

GURDJIEFF AND HIGHER COSMIC ENERGIES

*'Real love is a cosmic force which goes through us,
but we have to make ourselves available.'*

G.I. Gurdjieff

Cosmic Energies and Influences

The scale of energies in the universe, and the complexity of their transformation and mutual exchange, is truly mind-boggling. From the smallest sub-atomic entities to the realms of immense galaxies and vast clouds of nebulae, there is an exchange of energies within and across every level and scale of existence. John G. Bennett, a student of Gurdjieff, marvels at the immensity and mystery of the universe and its coherent harmony:

The entire Creation is engaged in the transformation of energies and we may suppose that behind this transformation stands a Great Purpose that must be served. For the creation as a whole and for all its parts, this Purpose, of which the transcendental energy is the first, direct instrument, must be inexorable, to be achieved whatever may be the cost to all created worlds. It must immeasurably surpass all human understanding. We cannot conceive that the entire human race can count for anything in a Purpose so tremendous as to require the creation of a hundred billion galaxies and so prodigious in size and duration from subatomic particles that exist for a million millionth of a second to families of galaxies working out their destiny in thousands of millions of years. In this immensity, life – which occupies an intermediate position between the infinitesimal particles and the quasi-infinite totality – would have no meaning, if there were not some Power as great as the universe itself to mediate between life's puny strivings and the Inexorable Purpose behind the Whole. (1)

In the universe, energy of one quality can be transformed into energy of another quality, a process sometimes referred to as "the separation of the fine from the coarse." Traditional cosmologies assert that the material universe is the creation of Mind or Spirit descending and dividing into myriad material forms. In this great transformative process, the descent of Spirit (involution) proceeds from the non-material to the material level and involves many gradations of energy transformation between the different levels of the phenomenal universe. At the human level, a reverse process of evolution is possible in which the energy of consciousness can be developed and transmuted, and eventually return to the original source of Spirit.

The transformation of energy is a fundamental cosmological principle at all levels and scales of the universe. Human beings are "cosmic apparatuses" for this process. Vital energies and

cosmic influences surround us, and their proper use, assimilation and transformation are essential for our very existence, as well as for our spiritual growth and development:

It is probably true to say that the entire universe with its myriads of galaxies is a vast apparatus for the transformation of energy. The solar system, and with it our earth, is a very small apparatus in comparison with one galaxy; but it is huge compared with individual man. We human beings are enormous compared with atoms. Some of the most astonishing discoveries of the present century concern the unimaginable differences in scale as we pass from one level of existence to another. Throughout the whole range, the transformations of energy are a connecting link and a means of understanding. For example, almost all that we know about the universe outside our solar system concerns transformations of energy. The modern science of astrophysics is wholly based upon study of transformations of energy in stars and galaxies. It is only on the scale of our own existence that we can hope to learn about consciousness, being and will; we can observe only the manifestations produced by energy transformations. (2)

Most traditional cosmologies are rooted in the premise that all elements in the universe, from atoms to galaxies, are inter-related and engaged in the transformation of energies. From this perspective, it follows that the sun, moon, planets and stars exert influences on the earth. This suggests that there are different levels and degrees of cosmic influence in the universe, as well as purpose and intention. In *The New Religions*, professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman writes: "Without the study of the purposes served by the mind and senses, and without the study of the interlocking influences and intentions that make up the organic universe, there can be no holistic understanding of the universe. A non-hierarchical and non-psychological approach reveals only patterns, but not meaning."

According to Gurdjieff, humanity (both individually and collectively) is affected by solar, lunar, planetary and stellar influences. "Humanity, or more correctly, *organic life on earth*, is acted upon simultaneously by influences proceeding from various sources and different worlds: influences from the planets, influences from the moon, influences from the sun, influences from the stars. All these influences act simultaneously; one influence predominates at one moment, and another influences at another moment. And man has a certain possibility of making *a choice of influences*, of passing from one influence to another." He further asserted that these cosmic influences are not constant and can change over time.

Gurdjieff also claimed that the sun and planets were "living beings" possessing different ages and life spans, as well as possibilities of "development and transition to other planes of being." He also suggested that the intelligence of the sun is "divine." Gurdjieff's senior student P.D. Ouspensky, who had a background in mathematics and philosophical thought, agreed with Gurdjieff's assertion about the influence on humanity from distant formations of the universe:

When I thought of what had been said about wars, revolutions, migrations of peoples, and so on; when I pictured how masses of humanity could move under the control of planetary influences, I began to understand our fundamental mistake in determining the actions of an individual. We regard the actions of an individual as originating in himself. We do not imagine that the "masses" may consist of automatons obeying external stimuli and may move, not under the influence of the will, consciousness or inclination of individuals, but under the influence of external stimuli coming possibly from very far away. (3)

Gurdjieff described organic life on earth as a "transmitting station of forces," mediating between the earth, moon, sun and planets. Not only does organic life receive energy and influences from beyond the earth, it also radiates energy back to extraterrestrial bodies in a reciprocal process of exchange: "With the help of organic life each portion of the earth's surface occupying a given area sends every moment certain kinds of rays in the directions of the sun, the planets, and the moon. In connection with this, the sun needs one kind of radiations, the planets another kind, and the moon another. Everything that happens on earth creates radiations of this kind. And many things often *happen* just because certain kinds of radiation are required from a certain place on the earth's surface." He further elaborated and emphasized the significance of this relationship:

