

## HUMAN CENTERS AND FUNCTIONS II

*'We can have no bread without baking: knowledge is  
the water, emotions the flour, and suffering the fire.'  
G.I. Gurdjieff*

In Gurdjieff's model of the structure of the human being, the intellectual center and the higher intellectual center are situated in the upper story represented by the 'head.' The emotional center and the higher emotional center are located in the middle story or 'heart.'

In terms of their functioning, both the intellectual center (thinking) and the emotional center (feeling) are equal partners in how we experience the world and process impressions. Each provides a different, yet complementary, view of reality which together form a more complete holistic view of the world.

The two higher centers operate at a higher level than their two lower counterparts – the intellectual center and the emotional center. But when these two lower centers, and the instinctive and moving centers, are in balance and harmony, access to the higher centers is possible. Glimpses of both the higher emotional center and the higher intellectual center may also occur in ordinary individuals who have not undergone a process of self-development and inner transformation.

### The Intellectual Center

The intellectual center plays a major role in how we understand the nature of reality. The functions of this center are numerous and varied:

- Thinking, reasoning
- Concepts, ideas and representations
- Speech, creation of words and language
- Memory and recall
- Affirmation and negation
- Classification, comparison, judgement, analysis
- Theories, abstractions, mental constructions
- Imagination, visualization
- Planning and coordinating future actions

The intellectual center does not directly experience reality in the way the senses do, as it works in a different sphere, involving higher order reasoning and abstraction: "Our illusions as to the value of the intellectual mind arise from confusion of truth with reality. The Intellectual

centre has no immediate access to the external world, and it does not deal directly with facts but, rather, with thoughts and ideas.”

Our ideas are for the most part, though not necessarily, expressed in words, so that words or symbols equivalent to words, are the currency of our intellectual commerce. This does not mean that ideas or thoughts have some kind of reality of their own, or that we think by means of fixed ‘unit ideas’ which are permanent and unchanging. Ideas and words are merely signs, which correspond more or less closely to groups of presentations from external experience, or to combinations produced by the intellectual process itself. They are abstractions which only gain substance by their relation to recurrent elements of experience. The work of the Intellectual Centre is essentially logical and it must be clearly understood that it is to this Centre, and to this Centre alone, that the laws of logic apply. The Intellectual Function consists in such processes as associations and comparisons, affirmation and negation. In its commonest and most familiar form, the activity of the Intellectual Centre is dualistic, that is, the association and comparison of ideas – two at a time. A characteristic manifestation is seen in what are called ‘trains of thought,’ or series of associations, in which each idea arises successively out of the ones which precede it. Typical work of the Intellectual Centre consists in dealing with numbers, which constitute the most abstract relation which we can have with the external world. (1)

The intellectual center is much slower than the other centers and works with ‘hydrogen 48.’ P.D. Ouspensky offers an example to illustrate the relative speed of centers in performing normal activities: “The intellectual center is never able to follow the work of the moving center (‘hydrogen 24’). We are unable to follow either our own movements or other people’s movements unless they are artificially slowed down.”

In the culture of the West there is an overemphasis on the intellect, on rationality, which cuts us off from the intelligence of the body and feelings. Mental knowledge, disconnected from the sensitivity of the body and feelings, dominates our life and our sense of identity.

Since concepts alone can only represent an incomplete picture of reality, they cannot be fully assimilated into the whole of ourselves. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman: “They therefore foster the illusion that the fundamental questions of life can be approached and even solved by one small part of the human psyche – the isolated intellect. And they foster the further illusion that ultimate truth about man and the universe can penetrate into the unconscious emotions and instinctive parts of ourselves without a long, difficult, and carefully guided inner struggle.”

Concepts require little more than careful verbal formulation in order to be communicated. They are, as it were, messages from the intellect to the intellect. To be understood, they require the analytic and combinatory

powers of the mind, functions which are now being duplicated with increasing success by computers. In fact, one of the most important lessons that the technological revolution is now offering modern man, is the realization of the automatic quality of those mental processes . . . Concepts are problem-solving devices, the internal equivalent of technologies. Concepts, theories, hypotheses, distinctions, comparisons – all these may be taken ultimately as instruments for organizing perceptions into logically consistent patterns called explanations. But they do not and cannot awaken in man a new quality of feeling or perceiving, a new organ or faculty of awareness. Concepts are no more nor less than tools by which man combines or analyzes that which he already knows through perceptions. If man's perceptions are limited mainly to the external senses, concepts can do no more than organize the material collected by the senses. Concepts can never reach beyond the level of perception or awareness of which man lives. (2)

The operation of the intellectual center is divided into two parts: affirmation ('yes') or negation ('no'). In *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, P.D. Ouspensky elaborates: "In every moment of our thinking, either one outweighs the other or they come to a moment of equal strength in indecision. The negative part of the center is as useful as the positive part, and any diminishing of the strength of one in relation to the other results in disorder."

