

INNER WORK PRINCIPLES III

Self-Remembering

Self-remembering has been called the “golden key” to Gurdjieff’s teaching of inner development. Other synonymous terms are self-consciousness, presence of self and self-recollection. Through self-remembering, the field of consciousness is expanded to encompass simultaneously both the inner and outer worlds of human experience. The three essential features of self-remembering are: presence of oneself, awareness of the place where one is, and awareness of this particular moment in time – “I am here now.”

P.D. Ouspensky represented self-remembering as a division of attention: “When I observe something, my attention is directed towards what I observe – a line with one arrowhead. When at the same time, I try to remember myself, my attention is directed both towards the object observed and towards myself. A second arrowhead appears on the other end of the line . . . The problem consisted in directing attention on oneself without weakening or obliterating the attention directed on something else. Moreover this ‘something else’ could as well be within me as outside me.” (1)

In Gurdjieff’s teaching, self-remembering is sometimes described as the third state of consciousness, “self-consciousness.” When fully developed, this state has three main qualities: permanent self-consciousness, independent will, and free attention. These confer an enduring sense of presence and a personal sense of responsibility:

It is usually taken for granted that we possess this state of consciousness or that we can have it at will together with all the qualities related to it: inner unity, a permanent I, will, freedom, and so on. Actually, observation shows us that we do not possess this state, and that our wish for it, however strong, is incapable of creating it in ourselves. We have only faint glimpses of it with no means of interpreting them correctly. In fact this third state of consciousness is a natural right of man as he is. This state is the result of “growth” – one might call it a gradual revelation – and it is impossible to make it more or less permanent without long work and a special training connected with the functioning in man of the higher emotional center, as well as the establishment of right relations between this center, the lower centers, and their functions. (2)

What distinguishes self-remembering from our ordinary state of consciousness is the “sense of presence.” The same functions of thinking, feeling, sensing and acting operate in both states, but in the state of ‘waking sleep’ the functioning is mechanical, driven by habit and conditioning. But in the state of self-remembering there is a higher quality of attention and the ‘sensation of being’ is much more vivid. One feels truly alive in the present moment. Remembering oneself is the first step to awakening: “This effort brings an ‘impression of oneself’ with a special ‘taste’ which cannot be mistaken. What this

effort actually implies, cannot be described in words: it is a personal experience which only has meaning when it is lived through at the moment.” (3)

An apt analogy for the experience of self-remembering is that of a stage actor in a play who is completely immersed in a role, but suddenly realizes that they are merely acting the role and are actually themselves, not the part they are playing. This is similar to an audience member who is watching a movie in a theatre and completely identified with the story and the characters. But if they remember themselves, they realize that they are only sitting in a seat with the rest of the audience watching a film projected on a screen.

Self-remembering has different degrees, and is essential for work on oneself. Complete self-remembering occurs when a person is totally present in all centers (intellectual, emotional and instinctive-moving) at the same time, with a vivid sense of *being*, of *I Am* – knowing, feeling and sensing one’s aliveness in the moment. French pupil Henri Tracol hints at the depth and complexity of self-remembering in *The Taste For Things That Are True*: “Remembering oneself admits of an infinite number of approaches. It can be looked at from many and varied angles. It has certain definite degrees and stages and there is always more in it than we can ever grasp. Yet, beneath all its multiple forms we can savour again and again the unique taste of the fundamental experience.” (4)

For most people, the state of self-remembering occurs only accidentally without any temporal duration or stability. But Gurdjieff placed great importance even on these momentary events, as they are signposts of what is possible after dedicated inner work: “We have it by flashes, but only by flashes. There are moments when you are aware not only of what you are doing, but also of yourselves doing it. You see simultaneously in the statement ‘I am here,’ the ‘I’ and the fact of being ‘here’.” (5)

Some people have vivid experiences of self-remembering when they were children, which retain their force even after the passage of many decades: “Certain memories of childhood, full of color and flavor, are moments of self-remembering – unforgettable because they connect our deepest inner world with what’s happening to us and around us. Such impressions are as alive as they were then, no matter how long ago they took place.” (6) But even in adulthood there are moments of self-remembering that stand out in stark contrast to our ordinary state of ‘waking sleep.’ They touch something deeper inside ourselves that transcends our ordinary life experiences:

In our waking state, we have only two ways of approaching it, two kinds of special moments which life sometimes brings and whose value we generally sense without understanding very well why. The first are those glimmers of consciousness of what we are which are given us in serious moments of emergency – at a moment when one’s life is in danger, for example, or at the loss of a loved one – which make a very deep impression on us. The second are moments of inner awareness, of a conscience which is our own, which we find intuitively when life puts everything in question for us and which forces us to look deeply within ourselves and respond “to the very best of our

knowledge and belief’ and no longer on behalf of an acquired morality and ready-made ideas. (7)

Jacob Needleman argues that natural experiences of self-remembering, which often occur in ordinary life, are signposts or intimations of a connection with higher levels of reality. In *What is God?* he writes:

Most people during their lives are given experiences of what can be called self-remembering, or the experience of *I Am* at one or another level. Such experiences are common in childhood, but they can also occur at any time, sometimes simply out of nowhere, and more often during special extreme moments of danger; or joy or grief; or wonder; or remorse; or deep and sudden loss or disappointment. In such moments a man or woman may come closer to becoming the human being he or she wishes to be – capable of love, compassion, inner peace, intelligence, resourceful action and often uncommon strength. That is, such experiences are like messages from our own real Self. Messages that say: “I am you. Let me enter your life.” But rare are the moments when one is given to understand *how* to struggle or how to live in a way that makes us, body and soul, available to such experiences. For such experiences, were we to become more available to them, would eventually transform us. (8)

