

A NEW CONCEPTION OF GOD:  
FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON GURDJIEFF'S WHIM

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TO OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE  
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EVERYWHERE





From this viewpoint it is interesting to notice that Gurdjieff intentionally maintains some distance between his teaching and the “traditions,” or, speaking as the “traditionalists” do, the Tradition. We face here a strange paradox. On the one hand, he deeply respects the traditions, the religions, and even claims kinship with the Tradition. On the other hand, he is resolutely determined to be modern, as if for the world we live in, for contemporary humanity, the ultimate aim is to rejuvenate, to renew, to regenerate, to readapt, to reestablish a contact, an input of current—the important thing being above all, to obtain the light, the heat, the driving power which the current brings.<sup>I</sup>

*Michael Legris*

If Gurdjieff invented this cosmotheology, he was a prodigious genius. His power was in his quest and his determination to fulfill his mission. That he was not a trained thinker is quite clear from the unfinished state of so many of his speculations. Ouspensky was not far out in describing Gurdjieff’s system as ‘fragments of an unknown teaching’. Gurdjieff discovered, or perhaps more accurately was permitted to discover, some very important knowledge *with a profound bearing on the future of humanity*. We are now passing through a critical transition which demands that this knowledge must be made available to those who can use it, as an obligation that overrides personal considerations.<sup>II</sup>

*John Bennett*

Gurdjieff came to give us a New World, a new idea of God, of the purpose of life, of sex, of war. But who are ‘Us’? ‘Us’ are those who accept him and his teaching and help to carry out this work. This work of ours cannot be saved in our measure of time. Had it been possible it would have been ‘saved’ long ago by the prophets and teachers who have been sent. Those who look for the world to be saved by a single teacher in a given time are shirking their own responsibility. They wait in hope of a ‘second coming’ with no effort on their part—indulging in the disease of tomorrow.<sup>III</sup>

*C. Stanley Nott*

## Author's Preface

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It is our view that it is critically important for the future of mankind that a continuing effort be made to understand the depths of Gurdjieff's "new conception of God in the world." The historical concepts of God, extending back at least five thousand years, have always been primary determinants of the personal, social and political values of the time. They have contributed majorly to sexual and family values, beliefs and manifestations in every society on Earth, have been fundamentally involved in endless wars and persecutions and, conversely, have been the major sources supporting healing, compassion and inquiry into the nature of both our inner and our outer worlds. Viewed historically, they (the variable "concepts of God") have been the greatest positive and negative influences on the personal and social life of mankind.

A major shift in the predominant influence of these concepts entered the life of man with the gradual appearance, and the sudden expansion, of the secular and rational forms of inquiry which have become known, especially over the past five hundred years, as the "scientific perspective." The initial entry of this perspective into western Europe provoked a violent and sustained negative reaction, in particular by the Roman Catholic Church, against the emerging views of the natural world that ran counter to the previously accepted concept of God.

The emerging scientific views led, quite lawfully, to the secular, intellectual/emotional revolution that came to be called the “Enlightenment.” The state of great personal/societal tension continued, reaching a climax in the second half of the nineteenth century with the work of such figures as Faraday and Maxwell, Michaelson/Morley, Darwin, Roentgen, the Curies and Planck. With Einstein’s special theory of relativity and the emergence of quantum mechanics, a pinnacle of scientific inquiry was reached that had enormous impact on the social, political and religious life of Europe and America (which rapidly spread throughout the world).

The expansion of the scientific enterprise, and the explosive technological outflow from the knowledge acquired, marks the entire 20th century. The atomic and hydrogen bombs, jet planes, satellites, computers, internet—each and many other technological innovations have widened the gulf between the historical, religious concepts (Christian, Hebrew, Islamic) and the secular, scientifically-based views of man and the Universe.

Gurdjieff appeared at the apex of this tension between the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds of man—a gulf which contributed in essential ways to the outbreak of the World Wars of the past century.

What is ‘carried’ by the force of the Gurdjieff teaching in regard to this gulf of our ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds?