Organic life forms something like a sensitive film which covers the whole of the earth's globe and takes in those influences coming from the planetary sphere which otherwise would not be able to reach the earth. The vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms are equally important for the earth in this respect. A field merely covered with grass takes in planetary influences of a definite kind and transmits them to the earth. The same field with a crowd of people on it will take in and transmit other influences. The population of Europe takes in one kind of planetary influences and transmits them to the earth. The population of Africa takes in planetary influences of another kind, and so on. Human society is a highly sensitive mass for the reception of planetary influences. Any accidental small tension in planetary spheres can be reflected for years in an increased animation in one or other spheres of human activity. Something accidental and very transient takes place in planetary space. This is immediately received by the human masses, and people begin to hate and kill one another, justifying their actions by some psychological or sociological theory. (4)

There is abundant empirical evidence from many scientific fields of study (ecology, biology, psychology, neurophysiology) confirming the concept of energies and influences emanating from the sun, moon and planets which affect organic life on earth. Many metaphysical teachings hold that these currents of cosmic energy are necessary for the spiritual development and perfecting of human beings. The concept of the transformation of energy throughout different levels of the universe is a cornerstone of Gurdjieff's cosmological teachings:

What Gurdjieff calls “objective science” uses the musical analogy to depict a universe composed of a chain of energies that stretches from the lowest octave to the highest: each energy is transformed as it rises or falls, taking on a coarser or finer nature according to its place in the scale. At each specific level, an energy corresponds to a degree of intelligence, and it is consciousness itself, fluctuating within a wide range of vibrations, that determines human experience. Gurdjieff does not speak only of energies capable of rising to new levels of intensity; he also affirms the reality of an absolute level of pure quality. From this source, energies descend to meet and interact with the energies we know. When the intermingling of the pure with the gross takes place, it can change the meaning of our actions and the influence they bear on the world. What we call ordinary life is played out within a field of energies whose limits are strictly circumscribed, and which, using the musical metaphor, rise and fall within a small number of scales. Thus the level of our awareness is low, our power of thought is limited, and these energies produce little vision, little purpose. This is an astonishing and radical notion: it implies that all energies, and consequently all human activities, can only rise up to a certain point on their own initiative . . . If, however, at the crucial moment, the energies that are in action can make contact with energies of a different order, a change of quality takes place. Intermingling with energies made finer by the intensity of their vibrations, consciousness rises to a higher transcendent scale; this in turn can lead to spiritual awakening – and eventually to absolute purity, to the sacred – for the sacred can also be understood in terms of energy, but of a quality our instruments are incapable of recording. (5)

One of the essential features of Gurdjieff’s cosmological teaching is the transformation of energy on both the macrocosmic (planetary) and microcosmic (human) levels. Human beings have the capacity to receive impressions and influences emanating from planet earth with an energy of ‘hydrogen 48’ in Gurdjieff’s schema. But the reception of higher-order energies is also possible, symbolized by ‘hydrogen 24’ (planetary), ‘hydrogen 12’ (solar) and ‘hydrogen 6’ (galactic). Through inner development and refinement, it is possible to receive and transform finer, subtler degrees of energy from these higher levels of the cosmic hierarchy: “Gurdjieff considered living bodies, and especially the human body, as instruments for the accumulation and development of energies. The human body, he taught, is uniquely designed to contain and foster the development on earth of a cosmically very high order of energy that no other creature on earth is capable of developing.” in *The Indestructible Question*, Jacob Needleman expresses this idea using the descending octave of Gurdjieff’s ‘Ray of Creation’ as a template:

For Gurdjieff, man’s role on earth, like that of all living beings, is a transformer of energy, principally the energy of the sun and planetary worlds. The diagram of the ‘ray of Creation’ depicts the place of the earth as a rung on a ladder of energies ascending and descending between the Absolute, through the starry world, our galaxy, the sun, the planets, the earth and the moon. This movement of energy, according to Gurdjieff, obeys the law of developing motion discovered

in very ancient times and which Gurdjieff terms the "law of seven." According to this law, every developing process passes through steps between a higher or finer quality of energy and a lower or coarser quality. This notion of a ladder of energies was more generally recognized in traditional teachings than it is today and was represented in the idea of a great chain of being stretching from inanimate objects up to the angelic spheres . . . The law of seven obtains everywhere and in everything and on all scales, macrocosmic and microcosmic. In the macrocosmic context, life on earth is understood by Gurdjieff as arising in the interval of the passage of energies between stellar and solar levels to the level of the planet earth. Organic life on earth functions in a manner somewhat comparable to a "transformer" which enables a relatively intense energy to be available to human beings at a gradient of intensity that corresponds to their needs and capacities. Organic life transforms the more intense energy of the sun, passing it to the earth, and is meant to function by transforming and emanating a specific quality of energy for both the earth and the moon and, in the reverse direction, for the sun itself and perhaps beyond. (6)

The human structure is a receiving and transmitting apparatus of energy and influences that is an image (microcosm) of the great universe (macrocosm). "There is a miniature ray of creation in each human being, and there is both the direction from highest down into manifestation, creation, and the return movement to the highest in us." Michel Conge, a French student of Gurdjieff, speaks to this correspondence in *Record of a Search*:

With each individual person, our centers are part of a cosmic structure and they are the means of transmission of a descending higher order. Our essence is born of the stars and is at the level of 'all suns.' From that level there is a transmission to our centers, which in turn creates our functions and our functions create forms. Contrary to what is generally accepted as fact, human beings have a cosmic origin and that origin descends into our functioning. Our centers receive the energy that needs to be transmitted through them. Through the centers we can receive this energy. If we could look at the stars and forgo our usual self-centered perspective of seeing them as separate from us, and instead see ourselves as an integral part of the whole structure, we would be more able to understand the purpose of our centers and of ourselves. This is the idea of incarnation: the ray of creation becomes embodied. It incarnates in our centers, and, as a result, the centers become a means of cosmic transmission. Without this global vision it is difficult to have a direction. The idea constitutes a point of reference that imparts orientation and direction to my search. The ultimate goal is to make oneself utterly receptive. For that, I must maintain virtual immobility, an inner quiet that would allow the energy to move through the centers. (7)

Human Transformation of Energy

Humanity is related to, and penetrated by, many types of cosmic influences and energies emanating from different levels of the universe. Every human being is a 'transforming station' for matter and energy, a function which serves the purposes of nature and proceeds without any intentional effort on the part of a person. Simply by existing, we receive, process and transmit energy through breathing, moving, sensing, and thinking. Although there are higher energies that can be assimilated, nature does not compel us to do so. However, humanity has a particular role to play in the whole scale of creation as a conscious transformer of energy. This function can be performed either unconsciously and passively, or with active intention. In the words of Gurdjieff's senior student Jeanne de Salzmann: "Forces from all worlds pass through me, from the lowest to the highest, the most pure. And I do not know it. I do not feel them. I do not serve them. For this to be possible, the barriers that separate me from my essential being must fall, and I have to become conscious of myself as a whole."

Man is a transformer. This term is very interesting, because just as in physics, a transformer runs with two currents, in two directions; man also inherently has two directions. The human transformer plays its role as part of this larger machine that is the universe. It has its place in relation to the need for transformation of the substances that are required through the action of the will of the Creator. And this transformer also has two currents, two directions; and many other things can happen beyond this simple role that has been allotted to us on Earth, a role we cannot escape and are obliged to play. There is also this other direction. I am an 'organization' that enables the transformation of substances, such that the possibility of evolution is built into the machine itself. I can gradually find and know states of being that are totally different from those I experience today, and I can reach true consciousness, that is, enter into the communion with the Divine that all religions call for and all spiritual teachings propose. (8)

The Ray of Creation describes a great descending cosmic process (involution) in which forms are born, grow and multiply according to certain laws, only to ultimately disintegrate through entropy. However, human beings have the possibility of moving against this current and returning to the Source (evolution) through a 'harmonious development' that enables a receptivity and alignment with the higher energies of the cosmos. "Man has been sown on Earth in order to transmit influences mechanically, in order to be a 'link' in the passage of energies. But man must evolve because, although the descending current is assured by his creation, only his conscious effort can allow an ascending current to appear. Without man's voluntary effort, there would not be any exchange. Consequently, man has two roles to fulfill, a mechanical one and a conscious one."

There are indeed different worlds, and we men and women live in worlds of totally different values and significance. On the whole, we tend to be aware only of the lower, coarser worlds, connected with physical, material pheno-

mena: whereas human beings by their very nature are intended to be a bridge between the spiritual and material worlds. This is our nature and destiny, unless we fail to realize in ourselves the potential for being a transforming system for energies, a transmitter of influences from one world to another – a means of transmitting influences that come from the higher world to the lower world in order that the lower should be spiritualized, as well as a means of refining the substances that come from the lower worlds in order that the higher should be nourished. Through humanity there should pass a twofold stream: a descending stream of influences from above and an ascending stream of substances refined from below, according to the principle of ‘separating the fine from the coarse.’ (9)

Human beings have the potential and capacity to access multiple levels of reality and transform the energies of these levels through the dual processes of involution and evolution: “We have been created in order to enable the Creator to overcome the unrelenting entropic descent of all forces. We serve a great purpose – to regenerate the fine energies that have been incarnated in the multiple human states of consciousness and being, thus enabling them to return to the Source.”

The domain of science is based on empirical facts resulting from objective measurement and verification, while the purview of spirituality is the perception of value, purpose and meaning. The scientific worldview does not recognize the importance of humanity as a bridge for the exchange of energies between earth and higher levels of existence: “Without humanity the earth cannot receive the energy from a higher level. Without the relationship with higher energy, life has no meaning. If some people work consciously, they assist the descent of this energy. Human beings are uniquely responsible for the establishment of cosmic harmony through their conscious participation in the exchange of energies from different levels of the cosmos.”

In his cosmological teachings, Gurdjieff attempted to show how an awakened consciousness can harmonize the two great energies of involution and evolution. Jacob Needleman applies Gurdjieff’s ideas to reconcile the scientific and spiritual worldviews in *An Unknown World*, a highly regarded exploration of the meaning of life on Earth: “The mystery of living things, animate beings, consisted in the inextricable harmonization of two opposing forces – *involution* away from the Source and *evolution* toward the Source. Under the invisible (to us) influence of the third energy a being lived its life consciously, the glow of life permeated its existence and was felt by a child looking at it in wonder, or by a man of science or a philosopher or a poet, artist, builder, yearning to understand.”