Students of the Work have also reported deep experiences of self-remembering. In *The Pursuit of the Present*, Henri Thomasson describes in vivid terms the conditions which prepare the ground for such formative experiences: “To remember myself is to submit to the effort which brings me to the concrete sensation of existing in the present moment: ‘I, wholly here, where I am, present.’ It is the power which is sometimes given me of experiencing at one and the same time the life that acts through me, the results of the actions that arise from it and the strength of the enlightenment that it is aware of. It leads to a real change in my whole being, thanks to which I am unable to escape, fleetingly at least, from the level on which I usually live.” (9)

Life passes through me like a flowing stream, each moment filled with a number of movements, thoughts, impressions that are felt, or impulses I obey and to be alive is to be present to this flow as though it were a spectacle at which I am at once audience and actor. The taste of this assures me that I need have no doubt at all that I really participate in my life. I am sure that I am ‘alive,’ that I have some life over and above the physical sensation of my animal life . . . To be present is to gather up in myself the material that every moment of life brings to me and to let this really stay alive in me instead of just reflecting it passively or letting it fly off with whatever in me wishes to enjoy, judge or act without any permission from me. To be present is to make sure that these moments feed and enliven all the parts they touch and remain constant in the stable place in which the source of my life lives. This place is timeless, but nevertheless quite certainly present. (10)

Gurdjieff stressed the fact that we do not normally remember ourselves and spend most of our time each day ‘asleep.’ Yet most people are completely oblivious of this self-evident reality: “Psychology in general has overlooked a fact of tremendous importance, namely that *we do not remember ourselves*; that we live and act and reason in deep sleep, not metaphorically but in absolute reality. And also that, at the same time, we *can* remember ourselves if we make sufficient efforts, that we *can awaken*.” (11)

The principal barriers to self-remembering are *identification* and the *duality* of the mechanical functioning of the lower centers. The expressions of duality – yes/no, like/dislike, pleasant/unpleasant – create an inner conflict which can only be overcome by the effort to self-remember through a separation of the attention, creating a *third force* which resolves the apparent duality (12).

Identification is even more of an obstacle to self-remembering than duality. Self-remembering and identification are mutually exclusive – they cannot co-exist under any circumstance. Self-remembering, simply to be present, attentive and aware of oneself in the moment, is the opposite of identification. In *This Fundamental Quest*, French pupil Henriette Lannes shows how inner work is a movement away from identification to a more conscious state of being: “Identification is the principal obstacle that stands in the way of self-remembering, to be conscious of oneself – inner freedom means freeing oneself from identification. If we learn to observe ourselves as we live, we notice that our attention is constantly taken by our thoughts, by our desires, our imaginings, our moods. Inner work asks us to remain present to our different degrees of identification.” (13) The struggle between identification and self-remembering is described as an ongoing movement in consciousness by Gerald de Symons Beckwith in *Ouspensky’s Fourth Way*:

Self-remembering starts as a simple awareness of myself being here, now, in this moment. Here and now is the only possible starting place. We possess no other moments, the past is gone and the future is yet to arrive. No action or thought or anything else can take place anywhere else but now. As soon as the mind strays into the past or the future we become automatons. Most of life is lived in this condition, the mind, the emotions and the body reacting automatically to the continuous driving belt of influences and impressions that make everything just happen. Being present to the moment is the beginning of ‘waking up’ which makes it possible to observe what we’re doing, feeling and thinking *now*. What happens then, of course, is that we immediately become identified with whatever we’re observing, the present moment slips away and we’re back in the usual automatic state without even noticing that it’s happened. (14)

The effort to self-remember is very difficult, as it requires a conscious attention free from identification or distraction. Although most aspirants recognize the importance of self-remembering, they may lack the force to do it, or simply forget that they have to remember themselves – “Lost in action,” as it were. There is no blueprint or fixed method, only a patient resolve to return to the sensation of oneself here in the present moment. But this ‘self-sensing’ is difficult to maintain for any length of time. In the

words of one of Gurdjieff's students: "An effort to prolong the moment always failed. Nor, mysteriously, was it ever possible to track down the exact second when the new state disappeared." (15)

John Pentland suggests a pragmatic, even tactical approach: "You will feel yourself as yourself. It is a very rare thing to feel 'I am here.' You have to awaken first. Don't strive for it. Strive for the wish to awaken. See more of what opposes it and then nothing can prevent you from coming to moments of self-remembering." (16)

Without exception, Gurdjieff's students report that self-remembering is never easy. They affirm that it may take years of slow but steady effort to develop the ability to sustain a conscious awareness of one's own presence, here and now. Henri Tracol describes his own up and down efforts:

Although the ability to remember oneself is our birthright, it needs first to be discovered and thereafter cultivated. Lacking such special work, it will wither. It is necessary, therefore – without exhausting oneself in fruitless efforts, but at the same time never giving up – quietly to try to develop this capacity by the frequency, duration and intensity of our attempts and by increasing their breadth and depth . . . Inevitably, this inner presence disappears. I lose it and forget it. Then I find it again. I remember it – or, to be more accurate, it recalls itself to me. In this dilemma: on one side the recognition of my impotence and nothingness, on the other the certainty of this ever-renewed power of being. But if I persevere – deliberately – by accepting to face it again and again; if I oblige myself to deepen my insight into the paradoxes of my inner situation, there may await me, at the end of this long tunnel, a very different prospect: a vision. I remember myself. Who is this "I"? Who is this "myself"? (17)

There is an important relationship between self-remembering and self-observation. Gurdjieff emphasized that self-remembering must precede any constructive attempt at self-observation (18). In other words, a person must be *present* in order to properly observe their thoughts, feelings and sensations. Without the foundational presence of self-remembering, one center merely observes another center – a phenomenon rightly termed "talking to oneself."

