we plant a seed the conditions are unsuitable for germination, perhaps if it is too wet or too dry or too cold?

John: The seed will die and eventually rot away. So that means the harnel-aoot is also a point of hazard?

Brian: A process can stop at any point if the conditions are wrong or if the third force is taken away. When that happens involution sets in and the situation deteriorates. If you examine any of the enneagrams you find the same thing, if the embryo fails to attach itself to the womb it is washed away and dies, if the builder cannot find a buyer for his house it must eventually become overgrown and begin to decay, if the harvest is not collected it will rot in the fields.

At any point the process can stop, whatever you are doing, if you cease to make the necessary effort the process stops and deterioration sets in. What I am trying to say is that at any point the process may stop or it may go on but at the moments of hazard it has to change direction if it is to continue.

Maria: As soon as we stop progressing we start to regress. I find this a frightening thought. When I look at folk who have given up striving to understand life, I see how their lives become meaningless.

Brian: It is worth remembering that when we stop trying to improve ourselves, sooner or later decay will set in. Yet, at the same time, we have to keep questioning whether we have passed a point of hazard unknowingly, and lost our way.

I think I should close this topic by summarising the knowledge about processes which we have gained from our study of the enneagram.

The initial stages in any process happen easily and automatically. Whatever we do, the early stages are easy because they are pushed along by our initial interest. As a result we find

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it 'interesting' and there may be a feeling that we have 'gained a great deal'. This latter is, of course, an illusion because, as we have seen, if the process goes no further all the apparent achievements will degenerate and be lost.

Next there must be the entry of a new factor and a new direction and this often means confronting the reality of the situation.

This is followed by a phase of difficulty, struggle or confusion in which we imagine nothing is being achieved and may start to question our own purpose. This is the time when our previous 'gains' are being substantiated and built upon. This in turn will be completed by the entry of a new factor or a fresh direction. The final stage (at point 8) is always easy and it is here that we are repaid for our earlier efforts.

I hope you will be able to use what you have learnt so as to foresee the difficulties in whatever you set yourself to achieve and prepare yourself accordingly. Your understanding of the enneagram will help you to see more objectively the relatedness of events and the inevitable and necessary way that they follow on, one after another.

* * *

13 *Work on Oneself*

I am convinced that if there is to be a change in our nature it can only come from work on ourselves; that without work there can be no deep change. It has been said that by our present acts we pay for our past and prepare our future. If our present is simply a mechanical result of our past, we are preparing a future which has no new possibilities and can only be our present but disguised by changes in our circumstances. Work on ourselves is our only hope for developing our possibilities and creating a future which is essentially different.

This being so, we need to be clear what is meant by this all-important 'work on ourselves'. In his book *In Search of the Miraculous*, P.D. Ouspensky recounts his first meeting with Gurdjieff and his pupils in Moscow in 1915: 'Then they spoke of *work on oneself*, but in what this work consisted they failed to explain.' And there was a very good reason for this; to put a definition on work on oneself is exceedingly difficult and whatever definition we choose is likely to be limited and perhaps even wrong in some situations. This problem is due to the rarity of true work on oneself in ordinary life, so that our language has no need to be able to convey this concept.

With this reservation, let us define work as *an act which goes against our mechanicalness for the purpose of self-perfecting*. We can use this as our starting point for considering the whole subject of work on oneself.

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If we are involved in an action which goes against mechanicalness and towards consciousness, something new must be present which enables this action to take place. A machine can only be mechanical and, hence, something of a different order has to enter into us if we are to be other than entirely mechanical. We know that for this to be possible a higher energy is needed. As we have seen, this energy can come from different sources, inside and outside of us. Higher energy which we need for work is available to us but, unless we have learnt otherwise, we waste it.

When no higher energy is available to us we cannot work, work on ourselves is not possible. So, before we can learn to work on ourselves, we have first to understand the laws which govern our energy exchanges and transformations. Of course, this does not mean acquiring information about these laws by reading books or hearing talks, it means seeing them in action in our own lives.

In the mechanical state no work is possible. This needs to be stressed because, amongst followers of the Gurdjieff ideas, there is a great deal of misunderstanding about it. People imagine that reading about work ideas and talking about them, is work. When these activities are totally mechanical, as in general they are, this is not work, just as reading about food is not eating. It is obvious that eating is quite different from reading about food, yet for some reason it is less obvious that work on oneself is altogether different from reading about work.