Like the other main centers, the intellectual center is subdivided into three parts, which reflect a gradation of the quality and effectiveness of the functioning of the center, as well as the degree of conscious attention:

### Mechanical

- Representations of impressions, memories and associations
- Dualism, division of things into two poles
- Classification of forms and impressions into categories
- Automatic, stereotyped responses to the impressions of the moment
- Ready-made phrases and slang expressions, jokes
- Mechanical talking, repetition of words and phrases
- Undirected or wandering attention

The mechanical part of the intellectual centre plays a pivotal role in keeping us asleep. It has a special name, the 'formatory apparatus,' and its inability to understand anything except in pairs of opposites maintains, more than anything else, the illusion of duality. It has a valid role in receiving impressions but constantly exceeds its authority and becomes an impenetrable barrier to understanding by preventing any creative level of thought. It thrives on labels, catchwords and popular theories. Both hemispheres are subject to this malady in their own separate ways. In the inward-looking hemisphere it produces

primitive superstitions and defective thinking; the dominant outward hemisphere becomes fixated by a rigid logic, blind to its own limitations. (3)

### Emotional

- Pleasure in learning and discovery
- Curiosity, desire to know and understand
- Artistic, political and scientific interests
- Interest, enthusiasm, novelty and excitement
- Gossip, reading newspapers, random chatter
- Attention is naturally attracted to and focused on the subject itself, without any effort or conscious will

### Intellectual

- Capacity for creation and construction
- Discovery and invention
- Creative thought
- Seeing connections, bringing order and unity to diversity
- Education and sense of morality influencing choice
- Attention is voluntary, consciously controlled by will and effort

Our thoughts clearly have different qualities, ranging from the mechanical and associative to the directed and conscious. Unfortunately, lower level thinking is far more prevalent than higher-order thoughts. "Because of their automatic arising in the face of every impression that emerges in the mind, their unceasing flow, their continual associations, their comparisons and systematically reactive responses, they make up in us what can be called the 'formatory apparatus,' with which we habitually respond to almost all life situations."

If it directly registered impressions, if it were actively-passive, it would function properly; helping further refine energy to make the connection to the higher emotional and thinking centers. Instead the formatory mind takes itself for the authority in all matters. It weighs, labels and judges all impressions, internal and external, by means of memory. In this wrong functioning it is highly dualistic, immediately dividing everything into two parts. Then it compares and contrasts, running out long strings of association, taking things to extremes. It is a fount of clichés and ready-made opinion. Among its many peculiarities, it always looks for the opposite. If "black" is being discussed, it brings up "white." Staying on the surface in this way, it avoids penetrating deeply into a subject. All this it calls "thinking." (4)

Real knowledge of human transformation encompasses both thought *and* emotion. Thinking, by itself, cannot necessarily bring about a change in human nature: what the intellect knows may not be what the heart feels. "Thoughts, perhaps especially thoughts about the greatest truths, have the property of absorbing all our awareness, leaving us blind to the actual quality of the emotional and physical impulses that govern the whole of our everyday lives." The history of Christianity illustrates this conundrum:

A wrong dichotomy between belief and reason has gradually established itself in the Western approach to both the meaning of religion and, indeed, the meaning of life itself. The message of Tradition, in this respect, is that there is in man a force that draws him toward Truth. This force is neither the thinking function nor the emotional function as they are commonly understood . . . A far-reaching error seems to have crept into the understanding of Christianity when one part of the ordinary, or "fallen," mind, the thinking function, was distinguished from another part of the ordinary mind, the emotional function, and when this distinction was presented as exhaustive and central to the human condition. Man was asked to choose between belief and reason. But, from the present point of view, the enemy of faith is neither belief nor reason as such. The real enemy is man's tendency to give his trust to what is only a part of the mind or self, to take a subsidiary element of human nature as the bringer of unity or wholeness of being. (5)

A truly comprehensive understanding of reality must include the organic knowledge and wisdom of the body. Only when the three functions of thinking, feeling and sensing merge in a unified integration or 'gestalt' is there a real perception of truth. In *A Guide for the Perplexed*, E.F. Schumacher writes: "Every craftsman realizes that his power of knowing consists not only of the thinking in his head but also of the intelligence of his body: his fingertips know things that his thinking knows nothing about, just as Pascal knew that 'The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing about'."

It is possible for the intellectual center to operate on a higher, more refined level: "We must come to look at our minds, not as the gateway to reality, but as the point of exit from illusion. Between the abandonment of illusion and the attainment of reality there is a long and arduous path which we can only traverse if all our functions can be made to contribute their own understanding." In *Toward Awakening*, Jean Vaysse writes:

At all levels, the function of the intellect is affirmation and negation: yes or no. The intellect receives the data, compares them with what it knows, coordinates, conceptualizes, and looks ahead. On the lowest level, it is automatic critical judgment and imagination; on a higher level, it is logical confrontation and foresight . . . Indeed, for the intellectual center to become capable of other than purely reactive and automatic thinking, it has to function on another level, the level of a presence and of a stable, all-enveloping, soundly established I. Then

independent thoughts are possible with a development, true “reflection,” and foresight that conform with our overall sense of individuality and which characterizes real thought. (6)

Gurdjieff taught that the proper role of the intellect is to be impartial and watch over the other two functions – feeling and sensation: “Your head is capable of observing only if you put your attention on it. It is only with a special attention that the head can observe. The head is like an apparatus; it plays the role of a policeman.”