Gurdjieff admonished his students to "remember yourself always and everywhere." However, to be successful at this very challenging endeavour, the *attention* must be mobilized and consciously directed: "The practice involves trying to open one's inner life to another source of attention, starting with just being aware that you're here – being present. It is possible to be more present, now, but you have to practice it. It means being fully engaged with whatever you are doing at a particular moment. Merely the attempt to do it can be transformative." (19)

There is a reciprocal relationship between self-remembering and attention: attention is proportional to the power to remember oneself. Attention enhances self-remembering

and, conversely, with self-remembering attention becomes more acute. Henriette Lannes: “Real remembering can only occur if your attention is entirely directed toward and maintained on yourself. But what is this attention? It is the attention connected with being-effort, the attention that comes from all essential parts of ourselves, gathered. It is a struggle *for*. In this struggle, our attention is not turned toward doing or engaged in fighting *against*, but rather to be there, to receive what *is there*.” (20)

With self-remembering our life is qualitatively changed and our experience of every-day living is much more vivid, richer and fuller. A secondary advantage, according to Gurdjieff, is that one makes fewer mistakes in life:

To remember oneself is to awaken again to what we truly are. It is an act of opening that leads little by little toward exact knowledge of ourselves. Above all, it is an experience of *coming back to ourselves*. Only when we succeed in gathering our attention and relaxing does our body become capable of opening. If these inner conditions are brought together and maintained for a certain time, a true feeling – without words, without images – can appear for a few moments within ourselves. At the moment of this experience, which is like no other, we sense a new vibration that transmits the taste of a more secret, more subtle life. We realize, then, that the capacity to *be there* has been given us. Habitually we are everywhere but there, in ourselves. In our ordinary state, we are sometimes in the past, sometimes in the future, but rarely in the present and at home. (21)

Self-remembering has a transformative effect on our intellectual, emotional and physical functioning, which leads to the development of a real and permanent ‘I.’ There is a deeper connection with the higher energies of the cosmos as life’s potentialities are revealed and actualized in everyday life: “As my inner receptive space becomes less occupied by involuntary thoughts, emotions and sensations, more subtle impressions can be received in a state of self-remembering. One feels in this state one’s own living connection with the silence that lies behind sound. This silence and the corresponding, more subtle feeling of the emptiness – the living void behind appearances, behind forms – connects us in a very vivifying way to the very ground of our being, the wordless, naked experience of being.” (22)

Self-remembering leads to a qualitative change in consciousness, as new elements of experience emerge which were previously hidden: “Through self-remembering we come under new influences which otherwise cannot reach us. If you feel the extraordinariness of your own existence, if you feel the miracle of your body, of your consciousness, of the world that surrounds you, if you begin to wonder who you are, then you are in the state necessary for self-remembering.” (23) Kenneth Walker describes the revolutionary change of perspective that self-remembering brings in *A Study of Gurdjieff’s Teaching*:

One seems to have stepped abruptly through a gateway into an entirely different world and mode of living. The small limiting ‘self’ of everyday life is no longer there to isolate one from everything else, and in its absence one

is received into a much wider order of existence. Separateness has gone and an overwhelming sense of 'being' takes its place . . . One becomes conscious of a unity, an intensity of existence, a blissfulness of 'being' never experienced before. (24)

Self-remembering allows us to choose how we use our energies – consciously or blindly under the influence of desires and identification: “Self-remembering is an appropriate action at the appropriate point – blocking the channel of identification and turning the attention and energy back toward oneself. In a state of self-remembering one’s organism is open to receive the impressions as they are, interact with them and incorporate them appropriately. This is an opening to another level of impressions altogether – an opening to another reality.” (25)

In *The Eye That Sees Itself*, Shimon Malin speaks to how self-remembering is a unifying factor in connecting the phenomenal and transcendental aspects of reality:

Stillness is not a state; it is an inner space. Like a hub at the center of a wheel, it accommodates quietude and movement with equal ease. Stillness is the place where the phenomenal and noumenal worlds interface. It is the opening through which subtle vibrations can reach us, and so reach the phenomenal world. Remembering oneself is the act of creating and maintaining this opening. Putting the idea of self-remembering at the center of one’s practice is the genius of the Gurdjieff work. Self-remembering is the foundation. The question, “Can I keep remembering myself as I get up and take a few steps?” is as simple as it is profound. A few moments of relatively pure engagement with this effort – an engagement without reaction – and the world becomes beautiful. Such a relatively pure effort brings a spaciousness that can accommodate whatever state the body-mind is in. And when we are able to see ourselves, that body-mind state no longer claims center stage. The dichotomy of *wish for change* versus *resistance to change* loses its power – so change can actually take place. (26)

Working with the Body, Emotions and Mind

The proper functioning of the intellectual, emotional and instinctive-moving centers requires a certain quality of energy distributed in a balanced, harmonious relationship. This provides the foundation for productive inner work. However, in many cases this functional organic energy is blocked or wasted:

Energy is spent chiefly on unnecessary and unpleasant emotions, on the expectation of unpleasant things, possible and impossible, on bad moods, on haste, nervousness, irritability, imagination, daydreaming, and so on. Energy is wasted on the wrong work of centers, on unnecessary tension of the muscles out of all proportion to the work produced; on perpetual chatter which absorbs an enormous amount of energy; on the “interest” continually taken in things happening around

us or to other people and having in fact no interest whatsoever; on the constant waste of 'attention'; and so on, and so on. (27)

