

CHAPTER 1

“ENTIRELY NEW PRINCIPLES”¹

How revolutionary was the teaching of Gurdjieff? Is his teaching appropriate and sufficient for contemporary man?

Our world of the internet, television, uncountable wars, inner city madness, zealots of left and right, crises in education, health care and the environment is different in hundreds of external ways from the world of which Gurdjieff was a part in the 1940s. It is difficult for older people, and nearly impossible for anyone less than fifty years old, to visualize a world without jet travel, intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear power, credit card economies, cellular phones, seven billion people on the earth, the exponential computerization of everything and the presence of 200 million plus, full color, instant-on, multi-channeled television sets. In the present age, there is the expectation of instant gratification; from instant travel and instant communications, to instant entertainment and promises of instant enlightenment. One result of these technological developments, is that we subjectively experience time as if it had accelerated greatly and, as a result, we might appropriately ask whether Gurdjieff’s teaching is resonant with this age of instant everything.

1 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales*, P v, “All written according to entirely new principles of logical reasoning”

TIMELINESS

The question of Gurdjieff's timeliness is one raised by many people of Work, as well as young people who are genuinely searching for a solid grounding in their spiritual pursuits. After all, a large number of teachers and spiritual leaders have appeared since Gurdjieff's death. Each of the Great Traditions has its representatives in motion world wide, speaking, organizing and leading groups. From Tibetan Tantric Buddhists, Indian Yogis, and Middle Eastern Sufis to aboriginal Shamans, Eastern Orthodox esotericists and a plethora of new-age spiritual leaders and apologists, the young and old have seen manifested a phenomenon which has never before occurred. It is as if the leaders of all the Great Traditions, in recognizing the immense hazard presently before humanity, have decided that it is essential to meet this hazard with every available resource, whether or not some of the practices and teachings had been traditionally considered esoteric.

With all of this multifaceted effort deriving from so many quarters, coupled with the broad and accelerating technological changes and scientific insights of the past fifty years, the question of the appropriateness and sufficiency of a teaching such as Gurdjieff's is quite real.

To raise this question with respect to the germination of each of the Great Traditions, it appears necessary to ask first about the appropriateness and sufficiency of the Great Traditions themselves. It has often been said that each of these primal teachings entered the life of man at a critical juncture, each of which was appropriate to meet specific needs in a specific time and initiate certain possibilities. The geographical, historical and cultural circumstances, and the existing religious forms, were the primary qualifiers of the *form* and *process* of each new spiritualizing impulse and served, simultaneously, as a vehicle of entry for the new impulse and as a powerful restraint or resistance to its total penetration. Thus, with each of the Great Traditions, we can readily identify prior rituals, language, customs, etc., which are interpenetrated by the new impulse (in the form of new teachings, different emphases and transformed rituals and organizations). The appropriateness of each new impulse² was measured by its balanced reconciliation of 1) the good and true of the old, that which had not been irreparably altered or diminished, 2) the particular historical, geographical and cultural circumstances, and 3) the new message, or body of truths and practices, introduced specifically and uniquely through the new spiritualizing impulse.

SUFFICIENCY

The matter of sufficiency raises a different order of question, for it must be sufficient to establish a germination which can grow and mature within an unpredictable yet hopeful future. In that growth and maturation process, the sufficiency is measured, in part, by the initiating energy or force. This force

2 Gurdjieff explores the appropriateness of new impulses in his discussions concerning the work of Ashiata Shiemash, the Buddha and King Konuzion among others.

must be potent enough to make possible the creation of a new body or vehicle (the *being* of the new impulse) and, in turn, that new body itself must be sufficient to perpetuate itself into an indeterminate future. Failing this (and Gurdjieff speaks of this kind of failure as a quite lawful process over time), its being will devolve to mere function (or external expression), which is a crystallizing process that results in fixed forms, rituals and rigid beliefs. At that point, the sufficiency of the new impulse will have been spent and the best that remains are the good customs, automatic habits and “good being-usages for automatic existence”³ to which Gurdjieff frequently refers. These good customs, etc., form an essential portion of the structural base for the next new impulse.