There is another aspect to this prevalent misunderstanding, I will give an example to illustrate: Some years ago, I was teaching science at a secondary school in a tough district of the city. Each day, for much of the first term, the stress of dealing with disturbed children totally exhausted me. I arrived home feeling wrung out and good for nothing. Several friends made some such comment as: 'It's all work on yourself!'. Inferring, of course, that I should be happy to be so overwhelmed by my job because it was a God-given chance

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to work on myself. But was this work? My energies were reduced to such a low level that I was barely able to remain awake in the ordinary meaning of the word. There was certainly no question of higher consciousness. So how could this possibly be work? It couldn't of course.

So, now I have written of what work is not and little of what it is. Perhaps we can think more about what constitutes work. A great deal of our work is aimed at balance.

There is a condition of balance between the magnetic attractions on our Will of the outer world and our inner world. Our attention is drawn to something outside of ourselves with such force that we forget everything else. Our attention is riveted. As individuals we cease to exist. A moment later, the pull of our inner world dominates — passing thoughts, feelings pleasant or unpleasant, fantasies, and again where are *we*? But if we are able to hold a balance between inner and outer, not losing ourselves in either, this is a higher state. It is remembering ourselves.

If we are able to retain that poise — this is work on ourselves. We can experience that condition as balance between inner and outer or as a balance between our internal mechanisms. Gurdjieff called it an *all centres balanced* state. This is another facet of the same experience. That separateness which we experience inside when we are not caught up either in external interests or internal activities, is also a state of balance between our three brains. We know we have a body and may be aware of feelings, but we don't get absorbed into any one impulse and, briefly, our mental associations leave us in peace.

So here we have two aspects of balance constituting work; balance between our functions and balance between the forces drawing our attention outwards and those pulling it inwards. We can go further: On the psychic level there is a balance point between effort and acceptance, assertiveness and submission. Too much effort fosters harshness, insensitivity and egotism. Too frequent acceptance is weakness.

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These are examples of balance between active and passive. In external things we can also be active or we can be passive, and here again we need to strive for balance. Some of us think and talk too much and we need to do more active things, but others cannot stop being active and need to rest or stop awhile and consider where they are going.

All of these things which constitute work presuppose a higher state than our usual condition of sleep in which we simply react to everything affecting us. If we are not in a more awake state the question of balance or imbalance is not going to be more than an interesting idea because we will not seek out and confront our imbalances.

In order to see our own nature we need to generate force, *elekilpomagtistzen*, in ourselves. It is this need for *elekilpomagtistzen* and formatory attitudes towards how such force is generated and sustained in people which has led to the widely-held belief that 'if it is nasty it is work on oneself'. The truth is that nasty things confronted may generate force, and frequently do initially, but by no means are all nasty things good for us.

I think that we should always emphasize that work and the conditions for work are uplifting. Work is a state of letting go of our own weakness which always has a joyful aspect. Because of ordinary attitudes and ways of speaking we have to express work on ourselves as struggle, effort, suffering, sacrifice — which make a horrifying prospect! All these are correct but none are as unpleasant as our imaginary picture of them and, in fact, the very same experience, for which in reality we have no words, could be as well described as self-satisfaction, purposefulness, joy. It is merely a question of whether we emphasize what we gain or the price we must pay for our gains. In and from our struggle and sacrifice there is self-satisfaction and joy.

Gurdjieff said that we are *third-force blind*. We only see the unpleasantness of work on ourselves whilst it remains just a mental concept. We see the wish unsatisfied or the

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unpleasantness confronted but we fail to see the third force which can enter at that time and raise us to a higher plane.

Associated with this idea that if it is nasty it is work on oneself is another peculiar form of self-deception. Rather than explain this phenomenon, it would be simpler to illustrate it in action:

Whilst in the U.S.A., Nina and I were invited to direct an existing group for a few weeks. A number of group members were taking work on themselves rather seriously, even grimly, so we suggested that we substitute for one of the meetings a Country Dance and all let our hair down. About half the group did not come because they considered that a Country Dance could not be 'real work on oneself'. Their basis for believing this was that because a dance is pleasant it cannot be work. Yet, strangely, it was the more gregarious members of the group who came to the dance. The ones who stayed away were those who would be at a loss to cope with a social situation. Those who might be uncomfortable at the dance did not come 'because it was not real work on themselves'!

