

HUMAN CENTERS AND FUNCTIONS I

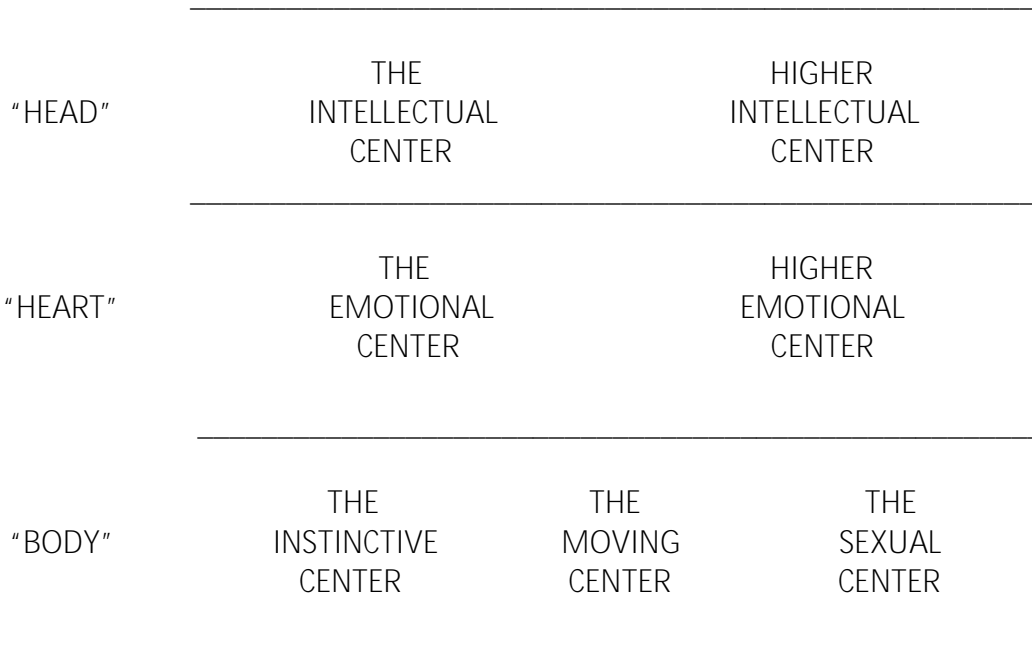
'The wolf must be satisfied and the sheep safe.'

G.I. Gurdjieff

G.I. Gurdjieff has proposed a model of the physiological and psychological structure of the human being that is both comprehensive and, to a certain extent, verifiable by personal observation and study. He described the human 'machine' as having three main levels or stories, metaphorically expressed as head, heart and body. Each level is characterized by a number of 'centers' or 'brains' which are the source of each of the major human functions – thinking, feeling, sensing, and so forth.

Centers and functions are not synonymous terms: the various organic and psychological functions of a human being are directed by corresponding centers which provide the basic vital energy appropriate for each function. "The functions are the expression in life of the centers, their manifestation; taken together they give each human being his or her own particular character. The functions are more accessible to us than the centers, so self-study must begin with them: they are our way of responding to life, and therefore we can observe them."

There are seven basic centers, each with its own unique functions and evolutionary purpose. The structure of the centers at each level is represented by the diagram below:



Qualities of the Centers

Although the centers are analogues of the spiritual dimension of the whole human organism, some of the centers are associated with specific areas of the body: the intellectual center with the cerebral hemispheres; the emotional center with the solar plexus and sympathetic nervous system; the moving center with the base of the spinal column and certain regions of the brain.

Each center has its own memory, habitual patterns and associations, as well as its own forms of imagination and daydreaming. Our behaviours are reflections of past experiences ingrained and conditioned in memory. For instance, the way in which we walk is a moving center activity which consists of a number of habits – walking at a certain speed with steps of a certain length. Our emotional life is also governed by memory and habits: “Many people find it very difficult to refrain from expressing their feelings about bad weather. It is still more difficult for people not to express unpleasant emotions when they feel that something or someone is violating what they conceive to be order or justice.”

A vital universal energy or force feeds and energizes the centers, which then passes into physical manifestation when activated by external impulses and influences:

The centres function with energy. When the centres don't function properly there is a displacement of energy. When I am in a conflicted state, for example, the emotional centre takes most of the energy and I am invaded by fear or grief. In other situations, the body is left to solve the problem. Since the body does not like compromises, it simply moves to avoid facing the issue, either with explosions of tears, or with laughter, sleep, hunger, forgetting. The flow of energy in each centre follows an undulating line: sometimes the energy of one centre increases, becomes more active, reaches its height, and then descends. Each centre has its own line. It would be more sensible for us to take advantage of an ascending movement of a given centre and, when the movement begins to descend, jump over to the ascending movement of another centre, and thus remain active. (1)

Each center receives information, processes it and decides on a response. “Information comes to us from outside: we receive, assemble, assess and compare it. This takes place by means of a double movement from the outside toward the inside, and from the inside toward the outside.” For example, the intellectual center gathers a certain amount of data from the external world, reflects on it, and then either *reacts* mechanically or *responds* consciously.