Gurdjieff constantly pointed out to his students that they were unable to observe themselves and the working of their functions for any length of time because they could not *remember themselves*. In general, most attempts at self-remembering are fragmentary and do not involve all parts of our being: "Self-remembering has a certain place in our lives, especially in our thinking. Yet it has remained only an idea. It is not alive, it does not apply to our whole life. We do not live the teaching. The different parts of ourselves are not profoundly touched by this idea. They remain unengaged, unconcerned." (28) In *The Reality of Being*, Jeanne de Salzmann writes:

Our body, for example, is not truly involved in self-remembering. I always ignore the experience of my body on the earth, belonging to the earth, and go off into speculations or emotions that deprive me of all possibility of being unified, of being whole. This can be seen at each instant. Either my energy is concentrated in my thought – in judging, approving, disapproving, looking for arguments . . . or I am taken by my emotional reactions – in opposing, being afraid, envying, wishing to dominate. In every case my body is isolated, apart. Here there is no Being, only parts of Being. (29)

De Salzmann argues that a volitional confrontation between the body and the psyche is necessary for any higher development to occur (30): "What is important is the continual struggle between our head and our 'animal,' between our individuality and our functions because we need the substance that this conscious confrontation produces. It requires effort again and again, and we must not be discouraged because the result of our work comes slowly." (31) In the Work there are certain inner tasks involving body and psyche which exercise a conscious will to create a struggle between "yes" and "no."

Gurdjieff constantly stressed the importance of becoming aware of our body and its various sensations as the first step in self-remembering. As one of the preparations for self-remembering, he taught his students special exercises for fully relaxing our muscles and then for 'sensing' specific areas of the body.

The moving and instinctive functions of the body can act as obstacles to inner growth through automatism, attachment to habits, tensions, laziness and improper functioning. Many of these obstructions are unrecognized and invisible to the person himself. To enter a quiet state amenable to self-remembering, the body needs to relax by first becoming aware of the myriad tensions of the body. Gurdjieff: "When a man decides to struggle for freedom, he has first of all to struggle with his own body. Therefore, one of the first things a man must learn previous to any physical work on himself is to observe and feel muscular tension and to be able to relax the muscles when it is necessary." (32)

In their initial attempts at self-remembering, students are often instructed to focus their attention on the body or specific parts of the body. This is suggested because the body is a relatively stable platform which can be controlled through voluntary attention, unlike

thoughts and emotions which are much more ephemeral and constantly changing: “For a long time, the Work involves returning to the sensations of the body over and over again no matter what you are doing. Such attempts are known as ‘efforts.’ They are meant to counteract the sleep of everyday life . . . These efforts help to dissipate daydreaming, absent-mindedness, and the hazy stupor in which we stumble through our lives.” (33)

Once the physical body is in a relaxed, receptive state, it becomes possible to unify all the functions into one harmonious whole. At this point, thinking, feeling, sensing and acting cooperate in such a way as to make self-remembering and self-observation truly possible, as well as opening to a higher dimension of reality (34): “The wrong functioning and interferences of the centers, which are habitual, represent such a waste of energy and loss of quality that 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 the centers whose functions constitute our life is the first stage in re-establishment of a rhythm of right work and of contact with the higher centers which is the basis of all human evolution.” (35)

Gurdjieff stressed that any higher development must begin, not with the mind, but through self-sensing with the instinctive-moving center as well as the emotional center. For self-remembering to be effective all the centers must work together in a harmonious partnership. C.S. Nott emphasizes this point in *Teachings of Gurdjieff*: “Mind alone does not constitute a human being. The centre of gravity of change is in the moving and emotional centres, but these are concerned only with the present; the mind looks ahead. The wish to change, to be what one ought to be, must be in our emotional centre, and the ability to *do* in our body.” (36)

Consciousness of self is a state predicated on self-remembering – a conscious awareness of the body, of being embodied, of being connected with what is happening internally, as well as what is happening externally. Once embodied, self-observation has a physical support; otherwise, observation is from only a part of us, the head, and therefore entirely mental. As we become relatively more whole, what is observed and experienced also has greater wholeness. Thus the impressions are stronger, more vivid, and evoke a feeling of what is observed as well as its image. An eagle suddenly flies overhead, for example. Now there is both its image and a sense of myself; both an awareness of the eagle, the “it,” and the “I” that is seeing “it,” and both *at the same time*. Only when there is self-consciousness do we experience the world and ourselves in the world. Then, we viscerally sense, feel and know both *simultaneously*. An immediate, sensory experience of the triadic functioning is not only mental, not an idea or feeling alone, but an actuality. (37)

Unlike many contemporary spiritual paths, Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way teaching is based on a balanced development of *all* human functions realized and actualized within the challenges of everyday life:

It imposes no preliminary renunciation, but demands, within the framework of everyday life, a set of conditions appropriate for *real work on oneself*. It opens up a perspective of profound transformation of being through awakening and self-knowledge. It presupposes a sincere search in oneself for truth, the realization of one's own "nothingness," the recourse to effort – and to super-effort – for the development of one's power of consciousness. It also allows one to discover and to realize certain hidden possibilities by means of a simultaneous and interrelated activation of one's intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities toward a voluntary concentration on the struggle which takes place in oneself between one's positive and negative tendencies. This perpetual struggle operates within every seeker according to the principle of relativity which governs the relationship of different levels of energy in human nature, as it governs those of the universe. (38)

One of the great challenges of inner work is to involve all our functions in the process of transformation. Usually only the head or thinking participates in self-development while the feelings and body remain unrelated to this important task. It is necessary to recognize the lack of a relationship between *all* the centers, and the ensuing resistance and incapacity in our life that this represents. It is primarily our head that is touched by the Work. The body and feelings are essentially indifferent, and stand aside oblivious to their need to participate in the quest for self-development. Jeanne de Salzmann:

As Gurdjieff said, the power of transformation is not in the thought. It is in the body and the feeling. And our body and feeling experience no demand so long as they are contented. They live only in the present moment, and their memory is short. Until now, the greatest part of our wish, of our efforts, has come from the thought. The thought wishes to obtain, to change something. But what has to change is the state of the feeling. The wish must come from the feeling, and the power to do – the capacity – must come from the body. With my thought I remember that I wish to be present. My thought has concluded that this would be useful and necessary for all the centers, that I should do everything I can to interest and convince the other centers. But it must be understood that the greatest part of our "I" is not interested in self-remembering. The other centers do not even suspect the existence in the thought of a wish to work in this direction. It is therefore necessary to try to put them into contact with this desire. If they can feel a wish to go in this direction, half of the work will have been accomplished. (39)

As self-remembering ripens and attention deepens, awareness increases and rests in the body and the senses, intensifying the experience of life. In *Themes III*, A.L. Staveley explores this transformative process:

For awareness to increase there must first of all be something in my presence for which this is a possibility. I must begin, as ever, with self-remembering. There must be someone there – at home in me – to remember. For awareness to exist in me there must be a place in my presence which corresponds to it. I must be awake. I must be awake to life forces which continually and lawfully pull my inner forces towards the outer, the periphery of my living, and also to

the force of my wish, which must constantly move against this. Only this struggle is going to generate the friction and intensity required to awaken me more, bring me to awareness . . . Awareness is, after all, not an abstraction but that for which my marvelous body is an instrument. I cannot reach the deeper levels of awareness by bypassing my body, quite the contrary. This is where I begin. (40)

Harmonization with Everyday Life

The full blossoming of our human potential is sometimes described as a process of “death and rebirth.” Gurdjieff alluded to this when he quoted an ancient aphorism to his students: *When a man awakes, he can die; when he dies he can be born.* The first stage in this transformative process is the recognition of one’s *actual* state of development and being: “To awaken means to realize one’s own nothingness, that is, to realize one’s complete and absolute mechanicalness and helplessness. And it is not sufficient to realize it philosophically in words. It is necessary to realize it in clear, simple, concrete facts, in one’s own facts.” (41)

The continual consciousness of his nothingness and of his helplessness will eventually give a man the courage to ‘die,’ that is, to die, not merely mentally or in his consciousness, but to die in fact and to renounce actually and forever those aspects of himself which are either unnecessary from the point of view of his inner growth or which hinder it. These aspects are first of all his ‘false I.’ But in order to see a thing *always*, one must first of all see it even if only for a second. All new powers and capacities of realization come always in one and the same way. At first, they appear in the form of flashes and short moments; afterwards they appear more often and last longer until, finally, after very long work they become permanent. The same thing applies to awakening. It is impossible to awaken completely all at once. *But one must die all at once and forever* after having made a certain effort, having surmounted a certain obstacle, having taken a certain decision from which there is no going back. This would be difficult, even impossible, for a man were it not for the slow and gradual awakening which precedes it. (42)

The ‘personality’ is a necessary component of human experience, allowing us to relate with the outer world. In the Work, the aim is to render the personality subordinate to, and a conscious instrument of, the ‘essence.’ Then our higher nature or Self can manifest freely without the constraints of the conditioned, secondary ego-self: “It is much more productive to regard personality as an essential and potentially entirely useful construction that can help lead us home. In the light of knowledge, the changing ego and the negative aspects of our personality which we habitually block out of our mind can be looked upon with kindly tolerance and good humour.” (43)

With knowledge and generosity, personality can become a help rather than a hindrance, relinquishing its position on the centre of the stage to allow the rightful and essential Self to direct its activity. Even the ‘realized’ man has a personality, but it serves to channel his influence, not block it out. With the enlightened self-knowledge that arises from truly impartial self-observation,

negative aspects of character can drop away, often effortlessly, and innately positive qualities are allowed the freedom to develop their full potential. The key to success in any psychological enquiry is not to regard the personality or the separate ego as the enemy, as an uncontrollable manifestation of ignorance that is continually hampering and catching us out, but to see it as the cocoon we have spun, not only as a defense against the pain of forgetting our divine origin, but also to protect the Self within. (44)

Through inner work, the personality develops the capacity to deal adequately with the affairs of daily life and, through conscious participation, turn any life situation to practical advantage. As well, awareness expands beyond personal desires to encompass a more holistic perception of life. There is an increased sensitivity to the rich field of life's manifestations that we normally do not notice, and a greater consciousness of how all living things contribute, each in its own unique way, to the great drama of existence:

This, of course, does not just happen. It requires a conscious effort to make room for the interpretations of the deeper levels of the mind. If this is done it is clear that the quality of the experience is transformed. The raw material of events has been refined to a condition in which it can provide the nourishment which Essence is seeking. It involves the gradual creation of new, more vivid qualities of experience. This is the formation of a second (astral) body which now exercises some control over our behaviour. (45)

When the quality of attention is developed to a point where it is voluntary and stable, self-remembering becomes more prevalent and there is a movement toward consciousness and a fuller presence. But the challenges of everyday life provide a constant reminder that the ascending octave of awareness can quickly return to a lower state of 'waking sleep.' Jeanne de Salzmann: "There is the possibility of two kinds of action: those that are automatic and those taken voluntarily, according to 'wish.' To wish or will allows us to take an action that is not automatic. We can, for example, choose something we wish to do, something we are not ordinarily capable of, and make it our aim, letting nothing interfere. With conscious will, everything can be obtained." (46)