* * *

Recently I asked a group of people to consider, for a week, the question: *What is work on oneself?* These are their answers:

'It is opening oneself — being receptive — even feeling a reverence for everything that exists'.

'For me, letting go of anxiety and tension, is work'.

'I think that it is work on myself to pause and shake off my identification. I was clearing out a room in the house and at the same time, identified with thoughts about the meetings.

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Suddenly I stopped in the doorway and stood still for a few moments. This changed my way of working, it seemed like work on myself.'

'It is in being free from my ego. I will give an example: I was trying to get my car out of a short parking space between two cars. I began to get tense and agitated, then I realised that there was no point in getting upset, it was not helping at all. I let go of the tension and struggle and just drove out easily.'

'I thought for a long time about what work on myself could be and I realised that I did not know what it meant. Then the thought came to me that I could be sensing. I did so, and felt a strong sense of being present. Perhaps this was work on myself. Some other people came into the room and I forgot about my sensing immediately. Later I realised, at that moment I had forgotten about work.'

'I think it is a certain way of doing one's duty. Working for the benefit of some other self than our ordinary self.'

None of these comments attempt to put a definition on work on oneself and they could be criticised for not being concerned with an overall view of the Work. But they do illustrate very clearly the important fact that work on oneself is an action. This action is hidden. The activities which they spoke about could, quite easily, have been done without work, but they tried to express that something extraordinary had to be present for there to be work.

It is important to understand, if that something extra which is extraordinary and miraculous is not present in us, there can be no work on ourselves. We can go further and say that work on ourselves is not something we have the power to do. This sounds confusing and even contradictory, but it is true. The fact is that the Work can enter us if we are prepared, the Work is not something we can *do*. Work

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requires the entry of Grace, it is an essence state. To be in an essence state is work on oneself, but we cannot make that come about from our ordinary self, our personality.

This is a source of misunderstanding for many people — the problem that on the one hand work is not something we do, yet we have to do something for the Work to enter us. If we do not make the necessary preparation there will be little chance for work.

Many teachers have said all that is needed is to learn to be ourselves. This is completely true. But you and I know that it is not the whole story. Somehow effort, struggle, sacrifice, discipline and meditation are all needed. They provide conditions for work.

Mr Bennett resolved this seeming contradiction by saying that there is essence work and personality work. The only true work is essence work, which is simply to live from our essence, nothing more. But we live in our personality and this part of us has not the power, intentionally, to transfer to our essence.

Personality work is the necessary preparation from which comes the transfer to our essence. Personality work is meditation, self-observation, the Movements, efforts, sacrifice, suffering and all the other things that we do or accept for the sake of the Work. But none of these things are in themselves work on oneself. They are all personality work and as such they are all that we can do so that the Work may enter us, so that we can be in a state of Grace.

We can recognise personality work by its sense of urgency and its seeking for results and progress. Essence work does not have these qualities. Effort, struggle and sacrifice are also personality work. These words all belong to our ordinary life and express a personality condition.

Essence work and personality work can both be taught. Some teachers only teach personality work because that is all they know. It may be that some who teach through

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silence or using a trade as a medium, teach direct to the essence. Both personality work and essence work have their part in a Way which is to be pursued in ordinary life.

* * *

People have many and different preconceptions about the results of work on oneself. Does the Work develop self-control? It does, but not in the harsh fashion which many imagine. It brings control through increasing our inner strength or harmony.

Will we become enlightened? Work on oneself is the route to enlightenment so the answer is, 'Yes', but what is enlightenment? When we seek to be transformed and to achieve enlightenment we are really as ignorant of where we are going as is the caterpillar that spins a cocoon from which he will eventually emerge as a butterfly. We cannot understand enlightenment until we have reached it.

Enlightenment means being ourselves. It does not mean copying an ideal which we imagine we see before us. The ideal, this person that we copy, may well be a copy of his imaginary picture of some other person. It is easy to see the pointlessness of this, but it happens. A person imitates his or her teacher who in turn is imitating his teacher, and so on. Expressed this way it is easy to see this has nothing to do with the Work, but in practice that is less obvious.