Using the two criteria of appropriateness and sufficiency, it is possible to look backward in time at the origins (as best they are known) of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam⁴ and to readily recognize the potency and reconciliation of each of the historical circumstances, the unique needs of that time and the spiritual architecture of the past. Within the potency of each, however, can also be recognized a great vulnerability at its time of initial entry. Each of these impulses emphasized and modeled the attainment of such potential human attributes as generosity, forgiveness, hope, gratitude, love, patience and compassion. All too rapidly, however, formalism, hierarchy and dogma began to invade the interstices of these genuinely higher potential attributes and a process of crystallization towards absolutes took place. As this occurred, the spontaneity, inner freedom and emphasis on objective personal responsibility and self-knowledge (which was at the core of most new impulses) underwent a downward transformation; a spiral into subjective rigidities, coalesced boundaries and fixed beliefs. Over centuries, each devolved to such a degree that every civil war presently in motion on our planet can be seen to have, within the subjective core of both antagonists, the coagulated remnants of these subjective rigidities. Each side claims it possesses inviolate rights, each is special by its own definition and each has its own god on its side. What characterizes these conflicts, most chillingly, is that they are passed on intact from generation to generation. The good customs and observances of religion, as well as the bigotry of a community, are passed on together. Each succeeds in creating “identity” and “belonging” at the expense of a greater relatedness.

By the opening of the 21st Century, this sorrowful situation has become a major factor contributing to the uniquely hazardous circumstances of our time. The extraordinary efforts currently being made by the carriers of each of the Great Traditions can be understood, in part, as efforts to re-infuse real being-values and customs into the life of humankind—a restatement, or representation of the core notions concerning the potential for true human inner freedom, objective responsibility and spontaneity.

3 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, p 656. See also pp 649, 653 and 961.

4 Other significant paths include Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Bahá'ism and Zoroastrianism.

All of these renewal efforts, however, suffer from a debilitating insufficiency and inappropriateness. In their devolved form, none of them has an appropriate structural form or unique potency specifically resonant with the present world wide circumstances. Those circumstances: the multiplicity of nation-states, the egoistically infused remnants of the Great Traditions and the marked decline in ordinary being-values would, even if they were the only factors contributing to the present circumstances, be more than sufficient to require a very great and new entry of a reconciling principle into our lives. They are not the only, or even the most powerful, factors and it is in this that the true dimension of *hazard* shows itself.

Spiritualizing ideas, taken at their highest level of meaning,⁵ are the *images-of-law* that have been the most powerful carriers of force in human history. The unitary concept of creation, the intrinsic value of all life and the inter-connectedness of everything existing are examples of such images-of-law. It is via these *images* that the highest capacity of the third brain⁶ is expressed. Every major positive change that has occurred in humankind's history entered in this way. The progressive descent of these compressed or imaged principles is given variation by the intellectual, emotional and physical brains and flows from there, via the body, into the time of the external world. This would apply equally to the mathematical formulations of Euclid, the conception of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, Bach's *Magnificat*, or the Egyptian temples at Karnak. Sadly, it also applies to the malevolent, egoistic conceptions of Hitler or Lenin. In its highest possible form, it is the vehicle of what Gurdjieff called "Objective Reason;" an image of the "Divine Idea" referred to in the Chapter "The Holy Planet Purgatory."⁷

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD — A NEW IMPULSE

During the past four centuries, one singular perspective on reality has been dominant above all others. The entry of the scientific method into Western Europe in the 16th Century represents the most powerful two-edged blade ever to enter the life of man. Science, in all of its branches and with all of its technological by-products, has transformed the physical world of man and all other life. It has opened multiple doors into man's inner worlds as well, bringing into question the underpinnings of each and all of the forms, values and functional manifestations of every spiritual teaching. How profound and far reaching the influence of science has been and will be, and even in the 21st Century, is only barely perceived. For the most part, humankind, individually and collectively, is still in a reactionary state characterized by denial, opposition, opportunism, redefinition or dismissiveness. Each of these reactions has failed to *digest the spiritualizing* potential of the scientific perspective.

5 *idea*: that which is conceived in the mind as a result of conscious thinking and/or creative imagination. *Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary*

6 In the author's *Man—A Three-Brained Being*, and in chapter 2 in this volume, a more detailed biological underpinning to the first brain (physical-material world), the second brain (self-other relationships) and the third brain (individual creative purpose) is explored.

7 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, pp 762-810.

If there is to be a reconciling impulse, appropriate to and sufficient for the present age in the life of humankind, it must contain a level of understanding and a potency that can incorporate scientific principles *and* all of the core values and purposes of the Great Traditions. Lacking this appropriate and sufficient *impulse of reconciliation*, the future of man and of all life, appears precarious and hazardous to a degree exponentially greater than in any known past epoch.