### THE CONCEPTION

A new conception of God in the world must truly be vast and all encompassing. It must encompass the what, how and why of everything from fundamental matter to the starry heavens; it must explain the appearance and roles of life and especially of human life; it must give form to all the mysteries confronting man and present resolutions to those mysteries. It must provide guidance and methodology for fulfilling the purposes and ‘laws’ of higher worlds. It must comfort, enliven, correct, guide, discipline and reward the individual and the collective.

For millennia, these spiritual concepts, initiated and given form by the Great Messengers, were, far and away, the predominant sources of the concept of God that held sway over the minds of mankind. That they did not include a deep penetration into the *mechanisms* of the material world is evident. At best, they were descriptive and classifying of types of structures (mountains, forests, rock formations, plants and animals), saying little about underlying, physical principles or laws that could be verified by experiment. The Great Messengers were powerful motivators of *behavior*, the source of the motivations being ‘spiritual’ influences that lay beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. How to reconcile this seemingly *unbreachable* gulf? This is the question which, we maintain, was Gurdjieff’s most fundamental aim to address.



## Gurdjieff's Vision

There are a great many aspects to Gurdjieff's new conception of God in the world. His vision stretches from the crystalline/elemental level of moons, the vibrant life-supporting matters and energies of Earth, the planetary world in all of its variance and the creative power of the solar world, and beyond these to the galactic and universal worlds that define the limits of our Universe. Each level is given appropriate prominence within the Trogoautoegocratic process ("I maintain myself through eating or nibbling")—the interlinking of forces that forms the evolutionary/involutional backbone of the Universe. It is our understanding that in his presentation on Time, the three Holy Forces, Okidanokh and the principles of Triamazikamno and Heptaparaparshinokh, Gurdjieff elaborated a perspective which is wholly consistent with modern science and, in particular, with quantum mechanical principles and relativity.<sup>1</sup> Within these multilayered presentations, lies an approach to reconciliation of the principles espoused by both the Great Traditions *and* modern science.

## Gurdjieff and Science

The presentations of the 'hydrogen' table<sup>2</sup> and digestive processes of food, air and impressions<sup>3</sup> are thoroughly scientific endeavors. Gurdjieff incorporated all of known scientific knowledge in his discussions of the digestive process of DO<sub>768</sub> to FA<sub>96</sub> of physical food and elaborated upon the equivalence of the digestive processes of air and impressions. In the chapter "Sensing and Feeling," we discuss the important initiating influences that appear at the levels of H<sub>96</sub> and H<sub>48</sub> and how these are related to our male/female heredity and our complete dependence on the energies which are initiated by 'mother' in our feeling life. These are thoroughly *scientific* findings, confirmed by a plethora of investigations. The fact that Gurdjieff blends (reconciles) the process of potential self-transformation with an appreciation of fundamental scientific 'knowledge' is an essential aspect of his new conception of God. It is important to note his emphasis on the fact that the utilization of Okidanokh (which is the fundamental energy underpinning the creation of the material Universe) is necessary for the coating of the Higher Bodies.<sup>4</sup> Here, Gurdjieff clearly links the energies of the material Universe with the processes involved in Conscience and Higher Reason.

Gurdjieff's emphasis on strengthening and separating the Attention is perhaps the most fundamental reconciliation of science and spirituality. There is no higher value in science than careful and repeated attention brought to observation of that form or process which has been focused upon. This focused, repeated and separated attention is given preeminence by Gurdjieff,

1 Buzzell, "Gurdjieff and the Quantum World" in *Reflections on Gurdjieff's Whim*, pp 236-51.

2 Ibid., "The 'hydrogens" in *Perspectives*, pp 113-49, and the foldout, "Attention and Work."

3 See G. I. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything/First Series, An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man, or Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, (Aurora: Two Rivers Press, 1993) pp 783-90, and Ouspensky, *In Search* pp 181-93.

4 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, p 1158.

although the most important but not exclusive focus for him was on the *inner* world of man. It is the power (or powers) of attention that is common to both perspectives, whether one is focused on the *outer* world of physical or biological processes, or on the inner world of sensation, feeling and thought. Inevitably, and lawfully, both *inner* and *outer* worlds share the same fundamental lawfulness of Heptaparaparshinokh and Triamazikamno.