Because of this kind of misunderstanding, people ask whether the Work has become diluted as it was passed on from Gurdjieff to the next teacher and the next. One might as well ask whether the human race has been diluted as generation after generation was born! The truth is that the Work died with Gurdjieff, just as it died with Christ. But it is born again in the heart of every true seeker who finds it. When we find the Work a seed is planted in us which may grow great and strong or may wither and die. No individual

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can embody more than a limited view of the Work. What we learn from our teacher is a fraction of this. This is our starting point which later we have to struggle to cast off so that we can truly be ourselves and find our own place in the Work.

It frequently happens that when people contact this Work a spontaneous and unexpected improvement begins to be noticeable in their ordinary life. Recently a man told me that since he has been connected with the Work his business has prospered and his life has been happy and successful in every way. This is a common experience but one should not assume that it will last forever. If we are to fully understand ourselves and others, we must experience both success and failure. There is a stage in this Work which the Sufis call *malamat*. *Malamat* means blame, failure, discredit, disgrace and humiliation. Mr Bennett used to say there is a Way of inner work based upon *malamat* but outside the pearly gates where the people queue to enter Heaven, the shortest queue is the one marked 'Malamat'! Most of us who do not choose to specialise in this Way will at sometime in our lives experience *malamat*.

In this Work one is exposed to many strange experiences, sometimes appearing even as a *test*. Something like this happened at Strzelecki where we held our first summer camp:

Early in the program a sequence of events happened many of which alone would have been unremarkable but happening as they did, one after another, they began to seem to us all like a 'test', specially arranged to persuade us to give up.

The camp began on 31st December, a Friday. On the previous day two landrovers brought by students, and considered essential for getting about on the rough terrain near the house, both broke down with quite serious and unexpected faults.

On Day 1, I became ill and was confined to bed for several days. This was nothing extraordinary but a nuisance!

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Day 3, Nina broke her ankle whilst playing with the children in the garden. She had never in her life broken a bone before but this was a bad one; three bones were broken. She was taken to hospital for six days and, of course was in plaster for months after.

At this stage both Nina and I were, to some extent, out of action, so the program was mostly taken over by a Sherborne student who had come along because she felt a need to strengthen her contact with the Work.

On Day 7, I had recovered sufficiently to drive into town and pick up the week's groceries. On the way back, rounding a corner, a truck travelling the opposite way threw stones on my windscreen and smashed it. A small thing, I know, but the only broken windscreen I have ever had.

Day 8. The water supply stopped during the afternoon. Not a pleasant situation in an isolated spot at the height of Australian summer. Fortunately we were able to find the fault next day and refill the supply tanks.

Day 12. Michael's landrover was now repaired. He took his alsatian for a run behind the car as usual but the dog ran under the wheels and was killed. That same afternoon a connecting-rod in the engine broke and the engine was a write-off.

Day 16. A violent storm with heavy rain. Lightning struck the house. I was at the bathroom sink at the time. There was a loud crash and a flash appeared to go from the tap down my body. A woman in the kitchen had a similar experience but we were both unhurt.

By this time we had begun to wonder if all these difficulties and strange events were trying to tell us something! We were concerned about the children too, because several times they had been discovered chopping wood with the axes — the next strange event could be something more serious. Also they had found some sheets of old and rusty, but sharp, corrugated iron which they had used to build a precarious house amongst some bushes. Several times we arranged and

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secured the metal sheets to make it safe but each time they rearranged their house soon after, in a highly dangerous way!

Next day, (Day 17), I replaced my windscreen and in the afternoon we all drove to a spot some miles away where there was an old disused road. We hiked several miles along the track and back in sunny, pleasantly warm weather with a clear sky and a light breeze. As we got back to the cars the sky became overcast and hailstones began to fall. These were giant hailstones, about four centimetres across! I thought 'they' were going to break my windscreen again! Next day, local farmers told us they had never seen such hailstones before.

Next morning, I called all the people at the house together and asked if they felt we should cancel the rest of the program, having been 'threatened' enough. Apart from one person, they all wished to continue. That person left us and went home. There were no more strange events after that time.