The centers work at different speeds. The slowest is the intellectual center, while the instinctive and moving centers work much faster. For example, when driving a car, the moving center is able to make a complicated series of perceptual and muscular adjustments to avoid a collision, even before the driver “has time to think.” The emotional center has two speeds. One corresponds to the mechanical part of this center and works at the same speed as the instinctive and moving centers. However, the intellectual part of the emotional center operates

at the same speed as the sex center and the higher emotional center. The higher intellectual center is even faster in its operation and seems almost timeless, as it is under laws of a world where there is no distinction between time and eternity.

The lower three – intellectual, emotional and moving-instinctive – are capable of forming a *triad* in which they can act as conductors of the three primal forces (affirming, denying and reconciling) of the Law of Three. “‘Yes’ is of the mind, ‘No’ is of the body, and the reconciling is the emotions. Body knows the *how* of things, mind knows the *what* of things; emotion plus mind and body, understand the *why* of things.”

Each center is not only an active manifesting energy, but also a ‘receiving apparatus’ for external influences. Gurdjieff suggested that these influences could be very distant, originating from a planetary or galactic level of the universe. His student, P.D. Ouspensky, expanded on this notion:

When I thought of what had been said of wars, revolutions, migrations of people, 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. (2)

Each center has the possibility of a higher quality of attention which optimizes the functioning of that center. For the intellectual center, the attention acquires a power of vision or illumination; the emotional center acquires a warmth and openness; on the level of the body there is a heightened sensation of oneself:

Sometimes when a problem or great difficulty comes up, my attention can be concentrated, condensed; its quality changes, it acquires more force, it is sustained by an element of desire or interest. No longer vagrant, it is captured. There is, however, a very different kind of attention, an attention that is more conscious, more voluntary. Sometimes, on rare occasions, I discover the taste of it. If this occurs in my thought, I see that my thinking becomes clear. And if this occurs in my feeling, I know the feeling of being completely free from my habitual emotions. As for my body, I can also experience in a new way what is happening at its level. (3)

The centers are not independent in their functioning, as their abilities overlap to some extent. “They influence one another, interfere with one another and may even, at times, seriously damage one another.” As well, the same behaviour can originate in two different centers. An example would be a novice primarily using their thinking center when learning a

complex task such as juggling, while an expert performs the same task with their moving center, which does it much more effectively. The functions of the centers vary in their operation and importance from person to person:

Attentive observation shows that the five functions on which our everyday life depends are constantly in action but at different degrees of activity; generally, we see that one of them is more active, dominates and leads the others, but this predominance often changes as a result of outer and inner events. There is nevertheless a habitual dominance by one of them, always the same one, according to the type of the individual. Despite our notion to the contrary and our belief in a degree of freedom within ourselves, correct observation also shows that our functionings are linked together. This dependence – in reality this connection – is evidently very different in each case. Sometimes the connection appears to be so close that it is difficult to separate the functions, owing to our conditioning, our ingrained habits, and our masks. Sometimes the relationship between different functions is so distant that they appear to be independent of each other and become part of the unconscious, apparently inaccessible to our direct observation.
(4)

Typically, one of the centers is dominant in a given individual and they tend to view reality through this particular prism. This helps to explain why different people react and manifest themselves differently in everything they do. Since each person sees life from their own perspective, misunderstandings, conflicts, quarrels and the like predictably arise.

The human types are defined by which center is dominant in a given individual. When one center predominates, it suggests that the other centers are underdeveloped. "Almost all great thinkers reach their pre-eminence at the expense of motor and emotional centers. We have grown accustomed to the artist with the mentality of a child; and to the athlete with neither mind nor heart." Those whose primary mode of experience is in the moving and instinctive centers are largely concerned with the health, wellbeing and activities of the physical body. Emotional types are focused on relationships, artistic and creative pursuits and helping others. The third type experiences the world through ideas and intellectual constructs.

The three archetypal human types are the athlete, the artist and the scholar. These types are also reflected in their corresponding bodies – muscular, visceral and cerebral. As well, each type has its own opposing manifestations: "Positive muscular dominant is physically active and energetic; negative is physically lazy. Emotional positive means optimistic; negative is the opposite – pessimistic. Positive intellectual is the constructive criticizer, the one who as a rule finds themselves in agreement with proposed statements; the negative is the destructive critic."

There are significant differences between individuals in terms of how they view reality and perceive their functions. For instance, a person may confuse their thoughts with feelings or

their feelings with sensations, leading to confusion. Gurdjieff: "If two people perceive the same thing differently, let us say that one perceives it through feeling and another through sensation – they may argue all their lives and never understand in what consists the difference of their attitude to a given object or subject. Actually, one sees one aspect of it, and the other a different aspect."

We take people to be much more alike than they really are. In reality, however, there exists between them great differences in the forms and methods of their perception. Some perceive chiefly through their mind, others through their feeling, and others through sensation. It is very difficult, almost impossible for men of different categories and of different modes of perception to understand one another, because they call one and the same thing by different names, and they call different things by the same name. Besides that, various other combinations are possible. One man perceives by thoughts and sensations, another by thoughts and feelings, and so on. One or another mode of perception is immediately connected with one or another kind of reaction to external events. The result of this difference in perception and reaction to external events is expressed in the first place by the fact that people do not understand one another and in the second by the fact that they do not understand themselves. (5)

Each center provides a unique way of viewing reality. A complete picture of reality must include all possible perspectives. P.D. Ouspensky provides an apt analogy: "We are like a house with windows opening on to different sides. You look through a window facing south, and then through a window facing north, and then east, and then west. A balanced person, who can use all ordinary centers, can see as it were out of all windows. The truth which is transmitted from each window is then joined into a whole view."

