

## HARMONIOUS AND BALANCED DEVELOPMENT

*'The first step of conscious evolution is balancing energies.  
The method begins with separating the energies of thought,  
feeling, sensation and then harmoniously blending them.'*

*G.I. Gurdjieff*

### Improper Functioning of the Lower Centers

In a normally developed human being each of the lower centers does the work for which it is best adapted and qualified. The intrusion of another center in this functioning or the use of the energy of another center for the same work is disruptive and ineffective. There are three main consequences of this misuse of the centers:

- The lower centers, and especially the emotional center, function at less than optimal speed and respond more slowly to life situations and circumstances.
- On the other hand, centers may waste energy through excessive expenditure of effort, overextending their capacities.
- One center may substitute for another and work at tasks they are not properly equipped to perform. The psychological result of this is an unbalanced state of mind, or neurosis.

A further consequence of the centers not working at their full capacity and potential is their inability to properly contact the higher centers. "If the emotional center was operating to the fullest it would become connected with the higher emotional center and if the intellectual center was operating correctly it, too, would become connected with the higher intellectual center. These connections require a match in vibrational levels between lower and higher centers. Permanent connections with the higher centers can, therefore, be forged only when the work of the lower centers has been regulated and quickened."

The wrong work of centers is the principal obstacle to inner development and our possible evolution to a higher state of being. When not functioning properly, they create a constellation of difficulties as we navigate through the many experiences and challenges of life. "Victimized by habits or haphazard reactions occurring in one center or another, we are momentarily taken over until a new stimulus evokes a new reaction, perhaps in a different center. Each one calls itself 'I' and takes charge in my name, making decisions and writing cheques for which all of me will have to pay."

Instead of consciously directed thinking, appropriate emotional responses and effective action, the improper working of centers leads to confusion, unpredictability, abortive efforts, misunderstandings, and avoidable errors. Or they can produce misplaced actions, poor decision-making and unintended consequences. For example, in a fit of pique the emotional

center may decide to take a drive in a car to “blow off steam,” which ends in an accident through lack of attention by the moving center.

Each of the centers is adept at certain activities, but often “it will steal” the work of other centers. The most common misappropriations are when the thinking center tries to feel, or the feeling center attempts to think, or the moving center seeks to think and feel. “Moving center working for the thinking center produces mechanical reading or listening, as when someone reads or listens to nothing but words and is utterly unconscious of what they are reading or hearing.” In *In Search of the Miraculous*, P.D. Ouspensky provides further examples of the misuse of the energy of centers:

The emotional center working for the thinking center brings unnecessary nervousness and hurry into situations where, on the contrary, calm judgment and deliberation are essential. The thinking center working for the emotional center brings deliberation into situations which require quick decisions and makes a man incapable of distinguishing the peculiarities and fine points of the position. Thought is too slow. It works out a certain plan of action and continues to follow it even though the circumstances have changed and a quite different course of action is necessary. Events that are quite different for the moving center and for the emotional center appear to be alike. The decisions of the two centers do not correspond. Similarly, we can imagine the interference of thought, the theoretical mind, in the domain of feeling, or of sensation, or of movement; in all three cases the interference of the mind leads to wholly undesirable results. The mind cannot understand shades of feeling. We shall see this clearly if we imagine one man reasoning about the emotions of another. He is not feeling anything himself so the feelings of another do not exist for him. *A full man does not understand a hungry one.*  
(1)

The lower centers can also expend great amounts of unnecessary energy on their own functioning, leading to inefficiency and even harm to the organism. This includes the expression of unpleasant emotions and sensations, worry, restlessness, haste, and a whole series of mechanical actions which are completely ineffective and useless. Ouspensky:

First of all there is the constant flow of thoughts in our mind, which we can neither stop nor control, and which take up an enormous amount of energy. Secondly there is the quite unnecessary constant tension of the muscles of our organism. The muscles are tense even when we are doing nothing. As soon as we start to do even a small and insignificant piece of work, a whole system of muscles necessary for the hardest and most strenuous work is immediately set in motion . . . Still further we can point to the habit of continually talking with anybody and about anything, or if there is no one else, with ourselves; the habit of indulging in fantasies, in daydreaming; the con-

tinual changes of mood, feelings, and emotions, and a number of quite useless things which a man considers himself obliged to feel, think, do, or say. (2)

Each of the lower centers has a positive and a negative expression. For instance, the intellectual center's proper role is creative thought and discovery, but it is also prone to day-dreaming and imagination. The aesthetic and interpersonal sensitivity of the emotional center can quickly become harsh criticism and irrational fear. The joy of coordinated movement and athletic excellence of the moving center can turn into muscular tension or needless fidgeting. In *The Heart of Philosophy*, Jacob Needleman captures this duality as it relates to certain human enterprises: "There is art that expresses ideas and values, and art that only satisfies the desire for stimulation; there is music that evokes the longing for truth and there is the music of sentiment and mechanical imitation; there is science that arises out of wonder and there is science that serves only material interests."