* * *

It is well known that the Work produces psychic powers. Mr Bennett would often do something, which without his intention, made it apparent that he had psychic powers which were denied to us. One evening soon after we began the course at Sherborne, the staff and students performed a Middle-Eastern ritual together in the Great Ballroom of the house. The ritual was a celebration of one of the Muslim holy days, though Bennett was himself a Roman Catholic by his own choice. Not being familiar with the Muslim religion myself, the ritual seemed very strange. The following day, after dinner, I was chatting with another student, a retired army officer, in the crowded, noisy coffee room. I began to comment about the ritual of the previous day, saying that I wondered if I had got mixed up with a bunch of lunatics.

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Unbeknown to me, the man I was speaking with was finding life at Sherborne far too difficult for him and was near to leaving. As I spoke, I had a strange sensation in my neck. I turned around and saw, in the far corner of the room, Mr Bennett staring at me with an angry look. In that hubbub, and from that distance, he could not possibly have heard what I said.

I do not believe that Mr Bennett knew exactly what was being said but I suspect he felt there was something happening which he had to stop. Such psychic powers are in reality a natural ability like sight or taste but we have lost the use of them owing to our conditioning and especially bodily tensions. The re-awakening of these perceptions is one more of the unexpected results of work on oneself.

In all this we must take care not to seek for results from our work. Only the personality looks for achievements, 'tests' and proof that as individuals we are special; to the essence these are all irrelevant. To expect to obtain results and benefits is a materialistic attitude which is incompatible with work. So devote yourself to the Work without expecting rewards. You will see changes and benefits but they will be unexpected. You will be given what you need, not what you want or what you think you need.

* * *

Finally, let us think about the various stages which each of us will pass through as we find our way in this Work. Each stage has its distinctive qualities and difficulties, and I think these can most clearly be discussed using the enneagram to provide a structure against which to view the phases of our transformation:

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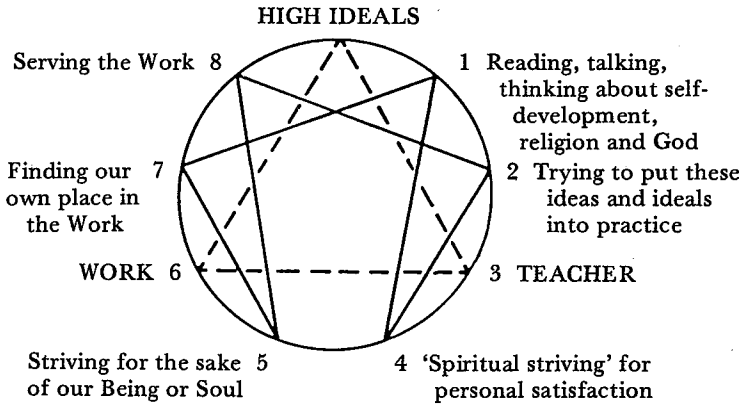


Fig 12. Enneagram of personal transformation

I have split the action of the Work into three stages, each of which has its outer aspect, which comes first, followed by a more active or inner aspect. If we think about the first two points; study and putting the ideas into practice, it is easy to see that the second of these is more active because we are not just thinking about things, we are doing something to bring the ideas to life.

However, some of us have found that years of practice, effort and trying to live up to the ideals we have set ourselves bring little results, even with the help of others with similar interests. Either the results are disappointingly little, or in some way things seem not right. What is 'not right' is that if we make an effort or sacrifice, we fall into the next trap which is a lawful, necessary result of our good effort. If we make some effort, perhaps in connection with negative emotions, which seems from what we have learnt to be work on ourselves, there can be either of two results. If it is not

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work, we remain as we are; in a state of illusion. If our sense of what is work is right, we will be rewarded. Our reward is always a temptation. This is where people who have no guide get into difficulties — they fall for the temptation and their illusions are strengthened.

This all sounds mysterious so I shall give examples: Let us say I make an effort to be present, to remember myself, what happens next? I say to myself, 'Good, I am succeeding in remembering myself'. But when I say this, everything is gone, I have failed the test because that moment of higher energy has flowed into egotism. Later, I realise that my awareness disappeared at the moment that the thought entered my head that 'I am remembering myself'.

We cannot be awake and egocentric. It is even worse if I say to myself during that moment of awakening, 'I am remembering myself whilst all these people are machines'! As I say this I do not realise that I also have fallen asleep and that higher substance has gone to strengthening the Devil's representative in me.