You can look at a beautiful picture or scene in quite different ways. You can look at a mountain as a beautiful object in which case you have an emotional relationship to it. Or you can look at it from the standpoint of a geologist noticing what kinds of rock it is composed of, in which case you have an intellectual relationship to it. Or you could look at it from the standpoint of a climber planning the line of ascent and the amount of effort necessary, in which case you will have a predominantly moving center relationship to it. Our intelligence, in short, is made up of many different intelligences that connect with quite different meanings of the same thing. (6)

Traditionally, spiritual practices have been given to different individuals based on their psychological 'type,' i.e. the predominance of one of their centers over the others. However, in our contemporary world a more holistic approach is warranted which simultaneously develops all of the centers. Unlike the traditional paths emphasizing one function – body, emotion or mind, the Fourth Way espoused by Gurdjieff seeks a *balanced* development:

These traditional separate 'ways' have always existed for people whose natures were predominantly intellectual or emotional or physical – the ways of knowledge, devotion and action – and all three usually demanded some form of purposeful renunciation and an imposed discipline, such as obedience, silence, celibacy, solitude, physical regime, dietary regulation, mental discipline, and so on. Nowadays, at least in the initial stages, a 'whole person' approach is not only more appropriate but actually more possible. The voluntary suffering and effort based on a blind belief often demanded by the traditional ways required a capacity that modern, civilized people now only rarely possess. The Fourth Way is just such a 'whole person' approach, providing wisdom and enlightenment for 'householders,' ordinary people fully engaged in the hurly-burly of modern life . . . On this Way, the faculties of 'head, heart and hand' are regarded equally and are addressed simultaneously. All the practices and disciplines, whether intellectual, emotional or physical, are progressively and voluntarily self-imposed. Understanding comes first and then gives rise to action. By this method, ideas and theory are demonstrated and confirmed by action, which in turn gives rise to emotional development. (7)

It is quite possible to be unbalanced with regard to the centers – highly developed in one center, rudimentary in another, and atrophied in a third. "Ideally, 'I' should have power over my thoughts, feelings, sensations and my bodily reactions. But in ordinary people the impulse for their thoughts, feelings and bodies comes from their desires, their attractions and aversions. In so far as *these* control us, we control nothing, for they are without our will or intention."

The work of bringing the three main centers into a harmonious balance is the goal of inner work. But some centers are more challenging and difficult to work with and require greater and more effectual efforts. When the three centers are harmonized, it is then possible to create an enduring 'I': "Be conscious of your body, aware of your emotions and mindful of your thoughts. Feel with the mind, think what you feel – this is insurance against self-deception."

The essence of correct work is in the working together of the three centers – moving, emotional and thinking. When all three work together and produce an action, this is the work of a *man*. There is a thousand times more value even in polishing the floor as it should be done than in writing twenty-five books. But before starting to work with all centers and concentrating them on the work, it is necessary to prepare each center separately so that each is able to concentrate. It is necessary to train the moving center to work with the others. Our moving center is more or less adapted. The second center, as difficulties go, is the thinking center and the most difficult the emotional. We already begin to succeed in small things with our moving center. But neither the thinking nor the emotional center can concentrate at all. (8)

With conscious, directed attention a higher level of energy enters and supports the working of the centers, enabling greater control of them. Each center vibrates at a different rate and to develop we need to bring them to a similar rate of vibration: "When all centers vibrate uniformly, then 'I' can act, and not just one part. Thought can create emotion, and then action – observe all three in action."

Man has three brains, three nervous machines with which he can experience because there is in him the energy of attention. So long as his energy of attention is not controlled from within, his experience is quite automatic and passive. What attracts his attention, he experiences; he is not his own master, but the slave of whatever happens to catch and hold his attention. His experience depends on the accidental activity of his nervous system. When he begins to control and direct his attention, then to some extent he experiences what he wants to experience. For example, if I direct my attention towards my thought, I can think what I decide to think and not what happens to come into my mind, but if I do not make this effort of attention, my thoughts can only be automatic associations, verbal associations and so on, and what I will be thinking a minute hence is quite unpredictable. It is by attention that intentional experience comes, and therefore change becomes possible. (9)

When every center participates in our living experience, there is a natural expansion of awareness. When the centre of gravity of our attention is in the intellectual center mental activity dominates. But when the attention expands to include awareness of the body, a new balance appears, creating a subtle sensation of an inner presence. The next step is the awakening of feeling, which brings a third dimension to our awareness. Michel de Salzman:

Each of these functional apparatuses (thought, sensation, and feeling) carries a specific energy and a specific attention and sensitivity. When mobilized together by virtue of questioning, they potentialize each other and contribute to the rare experience of being really present, aware of oneself. Everyone has tasted more or less strongly such a state of awareness in certain occasions or events of his or her life. When more aware of ourselves, we are able to contain our energy and at the same time be open, permeable, seeing and yet not interfering in whatever has to take place in ourselves. This is already a great inner change. Total awareness means being present to everything within ourselves at the same time. (10)

Subdivisions of the Centers

Many of the centers are divided into positive and negative parts, but this division is not identical for all the centers. In the instinctive, moving, intellectual and emotional centers there are two components – positive and negative – but in the sex center and higher emotional and higher intellectual centers there is no negative side.

