Quotes From

THE TEACHINGS OF GEORGE GURDJIEFF

Week Four
ONLY A LARGE ACCUMULATION OF THESE FINE MATTERS ENABLES A SECOND, A LIGHTER BODY, TO BE FORMED WITHIN MAN

“Everything living has an atmosphere round it. The difference lies only in its size. The larger the organism, the larger its atmosphere. In this respect every organism can be compared to a factory. A factory has an atmosphere round it composed of smoke, steam, waste materials and certain admixtures which evaporate in the process of production. The value of these component parts is quite different.

“In exactly the same way human atmosphere is composed of different elements. And as the atmosphere of different factories has a different smell, so has the atmosphere of different people. For a more sensitive nose, for instance, for a dog, it
is impossible to confuse the atmosphere of one man with the atmosphere of another. I said that man is also a station for transforming substances. Part of the substances produced in the organism is used for the transformation of other matters, while another part goes into his atmosphere, that is, is lost. So here too, the same thing happens as in a factory.

“Thus the organism works not only for itself but also for something else. Men of knowledge know how to retain these fine matters in themselves and accumulate them. Only a large accumulation of these fine matters enables a second, a lighter body, to be formed within man.

“Ordinarily, however, matters composing the atmosphere, are constantly used up and replaced by man’s inner work...

“Three groups of phenomena: magnetism, hypnotism and telepathy are phenomena of the same order. The action of magnetism is direct; the action of hypnotism is at a short distance, through the atmosphere; telepathy is action at a distance.

The latter is analogous to a telephone or telegraph. There connections are cables, metal wires, but in telepathy it is the trail left by man. A man who has the gift of telepathy can fill this trail with his own matter and thus re-establish the connection, forming as it were a cable through which he can act on a man’s mind.”

~ George Gurdjieff “Gurdjieff’s Early Talks 1914-1931”

HE RADIATED TREMENDOUS POWER AND ‘BEING’ SUCH AS I HAD NEVER IN ALL MY TRAVELS MET IN ANY MAN

“Orage and Dr Stjoernval came in. At once I sensed that I
was a mere youth in the presence of these adult men. Very soon I made another and more striking comparison; Gurdjieff arrived, very impressive in a black coat with an astrakhan collar and wearing an astrakhan cap. With a twinkle in his eyes he began to joke with the others. Then he walked round, and I found him standing beside me. I looked up, and was struck by the expression of his eyes, with the depths of understanding and compassion in them. He radiated tremendous power and ‘being’ such as I had never in all my travels met in any man, and I sensed that, compared with him, both Dr Stjoernval and Orage were as young men to an elder.”

~ CS Nott “The Teachings of Gurdjieff - A Pupil’s Journey”

THUS ALLOWING THE LISTENER TIME TO HOLD A KIND OF SILENT DIALOGUE WITH HIMSELF

“When Gurdjieff talked he would, sometimes, when the meaning of the phrase was difficult and it was not easy to perceive it at first glance, pause to give us time to absorb and digest it, thus allowing the listener time to hold a kind of silent dialogue with himself, considering all the pros and cons, thus to verify his attitude to the master’s words. This helped to make perception of the meaning of what we heard much easier, for the difficulty lay not so much in its lack of clarity as in the fact that it was perfectly possible to interpret it in different ways, and also to approach it in different ways. It was always possible to ask Gurdjieff about the essential meaning, but it was much better for us to arrive at it (or try to) by our own means and efforts, even if it meant going round and round, hither and thither, before reaching the goal.”