The instinctive center, which controls the inner physiological functioning of the body, is a marvel of adaptive intelligence. Its natural innate functioning is only disturbed by illness or injury. The moving center controls learned movements of the body, but has a tendency to interfere with the functioning of other centers:

The moving center, when it tries to take over the work of another center, produces its regularity, its power, its submissiveness, its talent for imitation, but it also brings with it its laziness, its inertia, and its inclination for what is habitual and automatic. Often it does the work of the intellectual center, or, still more often, continues (by inertia) work that the intellectual center had begun; in fact, the intellectual center, while carrying out some work which it has undertaken, often allows itself to be distracted by something that captures its attention – sometimes by some other useful work, more often by dreams and imagination; then the moving center takes on the work instead. This results, for example, in mechanical reading where we read or hear words and phrases without understanding their meaning. The attempts of the moving center to feel are perhaps less obvious, yet they also play a very important role; for example, they introduce mechanicalness and habits into human relationships, with all that this entails. (3)

The emotional center can affect other centers in a deleterious way. Negative emotions can impact the instinctive and moving centers (illness) and the intellectual center (compulsive thoughts). "The peculiar characteristic of negative emotions is that they go on and on by themselves, even creating fresh negative emotions, long after the cause is removed.":

When the emotional center works for another center, it brings with it its sensitivity, its speed, its intensity and above all an egocentric quality. When it works instead of the intellectual center, it produces nervousness, thoughtless and unnecessary haste, when measured judgment is appropriate. When it works instead of the moving center, it produces impulsiveness and a ten-

dency to be carried away rather than making the right movement. In the place of the instinctive center, it produces exaggerated effects and too much or too little activity. (4)

When the emotional center captures the thinking center, it distorts its legitimate function of “useful” mental activity directed towards a definite purpose. An example is daydreaming and the misuse of imagination:

Daydreaming does not pursue any aim, does not strive after any result. The motive for daydreaming always lies in the emotional or the moving center. The actual process is carried on by the thinking center . . . Daydreaming of disagreeable, morbid things is very characteristic of the unbalanced state of the human machine. After all, one can understand daydreaming of a pleasant kind and find logical justification for it. Daydreaming of an unpleasant character is an utter absurdity. And yet many people spend nine-tenths of their lives in just such painful daydreams about misfortune which may overtake them or their family, about illnesses they may contract or sufferings they may have to endure. Imagination and daydreaming are instances of the wrong work of the emotional and thinking centers. (5)

The intellectual center is rarely operating at optimum capacity and full potential. Often, it distorts the thinking process through disagreement, argument, fault finding and hair-splitting. “When the intellectual center takes over the work of another center, it produces endless discussion, equivocation, and inflexibility. It is not subtle enough to perceive the subtleties and nuances of a situation, still less to see how the situation progressively changes. Its interference ends up by producing inappropriate or faulty reactions, attitudes which are rigid, too generalized and often completely fixed.” In his influential book *The Master Game*, Robert de Ropp incisively documents this distortion of the thinking process in contemporary times:

The intellectual brain consists of a labelling or coding instrument that stores information in the form of words. Words are certainly handy devices; without them the inventive capacity of the brain would be severely curtailed. Moreover, the accumulation of knowledge and its transmission from generation to generation would not be possible without words. So the labelling device is very important and its products, the written word and the spoken word, make possible all those flexible interactions that distinguish human societies from the rigid instinct-dominated aggregations of social insects. But the labelling device is a very poor thinker. It is not really capable of thought at all. As a result we become tangled in a web of unreality, an elaborate tissue of illusions. We mistake the word for the thing, the map for the land it represents. We believe we know the truth when in fact we are merely juggling with verbal symbols. (6)

Our modern Western culture overvalues the intellect at the expense of other human faculties. The result is a lopsided version of reality which has led to many of the serious problems and challenges affecting our contemporary world. Jacob Needleman: "We have grown over-analytic, ceaselessly weighing consequences, commenting on alternative possibilities, evaluating past decisions. The intellect has been stimulated in a single direction rather than in a balanced way, and we are caught in the overwhelming din of its ceaseless chatter. The intellect can become constrained by categories and classifications, allowing no new lines of thought to develop. Only a new way of thinking that cuts through the mind's pre-occupation with its own inventions can liberate the suppressed action-seeking side of human nature."