What, then, is the difference between the *ordinary* knowledge resulting from scientific pursuits and the *extraordinary* knowledge revealed by Gurdjieff while making use of the same *attention*!

### Ordinary and Extraordinary

There are many ways to view the Six Descents of Beelzebub to Earth. One important perspective to keep in mind is that the descents are a process of *education*—of a grandfather teaching a favored grandson, educating him, perhaps, so that the grandson will not have to *repeat* the long and difficult journey that the grandfather went on to attain the degree of understanding he attained. In each of the descents, it is also notable that the knowledge shared by Beelzebub, specifically concerning the *three-brained beings*, is *ordinary* knowledge. There is nothing extraordinary or esoteric about the observations of Beelzebub in this regard. He shares observations and his own perspectives on the successive events. While his comments are very revealing about the behaviors and motivations of three-brained beings, we, the readers, have no difficulty following his presentation and being able to confirm for ourselves the appropriateness of his conclusions. His arguments, especially in the first three descents, are logical and rational, not mysterious or dependent on any ‘superhuman’ intelligence. This is what we mean when we refer to *ordinary* knowledge.

This is not to say that there is not *extraordinary* knowledge put forward in *Beelzebub’s Tales*. The presentations concerning Triamazikamno, Heptaparaparshinokh, Okidanokh, the actions of the Divine Attention, the Merciless Heropass, of Kesdjan and Higher Being-body and, particularly, the chapter “Purgatory,” all contain, in metaphorical and often in specific terms, *extraordinary* knowledge, and Hassein is directed, repeatedly, to pay particular attention to Beelzebub’s discussions.

Toward the latter part of *The Tales*, mention is made of the *possibility* that Hassein may find himself on the planet Earth having to interact with the three-brained beings. He is advised to be very careful and circumspect in his dealings, avoiding at all costs any comments or manifestations that could be interpreted as critical or negative toward the three-brained beings. Who, within this perspective, is Hassein? Is there an admonition intended for us, in our ordinary life interactions? If we are in pursuit of *extraordinary* knowledge, is it not important to ‘stay under the radar,’ to avoid calling attention to ourselves in such a way as to call down the judgment and negative manifestations that are so much a ‘natural’ part of the societal life of today? A difficult question!

The *extraordinary* knowledge contained in the Gurdjieff teaching becomes evident to one *only* with the practice of methods given by Gurdjieff. Here we are referring to the sensing exercises, the tasks, the moments during work on the Movements and Sacred Dances, when the *attention* suddenly broadens and incorporates new dimensions of the inner life; in moments when the attention is finely focused on self-observation; in the momentary struggles with automaticity and negativity which sometimes lead to experiences of remorse of Conscience; in the experiences appearing during a performance of the Gurdjieff/de Hartmann music when we enter a new dimension of the inner world, and in the extraordinary moments of deeper understanding that result from the struggle to comprehend a sentence, a paragraph or a chapter of *Beelzebub's Tales*. In each of these inner experiences, we may have momentary glimpses (*extraordinary* compared to our *ordinary* level of attention) of the incredible complexity, diversity, subtlety and lawfulness of our inner, psychological/spiritual world. It is *attention*, strengthened by effort and repetition, that makes these experiences of the inner world possible. But it is the same 'hydrogen' 12 level of powers (the Attention) that makes possible the study and gradual comprehension of the *inner* and *outer* worlds. In the application of these powers of attention, lies the ultimate reconciliation of science and spirituality.

To this point, we have not emphasized sufficiently the effort, the repeated wishing and willing, that is required in both outer (scientific) and inner (spiritual) quests. Because the inner quest lawfully requires an embracing of the feeling (relational) and thinking (lawfulness) worlds in addition to the sensory/motor world, the efforts required must involve all three brains and the Gurdjieff teaching provides methods (physical, emotional and intellectual) that engage all three. Gurdjieff's new conception of God incorporates *all* knowledge in its purview, constantly reconciling apparent opposites and contradictions — always seeking the perfecting and harmonizing of the physical, feeling and thinking life of man.