~ Anna Butkowsky “With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris”
THE ACQUISITION OF A NEW, NON-HABITUAL FUNCTIONING

“But as we are speaking about the harmonic development of the physical body, of man’s machine, every “dispute” in us must lead to development, that is, to the acquisition of a new, non-habitual functioning of that machine. We know that in it are five main centers: thinking center, formative apparatus, emotional center, moving and sex. The one-sided development of any one of them leads to hyper-atrophy, the type of a one-centered man. There will be five such main types. But if all five centers are developed in one man, he “locks up” within himself the pentagram by the fact that he brings his life and the work of all five centers into harmonic correspondence. By manifesting according to law and living harmoniously he represents the finished physical type of modern man. He is the type of the synthesis of five in one.
He is one, and at the same time five, for he can live just like one of the five and like all together. He is a six pointed star, and by becoming the possessor of this harmony and isolating himself in it from all outside influences, by locking himself up in an independent circle, in a life enclosed in himself, he is the personal realization of “Solomon’s Seal.”

~ George Gurdjieff “Gurdjieff’s Early Talks 1914-1931”

**TWISTING THE KNIFE IN THE WOUND**

Much later, the suggestion was made [by Gurdjieff] to each of the six to relate, in front of all the others, a true account of the very worst action they had ever done in their lives, and I well recall how utterly painful it was to the doctor to make this confession. He was accustomed in his profession to imposing his will on others, and to maintaining the prestige that came from his knowledge that could prevent or lessen human suffering; and here he was being obliged to cast off this crown of convention which he had chosen to wear, and to show himself to his companions, not as he appeared in the eyes of others, on the heights, but in a humiliating light. And when at last, with a forced and pained expression on his face, he embarked on a confession of the worst deed of his lifetime, I felt that he was deliberately shirking the truth. He described the event in an abstract, impersonal fashion which made it anything but convincing, and one could sense the struggle between his desire to whitewash the action and his knowledge that it was impossible to deceive Gurdjieff; or even to deceive the rest of us, for by this time we had all begun to understand the hidden side of human nature. It was not hypocrisy, but more duality: the duality between the man of everyday and the man who is beginning to discover within himself the things of which he was never before conscious. He is ashamed of his worse actions, but so deeply are they hidden, so blind is his foolish pride, that he does not ac-
knowledge them as his own. Instead of accepting the experience as one that would help him forward along the Path, and instead of bearing his humiliation with stoicism, a man will try to conceal the truth in order to avoid pain and shame, and what he fondly believes will give his colleagues a false view of himself. This was how the doctor reacted in making his confession. Perhaps he was not big enough to make a truly sincere effort to attain the desired purpose—so he tripped over on his first attempt. We could only imagine what he was trying to conceal.

Gurdjieff, listening, said nothing, but fixed him with such a piercing look that it stopped the doctor in the middle of a word.

Then Gurdjieff said, twisting the knife in the wound, ‘Another time, doctor, you will be sincere, and recall these matters accurately. . . . Think it over.’

~ Anna Butkowsky “With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris”

REMEMBER YOURSELF AS TWO—
YOU AND YOUR BODY

He [Gurdjieff] said: “You have already too much knowledge. It will remain only theory unless you learn to understand not with mind but with heart and body. Now only your mind is awake: your heart and body are asleep. If you continue like this, soon your mind also will go to sleep, and you will never be able to think any new thoughts. You cannot awaken your own feelings, but you can awaken your body. If you can learn to master your body, you will begin to acquire Being.

“For this, you must look on your body as a servant. It must obey you. It is ignorant and lazy. You must teach it to work. If
it refuses to work, you must have no mercy on it. Remember yourself as two—you and your body. When you are master of your body, your feelings will obey you. At present nothing obeys you—not your body, nor your feelings, nor your thoughts. You cannot start with thoughts, because you cannot yet separate yourself from your thoughts.

“This Institute exists to help people to work on themselves. You can work as much or as little as you wish. People come here for various reasons, and they get what they come for. If it is only curiosity, then we arrange things to astonish them. If they come to get knowledge, we have many scientific experiments that will instruct them. But if they come to get Being, then they must do the work themselves. No one else can do the work for them, but it is also true that they cannot create the conditions for themselves. Therefore, we create conditions.”