The positive and negative aspects of the four main centers express their duality:

- Instinctive center: (+) pleasant sensation, (-) unpleasant sensation
- Moving center: (+) active, energetic, (-) inactive, inert
- Intellectual center: (+) affirmation, support, (-) negation, criticism
- Emotional center: (+) attraction, like, (-) repulsion, dislike

In addition to the binary division of centers (positive, negative), there is a threefold division (mechanical, emotional, intellectual), creating a total of six subdivisions for each of the four main centers. Each center is capable of expressing both a complementary aspect (duality) and a unifying principle as exemplified by the trinity (harmonization).

Each of these parts of centers has its own characteristics, its own role, and functions with its own particular kind of attention. Greater attention means more receptivity to the needs of the moment. Typically, a person is only aware of one part and is unable to perceive the other two parts, thereby limiting other possibilities of understanding.

The mechanical part works automatically with little attention required, but lacks the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. With the emotional part, attention is captive, attracted without effort. In the intellectual part attention is consciously directed and under the control of the will.

The quality of attention determines the nature and possibilities of the functioning of each center. "The centers can work in very different states of attention and these correspond to some extent to the state of consciousness because one's relation to attention changes as the state of consciousness changes."

Characteristically, in the moving part of centers action goes on by habit and can go on more or less without attention, and this way of acting has a perfectly useful part to play in our lives; we need to learn all sorts of habits to navigate in life at all. If we had to do consciously everything we do by habit, we wouldn't have time for anything else. The middle part in any center, the emotional part, is active when the center functions with the attention drawn and held. It is this state of the attention that often gives us the illusion we have control of our attention, because our attention is held in a definite direction for a long time. And the intellectual part of centers, the highest of the three parts, is the state in which functions are performed when attention is collected and directed consciously and voluntarily. (11)

The Instinctive Center

The physical body has its own intelligence, independent of the mind. It naturally breathes, digests food and regulates myriad physiological processes of amazing complexity – all without the conscious participation and direction of the mind. The instinctive functions are concerned with the maintenance of the organism and all its internal processes. “Its perceptions are expressed through satisfaction or need. It is the center of ‘instinctive’ attractions and repulsions, the center of organic impressions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ which regulate the life of the body and which taken all together make for organic well-being or discomfort, and even pain.” The complex operations of the instinctive center are a marvel of innate intelligence, which we call the “wisdom of the body”:

An elementary acquaintance with physiology is enough to inspire us with wonder at the power possessed by the body to control and coordinate the most complicated chemical and physical processes necessary for the maintenance of life. Every advance in physiological science only serves to strengthen the conviction that we are in the presence of a mechanism which greatly transcends the construction of the human mind. The ingenuity of a thousand chemists with all the resources of modern science could not maintain the complicated system of superimposed equilibria present in the blood against the manifold disturbing influences which play on it varying from moment to moment, each of which have secondary, tertiary and even more indirect repercussions upon the remainder. Taken separately, many physiological processes are tolerably easy to explain, but when, with our minds, we attempt to grasp as a whole the system of regulating devices, we are driven to the conclusion that without consciousness the mechanism could not possibly operate as harmoniously as it does day and night from birth to death. (12)

Most of the time we are not aware of the internal functioning of the body and take it for granted: “The functions of the body – defecation, urination, menstruation – remind us of a part of ourselves we’d rather not have. Only with these unavoidable functions and times of physical shock, hunger, pain, lust, desire, is the supremacy of the body at this level realized. And when these pass: what happens? The body is forgotten again.”

The instinctive center is responsible for the regulation and coordination of all inner physiological processes:

- Digestion and assimilation of food
- Circulation of the blood
- Respiration and pumping of the heart
- Creation of new cells
- Healing wounds
- Regulating body temperature

- Alimentary and urinary tract processes
- Regulating water and sugar balance
- Hormonal and glandular processes
- Growth and maintenance of cells
- Immune system functioning

The instinctive center is in charge of the functioning of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch), as well as other sensations such as temperature, humidity, pressure, pain, hunger, thirst, balance, sense of space and proprioception. It is also responsible for physical memory of taste, smell and pain, as well as inner reflexes, even the most complicated such as yawning and laughter.

The positive and negative sides of the instinctive center correspond to what is beneficial and what is harmful to the organism:

Its office also includes the task of looking after external influences, avoiding those that are dangerous or harmful, and seeking to augment those that are beneficial. It does this by distinguishing between pleasant and unpleasant sensations. When the instinctive center is working normally, it takes pleasure in tastes, smells, sounds and sights which corresponds to conditions favorable to life and it is ill at ease when exposed to sensations which indicate conditions that are dangerous or detrimental to our physical welfare. (13)

The instinctive center is subdivided into three parts – mechanical, emotional and intellectual. Each part has specific functions and qualities:

Mechanical

- Pleasant and unpleasant sensations
- Inner and outer reflexes
- Regulation of all physiological processes within the body
- Habitual sensations which serve, often unnoticed, as background to other sensations operating in the body

Emotional

- Protection against danger and disease
- Adaptation of the body to the rhythms and processes of the external world
- Transformation of sense perceptions into representations of the outer world
- Instinctive love and nurturing
- Animal rage and jealousy