The Gurdjieff teaching showed that the wall between [empirical fact and spiritual intuition] existed only as perceived in the state of human consciousness that he called “waking sleep.” For awakened man, man as he was meant to be, there were two great movements of energy, one movement flowing down from the Source of the universe and another majestic movement flowing

and struggling back toward the Source, the proto-cosmic and pre-cosmic unity. Awakened man could lead and did lead a life in which a conscious third movement, energy or force harmonized and supported each of the others in the greater conscious life. In this conscious life of awakened man the *conscious third force* engendered a life above biology, a life both within and above the Earth. The third force of life existed always and everywhere, from the merest inhabitant of the subatomic world to the great dynamic movement of cosmic entities existing at vast levels of purpose beyond our imagining. This mysterious harmonic interdependence of the two movements of energy away from and toward the Source was the deep meaning of life itself, always and everywhere. And these two movements were given names that immediately broke down the wall between fact and value that separated scientific reality and conscious, intelligent purpose and meaning. The names were *evolution* and *involution*. (10)

Much of the work of self-development is based on the reception and circulation of energies. "In this work of self-knowledge, we try to allow the movement of certain energies to appear. Energies continuously circulate in us, but our habitual resistances to them get in the way. The attitude of a seeker can make us sensitive to the presence of these different energies, one finer than the next." In *This Fundamental Quest*, Gurdjieff's student Henriette Lannes emphasizes this sacred task of conscious inner work:

Fundamentally, you are a concentration of energies. To feel the manifestation of an energy in yourself is already to experience something more real. We are made of a large quantity of energies of different qualities. Today we cannot pretend that we contain them all. Every experience asks a certain energy of us. It takes energy to think, and to feel. When we try to collect our attention, when it returns to its source, then too we are making use of energy. You are beginning to awaken inwardly to the evolutionary and involutory movements of your energies. These two movements are the twin pillars of your being. When you return to a different experience of yourself, you feel more alive. You have a more real feeling and sensation of yourself. Yet we cannot work all the time. Little by little we discover our completely mechanical state, which is passive, which is the 'waking sleep' we incorrectly call life. There is another state, the state of inner work. It is much more active and conscious. (11)

The mechanical functioning of thinking, feeling, sensing, and perceiving acts as a barrier to accessing higher energies. Jeanne de Salzmann: "Beyond the forms of my continual thoughts and emotions there exists a very fine energy that allows me to know what I am in my essence. But to come to the emptiness in which this living energy can be felt is difficult. How to go toward awareness of this subtle energy, at each step seeing the traps of making it conform to some design or of limiting it by ascribing a known meaning?"

In order for a force from above to be absorbed and influence the heavier matter in me, there must be a new circuit, one with a higher intensity capable of electrifying the whole. This requires a current of purer feeling, free from my usual subjective emotions, an intense state of attention that can appear only when I sincerely see that I do not know that I really know *nothing*. When I recognize this and this state appears, my automatism slows down. I see the subjective circle within which my thoughts and feelings turn, and I see beyond it. I feel myself the center of a double movement: one movement of coming together which allows access to a purer force, and another of letting go in which this force can be absorbed. These two movements complement each other in the fluidity of life. There is a moment of greater stillness. Then, through my sensation, I perceive vibrations of another quality and penetrate a world of fine matter. This produces something like a magnetic field that reflects the energy needed for higher consciousness, bringing energy of a different order. (12)

Human Evolution and Purpose

Many esoteric teachings suggest that there is a hidden order and purpose behind the phenomenal world of appearances and events. According to John G. Bennett, human beings are a link between a higher world of universal archetypes and patterns and the everyday world of material existence. The pattern exists in the unmanifested level of reality which is invisible to our senses. But the pattern provides the physical world with a form or template which corresponds to the greater cosmic pattern. Human beings can act as intermediaries between the two worlds, allowing the higher energies and influences to manifest on earth. This function is alluded to in the Gospels: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Human beings are said to incarnate for the purpose of bringing elements of the spiritual world into the material world and, in a reverse process, restoring certain qualities of earthly existence to the spiritual sphere. Bennett: "For each of us there is a pattern of life which is our destiny. In the realization of this we fulfill the reason for our existence here on earth. To see this requires a certain kind of awareness. The direct perception of our pattern belongs to conscience and the unconditioned side of our nature. Rare people can produce extraordinary events in the world because they are endowed with pattern awareness."

In traditional cosmologies, nature, life, energy and matter are considered to have qualities of consciousness, purpose and intention. They assert that there are certain laws, principles and levels of intelligence beyond the scope of scientific study, but which are perceptible to the inner consciousness of spiritually developed human beings. Jacob Needleman: "We may speak of the evolution of man as the process by which human beings become able consciously and voluntarily to serve the purposes of higher, perhaps the highest, intentions in the universal world, intentions that create and maintain worlds upon worlds in the universal world."