Some such temptation is the lawful, inevitable result of our making a right effort. But this does not repeat on and on. Each deed rightly done brings a single temptation.

Our other problem is self-calming. Unknowingly, we calm away the results of our work. As we have seen, self-calming can take many forms and sometimes be very hard to distinguish in our actions. A very common error is self-criticism and self-condemnation. It happens like this: Just for a moment, the course of events leads to our becoming sufficiently awake to notice our own actions and attitudes. We see that we are not as perfect as we imagined and automatically either condemn or excuse ourselves. When this happens we have failed the test and wasted an opportunity. Self-condemnation is a retreat from reality, not acceptance of reality as one might assume. If we accept reality we do not criticise or condemn; acceptance and condemnation are mutually exclusive states. Self-criticism of this negative sort

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is really a refusal to accept reality, but disguised. It is one of the many, many ways we deceive ourselves.

We need someone to help us to see where we are going wrong and wasting our chances with egotism and self-calming.

There also are certain well-known hindrances which result especially from practising meditation without advice. These hindrances are apparent psychic phenomena and dreams, and they may take pleasant or unpleasant forms. There are people who, when they sit, experience beautiful or ugly scenes or colours, often accompanied by strong feelings. These have to be ignored. They are not real though they may seem very real to the one experiencing them. They are a distraction because they can easily begin to be the aim of the practices which ought to be directed toward knowing reality.

A related phenomenon is physical hindrances. Of course, if one is unaccustomed to sitting still one must expect some physical discomfort. This is real but will disappear in time. It is more easy to cope with than the imaginary physical problems which can take various forms, such as sensations of vertigo, or believing yourself to be upside-down as soon as your eyes are closed. Again, there is no reality in these experiences and if one decides to continue with the inner exercise they go away.

Even our experience of awareness or self-remembering states are likely to be mostly imaginary. It is very difficult to distinguish between real awareness and the thought of awareness or imagining that we are awake. The touchstone of reality is our own body. If part of your self-remembering is a strong awareness that you have a body, all is well. If you do not have a sensation of your body, the awareness is all in the thoughts and feelings and is certain to be imagination.

Let us assume that we have discovered that our efforts alone are bringing little fruit and we are fortunate enough to find someone who can offer us genuine guidance. Look again at the enneagram and you will see that here also there are two stages in our path. The difference between these

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two is that at the harnel-aoot something has happened to our egotism. Initially we do what we do just for what we can get out of it for ourselves, for our personality really, but there has to be a point where we forget our personal wants and begin simply to do what is necessary for the inner self we have found. Part of this is a recognition of our responsibility for our companions in the group. Before coming to the harnel-aoot, we imagine that the important things are what we want and what we get. It is a common mistake to believe that we benefit from experiencing pleasant states or hearing stimulating ideas. The reality is that progress comes from what we do and what we give.

The harnel-aoot represents a break-away from our egotism. Therefore, it is really the beginning of the discovery of our essence. Before that point, we wake up momentarily and then dream that we are awake. The harnel-aoot is an awakening of the essence which is experienced as a different, more stable awareness.

When we get past that point of harnel-aoot, we discover that the secret of being conscious is in allowing Grace to enter us. When Grace enters, we wake up. We live in a sea of Grace, it pervades everything, though its concentration varies from place to place. There is enough and to spare for everyone. Gurdjieff spoke of the second and third foods, the air we breathe and the impressions continuously coming to us. We forget that we are breathing and we are not open to the impressions around us, so Grace cannot enter.

Soon we have to accept full responsibility for our own work. We have to find our own line in the Work; our own fate. This may be on a level of passing to others what we have learnt, or perhaps taking upon ourselves a worthwhile cause, or even simply spreading good influence.

* * *

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The following is a shortened version of a true story by Jean Giono entitled *The Man Who Planted Trees*. This story is especially valuable because it illustrates how, with persistence, a person can achieve a very great deal in whatever he strives for, whether his efforts are directed toward inward or outer aims. The old man saw a need and he had the persistence and fortitude to carry that task through to the end of his life:

'I first met Elzeard Bouffier in 1913. I was hiking over the Alpine foothills a hundred kilometres or so north of Marseilles; those bare and monotonous moors rising to a thousand metres or more. Nothing grew there but parched grass and wild lavender. After three days I was in the most desolate place imaginable. It was a sunny day in June but over these high moors the wind swept harsh and cold, it moaned in the shells of deserted houses. There was no water and no life there.