The life of modern man – seen as though from outer space or from another dimension of time – appears as a huge being in whom the intellectual function has taken over the governance of life, and has failed to bring order and simplicity into life. On the contrary, by thrusting its solutions on the instinctual, physical, and feeling functions of the human organism, it has brought more complications and unhappiness into the life of man. The solution of specific external problems has been offset by the eruption of unprecedented confusion and anxiety in the inner life. We are incomplete because we do not have a balance of functions; we have only the isolated intellect as master. (7)

The sex center works with very fine energy ('hydrogen 12') and as a consequence its interactions with the other centers is complicated. The actions of the sex center are quicker and stronger than the other centers and, therefore, it "governs" them. Gurdjieff stressed the importance of the sex center in the balance and harmony of the human organism: "The role of the sex center in creating a general equilibrium and a permanent center of gravity can be very big. According to its energy, that is to say, if it uses its own energy, the sex center stands on a level with the higher emotional center. And all the other centers are subordinate to it."

The energy of the sex center is especially susceptible to either acting on, or being acted upon, by the other centers. The wrong work of the centers in relation to sex occurs in two different types of influence: the functioning of the sex center with energy borrowed from other centers and the functioning of other centers with energy borrowed from the sex center. The effect of other centers, especially the emotional and instinctive, on the sex center is one form of this influence:

In the sex center, either there is attraction accompanied by a pleasant impression or else there is nothing, indifference. On the ordinary level, it may appear to be otherwise; but observation shows that this is due to interference of the other centers which are constantly taking place at the lower level of the sex center – nowhere is the bad work of centers as habitual as in the sex center. The negativity attributed to sex impressions derives entirely, in fact, from the negative impressions belonging to the other centers, but transferred to the sex center. These interferences are pro-

duced especially by the negative parts of the emotional center and the instinctive center: certain sexual stimuli (ideas, recollections, actions) can thus provoke unpleasant emotions or sensations. Moreover, the ensuing repressions and refusals take the form of aberrations. (8)

When the sex center interferes with the other lower centers, it disrupts their normal functioning and produces effects which are harmful to both the individual and others who interact with them. When the relatively fine energy of the sex center ('hydrogen 12') works with the coarser energy of the thinking center ('hydrogen 48') it results in imagination and fantasies regarding sex. When working with the emotional center ('hydrogen 24') the outcome is usually sentimentality or, on the contrary, jealousy or cruelty:

The energy of the sex center in the work of the thinking, emotional, and moving centers can be recognized by a particular "taste," by a particular fervor, by a vehemence which the nature of the affair concerned does not call for. The thinking center writes books, but in making use of the energy of the sex center it does not simply occupy itself with philosophy, science, or politics – it is always fighting something, disputing, criticizing, creating new subjective theories. The emotional center preaches abstinence, asceticism, or the fear and horror of sin, hell and damnation, all of this with the energy of the sex center. Or it works with revolutions, robs, burns, kills, again with the same energy. The moving center occupies itself with sports, climbs mountains, wrestles, fights, fences, and so on. In all the instances of these three centers, when they work with the energy of the sex center, there is one general characteristic – a particular vehemence and, together with it, the *uselessness* of the behaviour in question. Neither the thinking, nor the emotional nor the moving center can ever create anything *useful* with the energy of the sex center. (9)

The outer social and cultural world is a reflection or mirror of our inner world. Conflict and chaos can reign both within and without. "Crime in all its forms occurs out there only because the same crime is occurring within ourselves." Through our inner disharmony we create the culture of "us and them," of "ally and enemy," which is the root cause of prejudice, social inequality, poverty, exploitation of the environment, and senseless wars and conflicts:

If there is hatred, violence, and disorder among human beings it is because there is violence and disorder among the parts of myself: thought inflicting its formulas upon the body, which has its own kind of mind; instinctual and sexual energy in turn fueling the impulses of the mental personality – breeding fear, possessiveness, aggression, cruelty; the energy of feeling blindly merging with ideals and intentions formed out of prejudice and the naïve reflexes of physical survival – loyalties, to family, tribe, nation, race, social class. This whole state of affairs in which one part of the self usurps, steals from the other parts, is covered over by theories, concepts, illusions – while

inside the organism the situation is maintained by conditioned habits of self-justification and physical tension. And, the name for this entire state of affairs? *Egoism*. (10)

## Importance of Balancing the Centers

In the prospectus for his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, Gurdjieff laid down the fundamental tenets of his system of spiritual development. One of the cornerstones of his teaching was the danger of an unbalanced approach to inner work and to our everyday life experience. "The modern person simply has no conception of how self-deceptive a life can be that is lived in only one part of oneself. The head, the emotions, and the body each have their own perceptions and actions, and each, in itself, can live only a semblance of human life."

Our psychic life (as we perceive the world and express our perception of it) is not a whole that acts as a repository for our perceptions and a source for our expressions. On the contrary, it is divided into three separate entities, which have almost nothing in common, being different in both their substance and their function. These three separate and quite distinct parts constitute the intellectual, emotional, and instinctive-moving life of man. Within each of us there is a logical man, an emotional man and a physical man. Each truly conscious impression and expression of a man must be the result of simultaneous and coordinated working of all three centers, each of which must take its part in the whole task. A complete apperception is possible only if all three centers work together. But because of the many and varied influences which disturb and affect modern man, the working of the centers is almost always unconnected, with the result that the three functions fail to complete and correct one another; they travel along different paths, they rarely meet, so moments of real consciousness are very few . . . If we observe the working of the centers, we shall see how contradictory they are, how divided, and it will be obvious that man cannot be master of himself because he himself cannot control the work of his centers.

(11)

Contemporary education and culture develop only certain sides of a human being to the detriment of other faculties, leading to a one-sided development, fragmentation and disharmony. Gurdjieff: "The mind wants something, the feelings do not want it; if the mind proves to be stronger than the feelings we obey the mind. If the two are equally opposed the result will be conflict. This is what is called free will in ordinary individuals; we are ruled now by the mind, now by the feelings, now by the body." For conscious understanding and proper development, the functions of the centers must be attuned and harmonized into a single, common aim:

Every conscious perception and every manifestation of a person should be the result of a coordinated working of the three centers, each of which should furnish its own share of associations and knowledge and experiences. In place of this, the working of these different centers is, nowadays, almost completely disconnected. For this reason, we are very rarely *conscious*. We are not one individual, but three distinct people that are not in harmony. The first thinks in total isolation from the rest; the second feels in the same way; and the third acts mechanically, according to long-established habits. If development were normal, the intellectual, emotional and instinctive-moving functions would form one single entity, in harmony with all the different sides of oneself. (12)

The actions of most people are driven by their ego, so they think, feel and sense from a subjective viewpoint. Only one function dominates at a time; they never work together as a whole. In our usual state, our thoughts, words and associations are passive and reflexive rather than being consciously directed and controlled. Emotions are at the mercy of projections and accidental shocks. And the energy of the body is blocked by inertia and unnecessary tension.

When the psychic centers are balanced, one center no longer has a predominance over the others. This opens up new avenues of perception and understanding: "The difference between knowledge and understanding becomes clear when we realize that *knowledge* may be a function of one center. Understanding, however, is the function of three centers. Thus the thinking apparatus may *know* something. But understanding appears only when one *feels* and *senses* what is connected with it."

The lack of balance between the centers prevents our full potential as human beings from being realized. For most people, each center responds to impressions in its own unique way based on memory and conditioning. But by themselves they are unable to perceive the fullness of reality, which contains level upon level of meaning. "For real understanding in the light of consciousness, the functions must all be attuned and united in a single movement of openness and availability. If there is any distance between them, the common aim is lost and the blind functions act according to their habits."

The lack of balance between the centers reinforces our subjective understanding of reality and prevents the actualization of our full potential. "By opening our ears and eyes, it is possible to develop an awareness of how relative our thoughts, feelings and perceptions really are. Experiencing their relativity is itself not relative. It is a step toward realizing how our subjectivity distorts our reception of data from the real world." In *Real Philosophy* Jacob Needleman speaks of our natural being, which emerges when seemingly opposites are reconciled in global awareness:

Our not being all that we can be is due to a lack of balance or a disproportion in our attributes. We are just like a mechanical device, a gear system for example, which does not function properly when the parts are out of adjustment.