Your head is your ‘self.’ It is your reason. That is where your intelligence is. This is your individuality. Everyone has a body, everyone has feeling, but rare are those who have a head that lives an independent life – free, never influenced. Only the head can be just; only the head can be impartial. The head must have the initiative, whereas with you at present, it’s all the rest that has the initiative. For you, at present, the head must be like a policeman, always turned inward to see with inner sight and to know these two parts: body and feeling. It must watch with a strong attention, but without tensing, and know where the impulses come from. Are they unintentional or conscious and intentional? Only then will it be able to play its role, which is to direct, to initiate. (7)

It is possible to become free of the endless cycle of thoughts and images that rob our attention and energy, and divert us from fulfilling our true intellectual capacity. But we have the power not to be devoured by our thoughts. Jacob Needleman: “We are called to free our mind, our attention, from its absorption in its own automatic functioning. We are called to step back in ourselves and allow the entrance of something that is incomprehensible to the ego-driven mind. This incomprehensible ‘something’ is not the plaything of time . . . The kind of thought that emerges from the whole being, the kind of vision and mentation is a property of the Self. What we experience as thought when our minds are on automatic is worlds apart from the intelligence that resides in the Self.” In *Time and the Soul*, Needleman explores the ramifications of a free attention when observing the workings of the intellectual mind:

To those of us who are too busy, the very least thing that wisdom tells us is that we can step back, not so much from our activities, but from our thoughts. When we try this, we may find a hint of the next step that we can take. In that space that appears when we try to see our thoughts instead of letting them frighten us or goad us, we may sense that our living body is there asking for our calm attention. No man or woman can be too busy when there is even the beginning of a calm relationship between the mind and the body. When the mind and body quietly move toward each other, a man or woman begins to become a grownup. And, whatever it may mean to be a wise man or woman, surely the first step is to become a grownup. A grown-up man or woman may have to move very fast and do many things, but he or she is never in a hurry. (8)

## The Emotional Center

The functions of the emotional center include a wide range of emotions and feelings, as well as the ability to appreciate and value people and things in relation to ourselves. At one end of the spectrum are positive emotions such as joy, wonder and compassion, while at the other pole we see fear, anger and sorrow. The speed of emotional reactions is much faster than that of the intellectual center. The emotional center has the potential to work with 'hydrogen 12,' but in reality rarely works with this fine energy, using instead a coarser energy which prevents the possibility of more refined or purer emotions.

Sometimes the action of another center is incorrectly interpreted as an emotion. For instance, a sudden shock to the body, such as instinctive fear in the face of danger, is often interpreted as similar to an emotional shock ("I lost my job"). In our ordinary daily lives, we often confuse thinking and feeling, or sensation and feeling. The opposite situation can also occur when, for instance, the emotional center makes use of the intellectual center for daydreaming. This is because the emotional center has a tendency "to repeat, to keep alive or to recreate experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant, that have been previously lived through or imagined."

For most people, the emotional center is only partly developed. As a consequence, many of the problems and difficulties that we encounter in life are emotional in nature. In a conversation with a young student, Fritz Peters, Gurdjieff asserted that "we did not know how to use emotions properly in the course of our lives, and had only learned to form improper emotional habits from the moment we are born. We did not understand what our emotional needs were and how to satisfy them." In *Boyhood with Gurdjieff*, Peters relates more of the conversation:

All existing emotions, all feelings have purpose; there was a reason for their existence and a proper use for each of them. But without consciousness or knowledge we used them blindly, compulsively and ignorantly, without any sort of control, producing the same effect in our emotional life as would have been produced, musically, by playing a pipe-organ as an animal might play it, without any knowledge, and without music – simply at random. The great danger of uncontrolled emotion was that "shock" generally produced effects in oneself and in others, and the force of shock was emotional. If from lack of consciousness or knowledge, one felt – mechanically – anger instead of, for instance, compassion at a time when compassion was the proper emotion, only havoc and chaos could be produced. Most of the problems in communication and understanding between individuals resulted from just such emotional shocks which were inappropriate, unexpected, and therefore usually harmful and destructive. (9)

The emotional center directly experiences situations and events, and whenever an external impression reaches it, there is a feeling of either like or dislike, approval or disapproval, agreement or refusal. Emotions are felt as either pleasant or unpleasant, but never indifferent.

The emotional center is also subdivided, like the other main centers, into three parts:

### Mechanical

- Stereotyped expression of emotions
- Habitual and personal likes and dislikes
- Love of pageantry and spectacle
- Sentimentality, laughing and crying
- Primitive or base emotions such as cruelty and jealousy

This part of the Emotional Centre plays a very great part in our lives, for it operates all the ordinary judgements of value which determine our actions. Thus, love of praise, dislike of blame, pleasure of achievement, distress at failure, the excitement of a crowd, the boredom of solitude and a thousand other desires and aversions, attractions and repulsions, control a man's actions. These are acquired by the growing child through imitation of his elders and companions. They are accentuated by the conditions of his life and by the features of his Intellectual, Moving and other Centres. This positive and negative working of the Emotional Centre is so gravely distorted by the presence of negative emotions that only patient study of oneself and other people enables the natural working of the Centre to be discerned. (10)

### Emotional

- Religious and moral values and emotions
- Natural emotional judgement free of acquired habits
- Emotional attitudes appropriate to the situation
- Power of discernment based on consciousness
- Sense of humour and the comical
- Sarcasm, derision

This working of the emotional part of the Emotional Centre may sometimes be recognized in our judgement of other people. Many people have the power – some to a marked degree – of forming a total judgment of the 'character' of a person at the first meeting. Such judgements may be mistaken, indeed they almost always require correction after fuller acquaintance, but their outstanding character is their 'organic completeness and simplicity.' Thus the whole of our reaction may be expressed by the simple feeling 'I like that man.' With some people this power of emotional judgement is so great,

and can be developed so that they can predict with considerable accuracy the tastes and inclinations of a person, with their views on many subjects, and their behaviour in a variety of circumstances, after a short acquaintance. (11)