I moved on and, in the distance, glimpsed a small black upright silhouette like the trunk of a lone tree. As I drew closer I saw that it was an old man. I greeted him and asked where I could get water and he offered me a drink from his gourd, then invited me to his home, a neat stone cottage nestling in a hollow.

In response to my questioning he told me of his solitary life there. Three years before, when his wife and son died, he had retired to the hills. He felt that the land was dying for lack of trees and had decided to do something about it and so, each day, with infinite care, he planted acorns. In three years he had planted one hundred thousand, of which perhaps ten thousand would survive to maturity. I said that in thirty years time these ten thousand oaks would be magnificent, and he replied with simplicity that, if God spared him, in thirty years he would have planted very many more.

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The following year was the beginning of the fourteen-eighteen war, in which I served for five years. In all that time I thought no more of the old man. After the war I made my way back to those lonely uplands and it was only then that my thoughts turned again to the man who planted trees. The moors had not changed. However, near a deserted village, I could see in the distance a sort of grey mist drawn like a veil over the higher land.

As I drew nearer I saw a forest of young trees. Elzeard Bouffier was still living there and had continued his planting; he had not taken the slightest notice of the war. Some of his oaks were now ten years old and taller than we were. His forest was a striking sight. It stretched for eleven kilometres at its widest part, with oaks growing thick and strong, beeches shoulder height and healthy clumps of birch carpeting the coombe floors.

From 1920 onwards, I never let a year go by without paying him a visit. I never once saw him hesitate in his labours or show any doubt, though heaven knows what setbacks and adversity he had to battle with over the years. It should be remembered that he worked in utter solitude — to the extent, indeed, that towards the end of his life he lost the habit of speech.

His creation seemed to be having a chain effect. I saw brooks running which had been dry for as long as anyone could remember. The wind also scattered seeds. As the streams reappeared so did reeds, meadows and flowers.

In the second world war his enterprise was threatened. Fuel was in short supply and felling started amongst the oaks planted in 1910, but they were so far from any road that the operation was unprofitable and it was abandoned. At that time, the old man was thirty kilometres away, calmly continuing his work and paying no more attention to the second world war than he had to the first.

I saw him for the last time in June 1945. He was then eighty-seven years old. I returned to what had been a bare

Work on Oneself

wilderness but now there was a bus which ran from the valley of the Durance up into the hills. I did not recognise the area through which I used to travel on foot. Where there had been ruins were now well-kept farms, the old springs were running again and streams were being channelled to good use. Life was burgeoning everywhere. On the lower slopes were plots of barley and rye, still green, and in the narrow valleys fresh green pastures.

I reflected that this countryside through which I was passing had been created by the hands of one man. Relying only on his own physical and spiritual resources, Elzeard Bouffier had made the wilderness flower into a land of peace and plenty.'

This story is useful because it helps us to see that results can be achieved, not by incredible (and imaginary) feats of strength and 'violence' to enforce a change, but by silent determination, patience and love for what we aim for.

By working with humility and devotion he achieved harmony with the universe. We can do the same even whilst we live in this society.

The final point on our enneagram is 'serving the Work'. But we have no need to ask what our task will be. Nor should we dream of imitating the man who planted trees. He found his own task and, when we have prepared ourselves, we will find ours, not as a 'good idea' or a 'worthwhile cause' but simply as a need which we see that we can fill or even as a task which we are already fulfilling.

According to our nature we may look inward for our task or we may see an external need to which we can apply ourselves. In the end, both of these are equal and the results are the same. If we make our aim an inner one, we will have to spread good influence to achieve it. If our task is in the material world, by our persistence and our attitude we will gain in strength and purity.