~ JG Bennett “Witness”

SOMETIMES I MAKE JOKE

“Never pity money” was a piece of advice constantly given to the assembled company at the table. Mr. Gurdjieff used to tell us that every morning he would go round to “my café” in the Rue des Acacias, sit down and order a coffee. Although he had no money to pay for it, everyday someone came and saved him. Indeed by the end of the day, he would find his pockets, which had been empty in the morning, were cram-full of money. This he did not like to keep for himself, he said, so each night before going to bed, he would empty his pockets and throw what money he found there out of the window. One evening when I had been doing some shopping for him, I took him my purchases and some change. He took out a large roll of bank notes, added the ones I was returning and put the lot back in his pocket. Greatly daring, I said, “Oh Mr.
Gurdjieff, isn’t it time you threw all that out of the window?” He looked at me with an expression of utmost gravity and replied, “You know, Egout, sometimes I make joke.”

~ Rina Hands “Diary Madame Egout Pour Sweet”
Turning a bend in the path, where there was a big grey rock, I met Gurdjieff. Our meeting seemed inevitable, although I had never been in that part of the Forest before. Without any preliminaries, he began to talk about the energies that work in man.

“There is a certain energy that is necessary for work on oneself. No man can make efforts unless he has a supply of this energy. We can call it the Higher Emotional Energy. Everyone, by a natural process, makes a small amount of this energy every day. If rightly used, it enables man to achieve
much for his own self-perfecting. But he can only get to a certain point in this way. The real complete transformation of Being, that is indispensable for a man who wishes to fulfil the purpose of his existence, requires a very much greater concentration of Higher Emotional Energy than that which comes to him by nature.

“There are some people in the world, but they are very rare, who are connected to a Great Reservoir or Accumulator of this energy. This Reservoir has no limits. Those who can draw upon it can be a means of helping others. Suppose that a man needs a hundred units of this energy for his own transformation, but he only has ten units and cannot make more for himself. He is helpless. But with the help of someone who can draw upon the Great Accumulator, he can borrow ninety more. Then his work can be effective.”

~ JG Bennett “Witness”

YOU ARE OBLIGED TO HAVE A POSITION OF RESPONSIBILITY IN THE LINE OF YOUR BLOOD

“You know “Justice” is a big word—it is a big thing in the world. Objective things are not small things like microbes, they go according to law, as the law has accustomed them to go. Remember; as you sow, so you shall reap. Not only people reap, but also families and nations. It often happens that that which happens on earth comes from something which was done by a father or a grandfather. The results converge on you, the son or grandson; it is you who have to regulate them. This is not an injustice, it is a very great honor for you; it will be a means which will allow to regulate the past of your father, grandfather, great-grandfather. If misfortunes come to you in your youth, it means that someone brought them—for this you must reap. He is dead, it is another on earth who reaps. You must not look at yourself egotistically. You are a
link in the chain of your blood. Be proud of it, it is an honor to be this link. The more you are obliged to repair the past, the more you will have remorse of conscience. You will succeed in remembering all that which you have not done as you should in the past. Those things which you have done contrary to justice have mortified your grandfather. Thus you can have ten times more remorse of conscience and your worth will augment in proportion.

“You are not tail of a donkey. You have responsibilities, a family. All your family, past and future, depend on you. Your entire family depends on the way you repair the past. If you repair for everyone, it is good. If you do not repair for everyone, it is bad. You see your situation. Logically, do you see what justice is? Justice is not occupied with your little affairs, unredeemed pledges, it is occupied with big things. It is idiotic to believe God thinks of small things. It is the same with justice. Justice does not touch all that, and at the same time, nothing is done on earth without it. Search for the reasons. You are obliged to have a position of responsibility in the line of your blood; you must work more to repair the past. It is difficult to understand all at once.”