### Intellectual

- Respect for knowledge and learning
- Aesthetic appreciation and artistic creation
- Dreams, reveries
- Seat of the 'magnetic center' guiding one's spiritual search
- Awakened conscience crucial to self-development
- Gateway or bridge to the higher emotional center
- Clairvoyance and psychic sensitivity

The work of conscience is to see ourselves as we really are, to feel all our contradictions and meanness, and, worst of all, to know that besides these things, we are *nothing*. We are not strong enough to bear the seat of conscience, for until we begin to move on the path of self-creation, the vision which it reveals is too appalling to be endured. Conscience is to the Emotional Centre what self-consciousness is to the Intellectual. It is the working of the second part of the Centre – the union of function and consciousness. This leads to emotional self-knowledge, which means knowledge and *judgement* combined. Through conscience one not merely knows oneself, but assesses one's own value and level of being objectively. Conscience, in the highest part of the Emotional Centre, has power over all the Centres. This is the Steward in the full exercise of his authority, preparing the whole of the house for the Master's advent. Then conscience is no longer terrifying, but on the contrary gives the first taste of the positive emotions which belong to the Higher Emotional Centre, emotions which in our present state we should not presume even to name. (12)

According to Gurdjieff, emotions may be pure or impure, unmixed or mixed with a personal element which distorts the purity of real genuine emotion. "As soon as one wishes to draw a personal profit, the sentiment becomes impure. This is what happens to our most elevated feelings – love, faith, charity. They become mixed with personal elements; they become impure."

The sign of the growth of emotion is the liberation from the personal element. Personal emotion fools, is partial, unjust. Greater knowledge is in proportion to fewer personal elements. The problem is to feel impersonally. Not all emotions are easily freed of the personal. Certain ones by their nature corrupt, separate. Others, like love, lead man from the material to the spiritual . . . There can be an impersonal hate, for example: the hate

of injustice, of brutality. Impersonal anger – against stupidity, hypocrisy. A pure emotion is one which is not mixed, which never seeks personal profit. An impure emotion is always mixed, it is never one; it is mixed with personal elements; it has sediments of other emotions. Love of science can be pure, or mixed with personal profit. The same is true in art, literature, etc. (13)

The traditional wisdom teachings of the world use different terminologies to describe emotional reactions. Both Hinduism and Buddhism characterize emotional states as manifestations of “the ego.” Early Christianity identified the “seven deadly sins”: pride, anger, lust, avarice, gluttony, sloth and envy. Psychologically these are seen as patterns of emotional reactions which “unnecessarily diminish or destroy the capacity of the human psyche to be free.” What these teachings have in common is an approach which acknowledges these emotions, but also offers a way of consciously working with and ultimately transforming them. Philosopher and pupil of Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, describes how emotions can be transformed from the personal to the impersonal, where they become emotions of a higher order:

The sign of growth of the emotions is their liberation from the *personal element* and their transition to higher planes. The liberation from personal elements enhances the cognitive power of emotions, because the more personal elements there are in an emotion, the more capable it is of leading into delusion. A personal emotion is always *biased*, always *unfair*, if only for the reason that it opposes itself to everything else. Just as it is wrong in relation to oneself to evaluate everything from the point of view of *one emotion*, opposing it to all the rest, so it is wrong in relation to the world and its people to evaluate everything from the point of view of some one accidental “I” of one’s own. Thus, the problem of right emotional knowledge is to *feel* in relation to people and the world from a point of view *other* than the personal. And the wider the circle for which a given person feels, the deeper the knowledge which his emotions give. (14)

It is possible to develop a purity of feeling that transcends our normal emotions and brings us closer to the true reality of life. “Deep feelings, like a sense of wonder, are outside time and beyond our daily concerns: they are impersonal and impartial yet powerfully experienced within ourselves. They connect us with a sense of joyous obligation to something that shows us why we are here. Real love, deep joy, or genuine grief all have this transcendental quality.” Children often naturally possess this subtle refined emotional perception as they view the world through a pristine untainted lens. In *An Unknown World*, Jacob Needleman speaks of his own childhood experiences:

Elias and I were often in touch with this invisible element of feeling when we contemplated the heavens and the Earth. But we had absolutely no idea, no conception at all – How could we? We were children – that this quality of feeling, this pure sense of wonder, was a seed of something even greater, far greater. We had no idea at all of what the sense of wonder is meant to be-

come in us, how it is meant to develop in man. And the invisibility of this potential, after all, lies at the root of the whole human condition, the whole fate of mankind and, very possibly, of the Earth itself. How could we know the existential price that has to be paid before the heart of man can play its necessary role in the awakening of consciousness and its power to see reality as it is in itself? We are speaking of the role of feeling, an unknown, invisible level of feeling that is an indispensable component in the attainment of objective knowledge. This higher feeling has to be paid for by inner sacrifice and struggle. (15)

Understanding our inner emotional world is a prerequisite for a balanced development of the centers. Observing and then transforming negative emotional states open up new possibilities of a freer and less reactive expression of them: "The word-based reminding factors of remorse, suffering, effort and hope begin to initiate the actual states pointed to by these words, gains dimension, subtlety and a remarkable new reality. 'I' as a separated presence, begin to truly inhabit my interior world. All real work on negative emotions depends on this separated presence." The awakening of the emotional center then allows a redistribution of the inner energies flowing through the body. Michel de Salzmann:

The opening of the feeling can only take place when one begins to understand, through experience, the necessity of a balanced state in the distribution and circulation of our inner energy. It involves a new center of gravity of attention, its withdrawal from the mind, and the revelation here and now, through my entire body, of my existential participation in life. In that state, for instance, the act of breathing can be in itself an entirely new experience. It engenders a specific shock and mobilization of energy when I discover that 'it breathes through me.' And if I can let it be and am able not to interfere, not to react in any manner to it, it awakens a new kind of sensitivity. This, for instance, can open in me something quite unusual, but it comes through a special balance. (16)

As human beings we have the capacity to consciously and intentionally manage the myriad impressions and experiences that life brings us. The key is to separate ourselves from the disorder and confusion of egoistic reactions that are so harmful in our relationships with others and the natural world:

Emotional reactions are part of human nature. Take almost any man or woman you know or know of, including the towering historical figures and moral heroes of the past: they, too, quarreled with their spouses. They too, without doubt, sometimes manifested themselves as petty or spiteful or sullen or beside themselves with rage or sunk in the histrionics of self-pity. So it is a nearly universal phenomenon . . . Obviously, if we are searching for inner growth, we must face the question of what to do about the emotions of the ego. And the answer that comes to us from every great inner teach-

ing is that there is something in ourselves that can be free from these emotions. There is a capacity of the mind that can step back from them, a capacity of consciousness to exist independently of the egoistic emotions. We are advised not to seek to destroy these emotional reactions, but to allow their existence within the light of our free awareness, without seeking to suppress them, or on the other hand, indulging in their expression. Awareness or pure seeing can eventually free the human psyche from the pain and disorder of the egoistic emotions. (17)

Each center perceives a certain aspect of reality and only the simultaneous contribution of all centers can provide a full picture of the world. The emotional center is the primary instrument for perceiving values and qualities, and complements the conceptual knowledge obtained by the intellectual center. "Values are to be felt, not merely logically demonstrated. Feeling brings access to an aspect of reality, just as surely as rationality; one without the other gives only a one-dimensional vision."

In denying ordinary emotions any significant cognitive value, modern thought has ignored the possibility within man of a quality of feeling that does indeed have immense cognitive value. It is true that "sleeping" man's emotions are mainly egoistic and subjective and that the enterprise of objective knowledge needs to separate itself from their influences. But that necessity need not blind us to the existence within us of an entirely different quality of feeling which reveals to us aspects of reality that purely mental and sense-based knowledge cannot grasp. This quality of feeling must be brought more into relationship with intellect, not less. Indeed, it is one of the tragedies of the modern mind that it knows things without feeling their meaning and relationship to the whole of human life. Fundamental questions such as "Why is man on earth?" – indeed, any ultimate *why* – are a matter of feeling, not only of logic. (18)

When the emotional center works correctly it has a sensitivity and intelligence to quickly evaluate any situation or experience and see it as a *whole*. By building up an orderly set of values which correspond to both inner and outer reality, it can extend our participation in, and understanding of, the world and provide an opening to higher levels of consciousness. "The emotional centre is concerned with awareness of harmony and truth. This finds expression in the appreciation of beauty and more significantly in the recognition of connections and relationships beyond the perceptions of the ordinary senses. We have all experienced the occasional flash of intuition which conveys a feeling of rightness in a situation or perhaps provides a solution to a problem which has puzzled us for days, or even longer."

Emotional Centre is really the most valuable of the tools at our disposal because it is programmed by a level of the mind that can recognize the relationships in the real (unmanifest) world. It can *see as a whole* the pattern from which the transit of time creates the successive events of life. It can be aware

objectively of all the activities of the body, both physical and psychological, and can see their place and use. Most important of all, it can create conscious associations through which we can begin to make contact with inestimably higher levels of intelligence in the Universe which Gurdjieff called Higher Centres. But in practice we misuse this remarkable Centre for the gratification of personal desires and which is not only wasteful but can be very dangerous. (19)

## The Higher Centers

In Gurdjieff's model of the human body there are two higher centers – the higher emotional and the higher intellectual. The higher emotional center is located in the middle story ('heart'), while the higher intellectual center is found in the upper story ('head'). Unlike the lower centers, there is no division into positive ("yes") and negative ("no"). Both of the higher centers are said to be fully developed and operational. Although working all the time, their functioning normally does not reach our ordinary consciousness as they are not properly connected to the lower centers: "It is the lower centers that are undeveloped. And it is precisely this lack of development, or the incomplete functioning of the lower centers, that prevents us from making use of the work of the higher centers."

The higher emotional center works with 'hydrogen 12,' a more refined energy than the energy of the lower centers. However, the emotional center is capable of working with 'hydrogen 12', and when it does it can be connected with the working of the higher emotional center: "The intellectual part of the emotional center is open to the higher emotional center and capable of receiving, in a fragmentary way, its vibrations of higher meaning. The working or vibrations of a higher center become conscious to us as meanings on different levels. Where with a lower center we see only one meaning, we see many interblending meanings with a higher center."