Intellectual

- Intuitions of a higher order
- In the state of self-consciousness, it is possible in this part of the instinctive center to directly understand the functioning of the body and all its possibilities
- The emergence of new forms of cognition and paranormal powers. Gurdjieff: "If you were conscious in this part of the instinctive center you could talk with animals"

The true working of Will in the Instinctive Centre is in the intellectual part, where the almost miraculous power which the body possesses of cognition and regulation can be exercised consciously. This is the true 'Communion with Nature' of which the poets dream. It has also the power of discerning and curing disease, and for this purpose is able to control sources of energy in the body immensely greater than usually available to the Centres. These powers, external manifestations of which have often been described, are acquired by means of special exercises, the knowledge of which is confined to hidden schools. Unfortunately, however, so much charlatanism surrounds these manifestations that it is almost impossible to distinguish between real and false descriptions. While these powers require special training, they are not in any sense supernatural, nor, taken alone, does their possession necessarily imply a higher level of being. (14)

The most compelling self-evident truth is that we exist now, in the present moment. We are embodied within a physical sheath that is connected to the forces and energies of the cosmos. "Everything passes through me. I am the only one who can experience or live my life. It is not a second-hand life."

My life? I may say, in a way it was given to me. I have done nothing for that. It is now given to me as an existential fact. I can become aware of it. It operates through my body. This body given to me works by itself according to definite laws. It is the site of myriads of processes and constant exchanges with the outer world. Various determining influences have given it its peculiarities: race, heredity, climate, food, and also more distant influences: astrological, cosmic, etc., of which we know very little. Anyhow, it works, and most of the time I am unconscious of it . . . Thus animated, the body goes and comes, eats, sleeps, evacuates, and sometimes calls on me to be recognized, to be taken care of; but it usually works as well without me. In the best moments of awareness it appears to me as an integrated part of a greater whole, from which it is inseparable. Made of matter, my body obeys the causality of what we call the physical world. (15)

The quest for self-knowledge often begins with the study of the physical body, as it is more highly developed through nature than the emotional and intellectual centers. This is largely because its inborn intelligence automatically performs its functions without the intervention of

other centers. For this reason, many spiritual traditions begin the inner work of transformation with the body, rather than the mind or feelings. "If we wish to study our body, we must first of all be related to it. What relates us to the body is the sensation we have of it – the inner perception of my physical being, the physical sensation of myself. If our aim is eventually to develop a stable presence in ourselves, the sensation of our physical being is an inherent part of this. It is the most concrete and easily controlled part."

There is the organic level – our body. It is solid and concrete, with an apparent stable form which can, in any case, be relied on to some degree. It is the instrument through which we perceive and our means of action. It can stay still voluntarily and thus is easier than the other parts for us to observe. It is relatively obedient, and we have a certain amount of control over it. In addition, it is the one solid material base in us, and as a general rule everything undertaken on earth, whether human or not, must first be established on a solid and firm foundation. Finally, it is through the body that all the exchanges of life take place and through which we receive all the energies we need. (16)

In many spiritual traditions 'sensing exercises' are employed to enable a practitioner to consciously inhabit their body through an awakened presence. In *Perspectives on Beelzebub's Tales*, Fourth Way student Keith Buzzell relates his experience with such an exercise:

I begin to inhabit my body with my first efforts to 'sense' the body. The great variety of sensing exercises have, as one aim, the gaining of increasing consciousness of, and presence within, the planetary body. The deeper and more subtle the sensing becomes, the vaster and more varied the world of this body is discovered to be. It is similarly so when we begin to inhabit the external sensory instruments of this physical body, for we bring a new state of awareness to the outside world images created by our first brain. Each of our external senses participate in the creation of images of portions of the forms and energies of the external world. Through these images, melded into a flowing 'present moment' of perception, we can begin, with presence, to properly inhabit the vast world that our first brain opens to. (17)

The body is capable of connecting with higher levels of reality and acting as a conduit to a subtle spiritual energy. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman: "There are many images and symbols in the wisdom traditions that show us the human body irradiated by a finer energy, a vibrant sensation, a body full of light. That's the true human body, and everything may very well be in that body."

There's something about the body that's absolutely essential to the development of man's possibilities, of why we are on earth. If we are on earth for a reason, for a purpose, then the body must be there to serve that purpose. There's an idea that God's love, God's creation, God's purpose requires man – a being who is able to intentionally allow the purposes of the higher

to go toward the world of matter and life. And, of course, if a human being can allow that, he can also not allow that. If we weren't able to block it we wouldn't be able to allow it. Here we are faced with the age-old drama of human freedom. Man is free, which means there's a certain freedom that makes it possible to become what we were meant to be. To me, it has to do with the possible freedom of our attention, which is perhaps the only free element of human beings. Such as we are, the possibility of human freedom exists in the attention, and that can carry an influence down into our bodies and into the life of the earth. We become instruments of God. And in the process we become truly human. (18)

The Moving Center

Both the instinctive center and moving center involve the physical body. At times the moving center is active and the instinctive is passive. At other times the reverse is true; they alternate in their activation. As well, some people naturally have a more active moving center, while for others the instinctive center is more active.