~ George Gurdjieff “Paris/Wartime Meetings”

OBSERVING ONESELF...
BEGIN WITH SMALL THING

“A question was asked about observing oneself. Gurdjieff: ‘At first conditions for work must be prepared. At present you can only try to notice what you do, and gather material that will be useful for work. You cannot yet observe when your manifestations come from essence, and when they come from personality. You cannot tell while you are gathering material because man has only one attention, directed on what he is doing. His mind does not see his feelings or his
feelings his mind.’ He also spoke about being able, later on, to divide our attention into two or even three parts. But when someone asked how this could be done, he said, ‘You cannot do this yet. Later we will speak about it. People in general have no real attention. What they think is attention is only self-tensing. First you must strive to acquire attention. Correct self-observation is possible only after you have acquired a measure of attention. Begin with small things’.”

~ CS Nott “The Teachings of Gurdjieff - A Pupil’s Journey”
THEN HE FELL BACK DOWN TO CRAWL IN THE EARTH’S DUST AGAIN

“Mr. de Salzmann and I became good friends. He was a very original creature with big eyes and wonderful expressions. If he didn’t believe someone, he would pull the skin below one eye down with his forefinger as if to say, “You tell me, hah?”

One day he told me why he never smiled. He said that once Mr. Gurdjieff had picked him up and put him above the world where he could see everything as it really is. Then he fell back down to crawl in the earth’s dust again. From then on, he was unable to laugh. He yearned for that larger view until the end of his days.”

~ Louise Goepfert March “The Gurdjieff Years”
“After a moment, Gurdjieff added in a subdued voice, as if talking to himself, ‘One must know. One has to get off the soft divan and climb that mountain one has seen outside. But not everyone even sees the mountain . . . [then there] are the men who sit there on the divan, trying to teach others without themselves seeing the summit, the sacred heights, and then no one makes any progress. Yes! And how will you progress? Only by paying attention in every way to the most important thing, the one thing you have made an idol of. You have chosen it, and it satisfies you . . . whether it is studying the piano, the book you are writing, or love of your wife. To embrace all the subjects that interest you is impossible. All the time other things are pressing in on you from outside, and some of them are like a poison: they eat up your time, your body and soul . . . and at last one day there will be nothing left to eat up, and death is at hand’.”

~ Anna Butkowsky “With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris”

“Gives rise to a multitude of talk, rumors and tales

“It should be understood that every esoteric school which exists in the midst of ordinary life for a certain length of time gives rise to a multitude of talk, rumors and tales, many curious people who either cannot or dare not enter the school themselves make use of all kinds of stray information about it in order to form some idea of the school. Moreover, every school inevitably leaves in its trail a series of people who have not finished learning, who have begun but have left through weakness of character and lack of perseverance.
Such people serve as a rule as the source of information about schools. Thousands of the most incredible suppositions and tales usually exist about the methods of work, means of investigation, experiments and so on. Then, the people themselves who had been in contact with a school but had left, often begin after some time, to regret having left it, they feel remorseful and try to invent for themselves some means of continuing the same work as at school. But, quite naturally, they have no knowledge of the substance of this work and imitate only its outer form.”

~ George Gurdjieff “Gurdjieff’s Early Talks 1914-1931”

CONSCIENCE

Questioner: I lack an impulse for my work. I don’t succeed in approaching my work in a satisfactory manner unless I feel a certain urge which can only come to me from a clear realization of my present situation and my present nothingness. I have understood that very clearly. And that made me understand that I ought to have remorse of conscience for this nothingness. But I can’t go further than this statement. What can I do to have remorse of conscience?

Gurdjieff: That question carries with it seven aspects; not one, but seven. One I will tell: Every man when he comes into the world, comes here for certain reasons. There are causes; that is to say, outside forces have created him. These forces perhaps were not obliged to give you life. Are you glad to be alive? Is life worth something to you? Well then, if you are alive and glad of it, you should pay something in return. For example, I see your mother here. But for her, you would never have come into the world. It is to her that you owe your life. If you are glad to live, you must repay her. You are of age now, the time has come to settle your debts. One of the chief causes of your being alive is your
mother. It is because of her that you have your pleasures and that you have possibilities of developing yourself. One of the reasons, one of the aspects of your coming into this world, is, then, your mother. And I ask you, have you begun to pay your debts to her?