When a temporary connection with the higher emotional center is made, we experience new emotions and impressions previously unknown to us, but we are unable to express them in words. For this reason, myths, fables and teaching stories are often employed to convey the meaning of the higher emotional center influences. But generally, for most people, there is no connection between the lower and higher emotional centers and they are unable to hear the voice of the higher emotional center calling to them.

The higher emotional center is the gateway to a higher, more vivid state of consciousness – self-awareness or self-consciousness, the state of being present to oneself. "When a higher and permanent 'I' is present, forming a stable individuality endowed with the corresponding faculties of self-consciousness, attention and will, then real feelings appear – that is, a true feeling of self and feelings of a higher order that are linked with it." In *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time*, William Patrick Patterson provides an eloquent description of this state:

As the sense of self-consciousness reveals and informs the triadic functioning (the instinctive-moving, emotional and intellectual organism), its duration and depth proportionately increase. We say “yes” to Being – that which is consciously aware of itself and its contents, gross and subtle. Before, we lived in psychological time and space. We lived in the foreground. Life was all biography, not biology. But when attention shifts to include both foreground and background then the experiencing of ourselves, others, the environment, and time and space, changes, becomes dynamic. Time seems to stop, space expands. Silence, the ever-present background of all that is, is tasted. Released from the self-talk of the make-believe world, the ongoing societal hypnotism, we experience the primary – that is, the sensation of ourselves, the breath, the attention, perhaps an interior sound . . . In embodied presence one experiences – sees, feels, intuits – what-is. No longer is this static and fixed, but materiality converting into energy and energy into materiality, the world is experienced as it really is: dynamic, fluid, spatial, still, empty, solid, alive. And what is present is both the subject, the perceiver, and the object, what is perceived, that is, subject-object consciousness. (20)

The higher emotional center can sometimes be reached through the development of “mystical powers” or by a sudden challenging experience of a life-or-death nature. At other times the center is opened by a rapture induced by the wonder of nature. The main obstacle to accessing the higher emotional center is the presence of negative emotions in the lower emotional center, such as imagination, vanity or self-love:

The Higher Emotional Centre, when reached by the normal and legitimate processes of self-development, confers powers and experiences which are entirely positive. It is at one and the same time the seat and organ of the perfected individuality. It is the permanent ‘I,’ for when consciousness joins it with the lower Centres, the whole being is unified. Everything that can be known and experienced, both inwardly and outwardly, by a perfected individual belongs to the Higher Emotional Centre and the Higher Emotional, when joined with the lower Centres, enables them to perceive reality beyond the here and now of their usual experience. Authentic clairvoyance and all supra-normal cognition belongs to it . . . When consciousness in the Higher Emotional Centre is actually attained, all the self-centered motives which arise in the lower Centres are made subservient to the objective motives beyond self or non-self. (21)

When John G. Bennett was studying with Gurdjieff at his institute in France, he entered a higher state of consciousness following an intense series of exercises: “Suddenly I was filled with the influx of an immense power. My body seemed to have turned into light. My state was blissful beyond anything I had ever known. It was quite different from the ecstasy of sexual union, for it was altogether free and detached from the body. It was exultation in the faith that can move mountains.”

I experienced a clarity of thought that I had only known involuntarily and at rare moments, but which now was at my command. The phrase 'in my mind's eye' took on new meaning as I 'saw' the eternal pattern of each thing I looked at, the trees, the plants, the water flowing in this canal, and lastly my own body. I recognized the changing relationship between 'myself' and 'my pattern.' As my state of consciousness changed, 'I' and 'my pattern' grew closer together or separated and lost touch. Time and eternity were the conditions of our experience, and the Harmonious Development of Man towards which Gurdjieff was leading us was the secret of true freedom . . . It is not enough to know that another world exists: one must be able to enter it at will. Now I was living in Eternity and yet I had not lost my hold on Time. I was aware that Life itself is infinitely richer and greater than all our thinking mind can possibly know about it. (22)

Later, Gurdjieff explained the nature of Bennett's experience of higher consciousness:

There is a certain energy that is necessary for work on oneself. No man can make efforts unless he has a supply of this energy. We can call it the Higher Emotional Energy. Everyone, by a natural process, make a small amount of this energy every day. If rightly used, it enables man to achieve much for his own self-perfecting. But he can only get to a certain point in this way. The real complete transformation of being requires a very much greater concentration of Higher Emotional Energy than that which comes to him from nature. There are some people in the world, but they are very rare, who are connected to a Great Reservoir or Accumulator of this energy. Those who can draw upon it can be a means of helping others. (23)

The higher intellectual center works with the finest energy ('hydrogen 6') and can only be accessed through the higher emotional center, as the work of the lower centers is too slow to make a connection with such a subtle energy. Symbols are designed to reach the higher intellectual center "to transmit ideas inaccessible to the intellect and to transmit them in such a form as would exclude the possibility of false interpretations."

If we could connect the centers of our ordinary consciousness with the higher thinking center deliberately and at will, it would be of no use to us whatever in our present general state. In most cases where accidental contact with the higher thinking center takes place a man becomes unconscious. The mind refuses to take in the flood of thoughts, emotions, images, and ideas which suddenly burst into it. And instead of a vivid thought, or a vivid emotion, there results, on the contrary, a complete blank, a state of unconsciousness. Only rarely are there memories of moments of unusual shades and colors. This is usually all that remains from so-called 'mystical' and 'ecstatic' experiences, which represent a temporary connection with a higher center.