The laws of biological evolution do not contradict the laws of consciousness. Rather, what needs to be seen is that a different level or world begins just where biological evolution leaves off. We may speak of outer evolution and inner evolution – the former obeying scientifically perceived and studied laws of nature and the Earth; and the latter an interior process of evolution in which other laws begin to operate, laws having to do with capacities and energies that are unknowable by ordinary sense perception and the instruments and technologies that are the extension of what we identify as the five senses. On Earth, inner evolution takes place uniquely in man and depends on elements uniquely defined by relationship which, grounded in the eternal, relates the self to itself – and thereby brings forward into human life, what the great teachings call the Self. And in order for this process of inner evolution to begin, what is required is the sustained activation of capacities not yet, if ever, measurable by the science of our era: capacities such as truly conscious attention; genuine freedom or creativity; objective conscience; the genuine force of will; and impartial love. (13)

In Gurdjieff's cosmological system, the universe consists of many different cosmoses which are interrelated and exist at different levels. A human being, in his schema, is also considered a cosmos with certain attributes and possibilities. Humanity is endowed with the potential of conscious development to a higher level of existence and being. But without this development, an individual remains at the same level as any other terrestrial animal, acting as a mechanism of the *unconscious* transformer and transmitter of energy for the many other parts of the earthly environment. Only with a *conscious* development can humanity serve a higher purpose:

All creation is a constant outflowing from the Source, facilitating the activity of the creative urge in and through all the existing things and ending in finding the Path of Return to the Source. The Life Energy coming from Above forever enriches Itself by experiencing the lives of the myriads of functioning organisms it has brought forth. When man fails to become conscious of himself as one of these forms through which act many cosmic energies and objective laws, and tries to live entirely within the framework of his own subjectivity, then he alienates himself from the true order of things and lives only in the delight of his self-made dreams, of his imagination, and of fantasy. Man's physical, somatic, organic, planetary body is equipped to handle the things and events of the external world only, whereas his "psyche," including the mind, is fully equipped to receive higher spiritual knowledge from Above. (14)

Humanity has a sacred task to fulfill – aiding the circulation and transformation of energies and substances through the processes of involution and evolution: "There are currents of energy that pass from one cosmic level to another. In certain passages the flow is only possible if organisms are placed there. In the downward direction of involution, the movement happens by itself. In the upward direction of evolution, it will not happen unless there are men and women who become aware of their condition as seeds and acknowledge that they are placed

there to enable the energies to return and thereby receive a new possibility. If I enable this return of energies, I am transformed.”

Evolution is a movement of substances in transformation. This is something that must, one way or another, be accomplished. What is important is this inner circulation. In a sense, life is entrusted to us. Below the initial movement of the Absolute, the Absolute no longer intervenes, which means that responsible beings must appear. There is a need for beings who become aware of this and have such a love for Creation and the Creator, that no matter what trouble it causes them, they awaken to be the ones through whom this accomplishment takes place . . . This is the very purpose of evolution: a vast movement of maintenance – the law of reciprocal feeding. Either I am “eaten” by the lower levels, which is the fate of every sleeping man or woman, or I consent to serve as food for a more conscious level. The whole of life is feeding, exchange, transmission of substances, transmutation of substances. It is essential that I recognize that I am part of consciousness. Either you give yourself to something more conscious and you partake of that level of consciousness, or you let yourself go and you partake of a lesser consciousness. (15)

Humanity is the apparatus or bridge for the exchange of energies between the Earth and higher levels of existence: “Without man, the Earth cannot receive the energy from a higher level. If some people work consciously, they assist the descent of this energy. Human beings are especially responsible for the maintenance or re-establishment of cosmic harmony, and without their conscious participation there would be disorder in the universe.”

Man has a special function, which other creatures cannot fulfill. He can serve the Earth by becoming a bridge for certain higher energies. Without this the Earth cannot live properly. But man, as he is by nature, is not complete. In order to fulfill his proper function he needs to develop. The whole universe is made up of forces and energies. They have to be in relationship with one another. The Earth has its own level of energy; it needs human beings for the purposes of right relationship with other energies. This is what man is meant to serve. To be able to bring higher energy in contact with the earth, man must have a harmonious relationship – a right exchange – among his centers. Everything is in movement. The energies of our centers are in movement too, but not in harmony with each other. You need to learn how to work. Mind and body both have resistance. You need to understand that. You must ask repeatedly, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Why am I here?’ (16)

The transformation of higher energies is said to be a “sacred task” which serves both the needs and purposes of the cosmic plan or design, and an individual’s own inner development. In order to act as a proper conduit of higher cosmic energies, there must be a certain preparation and inner development on the part of the recipient. This ‘alchemical process’ entails a transformation of the lower human functions (thinking, feeling, sensing) and a

present-moment awareness through conscious attention. "This passage of attention enables the lower functions to obey the vision of the higher faculty of mind. Only in this awakened state is a person authentically 'master of themselves,' capable of great actions, great doing. That is to say, only a developed man or woman is capable of acting with true intelligence and effectiveness."