Questioner: No.

Gurdjieff: There are still six other aspects. But I speak to you of one aspect. Begin, then, by this first aspect: your mother. Repay her. Even if she is objectively bad, she is your mother. And how can you pay her? You should unify her life. But instead of that, what do you do? You make her life more difficult. You unnerve her, you irritate her. Unconsciously, remorse of conscience could flow from that. Take the year that has just passed, remember: often you have been very bad. You are merde. You have not fulfilled your obligations. If you have understood this, remorse can begin in you. This is but one aspect. I could explain to you six others, but forget them. Before knowing them, begin by this one. For the past two years how many times have you been bad, very bad, to her? Remember this and try to repair the past with your future in the present. It is a very difficult thing. If you forget, if you do not do it, it is your fault and doubly your fault; first you are to blame for the past; and you are a second time to blame for not repairing it today.

~ George Gurdjieff “Paris/Wartime Meetings”
HE WANTED ME TO BE MY "OWN MAN"

“The automatic assumption of most readers or people who know that I had a relationship with Gurdjieff [as a young boy and young man], is that I have some special knowledge or information that I, in my turn, have either the obligation or the need to pass on to them. This assumption may or may not be true — but whatever it is — there are a good many “holes” in it. People who meet me for the first time — this is a good enough example - more or less take it upon themselves to offer me Armagnac on the assumption that I automatically like Armagnac because that’s what Gurdjieff habitually drank. This is both inaccurate and presumptuous. I drink it once in a while, but I am an American and what I like to drink is whiskey. This is not a digression - it is an attempt to point out a misconception that many people fall into unconsciously: that Gurdjieff in some way cast his pupils or
students into what might be called his “mold”.

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

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

~ Fritz Peters “Balanced Man”
YOU HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGING

“Here Gurdjieff suddenly changed his manner of speaking, and looking, at me very directly he said: “You have the possibility of changing, but I must warn you that it will not be easy. You are still full of the ideal that you can do what you like. In spite of all your study of free will and determinism, you have not yet understood that so long as you remain in this place, you can do nothing at all. Within this sphere there is no freedom. Neither your knowledge nor all your activity will give you freedom. This is because you have no...” Gurdjieff found it difficult to express what he wanted in Turkish. He used the word varlik, which means roughly the quality of being present.”

~ JG Bennett “Witness”

G. IS, IN FACT, INDESCRIBABLE

“In September, after Paquet’s visit to the Prieuré, I wrote: G. [Gurdjieff] was horrified that you compared him to Plato. After my explanation, everyone (except Gurdjieff who indeed knows it better) appreciated how much truth there was in the comparison. Even so, everyone agreed it is impossible to compare him to anyone or anything. G. is, in fact, indescribable.”

~ Louise Goepfert March “The Gurdjieff Years”

IN THE EXPECTATION THAT WE, THE LISTENERS, WOULD TAKE IT UP AND ENLARGE ON IT

“From time to time it would happen that Gurdjieff would throw out some brief condensed statement in the expectation that
we, the listeners, would take it up and enlarge on it. Once, I recall, he did so with a nod in my direction which meant that I had to develop his suggested idea in its different aspects and in all its visible and invisible ramifications.”

~ Anna Butkowsky “With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris”
One day I was sitting alone with Gurdjieff and as we were talking, he began to speak about myself. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘you are feeling ashamed because you are making no progress—and the reason why you feel ashamed is because you’ve just been drinking coffee, which you love, and that makes you feel ready to embrace the whole world. Well, there’s some chance that something good will come out of your being ashamed... But then it’s very likely that your feeling of shame will pass very quickly.’