When we can remember ourselves, be open to ourselves, for long enough, we are put to the test by the intervention of the subjective "I" in the face of other people's manifestations toward us. At the moment the impression is received by the mind, I react. It is with this reaction that the notion of "I" bursts forth. I identify with the form projected by my thought. So, if I wish to go further, I need to be shocked, shaken, by seeing the selfish reaction of my ego, defending itself out of fear of being denied. In order to be free from this fear, I have to experience it, to wholly live with everything it entails. With a second conscious shock, it is possible that consciousness opens and we see reality. This is an emotional understanding of truth . . . A new feeling appears and a new understanding, not born from opposites. This is a feeling that embraces everything, a feeling of unity, of being. I am transformed, and in this new state I feel a new order appear. (47)

Conscious inner work and self-struggle produce real change. One of the positive consequences is the ability to free oneself from the pull of mechanical thoughts and feelings. Unnecessary thoughts, emotions and reactions slowly disappear in a movement toward the essential part of ourselves, the authentic 'I,' which opens new vistas of understanding and conscious action. (48)

In *The Reality of Being*, Jeanne de Salzmann proposes a model consisting of four successive stages of inner transformation in which there is a progressive opening to higher levels of reality. "In transformation the question is not how to achieve a more open state but how to allow it. The energy is here. Our role is not to make this energy appear in us, to make it pass in us, but to *let it pass in us*." (49)

Change in our being comes about through transformation of energy, a work that takes place in successive stages over time. First, there is a state of observation, of "critical watching," in which I become aware of a false attitude in myself. This is not a mental representation but an inner awareness that reveals all the flaws of imbalance from the functioning of one center alone. Second, as the false is recognized and felt, there is a letting go of what impedes me. This is a state of "trust." It is a dissolving of what has become fixed. This means accepting what takes place without relying on any mental representation . . . The third stage is marked by becoming conscious of the essential Being. The form of "I" becomes permeable. Everything that was hardened is dissolved and reconstituted for the formation of the second body. In the fourth stage there is trust in the essential, admitting the formless without classifying or naming. This requires the courage to endure the state of no longer understanding, that is, to be under the radiance of Being and to stay there, taking the risk again and again of dropping my deeply rooted attitudes and convictions. (50)

The Fourth Way is a path based on understanding, which must be consciously *lived* in the challenges and circumstances of everyday life. How we live our daily life is a direct reflection of our understanding and level of development. A deeper awareness of oneself and the world leads to a more intelligent participation in the activities of life: "Life needs no invention. The so-called ordinary life is extraordinary when I pay attention. Free attention frees the moment. Impressions once static are now dynamic, multi-dimensional. The moment expands. The physical 'becomes' the metaphysical. The symbolic and mythological come into play. The dance begins." (51)

One of Gurdjieff's most intriguing teachings was his admonition to his students to "exterior play a role, interior never." Essentially, this means to consciously assume a mode of behaviour in life appropriate to the circumstances, but not to identify with it, or become attached to it, or be inwardly influenced by it. In a talk with his French pupils in 1943, he expanded on this notion: "He who works becomes an actor in life. To be an actor is to play a role. Every day they change it. Today one role, tomorrow another role. He only is a good actor who is able to remember himself and consciously play his role, no

matter what it may be.” (52) The aim of inner work is that our outer life in the world should be a reflection of our conscious inner life:

What is important in our work is inner struggle. Without it, time will pass and no change will appear. We must learn inside not to identify, and outside to play a role. One helps the other. While I do this, I identify with nothing. Without being strong outside, it is impossible to be strong inside. Without being strong inside, it is not possible to be strong outside. The struggle must be real. The more difficult the struggle is, the more it is worth. Playing a role requires attending to what takes place around me and at the same time to what takes place within me. Two kinds of events, each of a different order – two lives, one within the other. How I live these two lives shows the extent of my power *to be*. A role is a kind of cross on which one must be nailed in order to be able to be attentive without respite. It is like being in a fixed frame or mold that constitutes my limit. I have to be conscious of this limit, to recognize it. Without the limit of this role, no concentration of force is possible. In this way, my outer life becomes like a rite, a service, for my inner life. (53)

One of the essential goals of the Work is to attain an attitude of *impartiality* (54) in both our thoughts, perceptions and interactions with others. This perspective is reflected in the adage “*The rain falls on the just and unjust alike.*” C.S. Nott: “A person can choose only when they are free inside; an ordinary person cannot sum up a situation quickly and impartially. It is necessary to work on oneself to learn to be unbiased, to sort out and analyze each situation as if one were another person; only then can one be truly just. Only when you can be truly impartial as regards yourself will you able to be impartial towards others.” (55)

I become aware of that active all-embracing love based on impartiality. Impartiality and acceptance go together: they are inseparable. Without impartiality all the attributes of love and faith are impossible. The basis of love is impartiality, and the basis of impartiality is acceptance. The ‘acceptance’ spoken of here is the acceptance of all that is as it is, without wishing for anything to be not as it is . . . This is a moment of eternity, and so includes all other moments of my life, because each moment of reality is successive, causal, lawful and unique. Each moment has come from the never-ceasing transformation according to law, and passes into the next. So the unconditioned acceptance of one moment with all its qualities and implications, seen and unseen, known and unknown, brings acceptance of all alternative aspects. The knowledge and the deepening experience of this truth makes possible the being-experience of impartiality – the flashing second of unconditional acceptance. (56)

As we progress on the path of self-development, the experience of ‘*I, here and now*’ becomes more pronounced and long-lasting. We enter a state of quiet listening, opening to a higher level of reality. The attention is freed naturally and we begin to feel a deeper integration with the movements of life. With awakening it is possible to experience life in

two realms: “I accept this life in the so-called normal stream, and am aware of myself as participating in this normal level. At the same time, this awareness allows us to participate also in the conscious life of the higher realm, bringing us into touch with its life and its vivid impressions. We touch this by consciously experiencing the impression of I AM, the being-reality.” (57)

The Fourth Way teaches that humanity has a cosmic purpose to serve nature by transforming certain energies emanating from different levels of the universe. This service can be either mechanical and unconscious or conscious and intelligent. As one matures along the path of self-development, new possibilities and relationships with higher levels of reality emerge. Each individual has the potential to act as a conduit or ‘transforming station’ of higher energies, and through this action take their place on the steps of this ‘cosmic ladder’ or ‘chain of being.’