According to Gurdjieff, man is created to receive and elaborate energies of a specific quality through the development within himself of consciousness and being. This elaboration of conscious energies is needed by the earth and the moon as an essential element in their own evolutionary and involutory processes. Both cosmically and psycho-spiritually speaking, therefore, man is created as an *agent of transmission*. The parallel is more than metaphorical. In both cases, cosmically and socially, human beings are on earth in order to pass on a special energy in two directions – to nature and to other beings. Gurdjieff characterizes an "esoteric school" as a community which transmits truth following the same laws by which energies descend and ascend in the universe. It is thus not only ideas and rules of behavior, as such, which are meant to be transmitted by a school, but a certain quality of force comparable, perhaps, to what is termed *baraka* in Sufism, or the Holy Spirit in Christianity. This force has the power to act on the material level but in order to understand its action in the world of terrestrial nature, we must turn once again to the experiences as it is lived microcosmically. Here, the main point can be characterized as the need for an interior, individual struggle that allows a high force to be transmitted within oneself to the functions and impulses within the organism. The individual must allow the passage of the higher into his own lower nature before he is capable of being an agent of transmission on an external planetary scale. (17)

Opening to the higher energies of the cosmos brings about a reorientation and permanent life-altering change of attitude towards life itself. Jeanne de Salzmann: "When I come to unity in myself, I experience an energy or force of another sphere, which allows me to be born to my being as part of a great whole. I can serve this force by a new attitude towards it in all parts of myself, and then by a vision – ever renewed – of what I am, of the sense of my life in the life of the whole."

With consciousness, I see *what is*, and in the experience "I Am," I open to the divine, the infinite beyond space and time, the higher force that religions call God. My being is Being. To be one, whole in the face of life, is all that matters. So long as I remain conscious of this, I feel a life within me and a peace that nothing else can give. I am here, alive, and around me exists the entire universe. The life that is around me is in me. I feel the universal life, the force of the universe. And I feel myself existing as part of the world that surrounds me. Here everything helps, even the cushion on which I sit. I am present, awakened to what I am. And I see that the most important thing is

to be. I know it – now – and as I know it, I feel related to everything around me. There is no before, no after, only life itself. I have the impression of emerging from a dream. Everything is real. I feel free, and at peace. In this state I do not seek, I do not wish, I do not expect anything. There is only what “I Am” in this moment. I know now how I am here and why I am here. (18)

Receptivity and Opening to Higher Energies

The proper reception and assimilation of higher energies is not automatic, and requires a conscious intention and effort based on an understanding of the nature of the energies and the requirements needed for their optimal transformative power. Jacob Needleman: “The contact between levels for which man must be the active agent is necessary both for the evolution of his own inner nature and for his outer behavior and ‘emanation’ regarding terrestrial nature. It is a voluntary act of opening to a fine energy of consciousness of a more universal nature, permitting this conscious energy to enter into the lower level of terrestrial nature. The earth needs man’s understanding as a cosmic event in its own right, comparable to the reception by the earth of the light of the sun.”

The higher emotional and higher intellectual centers possess the capability of contacting higher levels of the universe. The two higher centers act as a conduit for a more subtle, pure energy that can pass into the lower human centers. “Special organs of perception, the higher parts of the centers, receive a direct impression of a finer energy, a more conscious perception beyond the functioning of the lower centers. It requires the formation of a kind of net or filter that maintains within its mesh a subtle cosmic substance.”

One of the primary conditions for the proper reception of higher energies and influences is the purification and transmutation of the ‘lower nature.’ Gurdjieff taught that only such a re-ordering and harmonization of the human functions would allow a man or woman to fully participate in the joys and sorrows of the world and act as a conscious instrument of cosmic or ‘divine’ wisdom and love, a state he referred to as “impartial and objective love for all that exists.”

In order to properly receive and process higher cosmic influences there must be a balance between the lower centers – thinking, feeling and instinctive – as well as a conscious directed attention. These higher influences and energies come from above the level of ordinary life and descend into the body. The attention must be very watchful and turned toward this intense movement of energy as it descends into the body. Jeanne de Salzmann: “There is an energy that comes from a higher part of the mind, but we are not open to it. It is a conscious force. It needs to appear: to pass into our body, to act on us. Generally, it cannot do this because there is no relation between the mind and the body. When I am subject to the automatism, there is too great a difference in vibration between higher and lower. The attention, which is part of this force, needs to be developed.”

In the Gurdjieff Work, effort is sometimes defined as “a lower energy coming under higher influence.” This contact between lower and higher energies must be conscious rather than mechanical, free from habits, fears, likes and dislikes: “In the Work sense we can say that lower energy is the mechanical or passive and that the higher should be the active. For example, when we work against like and dislike, this is an affirmation of our higher nature, an attempt to make our lower nature passive instead of active.”

As human beings we are designed to be the meeting ground for higher and lower energies. If we are to develop, higher influences or energies must come into us and have an effect upon our lower nature. The fact that we can receive the higher at all is a miracle. This must be possible only because there is something within us that can recognize the higher. This “something” has been given to us as a gift – to recognize the higher, a representative of the Creator. A work effort is an effort to receive these higher influences, to be receptive, to be open to help from above. The great efforts of the work, such as non-identification, self-remembering, self-observation, are all efforts to make our lower nature passive to something higher. This higher is like light that can enter into our inner darkness, our ignorance of ourselves. This light of itself slowly brings about a change, a move toward development. To be receptive to higher influences, to this light or consciousness, our lower nature must be made passive. Our lower nature is rooted in the body and the mechanical functions of the body and in associative thoughts and feelings. (19)

In the process of spiritual development, the energy of consciousness is transmuted to a higher, more creative and unifying level. This transformation of lower energies to higher energies requires conscious intention and the realization of one’s own mechanicalness and lack of a permanent ‘I.’ The first step in this process is to enter a state of inner quiet and openness to the higher levels of reality. John G. Bennett:

If we practise quieting of the mind, the first thing we notice is that the sensitive screen of the mind is crowded with a stream of thoughts – chiefly in the form of words, verbal mental associations, a kind of inner conversation, sometimes accompanied by visual images of what has been going on in or around us. If we succeed in quieting it, images of a different kind enter the mind. These have a higher significance, and thus enable us to understand things that we could not notice or understand at all before. If one can come to a state of real stillness and there is a genuine problem to be solved, then the solution may appear spontaneously upon the screen of the sensitivity. When the sensitivity has been brought to a state where it is not encumbered with the sensations and associations that arise from the automatic level, then it is able to receive impressions of quite a different kind that do not seem to come from us at all, but appear to be unaccountable flashes of inspiration. Something enters that we did not and could not know. (20)

In order to be receptive to higher energies, it is necessary to create suitable conditions – a relaxation of body, feelings and mind. This produces a quiet, open state that acts as a receptacle for the subtle energies emanating from the higher levels of the cosmos. Michel Conge: “Feel this emptiness, taste it and you will finally discover that it is alive. In this emptiness resides the most real, but also the most subtle, aspects of your being – *true mind*, *real feeling*, and *conscious intelligence*. Open to silence, to the fertile reality of emptiness. Then go out into life and start seeing how you understand your functions, all your actions.”

The sitting exercise, deep relaxation, and the silence we find should allow us to make contact with very fine and much more conscious impressions only so that, afterward, we may descend once again into the life of manifestation with a new intelligence, an intelligence enlightened by this contact. The sitting exercise is not intended to produce any extraordinary state. Even though this may occur, that is not its purpose. The aim is to enable us to live an ordinary life consciously. Our ultimate task is, by the transformation of our being and the appearance of a Presence (as yet virtual), to allow higher forces to pass through us at last and to illumine the darkness of our lower nature. (21)

In many traditional spiritual teachings, certain inner exercises, meditations and rituals may be employed to enhance receptivity to the higher energies of the universe. These practices enable a connection to be made to these ‘divine energies’ through a state of open presence. In *The New Religions*, Jacob Needleman describes such a process: “In such esoteric traditions, a ritual is, among other things, a form of action patterned upon the way cosmic energies descend and rise in the play of creation. To the degree a man or woman participates, inwardly as well as outwardly, in this form of action they become a channel through which the energies of compassion flow to the world at large.”

Conscious human activities such as prayer, chanting, meditation, and sacred ritual can produce a specific psychic energy that can accumulate in the atmosphere above the places of inner work and spiritualization. Receptive individuals and groups can contact and assimilate this field of higher energy for their own process of transformation: “Without this relation with a higher energy, life has no real meaning. A certain current, a certain magnetism, needs to be created. The traditional ways all recognized and served this aim in a manner that corresponded to the development of people in a given place and period. Today we need to find again the contact with this energy.”

Each person has an ideal, an aspiration for something higher. It takes one form or another, but what matters is the call to this ideal, the call of one’s being. Listening to this call is the state of prayer. While in this state, a person produces an energy, a special emanation, which religious feeling alone can bring. These emanations concentrate in the atmosphere just above the place where they are produced. The air everywhere contains them. The question is how to enter into contact with these emanations. By our call we can create a connection, like a telegraph wire, which links us, and take in this material in

order to let it accumulate and crystallize in us. We then have the possibility to manifest its quality and help others understand – that is, to give it back. True prayer is establishing this contact and being nourished by it, nourished by this special material, which is called Grace. As an exercise for this, we breathe in air, thinking of Christ, or Buddha or Mohammed, and keep the active elements that have been accumulated. (22)

According to Jeanne de Salzmann, there must be a letting-go and conscious obedience to a higher order before a stable connection can be made to the subtle energies emanating from higher levels of the cosmos: “The highest energy, which gives birth to all others, is in me. The question is not to make it appear but to allow it to appear, to submit to its actions. The more I try, the more the way is restricted and nothing gets through. I must learn to submit voluntarily to its influence.”

A new dimension of being – a state of voluntary silence and stillness – creates a welcoming receptacle for cosmic energies: “All my energy is constantly called outside by thoughts and desires. When I see this useless expenditure, I feel the need for greater tranquility, for a state of stillness in which I awaken to a pure, free energy in me. This is, in fact, a spiritualization in which the spirit penetrates matter and transforms it.”

Today something is open that calls me towards a relation with the higher, but this does not come by itself. I feel I have to obey a higher energy, and authority, which I recognize as the whole authority because I am a particle of it. And I need to serve it in order not to lose my relation with it. There are two kinds of obedience. If I try to obey in my passive state, unconsciously, I lose myself and cannot serve. But if I come to a more active state, I can voluntarily obey in submitting. This requires a state of conscious passivity in which only the attention is active and the functions are intentionally maintained in a passive state. I have to silence all my usual activity, disengaging and quieting my thought, emotion and sensation. My attention, now voluntary, can then be turned toward knowing “what is” and what “I am.” Only a voluntary force can liberate me from the power of an involuntary force. All the parts of myself are related in a total attention that leaves nothing outside its look. In the act of being present, I voluntarily obey and submit, renouncing my own will and at the same time asserting a different will over the functions. (23)

The effect of higher energies and influences is dependent on the quality of the channel each individual creates through inner work and development. Each person is unique in this regard. “Higher forces are playing on us all the time, but the result in life depends on the kinds of channels we are, and from this point of view we differ from one another. We need to find our way to being truly ourselves as we were designed to be and truly give to life what is our essential and unique contribution to serve higher forces and levels of reality.”