The functions of the moving center are not innate and must be *learned*. This is the principal characteristic differentiating it from the instinctive center:

The difference between instinctive and moving functions is as follows: the moving function of man, as well as of animals, *must be learned*, but instinctive functions are inborn. One of the chief properties of the moving center is its ability to imitate. The moving center imitates what it sees without reasoning . . . The idea of an independent moving center, which, on the one hand, does not depend upon the mind, and which is a mind in itself, and which, on the other hand, does not depend upon instinct and has first of all to learn, explained many observations in nature. The existence of a moving center working by means of imitation, explained the preservation of the "existing order" in beehives, termitaries, and ant-hills. Directed by imitation, one generation has had to shape itself absolutely upon the model of another. There could be no changes, no departure whatever from the model. (19)

In a newborn child, the initial movements are all instinctive. As the child develops, they begin to imitate other people. By the end of the first year, the moving center is already quite independent from the instinctive center. The moving center functions are educated from birth to perform an array of tasks: at the right moment, the baby learns to hold its own bottle, the toddler learns to walk. These achievements usher in a new stage of motor development:

The continued development of the Moving Centre goes at an accelerated pace, and as the Intellectual Centre comes into play, a new method of learn-

ing becomes available. The Intellectual Centre is able to control some of the most important groups of muscles which usually work through the Moving Centre and so teach them without an external model. The Moving Centre then imitates the Intellectual Centre and gradually takes control of the movement. As it does so, there is an unmistakable gain in fluency, because the Intellectual Centre is quite incapable of that intimate coordination which is required by complex movements. The ability of the Moving Centre to learn by imitation is retained long after childhood by people whose conditions of life require this power, but under the conditions of so-called civilization, the development of the Moving Centre stops at an early age, or is directed into restricted channels by such activities as athletics and the tending of specialized machines. (20)

Moving functions encompass all outer activities of the organism, movement in space and learned behaviours. It controls not only simple movements, but also complex processes involving adaptation and coordination. "The moving function includes in itself all external movements such as walking, writing, speaking, eating, and memories of them. To the moving function also belong those movements which in ordinary language are called 'instinctive,' such as catching a falling object without thinking." Also included in the moving functions are uncontrolled manifestations which represent useless activity not intended by nature and which waste energy: imagination, daydreaming, talking for talk's sake or talking with oneself:

All these movements are responses to programmes which have had to be learned by trial and error. Initially a small amount of conscious direction is required but once the technique has been acquired the relevant associations are established and thereafter operate automatically, as for instance in riding a bicycle – a skill which once acquired is never forgotten. Throughout the day the body makes innumerable movements which we take entirely for granted, all directed by the intelligence of the Moving Centre. We ought to be more appreciative of the speed and efficiency with which it reacts to our (mostly unconscious) desires. (21)

The moving center has both a positive side (activity, excitatory impulses) and a negative side (rest, inhibitory impulses). These two aspects of the moving center combine to produce the smooth and harmonious working of the normal healthy body.

The moving center is also subdivided into three parts (mechanical, emotional and intellectual). Each part has specific qualities and functions:

Mechanical

- Automatic reflexes and movements
- Repetitive actions and behaviours
- Capacity for imitation

- Acquired and learnt movements which are not dependent on consciousness
- Limited ability in learning new movements

Emotional

- Pleasure in movement
- Love of sports and games
- Feelings of interest and excitement
- Movement involving purposeful adaptation to new circumstances
- Ceremonial and festive dances involving coordination of the muscles in a smooth series of movements
- Occupational rhythms and artistic crafts

Intellectual

- Capacity for invention, innovative methods of doing things
- Overcoming difficulties, improvisation
- A feeling for the working of the laws of nature
- Imitating at will the voice, intonations and gestures of other people such as actors can do

Over time, the body develops many ingrained habits and unconscious postures which rob it of vitality, flexibility and free expression. This can also affect the emotional and intellectual functions. In a sense, we become “imprisoned” in our bodies: “Our body is exactly what we disappear into all the time. I can’t even sit still, without wanting more water, more coffee, without scratching myself, wanting to move my chair – the body is a very big devil for us. The body is, more or less all the time, the principal reason why I am lost in sleep.”

We rarely take notice of our bodies; instead, all of our attention is centred in our head, which tends to ignore the body and allows it to remain passive or indulge itself. “All that dulls the mind to the sensitivity needed to connect it with the body. So, this connection involves a certain reduction in the animal requirements of the body. If the body and mind want to team together, there are various conditions that have to exist in each.” One of these requirements is the ability to directly sense the body with a conscious attention. John Pentland suggests a simple exercise to establish a sense of presence of our body:

Try to prepare before you start your day. For the next day or two try to establish conscious contact with your body. Sit for ten or twelve minutes and try to realize it plays a very important part in your life. You take your attention away from your thoughts and try to be aware of sensation, something higher than thought. (22)

In the process of self-development, it is important to have a deep organic sensation of the body. Physical tension is an impediment to inner growth. "The body needs to be in the right posture and completely relaxed in order for one to be free of it. Otherwise, in general, the body controls us completely. One needs to break the hold of the body."

The unnecessary tension stored in the body can be released by conscious deep relaxation. Then we can contact a higher level of energy, allowing real growth and development to occur. Jeanne de Salzmann: "Your body is not only yours. You need to work to relate the higher with the lower. That is the purpose of human existence."