Our thought veers towards the familiar and established, our feelings often feel stale, and our physical existence stressful. Chuang Tzu incorporates the idea of a habitual state of imbalance into his reflections on what is lacking in the human condition. For him, the natural state is harmony, in which opposites – good and bad, high and low, simple and complex, still and moving – are subtly blended. As soon as the mind attaches itself to a single element ('this is good'), so implicitly or explicitly rejecting the opposing one ('this is bad'), we lose our finely poised integrity. The greater our reliance on such partial judgment, the more isolated we become from our own nature and the more we allow ourselves to exploit the rest of the natural world. If, however, we cultivate an attitude of fundamental relaxation, in which opposing ideas can coexist, we allow our natural balance to reassert itself. 'Therefore, the sage harmonizes right with wrong and rests in the balance of nature. This is called taking both sides at once,' Chuang Tzu tells us. (13)

Each of the centers has a certain quality of energy and mode of functioning. They receive impressions, process the information, and respond from their own memory and point of view. The full comprehension of a situation and the correct response depends on the cooperation of the centers so that they complement one another. The intelligence of the body grasps one part of the information and processes it, the intelligence of the heart another part, and the intelligence of the head still another part. Together, they process *all* the information and supply the appropriate action congruent with the circumstance.

According to Gurdjieff, conscious inner work requires the simultaneous participation of the thinking, feeling, and moving functions in order to experience a state of *presence*. For this to happen, a "struggle" between the mechanical functioning of the centers and the positive aim of remaining present in the moment must occur. The quality of one's attention is the critical factor in balancing the centers. When this relationship is established, all three centers are engaged in the same goal – the creation of the sense of a living presence, of 'I am.' In *The Reality of Being*, Jeanne de Salzmänn acknowledges the difficulty of this essential task:

My attention is not in contact with myself, with *what is*. It does not have a quality of perception that can liberate, that can change my state. So I am passive. My body obeys nothing and my feeling is indifferent. My thought is traversed by ideas and images, and has no reason to free itself from them. In this passive state my centers are not related, they have no common direction. Yet I feel a need to be present. I see that when my thought is more voluntarily turned towards myself, a sensation appears – a sensation of myself. I experience it. I see that the intensity of one depends on the intensity of the other. And this calls forth a feeling for this relation. The three parts of me are engaged in the same aim, that is, to be present. (14)

The balancing of the centers cannot be forced. Rather, there must be a relaxing, a letting go in which attention is open and free. Jeanne de Salzmänn: "The need for an energy appears, an

attention that will stay free and not become fixed on anything. It is an attention that will contain everything and refuse nothing. It will be without possessiveness, without avidity, but always with a sincerity that comes from the need to remain free in order to know."

The confrontation between the need for unity and the mechanical dispersion of the energies of the centers creates a tension that provides a deeper and more sensitive attention:

The attention that leads to the moment of consciousness is the fire which brings about a blending of forces, a transformation. To become conscious simultaneously of both these movements requires a greater activity of my attention. The effort *awakens* it, awakens a force that was asleep. My attention is entirely mobilized, including at the same time the higher centers and the lower centers, the functioning of my whole Presence. This depends on a new feeling that appears, the feeling of *being*. Remembering oneself is above all remembering this other possibility, the search for a force in myself that is more active. I wish to know, I wish *to be*. (15)

In a meeting with his French students in 1943, Gurdjieff provided a simple exercise to illustrate how we can blend the three lower centers. Initially he spoke of this process in general terms: "Try to think with the help, with the participation of your feeling. When you are used to doing both, we can blend it with sensation. After that blending, you will be able to think with your three centers. This is the thinking of a real man." Then he gave specific instructions:

For example, a very good exercise is to take your handkerchief, wet it and put it on your right hand. You think with your head. The handkerchief gives you a sensation. So you already have sensation. Now, with your left hand you beat time. Your feeling will start to come into play. If you do this, your feeling will begin to develop. If you make a mistake, if you forget to do it, your feeling falls asleep. You have to wake it up. This exercise can awaken it: a wet handkerchief on the right hand and the left hand beating time. It is not difficult. (16)

## Integration, Transformation and Wholeness

All the elements of human nature must be developed and nurtured in order to reach a state of wholeness and unity. Jacob Needleman expresses this notion in religious terms in *Lost Christianity*: "The *soul* is the name for that force or principle within human nature that can bind together all the intellectual, emotional and instinctive aspects of the human being through a mediating relationship to the highest principle of order and mind in the universe. Therefore, as it is said, 'love nourishes the soul'."