Virtually all of the monotheistic religious teachings of the world originate from a profound spiritual experience or revelation in which the founder has an opening and contact with the higher, noumenal reality. All the great traditions speak of a descent of pure energy and a return to the Source of all life. These higher truths were revealed to Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and others throughout history. In the words of the Prophet Mohammed: "Verily we are from God, and to Him we return." Although this primal Source transcends space and time, it is also the ever-present reality at the centre of our being. This experience is potentially available to every human being through inner work and conscious development, guided by a genuine teacher.

In her important essay "No Conscious Effort is Ever Lost," French writer and student of the Fourth Way Anne-Marie de Vilaine-Cambessédès, describes her experience of higher energy descending into her body and mind. It is an illuminating picture of the nature and effect of higher levels of reality entering a receptive and prepared 'vessel' and its powerful effect on her inner life:

One day, like a rain of gold showering over my head, shoulders and back, I was completely aglow, inundated by a grace both luminous and solid, which I received with surprise and wonder. The very density of the body had changed. Is this what it is to be "touched by grace?" To have come into contact with a higher energy? Each time that I breathe I am taken into the rhythm of a greater breath which entirely envelops me as an integral part of the cosmos. Imperceptibly, I find my balance, straightening or inclining forward or back, as if a magnetic force obliges me to hold myself erect in the field of its presence. The air circulates around me; I feel light; I hardly feel my weight on the ground. Not only do I recognize this energy above and around me; it seems to recognize me. Interaction. Exchange. "On earth as it is in Heaven." An intelligent but unintelligible presence envelops me. The humility of feeling so tiny in that infinite space, governed by laws I do not know. The serenity of accepting this smallness, this unknowing. The gratitude for being able to be conscious of it. I do not need to name or understand it in order to recognize it. On the contrary, not limiting it, not enclosing it in a definition, allows me to approach it with a great inner freedom, a state of mind not unlike the floating attention of one who begins to listen to the unconscious. I perceive first and think later, and this thought is sometimes wordless. It feels more vast or freer than words. (24)

Such experiences are contingent on the development of consciousness and being through an authentic spiritual teaching. Through inner development, the creation of an open, voluntary attention and the practice of self-remembering, the limitations of our conditioned personality can be overcome and a connection with the higher energies of the cosmos established.

Ravi Ravindra, a student of Jeanne de Salzmann, succinctly describes this inner work in his recollections of many years of work with her: "Sacred work is necessary in order to be able to receive energy from above for the maintenance of the cosmos, both on the scale of an

individual human being and on the larger scale. But it is constantly threatened by the forces of forgetfulness, inertia, fear and self-importance. A repeated return to a collected state of self-remembering, a recovery of the connection with the Real, is needed in order to fulfill the true purpose of one's incarnation on the Earth." The ultimate question, for all serious seekers of truth, is "How do we play our part in fulfilling our destiny and unique human function in the cosmos?"

References

- (1) J.G. Bennett *Energies: Material, Vital, Cosmic* (Gloucestershire, England: Coombe Springs Press, 1975), pp. 140-141.
- (2) J.G. Bennett *Energies: Material, Vital, Cosmic* (Gloucestershire, England: Coombe Springs Press, 1975), pp. 111-112.
- (3) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 115.
- (4) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 138.
- (5) Peter Brook "The Sacred Dimension" in Jacob Needleman (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), pp. 12-14.
- (6) Jacob Needleman *The Indestructible Question* (New York: Arkana, 1994), pp. 153-154.
- (7) Richard Guillon *Record of a Search: Working with Michel Conge in France* (Toronto: Traditional Studies Press, 2004), pp. 73-75.
- (8) Michel Conge *Inner Octaves* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions, 2013), p. 46.
- (9) J.G. Bennett *Radiations and Emanations* (Gloucestershire, England: Coombe Springs Press, 1971), pp. 4-5.
- (10) Jacob Needleman *The Unknown World* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2013), pp. 152-153.
- (11) Henriette Lannes *This Fundamental Quest* (San Francisco: Far West Institute, 2003), p. 139.
- (12) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 229-230.
- (13) Jacob Needleman *The Unknown World* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2013), pp. 132-133.
- (14) Nicolas Tereshchenko *Mister Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way* (Austin, Texas: Kesdjan Publishing, 2003), p. 146.
- (15) Michel Conge *Inner Octaves* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions, 2013), pp. 68-69.
- (16) Ravi Ravindra *Heart without Measure* (Halifax: Shaila Press, 1999), p. 24.
- (17) Jacob Needleman "Gurdjieff, or the Metaphysics of Energy" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 79-80.
- (18) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 192.
- (19) A.L. Staveley *Themes III* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1984), pp. 5-6.
- (20) J.G. Bennett *Energies: Material, Vital, Cosmic* (Gloucestershire, England: Coombe Springs Press, 1975), pp. 99-101.
- (21) Michel Conge *Inner Octaves* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions, 2013), p. 109.

- (22) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 198-199.
- (23) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 219.
- (24) Anne-Marie de Vilaine-Cambessédès "No Conscious Effort is Ever Lost" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 395-396.