Final Words

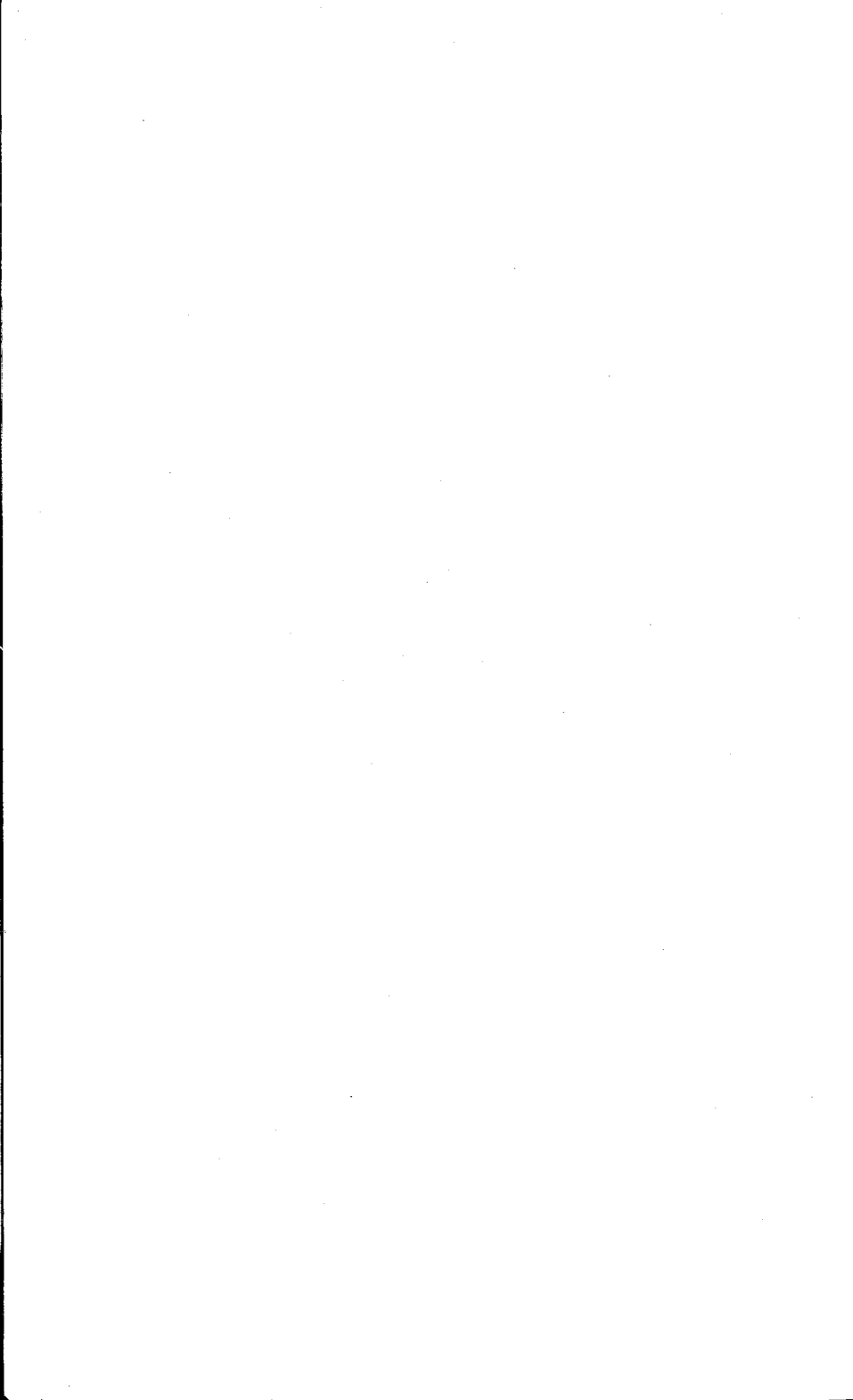
Dear Friend,

It is well to remember that on Earth there are many millions of people and, in an objective sense, neither you or I have any significance. This earth is part of the solar system; one of millions of stars in the Milky Way. If the Earth were to disappear, its passing would be unnoticed in the galaxy. The Milky Way is one galaxy amongst millions in the Universe. Our galaxy is so immense that its size is far beyond our power to comprehend, yet, if it were missing there would be no detectable effect in the Universe. So, of what significance are you and I?

Yet, hidden in each one of us is a tiny particle of the Creator. This Particle has to complete its journey through this life, all the while striving to return to its Origin.

Remember too that reading will not itself bring about the change you seek.

* * *



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