Our ordinary centers, in transmitting the impressions of the higher centers, may be compared to a blind man speaking of colors, or to a deaf man speaking of music. (24)

The way to the higher intellectual center begins with the purification and harmonization of the lower centers, eventually leading to the attainment of self-consciousness in the higher emotional center. Then a gateway is prepared for the eventual connection with the higher intellectual center. "Beginning with the unification of the lower centers, a great extension occurs in the ecstatic experiences which belong to the higher emotional center. However, the distinction between 'I' and 'not-I' remains, even though in the full working of the higher emotional center all self-centered separate motives have disappeared. But in the higher intellectual center the last distinction between any form of existence and all sense of separate individuality vanishes entirely."

The higher intellectual center is functionally expressed as a very high order of objective thinking and the attainment of the state of objective consciousness: "It is connected with a state of universal being and presence, endowed with objective consciousness and with feelings which ordinary people scarcely know."

P.D. Ouspensky notes that we only know of such a connection with higher reality from descriptions of mystical experiences and transcendental states from adepts from many different spiritual traditions across cultures and throughout history: "These states can occur on the basis of religious emotions, or, for short moments, through particular narcotics, or in certain pathological states such as epileptic fits or accidental traumatic injuries to the brain, in which case it is difficult to say which is the cause and which is the effect, that is, whether the pathological state results from this connection or its cause." In *Toward Awakening*, Jean Vayssé provides a succinct account of the state of consciousness associated with the higher intellectual center:

The highest state of presence is the state of "objective" consciousness. In this state a man could come in touch with the real objective world (which he is separated from by his senses, his dreams and his subjective states of consciousness), and thus he could see and perceive things as they are. But this state is not given to him by nature and can come only as the end result of a process of inner transformation and of a long work on himself. As in the case of self-consciousness, ordinary man only has flashes of objective consciousness, which he does not even notice and can remember only when he is in the state of self-consciousness. But ordinary man has a great deal of theoretical information about this fourth state on the basis of which he imagines he is able to reach it directly. Quite apart from fraud and charlatanism, every religion includes descriptions and accounts of what it calls ecstasy, enlightenment, and so on. And man often sets out in search of this without understanding that the only right way toward objective consciousness leads through the development of self-consciousness. Moreover, it is one of the character-

istics of the state of ordinary consciousness that the authentic knowledge which it can contain is constantly mixed with dreams and imagination which in the end submerge it. (25)

The two higher centers cannot be comprehended intellectually as they are beyond the perception of our ordinary senses. The similar descriptions of higher states of consciousness by mystics and spiritual masters of many traditions throughout history testify to the reality of these experiences, even though they are difficult to express in our usual linguistic forms. However, these experiences of a higher level of reality are not common: "We must not be misled by the descriptions given of the higher parts of centers, and the glimpses which they disclose of our latent possibilities, into thinking that they play an important part in the life of humanity."

Since these higher states can only be understood through direct experience, we can learn about them only indirectly from those who have actually experienced them and written about their experience. This explains why there is so much confusion about the functioning of the two higher centers and their corresponding states of consciousness. P.D. Ouspensky speaks of this misunderstanding in *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*:

In the religious and early philosophical literature of different nations there are many allusions to the higher states of consciousness and to higher functions. What creates an additional difficulty in understanding these allusions is the lack of division between higher states of consciousness. What is called *samadhi* or *ecstatic state* or *illumination*, or in more recent works "cosmic consciousness," may refer to one and may refer to another – sometimes to experiences of self-consciousness and sometimes to experiences of objective consciousness. And, strange though it may seem, we have more material for judging about the highest state, that is, *objective consciousness*, than about the intermediate state, that is, *self-consciousness*, although the former may come only *after* the latter. (26)

The main impediment to the opening of the two higher centers is the imbalance of the lower centers. A new harmonious balance and alignment between the centers is a prerequisite for the appearance of higher energy in the human organism. This requires work on oneself: "For most people a whole preliminary work of putting in order is generally necessary before real work on oneself can begin. To economize the energy of our organism and to balance and regulate the work of our centers – whose functions constitute our life – is the first stage in the re-establishment of the rhythm of right work and of contact with the higher centers which is the basis for all evolution of man."

Underlying the wrong functioning of the human machine and the rupture between the centers used for ordinary life and the two higher centers is the insufficient development of the lower centers. It is precisely this lack of development of the lower centers, or their faulty functioning, which prevents

man from making use of his higher centers by hindering the establishment of connections with them. But if by his personal work (which is only possible in a school) a man begins to develop his lower centers and to balance them, the emotional center may find its normal level of functioning again; and, as it becomes purified and more developed, contact is established with the higher emotional center. Later, through this, a new contact may come to be established with the higher intellectual center. No direct contact is possible between the lower intellectual center and the higher intellectual center. The axis of development of the human being is founded in an emotional development, and evolution of the feeling of self – its awakening, development and transcendence. (27)

When the lower centers are purified and balanced, they can be receptive to the finer vibrations coming from the higher emotional center ('hydrogen 12') and the vibrations of the higher intellectual center ('hydrogen 6'). Although the higher centers are fully operational, most people are not conscious of their activity – receiving influences from higher levels and realms of the cosmos. "If the higher centers become active they begin to serve the higher nature. I discover that a new structure is gradually taking shape, imbued with qualities of thought, feeling and sensation which I did not know before. This structure – a new body forming, condensing, organizing – is the previously missing intermediary element capable of uniting the higher and lower natures."