Hugh Ripman adds his voice to this possibility in *Questions and Answers Along the Way*: “We are each, from a very real and central point of view, unique. The Sufis say that if there had been anybody like me before there would have been no need for me to be born. This points to the fact that our possibilities lie in becoming a unique implement in the body of mankind and in the body of organic life, through which influences and forces from a higher level can manifest in life on the surface of this planet. Each of us is designed to be a different kind of channel for that purpose.” (58)

The real value of the teaching lies in its application, by which one can learn how to make conscious use of the experiences of life. If this can be achieved it begins to inspire one’s whole existence with a kind of impersonal delight; but even more significantly, it contributes to the pool of cosmic consciousness and thereby helps to offset the forces of negativity which are evoked by the greed and selfishness of sleeping humanity. There is an urgent need at the present time to remember one’s real purpose. Influences from more conscious levels of the universe are unknowingly playing upon the earth but we are too concerned with our own personal desires to hear them. (59)

Gurdjieff presented his students with five obligations or ‘strivings’ to follow in order to live a spiritually meaningful and awakened existence:

All the beings of this planet then began to work in order to have in their consciousness this Divine function of genuine conscience, and for this purpose, as everywhere in the Universe, they transubstantiated in themselves what are called the ‘being-obligolnian-strivings’ which consists of the following five, namely:

The first striving: to have in their ordinary being-existence everything satisfying and really necessary for their planetary body.

The second striving: to have a constant and unflagging instinctive need for self-perfection in the sense of being.

The third: the conscious striving to know ever more and more concerning the laws of World-creation and World-maintenance.

The fourth: the striving from the beginning of their existence to pay for their arising and their individuality as quickly as possible, in order afterwards to be free to lighten as much as possible the Sorrow of our COMMON FATHER. And the fifth: the striving always to assist the most rapid perfecting of other beings, both those similar to oneself and those of other forms up to the degree of self-individuality. (60)

These five strivings (preserve your life, find your place in the cosmic scheme, develop yourself, help others to develop, and pay with gratitude and effort for your arising) are the quintessence of Gurdjieff's practical teaching for a conscious life.

NOTES

- (1) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 119.
- (2) Jean Vaysse *Toward Awakening* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 63.
- (3) Jean Vaysse *Toward Awakening* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 155.
- (4) Henri Tracol *The Taste For Things That Are True* (Shaftesbury, England: Element Books, 1994), p. 155.
- (5) G.I. Gurdjieff *Gurdjieff's Early Talks 1914-1931* (London: Book Studio, 2014), p. 120.
- (6) Patty de Llosa *The Practice of Presence* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2006), pp. 1-2.
- (7) Jean Vaysse *Toward Awakening* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 64.
- (8) Jacob Needleman *What is God?* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2011), p. 239.
- (9) Henri Thomasson *The Pursuit of the Present* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1980), p. 50.
- (10) Henri Thomasson *The Pursuit of the Present* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1980), pp. 50-51.
- (11) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 121.
- (12) Professor of physics Shimon Malin reflects on the transformation of the subject-object duality inherent in the practice of self-remembering in *The Eye That Sees Itself* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2004, pp. 11-12): "The inclusion of both subject and objects in the field of attention is a transcendence of the

subject/object mode. Being between subject and object is akin to being in the middle ground between Self and self . . . When self remembers Self, an attention connects them. I am here; present to both. This is the condition of potential openness to a higher vibration.”

- (13) Henriette Lannes *This Fundamental Quest* (San Francisco: Far West Institute, 2003), pp. 32-33.
- (14) Gerald de Symons Beckwith *Ouspensky's Fourth Way* (Oxford, England: Starnine Publishing, 2015), p. 164.
- (15) Dorothy Phillpotts *Discovering Gurdjieff* (United Kingdom: AuthorHouse, 2008), pp. 121-122.
- (16) John Pentland *Exchanges Within* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2004), p. 35.
- (17) Henri Tracol *The Taste For Things That Are True* (Shaftesbury, England: Element Books, 1994), pp. 115-116.
- (18) P.D. Ouspensky constantly reminded his own students that they were unable to observe themselves for any length of time because they could not remember themselves (*The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* New York: Vintage Books, 1974, pp. 93-94.):

Try to formulate what you noticed when you tried to observe yourself. You noticed three things. First, that you do not *remember yourself*; that is, that you are not aware of yourself at the time when you try to observe yourself. Second, that observation is made difficult by the incessant stream of thoughts, images, echoes of conversation, fragments of emotions, flowing through your mind and very often distracting your attention from observation. And third, that the moment you start self-observation something in you starts imagination and self-observation, if you really try it, is a constant struggle with imagination. If one realizes that all the difficulties in the work depend on the fact that one cannot *remember oneself*, one already knows what one must do. *One must try to remember oneself*. In order to do this one must struggle with mechanical thoughts, and one must struggle with imagination . . . Self-remembering is a very difficult thing to learn to practice. It must not be based on expectation of results, otherwise one can identify with one's efforts. It must be based on the realization of the fact that we do not remember ourselves, and that at the same time we *can* remember ourselves if we try sufficiently hard and in the right way.

- (19) Jacob Needleman *Necessary Wisdom* (Napa, California: Fearless Books, 2013), p. 95.
- (20) Henriette Lannes *This Fundamental Quest* (San Francisco: Far West Institute, 2003), p. 128.