What science has brought, in its methods, its relative objectivity and its verifiability, is a treasure of infinite value. What humanity has learned concerning the laws that underpin our physical world is more than astonishing, it is a *seeing* that is the realization of one of the highest capacities; the ability to image cosmic or higher law in the physical world. With the progressive levels of seeing into the nature of physical law has come the application of that knowledge to all of humanity’s activities. We call this technology or applied science and, for our purposes in this chapter, it is most important to differentiate these functional applications from the *seeing* that leads to the primary ideas or images-of-law. The reason for this differentiation is obvious but of fundamental importance.

Of itself, the scientific perspective is in pursuit of *law*, such as the laws of physics and biological development as well as the laws that describe the emergence, behavior, results and resolutions of all forms of matter and energy. In that pursuit, there must be a pure, unmeasurable value and respect for *what is*. It is not at all inappropriate to say that a scientist, when really in pursuit, is in a state of devotion—enlivened by a singular purpose. To the degree that one is able to maintain an impartial and objective attitude toward the data and conditions, simultaneously with *value for* and *respect of*, one is assisted in the search for law.

Having this attitude does not guarantee success, but without it, one can never come to see nor to understand some aspect of law. Neither do the requirements for this state (while actually “doing science”) prevent the individual scientist, in his or her ordinary life, from falling into any of the egoistic states to which we are all vulnerable.

On the other hand, technology or applied science does not have the same arena of required states and attitudes.⁸ It applies what has already been imaged-in-law to whatever field it chooses. It is precisely in those processes of choosing, that man comes under the powerful influences of egoism, greed, vanity, false pride and master/slave views. All the malevolent, crystallized and rigid absolutes of the past find potential arenas of profit in this circumstance. From weapons of destruction to non-degradable plastics, from the entertainment/sports/television/video industry to cocaine, angel dust and legalized gambling; those in positions of power and those bent on preserving their beliefs and rights at all costs find a host of enablements that serve their aims.

8 Keith Buzzell, “The ‘True’ and the ‘Sorry’ Scientist,” *Perspectives*, chapter 8.

A Limitation?

While the scientific attitude has shown itself able to plumb very deeply into causal and material law, it has not shown an equivalent capacity (to date) to see into laws of *self-other* relationships, in particular as they concern personal–family–community–global human relationships. Historically, this has been an area strongly reserved and conditioned by the Great Traditions with their devolved religions and civil master/slave authorities. The laws of self-other relationships were derived from and defined by spiritual and civil authorities and, while during their origin and early growth they established many “good customs” and “good being-usages for automatic existence,”⁹ the passage of time and the destructive effects of wars, master/slave caste systems and man’s individual egoism, capped by the terrible misuses of science’s images-of-law, have brought us to our present near-cataclysmic circumstances.

In the past, we have explored at some length the notion that, while modern science was being birthed in 15th Century Italy, its underpinning insights with respect to time, motion and a three-dimensional perspective of reality (which together became the substrate of the scientific method) had the initial capacity or potential energy to diffuse beyond the external, material world and into the emotional or second-brain world of self-other relationships. This deeper entry, accompanied by the attributes previously noted (unqualified value and respect for *what is*, a devotion, singular purpose and an impartial, objective attitude), *could* have initiated a balanced, well-measured exploration of human self-other (personal–family–community–nation–planet) relationships built upon a progressive verification of the tentative conclusions resulting from such an exploration. However, that deeper action did not even begin to occur at that time and the reasons for that lack of penetration have continued to reverberate century by century to the present. Religious and civil authority, in both the Christian and Islamic worlds, reacted swiftly and violently to any implication that would diminish their absolute control over the emotional world of self-other relationships. Having in mind that a rigid, *two-dimensional* view of life characterized both great religious and civil centers of gravity of the time, it is no surprise that a formidable barrier to alternative points of view or perspectives was presented by both sides. For a thousand years, Islam held frozen anatomical, biological, mathematical studies and theocratic social forms. For a thousand years, Europe of the Middle Ages descended, after the fall of the Roman Empire, into human relationships typified by the feudal system and the dour prescriptions of good and evil by the Roman Catholic Church.

THE ENTRY OF THE THIRD DIMENSION

The initial diffusion of the *three-dimensional* perspective took place, fortunately, via the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, music). Its revolutionary, germinal potency established a firm foothold well before higher authority (both civil and religious) came to realize the full implications of the new perspective.

9 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, p 656.