To receive and utilize the energy and perceptions emanating from the higher centers, a certain attitude of mind and mobilization of attention is necessary. This is because the lower centers have a vibrational pattern which needs to be quickened and then stabilized in order to connect with the finer quality of vibrations of the higher centers: "In order to be open and permeable to this higher quality, they have to unite and become more active so that their vibrations intensify. The work is to increase the intensity of the lower centers in order to allow a contact with the higher centers." In *The Reality of Being*, Jeanne de Salzmann elaborates:

When I come to a quiet state, free of all tension, I discover a very fine vibration, a reality I could not perceive before. It comes from another level to which I am usually closed, from a higher center that cannot come into play unless the other centers let go, become quiet. I can be related to the highest energy if I accept voluntarily opening to it . . . In opening to this new energy, I experience an inner order in which this Presence, experienced as a whole, can see all the parts. It can act through them provided my attention remains active with the same intensity everywhere. This inner order requires a total attention. The new current of energy, which all the rest must obey, needs to take on force and become permanent. The connection between my inner Presence and my body is the connection between this Presence and life. (28)

A harmonious balance between the lower centers and the activation of a conscious attention creates the conditions in which the influences of the higher centers can be transmitted to and

received by the lower centers. Jeanne de Salzmann: "In order for transformation to take place, there must be a total attention, that is, an attention coming from all parts of me. In order for a certain blending to occur, my thinking, my feeling and my sensations must be together."

Attention is the conscious force, the force of consciousness. It is a divine force. The search is for contact with an energy coming from the higher parts of our centers. At times we have an intuition of it that is less strong or more strong. This intuition is the action on us of higher centers from which we are separated by our attachment to our functions. When this action is felt, it affects the body which then receives more subtle and alive sensations. It affects the thought, which becomes capable of holding under its look what is immediately present. It affects the emotions, giving rise to a new feeling . . . In order for this action to be felt by my body, mind and feeling, there must be a certain state of availability. (29)

Within each human being there is an embryonic wish for truth, for a taste of true reality. Normally this desire is largely dormant, activated only by special circumstances such as states of wonder, or organic grief, or authentic remorse. Spiritual ideas and guidance can support this wish as a first stage in the search for truth. "Beyond this threshold lies the work of consciously strengthening the power of my attention to truth, which in its mature form, is the only power in us worthy of the ancient name of *Mind*."

Many spiritual traditions speak of a higher guiding principle of consciousness residing in the mind. For this latent possibility to effectively actualize and function in life it needs to be developed: "There is such a thing as higher influences. But the way they act on us is always new and unanticipated in ourselves – namely need. To act on us, truth requires need." The higher energies of the cosmos require a suitable vessel through which this sacred impulse can manifest. In *The Heart of Philosophy*, Jacob Needleman shares his reflections on this idea:

This principle awakens in the moment of the desire for truth. When this need is activated, I observe that in myself something quite still appears and is obeyed by other parts of my inner nature that ordinarily go their own way, taking the rest of me with them. In the ordinary life of people, no one, man, woman or child, is closer to the possession of moral power than when he or she is in the state of wonder or in any of the other states related to it. This need for truth is the embryo of the ruling principle. It is delicate, fragile, weak, shy, easily covered over. It is not yet the inner master spoken of in the ancient teachings. It is quite far from that immense force. But it is the beginning of it. When it is activated, "inner morality" is, for the moment, a fact. Higher influences – such as authentic philosophy, myths, religious ideals, certain kinds of art, ritual, and custom handed down from ancient times – act upon us to support the condition of "inner morality" in which the parts of human nature do not seek gain from the other parts, but these influences cannot create this internal state of affairs directly. The direct cause is the desire for truth and being.

These higher influences speak directly to this special impulse in humans and support it. (30)

As human beings, we often have moments of quiet self-reflection about our possibilities and destiny which lie beyond the realities of ordinary life. "Such thoughts can be more than solace and can do more than lead us into a more 'spiritual' mood. They can inform our mind and body and emotions that there is, as it were, 'something else' in our house. That is, there is another aim possible in my life."

We have, as awakened human beings, the possibility and capacity to experience realms of existence beyond physical sensations, emotions and thoughts. Jacob Needleman: "A man or woman, a human being, is built, structured for the happiness that comes from the cultivation of a deeper power of mind and feeling than is offered to us by our normal automatic processes."

Before anything else, we are human beings in search of our Self. We are human beings, this cosmically unique being whose essence contains the whole of nature and nature's God. We are built to contain very fine, very subtle, and creative elements, the current that sustains worlds; we are also built to contain all the powers and urgings of the animal and of the matter of earth. Wisdom tells us we are both – god and animal, heaven and earth – at one and the same time, and through the existence together of these levels something of God is meant to enter into the world of humanity and the world of our planet. That is what we are, cosmically, as human beings. And we are two in another sense – a related sense, but not exactly corresponding to this cosmic structure. We have in ourselves the yearning to actualize this authentic destiny, and we have in ourselves overwhelming and massive ignorance of this yearning and what it strives for. We have in ourselves a spark of divine hunger, along with an inferno of fear and tension that calls itself desire, but which is often actually normal physical and social desire mixed with unconscious terror – what the Buddhists call "craving"; what the Christians once called "passion." We are both an expansive thrust upward and a dark contraction downward: we wish and do not wish for the Self. (31)

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