- (21) Henriette Lannes *This Fundamental Quest* (San Francisco: Far West Institute, 2003), p. 60.
- (22) Hugh Brockwill Ripman *Questions and Answers Along the Way* (Washington, D.C.: Fourthway Center Press, 2009), pp. 120-121.
- (23) Maurice Nicoll *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff & Ouspensky 2* (London: Robinson & Watkins, 1974), pp. 601-602.
- (24) Kenneth Walker *A Study of Gurdjieff's Teaching* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), pp. 47-48.
- (25) Shimon Malin *The Eye That Sees Itself* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2004), pp. 89-90.
- (26) Shimon Malin *The Eye That Sees Itself* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2004), pp. 9-10.
- (27) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 179.
- (28) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 287.
- (29) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 287.
- (30) The result of the confrontation between body and psyche is the production of a higher energy ('hydrogen 24') which enables the formation of the second or 'astral' body. In *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010, pp. 242-243) this process is made explicit: "When our attention is highly concentrated on the various movements of our thinking, feeling and body, this produces a substance similar to electricity. It is necessary to accumulate this material for a second body to be formed. The way is long, but the substance can be created in us by conscious effort and voluntary suffering." De Salzmann further elaborates:
- There is in us naturally a permanent conflict between the psyche and the organic body. They have different natures – one wishes, the other does not wish. This is a confrontation that we must reinforce voluntarily by our work, by our will, so that a new possibility of being can be born. It is for this that we undertake a task, something precise that reinforces this struggle . . . There is a conscious, voluntary struggle between a "yes" and a "no" that calls the third force, the "I" that is the master who can reconcile. Only at this moment does the work begin.
- (31) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 242.

- (32) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 350.
- (33) Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney *Hidden Wisdom* (New York: Arkana, 1999), p. 216.
- (34) In Gurdjieff's teaching, inner work passes through several degrees of intensity as the functions become more receptive to higher energies. This process of inner transformation is detailed in Jeanne de Salzmans's *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 183-184):
- A vibration comes from a higher octave, opening to a new vision of a quality that was not there before, to an idea from a higher source . . . We have feelings and sensations belonging to layers that are deeper, passing to a new level. A new seeing appears that brings a new understanding, a conviction. Here, there is a certain light, but it is still insufficient . . . The thinking and the body are no longer enough. A new feeling must appear – the feeling of *being*. I feel myself subject to a force that is beyond me, and I see the process of inner transformation intensify in the fire of the wish *to be*. And from the union of these three forces appears the independence of the sensation of self, the consciousness of self with its own individual life – a new octave.
- (35) Jean Vaysse *Toward Awakening* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 108.
- (36) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), p. 37.
- (37) William Patrick Patterson *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2009), p. 13.
- (38) Henri Tracol *The Real Question Remains* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2009), p. 221.
- (39) Jeanne de Salzmans *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 286-287.
- (40) A.L. Staveley *Themes III* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1984), pp. 99-100.
- (41) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 218.
- (42) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), pp. 218-219.
- (43) Gerald de Symons Beckwith *Ouspensky's Fourth Way* (Oxford, England: Starnine Publishing, 2015), p. 308.

(44) Gerald de Symons Beckwith *Ouspensky's Fourth Way* (Oxford, England: Starnine Publishing, 2015), pp. 307-308.

(45) J.H. Reyner *Gurdjieff in Action* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), pp. 52-53.

(46) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 220-221.

(47) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 185-186.

(48) Maurice Nicoll describes this change of perspective in *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff & Ouspensky 3* (London: Robinson & Watkins, 1970, p. 870):

You can reach a stage in the Work in which you begin to have a feeling of freedom from your moods, your emotions, and your thoughts. You observe them starting off, but you do not go with them, because you do not feel that they are you – that is, they are not ‘I.’ The Work does not say that you can stop your moods and thoughts just like that. It says that you can separate from them or observe them . . . Self-observation is a conscious act. You will know that you have been through this or that before and that these states lead nowhere and so you will not identify with them so fully as you did formerly. This means that you begin to become sealed to some extent from their power. You will not consent to them, you will not believe them.

(49) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 248.

(50) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), pp. 247-248.

(51) William Patrick Patterson *Eating the “I”* (San Anselmo, California: Arete Communications, 1992), p. vii.

(52) G.I. Gurdjieff *Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings 1941-1946* (London: Book Studio, 2009), p. 16.

(53) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. 290.

(54) Impartiality is the reconciling or third force between the duality of yes/no, agree/disagree, for/against. It mediates the polar opposition between the apparent duality of the active and passive forces: “The state of impartiality is a state of coexistence, and makes possible the experience of a higher realm of reality, where there operates the trinity of conscious forces, the third force of which is called ‘love.’ And so we come to the miracle, the manifestation of the laws of a higher world in this world.” (George Mountford Adie and Joseph Azize *George Adie: A Gurdjieff Pupil in Australia* (Wauke, Iowa: By The Way Books, 2007), p. 390.)

- (55) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), p. 38.
- (56) George Mountford Adie and Joseph Azize *George Adie: A Gurdjieff Pupil in Australia* (Wauke, Iowa: By The Way Books, 2007), pp. 389-390.
- (57) George Mountford Adie and Joseph Azize *George Adie: A Gurdjieff Pupil in Australia* (Wauke, Iowa: By The Way Books, 2007), pp. 388-389.
- (58) Hugh Brockwill Ripman *Questions and Answers Along the Way* (Washington, D.C.: Fourthway Center Press, 2009), p. 318.
- (59) J.H. Reyner *Gurdjieff in Action* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. x.
- (60) G.I. Gurdjieff *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), pp. 385-386.