Throughout the natural world, there is a balance between pairs of opposites ('yin' and 'yang' in Taoism), which creates a harmonizing or reconciling force mediating between active and

passive, matter and energy, lower and higher levels of reality. Balance is the proportion, the relationship between one part of the whole and another part. In Gurdjieff's cosmological teaching, this is expressed as the Law of Three.

Higher knowledge is not just the prerogative of the intellectual center – spiritual wisdom can be felt and sensed as well. Integrated responses to the continually changing circumstances of life require simultaneous action by mind, feelings and body. Each function has its own role in contributing to our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world:

We must understand that every normal psychic function is a means or an instrument of knowledge. With the help of the mind we see one aspect of things and events, with the help of the emotions another aspect, with the help of sensations a third aspect. The most complete knowledge of a given subject possible for us can only be obtained if we examine it simultaneously with our mind, feelings and sensations. Everyone who is striving after right knowledge must aim at the possibility of attaining such perception. In ordinary conditions we see the world through a crooked, uneven window. And even if we realize this, we cannot alter anything. This or that mode of perception depends on the work of the organism as a whole. All functions are interconnected and counterbalance one another. (17)

Whenever we perform an activity well, all three centers participate and contribute. We have the experience of doing something with a single mind and whole heart, working together in a fluid, adaptive body. The lawful result is both a sense of satisfaction and of joy. An apt analogy of a balance between the various centers is the harmonious interchanges between members of an orchestra, in which each musician, playing their own instrument, uniquely contributes to the whole ensemble performance.

In certain esoteric teachings the symbolism of numbers and geometric forms is employed to describe the harmonization of the centers of a human being, reflecting the degree of spiritual development. Duality (2) is represented by two parallel lines, the trinity (3) by a triangle, the quaternity (4) by the square, the number 5 by the pentagram, and the number 6 by the six-pointed star or Seal of Solomon. The final stages of this progressive development of consciousness is described by Gurdjieff in *In Search of the Miraculous*:

The development of the human machine and the enrichment of being begins with a new and unaccustomed functioning of the machine. We know that a man has five centers: the thinking, the emotional, the moving, the instinctive, and the sex. The predominant development of any one center at the expense of the others produces an extremely one-sided type of man, incapable of further development. But if a man brings the work of the five centers within him into harmonious accord, he then 'locks the pentagram within him' and becomes a finished type of the physically perfect man. The full and proper functioning of five centers brings them into union with the higher centers

which introduces the missing principle and puts man into direct and permanent connection with objective consciousness and objective knowledge. And then man becomes the *six-pointed star*, that is, by becoming locked within a circle of life independent and complete in itself, he become isolated from foreign influences or accidental shocks; he embodies the *Seal of Solomon*. (18)

The harmonious development which results from the balanced relationship between the centers leads to an increase of *being* and a greater integration with all aspects of life:

When impressions are received consciously, that is we are aware of them, the three forces are distributed properly and the three centers equally fed. Our first job is to restore the balance. In the world at present, all the high rewards are for doing and knowing. There are none for *being* and yet being is the result of doing and knowing properly applied. Before becoming highly developed we must become *ordinary* men and women, that is people who are harmoniously developed. The world at present calls only those successful who are unbalanced, with one center predominating. To be ordinary is a step toward becoming *normal*; for a normal person is one who is ready to meet every situation as a united being – thinking, feeling, and acting in unison and toward one purpose. (19)

Throughout the natural world, especially the plant, animal and human realms, everything that exists seeks to grow and develop. The cosmic duty of every human being is the conscious evolution of their inherent potentialities. When the psychic centers are balanced and fully participate in life, a stable foundation is established, and the activity of the centers can be directed toward a conscious aim – to help others achieve a higher level of being: “If we are to develop beyond the point to which physical evolution has naturally brought us, the work must be consciously done. Out of reason and thought, we must arise to conscious awareness. Out of our emotionally diverse and unstable wishes and reactions, we must develop will or continuous conscious effort. Out of our instinctive personality we must develop a real individuality.”