The body is where everything happens, where unconscious forces play, where intelligence vies with habits, where comfort competes with ambition and where personal likes and dislikes rule the kingdom. Most important is to make a new relationship with it, a conscious one that replaces our automatic associations. According to Madame de Salzmann, "higher energies are in the body, but they are not *of* the body. Our attention is so scattered that it needs to be trained to be contained in the body, to relate with it, to remain anchored." The primary effort in work with the body is to anchor the attention of all our parts here in the flesh. When we try, the first thing we notice is the constant state of exaggerated tension. We don't realize how deeply it imprisons us. Work with only one center drains our energy. Why do I use so much force washing dishes that the glass in my hand breaks? Why am I more exhausted after a day spent solving a problem at the computer than if I had been out chopping firewood? It becomes clear that I am holding in or holding on to something. What would happen if I let go? (23)

Because the body is the instrument of movement and action in the world, it is important to have a direct understanding of its possible states. Jacob Needleman: "There is a meaning and a purpose of the human body for which we have no names and of which we only have misunderstanding glimpses in the course of our lives. Such glimpses of the finer life within the body can help us to interpret them in relation to the great possibilities of human life."

What we are seeking is a body, a life on earth, in which our actions and behavior serve the higher impulses and intentions, the higher feelings that constitute the heart of true human virtue. In a breathtaking real sense, we are searching for a new kind of body, a body that has a new aim, a new purpose: voluntarily to serve the Good. And to compound the mystery, in the search for a new kind of body within ourselves, there exists the possibility of discovering a new heart, a source of love within ourselves that we have perhaps glimpsed in our lives . . . Above all, we will need to discover how actually to communicate our understanding and our ideals to the body. We need to study the possibility of establishing an enduring and intentional relationship to the body, the

physical instrument of our life and action in the world. That will be the next stage of our work toward becoming a full human being – that is to say, a real human being, in whom the body with its immense energies of life obeys the conscience which calls to us from within ourselves. (24)

Many traditional spiritual teachings emphasize the importance of understanding the forces and energies of the physical body. “It is in the body and through the body that all the energies of man move and live and communicate with each other, and it is in the body that all the energies of human life can be studied, discriminated and eventually, as a result of inner struggle, come into harmonious relationship, thereby allowing the entry into human life and action of a spiritual force of great power and much efficacy.”

It is essential to take account of one’s own relationship to the body, that is, to the current of organic life that is always present in the tissues of our body but which we are usually aware of only in rare moments of passion or physical pain. There is in the body a flowing river of tangible sensitivity about which our culture has told us nothing. A human being’s intentional relationship to this current determines a great deal about both the normality of our day-to-day experience and the real possibilities of the inner search; it is necessary to see, personally, how even a faint and fleeting intentional opening to this current of organic sensitivity frees us from so much of the tyranny of time. One also sees, much more deeply, how often we lose this relationship to the body, and how much of deeper life, deeper feeling, more balanced intelligence we lose when we are under the sway of the temporality of the world – the temporality of a world without a life-inside-the-body. (25)

In a conversation with his pupil John G. Bennett, Gurdjieff stressed the importance of mastery of the body and the support and guidance that is required in the process of inner development and transformation: “The Institute exists to help people to work on themselves. You can work as much or as little as you wish. If they come to get Being, then they must do the work themselves. No one else can do the work for them, but it is also true that they cannot create the conditions for themselves. Therefore, we create conditions.”

You have already too much knowledge. It will remain only theory unless you learn to understand not with mind but with heart and body. Now only your mind is awake: your heart and body are asleep. If you continue like this, soon your mind will also go to sleep, and you will never be able to think any new thoughts. You cannot awaken your own feelings, but you can awaken your body. If you can learn to master your body, you will begin to acquire Being. For that, you must look on your body as a servant. It must obey you. It is ignorant and lazy. You must teach it to work. If it refuses to work, you must have no mercy on it. Remember yourself as two – you and your body. When you are master of your body, your feelings

will obey you. At present nothing obeys you – not your body, nor your feelings, nor your thoughts. (26)

The Sex Center

The main function of the sex center is the expression of the masculine ('yang') and female ('yin') principles in all their manifestations, especially procreation. It is directed by a higher level of intelligence than the other centers and is concerned with the integration of opposing principles. "This is the basis of real growth, as one sees in Nature by the conjunction of male and female elements. Part of the function of the sex centre is the direction of physical attraction and consummation but its more important aspects are psychological. One of its concerns is the transformation of negative emotions into useful material for the creation of the 'astral body'."

In Gurdjieff's schema the sex center is located in the 'lower story' of the human structure, along with the instinctive and moving centers. The sex center is the mediating or neutralizing force in relation to the moving and instinctive centers which transmit the affirming and denying forces of the Law of Three. "The lower story can exist by itself, because the three centers in it are the conductors of the three forces (Law of Three). The thinking and emotional centers are not indispensable for life."