I listened to what he said and ventured to ask in a timid voice, ‘But how am I to escape from the problem? You know I’ve a pretty poor capacity for observing my own faults and shortcomings.’
Gurdjieff replied, ‘All the time you keep expecting some miracle to happen! Now,’ he went on, ‘I’ll tell you something. How is it that you know at certain times that you have your hat oh crooked? By instinct? That’s an empty word. Try to think constructively about what I’m asking you.’

Although I did not feel sure of my words, still I found myself answering, ‘It’s a feeling of being uncomfortable—a sensation that something on my head isn’t right. Or it’s that one feels accustomed to a completely different sensation when it is on right!’

‘You must understand the reason,’ Gurdjieff said, ‘for that feeling of discomfort. You must make tremendous efforts, even that you “jump over your head”—no less,’ he added with a sudden smile. ‘Jump! Jump! . . . Of course it’s true that when you jump, your head jumps too, just as much as you do. But still you must jump, higher, higher—till you drop. And it’s here that the miracle may happen: because in making all that effort you have accumulated a potential force which serves as a preparation for the miracle to be accomplished. Now, apply my example about the hat to your own character: somehow or other you know that you have to move that hat a little to the right and not to the left. You rectify a situation that was wrong, even if it’s only more or less. But already that’s something good. Do you understand?’

Humbly, in a low voice, I answered, ‘I do . . . perhaps . . . even if not all of it.’

‘Very well!’ Gurdjieff replied. ‘It was good that you added “perhaps”—not being sure of yourself. It’s good that you aren’t like those people who are dogmatic about everything they say, or are blinded because they are in love—or in situations like playing cards for heavy stakes, or betting at the races, or buying expensive paintings that are far beyond
their means. In those situations the emotional temperature is so high that one can’t judge clearly, and it can bring one to the edge of catastrophe.’

~ Anna Butkowsky “With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris”

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**MANY PEOPLE CLOSE TOGETHER – EMANATIONS ALL FUSE LIKE THE COLORS OF THE SPECTRUM**

There’s a paragraph in his [Gurdjieff’s] book about persons who in one state of being will give him their soul, and in another state of being, with their hate, drown him in a teaspoon of water. This love and hate which he arouses – there was, a thought I could not get accurately, to the effect that the force of the hate is directly proportionate to the time spent in proximity to him. (He explained this last part in the cab going to the cafe.) Proximity has to do with atmospheres of emanations brought close – like me here. He says, “I helpless. You three so close – your emanations keel (kill) me almost.” And that remark followed some of his previous talk in the room about emanations of people who are forced to live in close proximity. Their emanations merge and find corresponding emanations in those of others. Many people close together – emanations all fuse like the colors of the spectrum and corresponding emanations find each other and mix.

~ “Gurdjieff and the Women of the Rope”

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**HE WAS NOT SURROUNDED BY A HALO**

I MET AND talked to Georges Gurdjieff for the first time in 1924, on a Saturday afternoon in June, at the Chateau du Prieure in Fontainebleau — Avon, France. Although the rea-
sons for my being there were not very clear in my mind — I was eleven at the time — my memory of that meeting is still brilliantly clear.

It was a bright, sunny day. Gurdjieff was sitting by a small marble-topped table, shaded by a striped umbrella, with his back to the chateau proper, facing a large expanse of formal lawns and flower beds. I had to sit on the terrace of the chateau, behind him, for some time before I was summoned to his side for an interview. I had, actually, seen him once before, in New York the previous winter, but I did not feel that I had “met” him. My only memory of that prior time was that I had been frightened of him: partly because of the way he looked at—or through—me, and partly because of his reputation. I had been told that he was at least a “prophet”—at most, something very close to the “second coming of Christ”.

Meeting any version of a “Christ” is an event, and this meeting was not one to which I looked forward. Facing the presence not only did not appeal to me—I dreaded it.