Our obligation and duty is the development of all three types of one’s potentialities. Every living being aims implicitly or explicitly to make the most of themselves. But they are usually limited to one or two of the possible fields and to the potentialities near the surface. Who will deny that that being who develops *all* types is truly superior? Among these potentialities are, in the intellectual center, an understanding of the aim and purpose of existence. In the emotional center, a sense of obligation to make this design prevail. In the body, the possibility of practical, disinterested action. In the absence of reaching these stages we have only words, but when these things are experienced, these things can be truly understood. (20)

If we could properly use each center as it was naturally designed to function, we would be more conscious, adaptable and effective in how we live our lives. The ability to then harmonize the centers into a coordinated response for a given situation is a prerequisite for genuine free will and the power to choose – the qualities of a ‘real I.’ Gurdjieff: “When all the centers have the same wish, this is what we call Will. Then we can say ‘I wish’ and ‘I can do’ with our whole being. It is the sensation of ‘I-am’.”

The goal of inner development is to achieve a quiet mind, a pure feeling and a relaxed body. In the words of William Segal, a long-time practitioner of the Work, “The highest state is a progression towards being present – which means a silence, inward and outward . . . One’s body has to be relaxed, not tense. There should be balance of the energies of the organism; the mind free of associations, the feelings quiet. A state of balance is essential.” When this harmonization and balance of the centers occurs, it provides a stable platform which allows access to higher states of consciousness:

There are several states or degrees of consciousness. The one we ordinarily live in has been called a state of sleep. Between this sleep and the highest degree of consciousness there are intermediate stages, and these we need to know. They are accessible to our observation; they depend on us. A person can try and come out of their dream and remember the meaning of their existence; they can try to be present to themselves, to be aware of what they are and of this ‘real I’ that lies within. It is a long apprenticeship. But when we open fully to what is in ourselves that needs our service, at that moment our functions are in tune with this wish: they change tempo, they harmonize. The thought is vigilant, the body lets go of its resistance and relaxes, and in the feeling, a joy arises which lends a warmth to support this mutual understanding. At that moment, there is unity; the true Master then makes its appearance. (21)

According to Gurdjieff, we can only *be* and *do* when we are in a “collected state” in which all our centers are attuned and engaged in the same direction: “What determines a collected state is that my thought does not wander. It does not leave my presence. My feeling also does not project itself. I am occupied with feeling ‘I am’.” In this conscious awareness of the whole of oneself there is the direct sensation of ‘I am.’ This is the aim of the Work, to come to the experience, which is unmistakable and undeniable, that “I exist, now in this moment.”

The ability to live in the present moment, the eternal now, is very much dependent on the balance between the energies of the three lower centers. Jeanne de Salzmann: “What does it mean to be present, to be here now? I have the sensation that I am present. I think it, I feel it, I embody it. There is a common direction, bringing the possibility of a conscious action in which the impulse comes from the three centers at the same time. I *know I exist* with all the parts of myself.”

## Serving a Higher Reality

Gurdjieff brought a comprehensive psychological and cosmological teaching to the West which has been called "the Fourth Way" or "the Work." It is adapted to the needs of the contemporary world and is predicated on a balanced development of the human functions of thinking, feeling and sensing. Jacob Needleman: "The levels of spiritual development possible for a human being are connected with a breathtaking vision of the levels of possible service that the developing individual is called on to render to humanity and to the universal source of creation itself. The proper relationship of the three centers is a necessary precondition for the reception and realization of what in the religions of the world has been variously termed the Holy Spirit, Atman, and the Buddha nature."

The Fourth Way path of inner development is practised in the midst of everyday life, and works with the mind, emotions and body simultaneously. The goal of 'the Work' is to prepare the ground for a higher force or energy to penetrate our being and create an inner unity among the centers. This spiritual energy originates from a higher level in the cosmos, but requires 'conscious labour and intentional suffering' on the part of the recipient to properly manifest. "A proper balance and equilibrium of the centers can be said to be an intermediate aim of the Work, so that what is above the centers altogether can have a possibility of embodiment for the sake of a more conscious world."

The possibility of consciously, and simultaneously, living in the 'head, heart and body' is the true measure of an awakened human being. "When we are present in the moment, we are available to a higher reality and can serve something greater than just ourselves."