A difference between the sex center and the other lower centers is that it is not, in reality, limited to their level alone, but gives a color to the whole human individual, whatever degree of evolution has been reached, so long as any trace of individuality remains. But ordinary man lives only at the lower, organic level of his sex center. At this level, the instinctive, moving and sex centers form a balanced unit, working on the same plane and able to receive the corresponding impulses of the three fundamental forces. Thus, the organic life of the machine is able to continue indefinitely on its own. The sex center plays the neutralizing role here in relation to moving and instinctive centers, sometimes one and sometimes the other of these is active or passive, according to states and circumstances. (27)

The sex center is fully active in normal human beings and works much faster and with a finer quality of energy than the other lower centers. When properly used, the energy of the sex center is at the same level as the higher emotional center ('hydrogen 12') and contributes to the general equilibrium of all the psychic centers, as all the other centers are subordinate to it. But, in many cases, the sex center is influenced by other centers which interfere with its work. Gurdjieff: "It would be a great thing if it worked with its own energy. This alone would indicate a comparatively very high level of being in which all other centers could work correctly in their place and with their own energies."

P.D. Ouspensky held that the study and understanding of the sex center should only occur after the workings of the first four centers were correctly understood:

Self-study must begin with the study of the four functions, thinking, feeling, instinctive function, and moving function. Sex functions can be studied only much later, that is, when these four functions are already sufficiently understood. Contrary to some modern theories, the sex function is really posterior; that is, it appears later in life, when the first four functions are already fully manifested, and it is *conditioned by them*. Therefore, the study of the sex function can be useful only when the first four functions are fully known in all their manifestations. (28)

The sex center is influenced by many of the other centers and, in turn, impacts the instinctive, moving, emotional and intellectual centers. The sex center rarely works completely independent of the other centers, which tend to rob it of its energy and make use of this energy in ways that corrupt the given center:

The sex function differs from the others in the sense that it derives support from and participates with the four of them, takes in their emanations and even goes beyond them to be the support of the creative aspect of the human being at every level, with the proper polarity in each case. All our education leads us to think only of the organic aspect of this function. Even from this point of view, we shall see that it cannot be studied in isolation. Since the sex function relies on the other functions, the study of these functions must come first, and this brings into our study the entire level of organic life. But sexual polarity and its functioning involves the entirety of the human being, and since this includes levels of life other than the organic level, they also participate in this function. Thus, a study of the sex function on the organic level only will result in a partial and inadequate view. A balanced study is not possible until the higher levels of the human being are sufficiently known. (29)

When the energy of the sex center is "stolen" by other centers it can be misused and abused, often through imagination, projection and identification. "The role of the sex center is to create an equilibrium among the other centers which should be subordinate to its direction; but in the absence of conscious control its high-quality energy is stolen by the lower centers which then work with undue fervour."

The transmutation of sexual energy in the development of a higher level of being may create an excess of energy that can be misused: "The excess has to be used up in a natural way because its accumulation results in abnormal usages and irregular intrusions of this energy in the other functions of the machine. If allowed to become established as automatic habits of the mechanism, these irregular usages of sex energy may become predominant and monopolize it so much that all hope of a man's evolution to a higher level becomes impossible." This is

consistent with Ouspensky's belief that any significant irregularity or abnormality in the sexual function prevents proper self-development.

In the culture of the West, a preoccupation with sex and the abuse of sexual energy is more prevalent than in Eastern cultures:

From an objective point of view the purpose of sex is twofold, procreation and self-creation – the procreation of planetary bodies, and the creation in ourselves of the body 'Kesdján' and the mental body. Thanks to the Romans we find ourselves using sex objectlessly, substituting the pursuit of pleasure derived from the sexual process for the real satisfaction derived from its use as an end. Or, under the influence of organized puritan religion, we deny sex, regard it as an evil, as the great sin; people then indulge in sexual fantasies. Why the enormous amount of thought in the West directed to the study of the results of the misuse or non-use or misdirection of sex energy? Sex problems do not arise in the East except where people have been influenced by Western puritanism. With the rest of organic life we have a right to the pleasure derived from sexual union, but as human beings we must use this force, or part of it, for a conscious aim. And when sex energy is not so used it becomes diverted to purposes much more harmful than what we call "abnormalities." (30)

The misuse of sexual energy is characterized by a particular vehemence and improper use of its force by one or more of the centers:

Moving Center

- Frenzied competition
- Attempting to set sports records
- Excessive tension
- Exaggerated gestures
- Endurance activities without any useful purpose

Emotional Center

- Preaching about sinfulness, hell and damnation
- Fear of imagined dangers
- Religious persecution, bigotry
- Cruelty and sadism
- Jealousy
- Sentimentality

Intellectual Center

- Arguments, disputes
- Fanaticism, advancing disruptive ideas
- Rabid criticism, vitriol
- Sarcasm, bullying
- Hostility, anger

Although the primary purpose of sex is reproduction of the species, it can also be used through sublimation as an energy for creativity and creation of higher 'bodies' which are in touch with the subtle spiritual levels of reality. The sex center can work with the finest energy in the organism ('hydrogen 12') and thus serve the highest function of a human being – namely, participation in the work of creation:

As soon as it comes into play, the sex center, thanks to the fine quality of the energy it uses, brings much more subtlety, acuity and speed to sensory perceptions, impressions and the functions. It is also clear that sexual fulfillment leading to the reproduction of life is the crowning achievement of the organic activity of the human being, and without this fulfillment all of this activity, from the organic and natural point of view, is so to speak cut short. But this does not exclude the possibility, from the point of view of higher development of the human being, that this same sexual energy, the finest and most active of the energies which are available to man, should serve not for the reproduction of organic life but for the realization of a higher order of life (a new birth, the opening up of another level of life) which can only come about starting from energy of this quality, from whatever there is of "creative" energy in man. (31)

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