When they did realize these implications, in the instances of Bruno and Galileo, the reaction was swift, harsh and sustained. Much of the civil and religious unrest of this period takes its origins from this barrier which was constructed to resist any change in how individuals or groups related to themselves or others. This powerful and essential self-other aspect of human life is a function which is imaged and expressed via the second brain. Until the time of the Renaissance (with one possible earlier exception), all self-other relationships derived their initial lawfulness from one of the Great Traditions or its forebears. With the Renaissance, this ultimate authoritarian perspective was brought into question; the results, as history documents, has been wars, civil wars, social upheavals and endless persecutions/counter persecutions.

Had the new perspective on the nature and lawfulness of the physical world really entered into man's second brain, a creative exploration into more appropriate and harmonious self-other relationships could have resulted. This pursuit of a more harmonious *new law* within the emotional life of man could be called the pursuit of *real conscience*. It would then have represented the entry of man's unique capacities into a realm 1) which had been causally explored, via mammalian evolution, for hundreds of millions of years and 2) which had been given an ordering of values via the Great Traditions or their forebears since the time of the earliest urban civilizations.

The results of this failure to actualize a truly three-dimensional perspective, into the inner world (the second brain) of man, are intertwined in large- and small-scale events extending through the past 500 years. As science has claimed preeminence in the so-called physical/material world with religion tenaciously holding on to its claim of preeminence in the spiritual world,¹⁰ a schizoid division of our *whole world* has resulted.

Visible – Invisible

One useful way of viewing what lies beneath this schizoid occurrence is to be seen in the division between the visible and the invisible worlds. Science, looking at the visible world of bodies and motions, began a process of abstraction or imaging that had as its aim a gradual entry into the non-visible world of law. A law, since it is non-concrete and not restricted to a single manifestation, requires, in essence, a never-ending series of verifications (hence perhaps it may be better called a theory or principle as it has been in the best of scientific writing). This circumstance requires a constant tentativeness of attitude as each new and untested application of the law (theory) is approached. As the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead said, “The progress of science consists in observing interconnections and in showing with a patient ingenuity that the events of this ever-shifting world are but examples of a few general relations, called laws. To see what is general in what is particular, and what is permanent in what is transitory, is the aim of scientific thought.”¹¹

10 Buzzell, see “Looisos: the Law and the Custom,” chapter 7 in *Perspectives*.

11 Alfred North Whitehead, *An Introduction to Mathematics* (Oxford University Press, 1959).

Only when the empirical data verify the law is there a confirmation. This confirmation, even in real science, restricts the applicability of the law to a *particular instance*.¹² This extraordinary sensitivity to all conditions, which forces a continual *refinement of observation*, is a fundamental touchstone of the scientific method. The abstracting process, the tentativeness, the repeated testing, verifying and revising is what makes possible a gradual, painstaking illumination of the invisible world.

In sharp contrast to this circumstance is the religious perspective which has come, through time, to a tightly hierarchal and codified system of rules and beliefs (such as obtained in 15th Century Europe). The invisible, in this circumstance, is a world whose laws can only be made clear by revelation (that is, ‘revealed from above’). It is assumed and held to as law that man cannot come to *truth* by his own efforts, even if that search appears to focus only on the material world. Religious authority has only slowly and begrudgingly (and in some quarters not at all) relinquished a portion of the invisible ground to the domain of science.

The simultaneously visible/invisible world (the world of feeling or what we have termed self-other) has become the most disputed aspect of man’s life, particularly in the past 150 years. From the earliest questionings that led over time into the fields of neurology, psychiatry and biological evolutionary theory, there has continued a fractious interface which shows few signs of change from within either science or religion.¹³

At the time of the Renaissance, however, the situation was at a much earlier stage. Denied direct and parallel access to the inner relational world of man, science underwent its astonishing growth and became an increasingly potent influence, essentially without a right measure of responsible discrimination in the world of self-other relationships (real conscience). The early resistance of civil and religious authorities quickly led to an implosion of perspectives within science; wherein, scientists themselves came to disclaim any application of its *method of enquiry* to the arena of self-other relationships. A careful reading of the writings of a number of early scientists (up to and including Leibnitz and Newton) does not support that artificial separation. However, repetition and dogged resistance, on both sides, eventually led to a crystallized acceptance of the material/spiritual schism.



12 One exception to this tentativeness could be with respect to the science of mechanics (the laws dealing with gross bodies and energies) a science which Gurdjieff utilizes as a consistent analog to man’s behaviors. These laws appear to be very fixed, but even here, the slight error in the predicted orbital path of the planet Mercury (by the laws of mechanics) represents a linkage into the world of Einsteinian relativity.

13 One important exception to this general statement is the continued pursuit of a convergence of science and spirituality by the present Dalai Lama, the leader of Tibetan Buddhism. See Recommended Reading—Reference.