A moment of balance between the centers is a moment of presence. It connects us to a higher level of being than the one on which we usually live. Jeanne de Salzman, to whom Gurdjieff entrusted the leadership of his teaching when he died in 1949, called it a science of being. She often said that the real purpose of human existence is to create "a link between two levels, to receive energy from a higher level in order to have an action on the level below. We have a function – becoming a bridge for certain higher energies." If it is true, as Gurdjieff and de Salzman say, that human beings are born to serve higher purposes, that we are sending/receiving stations in which energies of many levels meet or through which they pass, our primary task must be to avoid static or interference. But we usually live piecemeal, caught up in one or another center rather than operating as a unified whole. (22)

When the three centers are in balanced equilibrium, a new state of consciousness appears in which the attention is free. Such an open attention allows a contact with our higher centers. Unity and wholeness can only occur when the totality of our being participates in life. Then all our centers and functions are at the service of the one, indivisible life force.

In my usual state, my attention is not voluntary. It is of low quality, without power, and flows passively towards the outside. But this attention has the possibility of being transformed, of achieving a purer quality by maintaining a direction recognized as necessary. By the force of my attention actively turned inward, the movement of energy changes. Instead of going outside, it concentrates within until it forms the center of gravity of my Presence. My whole effort, my whole work, is to maintain a body so relaxed that the energy does not leave, a thinking turned toward myself so vigilant that its very presence sustains the stillness of my body, and a feeling of what is here, a feeling of "I." It is an effort of attention coming from all the parts of myself. The aim of my effort is to come to a certain unity. The different parts of my Presence must learn to work together in the same direction. I see that my vision and understanding, my intelligence, depend on this state of Presence. When I am attentive to this Presence, I feel its life, a mysterious life that relates me with every living thing in the world. My vision of myself is related to the whole. (23)

By achieving a state of inner quiet or tranquility through a free, open attention, our whole orientation to life changes, and we welcome a presence that animates each of the centers with an energy that connects us with our transcendental nature. Jeanne de Salzmänn:

The quality of the influences that reach me depends on the quality of my Presence and the relation of my thought, my feeling and my sensation. In order to be attuned to a more subtle force, the attention of each part needs to concentrate, to become charged with a new meaning and power to relax voluntarily. In this way the thinking purifies itself, as do the feeling and the sensation. Each plays its own role and functions in concert with the others with the same goal of being attuned with a more subtle Presence. This presence needs to shine, to animate my body. It has an intelligence, a vision that is like a light in the darkness and thickness of my sleep. It is the very essence of my Being . . . I am not prepared for this. A greater abandon, a greater magnetization toward my real "I," toward my "divine" nature, must take place. I feel the need for it, and I awaken to this wish, this life. I feel this intelligence awaken. (24)

A higher energy or intelligence is only possible when the centers are integrated and working in harmony: "To be able to bring higher energies in contact with the Earth, we must have a harmonious relationship – a right exchange – among the centers. The energies of our centers are in constant movement, but not in harmony with each other." The importance of inner work in developing a stable connection with the higher energies of the cosmos is highlighted in a conversation with Jeanne de Salzmänn shortly before her death, recorded in Ravi Ravindra's *Heart Without Measure*:

There are three forces – of the body, mind and feeling. Unless these are together, equally developed and harmonized, a steady connection cannot be

made with a higher force. Everything in the Work is a preparation for that connection. This is the aim of the Work. The higher energy wishes to but can not come down to the level of the body unless one works. Only by working can you fulfill your purpose and participate in the life of the cosmos. This is what can give meaning and significance to your life. Otherwise, you exist only for yourself, egotistically, and there is no meaning in your life. (25)

The harmonization of the lower centers and the subsequent connection with the higher centers is a crucial stage in the process of inner development and spiritual maturation. The ego no longer holds sway over our thinking, feeling and sensing functions, and there is a deeper presence and greater degree of consciousness in our interactions with others and the world. "As the intensity of presence rises, the matrix of our reactions and desires, the ego, gradually becomes elastic and transparent, and in the center of our automatic structure of behaviour a new space is formed in which a true individuality can arise."

Gurdjieff gave the name "self-remembering" to the central state of conscious attention in which the higher force which is available within the human structure makes contact with the functions of thought, feeling and body. The individual "remembers," as it were, who and what he or she really is and is meant to be, over and above his or her ordinary sense of identity. This conscious attention is not a function of the mind but is the active conscious force which all our functions of thought, feeling and movement can begin to obey as the "inner master." Consistent with the knowledge behind many contemplative traditions of the world, the practice of the Gurdjieff Work places its chief emphasis on preparing our inner world to receive this purer higher attention, which can open us to an inconceivably finer energy of love and understanding. (26)

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