The actual meeting did not measure up to my fears. “Messiah” or not, he seemed to me a simple, straightforward man. He was not surrounded by a halo, and while his English was heavily accented, he spoke far more simply than the Bible had led me to expect. He made a vague gesture in my direction, told me to sit down, called for coffee, and then asked me why I was there. I was relieved to find that he seemed to be an ordinary human being, but I was troubled by the question. I felt sure that I was supposed to give him an important answer; that I should have some excellent reason. Having none, I told him the truth: That I was there because I had been brought there.

He then asked me why I wanted to be there, to study at his school. Once more I was only able to answer that it was all beyond my control—I had not been consulted, I had been, as
it were, transported to that place. I remember my strong impulse to lie to him, and my equally strong feeling that I could not lie to him. I felt sure that he knew the truth in advance. The only question that I answered less than honestly was when he asked me if I wanted to stay there and to study with him. I said that I did, which was not essentially true. I said it because I knew that it was expected of me. It seems to me, now, that any child would have answered as I did. Whatever the Prieure” might represent to adults (and the literal name of the school was “The Gurdjieff Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man”), I felt that I was experiencing the equivalent of being interviewed by the principal of a high school. Children went to school, and I subscribed to the general agreement that no child would tell his teacher-to-be that he did not want to go to school. The only thing that surprised me was that I was asked the question.

Gurdjieff then asked me two more questions: 1. What do you think life is? and 2. What do you want to know?

I answered the first question by saying: “I think life is something that is handed to you on a silver platter, and it is up to you (me) to do something with it.” This answer touched off a long discussion about the phrase “on a silver platter”, including a reference by Gurdjieff to the head of John the Baptist. I retreated—it felt like a retreat—and modified the phrase to the effect that life was a “gift”, and this seemed to please him.

The second question (What do you want to know?) was simpler to answer. My words were: “I want to know everything.”

Gurdjieff replied immediately: “You cannot know everything. Everything about what?”

I said: “Everything about man,” and then added: “In English I think it is called psychology or maybe philosophy.”
He sighed then, and after a short silence said: “You can stay. But your answer makes life difficult for me. I am the only one who teaches what you ask. You make more work for me.”

~ Fritz Peters “Boyhood With Gurdjieff”
EASTERN ART IS PRECISE, MATHEMATICAL

Question: Does this mean that all Western art has no significance?

Gurdjieff: I studied Western art after studying the ancient art of the East. To tell you the truth, I found nothing in the West to compare with Eastern art. Western art has much that is external, sometimes a great deal of philosophy; but Eastern art is precise, mathematical, without manipulations. It is a form of script.

~ George Gurdjieff “Views from the Real World”
“At first it was extremely difficult for me to ask Gurdjieff questions. On the one hand was timidity, a fear of saying something foolish, or being thought stupid, an inner inertia, and on the other the feeling that I did not know what to ask. This state of wishing to ask and not being able reached such a pitch that I suffered. One day I saw him coming down the track in the forest, driving the one-horse wagon. He stopped and watched what I was doing, then got down to adjust the harness. At that moment, making a tremendous effort, I said: ‘Mr Gurdjieff, what is it that makes it so difficult for me to speak to you, to ask you a question?’ He looked at me without saying anything, then took my arm, and it was as if a warm flow of electricity passed through me. Getting up on to the wagon, he signed to me to sit beside him, and drove on. For half an hour we drove about while he gave directions to various people, then he gave the reins to me, told me to take the horse to the stable, and went into the house. We had not exchanged a word. But from that time I had a different feeling towards him, and though it never became easy for me to ask him questions, my attitude became different, and I discovered that if I pondered a question and was able to formulate it clearly, sometimes the question was already answered.”