## OUR RESPONSIBILITY

The questioning, theorizing, experimenting and insights that have taken place in recent years in the biological and physical sciences have led to conclusions that have remarkable resonances with many aspects of the Gurdjieff teaching. Researchers in the physiologic processes taking place in the brain have brought investigators increasingly close to confronting the electromagnetic origin of images and of consciousness (Gurdjieff's higher 'hydrogens' 24 and 12). Experiments in particle physics are exploring the transmutation of energy into mass and the rich interactions of fundamental constituents of mass and the high energies present in the early Universe. These findings are wholly compatible with Gurdjieff's elaboration of the early Universe as found in the chapter "Purgatory." Examination of quantum mechanical processes has clarified to a considerable degree the paradox of potential states and actual events that results from the 'collapse' of the *timeless* state of potentiality.

Gurdjieff's view includes the particle-wave duality of quantum mechanics as well as the multi-dimensionality (of time and space) found in the state of potentiality.

Studies in the behavioral sciences have confirmed many aspects of man's three-brained nature and the density/complexity of his inner world. Language utilized by Gurdjieff has become thoroughly integrated into these disciplines such that the expressions "Work on oneself" and "self-observation" have become part of the common language of psychology and psychiatry.

Gurdjieff's exposition of hypnosis has also entered into the common understanding of the mental/emotional/physical world of man. His concept of Kundabuffer is a sophisticated and subtle presentation into the biological/evolutionary history of man, pointing clearly to the enormous weight-of-law which greatly qualifies and restricts man's relationship to his 'reality'. Modern psychological studies continue to validate the wisdom and understanding of *mechanism* put forward by Gurdjieff.

### Language

*Beelzebub's Tales* has often been called *impenetrable* and *impossibly complex*. The use of neologisms<sup>5</sup> is a major facet of this apparent difficulty. Why did he create so many new words and weave them into so many of the primary notions he presented? It is our sense of it that Gurdjieff elected to create this multitude of new words in order to provide a *new* beginning, a new language, by which the comprehension of a new conception of God would be more possible. In effect, he says that the language that has accumulated over many centuries (in particular the use of key words) has led to a veritable tower of Babel, in that meanings have mixed and accumulated local nuances that inevitably conflict and/or greatly alter and limit the communication of fundamental qualities and attributes. Legominism, "... one of the means existing there of transmitting from generation to generation information about certain events of long-past ages,"<sup>6</sup> was an additional means of communicating certain key notions. The neologisms provide a new basis for precise communication and thus prevent the extension of past misunderstandings and constructions of meaning.

It is true that, on initial exposure to his many new words, a special effort has to be made to differentiate the basic and nuanced meaning of these new expressions. Over time and with repeated personal inner experience of what Gurdjieff has encompassed by these neologisms, one begins to think, feel and sense the arena of meanings and significances that are intended. Bit by bit, *Beelzebub's Tales* becomes expressed in a new language, with breadth and specificities that 'ordinary' language lacks. This factor, combined with the metaphorical ("Podobnisirnian," *BT* p 738) method of presenting ideas and

5 "a newly coined term, word or phrase"—Wikipedia.

6 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, p 349.

principles, creates a monolithic ‘*Thousand and One Nights*’ which brilliantly reflects a new conception of God in the world.

### Outside of Ourselves

Essential to the new conception of God is an impartial, objective perspective on the inner world that must be developed in order to walk on the path of self-transformation. When examined closely, this perspective is a clear reconciliation of spiritual and scientific approaches and, when presented in the metaphorical figure of Beelzebub, studying man from a not-so-distant planet and from personal visits to man’s inner environment, creates a powerful image of the preparatory steps required in the effort to learn about one’s psychological/spiritual world. The simultaneous beneficence and impartiality of Beelzebub also creates a potent image of man’s difficult position, poised between the great weight-of-mechanical-law and the unavoidable suffering involved in creating new possibilities. Beelzebub emerges as the carrier of the means of reconciliation between these two lawful states. Our aim, in these two volumes of *Reflections*, has been to highlight in some detail the remarkable reconciliation of spiritual and scientific perspectives that Gurdjieff’s teaching accomplishes.




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PREFACE, PAGE iv ENDNOTES

I Legris, *Gurdjieff Essays*, P 172.

II Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, PP 265-66. (author’s italics)

III Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff*, P 224.