~ CS Nott “The Teachings of Gurdjieff - A Pupil’s Journey”

THE ROOM WAS CHARGED WITH HIS DYNAMO

He [Gurdjieff] telephoned at 6:00 p.m. to say he would come at 9:30 p.m. We all were so depleted that no one could hold herself in her chair. Nevertheless we read until 3:00 a.m., mostly Katie, as she is the best reader. The strain was unendurable. He watched us as never before and the room was
charged with his dynamo and our super-effort.

~ “Gurdjieff and the Women of the Rope”

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WITHOUT TROUBLE, CONFLICT, LIFE BECOME DEAD

The money that I had received amazed me. It was, literally, more money than I had ever had at one time in my life. But it also repelled me. I could not bring myself to do anything with it. It was not until a few days later, one evening when I had been summoned to bring coffee to Gurdjieff’s room, that the subject came up again. I had had no private, personal contact with him—in the sense of actually talking to him, for instance—since his return. That evening—he was alone—when I had served him his coffee, he asked me how I was getting along; how I felt. I blurted out my feelings about Miss Madison and about the money that I felt unable to spend.

He laughed at me and said cheerfully that there was no reason why I should not spend the money any way I chose. It was my money, and it was a reward for my activity of the past winter. I said I could not understand why I should have been rewarded for having been dilatory about my jobs and having created only trouble.

Gurdjieff laughed again and told me that I had much to learn.

“What you not understand,” he said, “is that not everyone can be troublemaker, like you. This important in life—is ingredient, like yeast for making bread. Without trouble, conflict, life become dead. People live in status-quo, live only by habit, automatically, and without conscience. You good for Miss Madison. You irritate Miss Madison all time—more than anyone else, which is why you get most reward. Without you, possibility for Miss Madison’s conscience fall asleep. This
money should really be reward from Miss Madison, not from me. You help keep Miss Madison alive.”

I understood the actual, serious sense in which he meant what he was saying, but I said that I felt sorry for Miss Madison, that it must have been a terrible experience for her when she saw us all receiving those rewards.

He shook his head at me, still laughing. “You not see or understand important thing that happen to Miss Madison when give money. How you feel at time? You feel pity for Miss Madison, no? All other people also feel pity for Miss Madison, too.”

I agreed that this was so.

“Think necessary talk all time, that learn through mind, through words. Not so. Many things can only learn with feeling, even from sensation. But because man talk all time —use only formulatory centre—people not understand this. What you not see other night in study-house is that Miss Madison have new experience for her. Is poor woman, people not like, people think she funny—they laugh at. But other night people not laugh. True, Miss Madison feel uncomfortable, feel embarrassed when I give money, feel shame perhaps. But when many people also feel for her sympathy, pity, compassion, even love, she understand this but not right away with mind. She feel, for first time in life, sympathy from many people. She not even know then that she feel this, but her life change; with you, I use you like example, last summer you hate Miss Madison. Now you not hate, you not think funny, you feel sorry. You even like Miss Madison. This good for her even if she not know right away—you will show; you cannot hide this from her, even if you wish, cannot hide. So she now have friend, when used to be enemy. This good thing which I do for Miss Madison. I not concerned she understand this now—someday she under stand and make
her feel warm in heart. This unusual experience—this warm feeling—for such personality as Miss Madison who not have charm, who not friendly in self. Someday, perhaps even soon, she have good feeling because many people feel sorry, feel compassion for her. Someday she even understand what I do and even like me for this. But this kind learning take long time.”

I understood him completely and was very moved by his words. But he had not finished.

“Also good thing for you in this,” he said “You young, only boy still, you not care about other people, care for self. I do this to Miss Madison and you think I do bad thing. You feel sorry, you not forget, you think I do bad thing to her. But now you understand not so. Also, good for you, because you feel about other person—you identify with Miss Madison, put self in her place, also regret what you do. Is necessary put self in place of other person if wish understand and help. This good for your conscience, this way is possibility for you learn not hate Miss Madison. All people same—stupid, blind, human. If I do bad thing, this make you learn love other people, not just self.”

~ Fritz Peters “Boyhood With Gurdjieff”