

AUTHENTICITY AS A SPIRITUAL TEACHER¹

Gurdjieff first emerged as a spiritual teacher in 1908 in Tashkent, Turkestan, where he attracted a small circle of pupils. His teaching activity from this initial stage until 1912 is largely shrouded in mystery and cannot be independently verified in any way.

Research by John Bennett and biographer James Moore suggests that this period was essentially experimental, as Gurdjieff tested his ideas and teaching methods on a wide spectrum of personality types. Bennett notes that Gurdjieff in his writings claimed to have contacted an esoteric school based in Central Asia to seek permission to teach before entering a more formal phase of teaching, but he considered the evidence on this point inconclusive: “We have no other evidence that Gurdjieff set up his Institute with the authority or at least the approval of a higher school, but he spoke both in Russia and at the Priuré of schools in Central Asia with which he was in communication and to whom he sent specially prepared pupils.” (1)

Gurdjieff arrived in Moscow in early 1912 to begin his public teaching career. Accounts by his pupils during this time indicate that Gurdjieff was generally vague and indefinite about the sources of his knowledge and his connection with those who transmitted it to him, but did mention “Tibetan monasteries, the Chitral, Mount Athos; Sufi schools in Persia, in Bokhara and eastern Turkestan . . . and dervishes of various orders.” (2)

Early in the Russian phase of his teaching, Gurdjieff discussed with his students the three traditional paths or ways of spiritual development: the body (‘the way of the fakir’); the emotions (‘the way of the monk’); and the mind (‘the way of the yogi’). He suggested that there existed another way based on the simultaneous development of all three aspects, which he called the Fourth Way: “Instead of discipline, faith and meditation, this way calls for the awakening of another intelligence – knowing and understanding.” (3) Gurdjieff placed particular importance on this path and emphasized that this teaching was unique and previously unknown to the West. (4)

Conflict with Traditional Religious Beliefs

Critics of Gurdjieff’s teaching have focused on three major issues: Gurdjieff’s belief in a ‘Fourth Way,’ which is independent of traditional spiritual paths; his claim that contemporary religions represent a distortion of once valid teachings; and his unorthodox interpretation of many traditional Christian beliefs.

Gurdjieff’s contention that a more comprehensive and superior path of inner development (the Fourth Way) exists beyond the traditional ways has disturbed some

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traditional metaphysicians and philosophers like Whithall Perry: “Thus in one stroke do we see the likes of Rumi, St. Francis of Assisi, and Sankârachârya eliminated – unless one replies that they were secret practitioners of the Fourth Way.” (5)

René Guénon was especially critical of Gurdjieff, calling him a “charlatan” and disapproving of his Fourth Way teachings which, he claimed, failed to give sufficient emphasis to the performance of religious rituals and sacraments for purification of the soul.

Gurdjieff was clearly conversant with the tenets and practices of the major world religions, but was generally dismissive of traditional religions, believing them to be virtually useless as vehicles for spiritual development. (6) In his writings, especially *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff argued that modern Christianity, Buddhism and Islam have been modified and distorted out of all recognition from their original forms. With respect to Christianity he charged that “into this teaching of truth and verity, they began also to mix for various egoistic and political reasons, fragments taken from other religious teachings . . . [which] had not only nothing in common with the teaching of Jesus, but which sometimes even flatly contradicted the truths this Divine Teacher taught.” (7) He felt that Buddhism and Islam had undergone a similar process of distortion.

Although many of Gurdjieff’s ideas have been criticized for their departure from traditional religious dogma and beliefs, much of the criticism is due to a failure to distinguish between the outer (exoteric) form of religious observances and beliefs and the inner (esoteric) spiritual core:

Every real religion . . . consists of two parts. One part teaches *what* is to be done. This part becomes common knowledge and in the course of time is distorted and departs from the original. The other part teaches *how* to do what the first part teaches. This part is preserved in secret in special schools and with its help it is always possible to rectify what has been distorted in the first part or to restore what has been forgotten . . . This secret part exists in Christianity also as well as in other religions and it teaches *how* to carry out the precepts of Christ and what they really mean. (8)

Gurdjieff’s contention that religions undergo a process of degeneration with the passage of time is borne out in many spiritual traditions. It is almost a natural law that a valid spiritual teaching will be subject to change and dilution over time, particularly its external practices which may be different or even in complete conflict with earlier forms.

Research by contemporary religious scholars has shown that many Christian texts like the New Testament scriptures have been modified from their original meaning through editing and imperfect translation. This supports Gurdjieff’s claim that: “There exists no explanation that even approximately resembles the truth, because what is written in the Gospels has been in the first place, much distorted in being copied and translated; and secondly, it is written *for those who know.*” (9)

Following his death in 1949, Gurdjieff was reviled by some members of the French Catholic hierarchy, who called him an “emissary of the devil.” This antipathy toward Gurdjieff was partly due to his perceived heretical pronouncements regarding certain traditional Christian beliefs. Gurdjieff for his part generally held Catholic priests and representatives of the Church in contempt, sometimes shouting at them in public or swearing “Shoo! Son of a bitch.” (10)

Gurdjieff departed from orthodox Christian doctrine by insisting that Jesus was not unique nor the only ‘Son of God.’ He regarded Jesus Christ as one of a number of ‘Messengers from Above,’ including Buddha, Mohammed, Moses and Saint Lama. Gurdjieff also disavowed the resurrection of Christ following his death, stating that once a person dies they will never exist again as the same being. Gurdjieff maintained that Judas was a saint and the most devoted and evolved of the disciples: He alone understood the purpose of Jesus’ mission on earth and served a higher good by his selfless action and conscious betrayal of Christ.

Gurdjieff denied that God was omnipotent and in his writings preferred to use bombastic expressions like “OUR COMMON ALL-EMBRACING UNI-BEING AUTOCRAT ENDLESSNESS” to describe the Creator. He referred to the deity worshipped by most Christians as “Mister God” and reserved little respect for their prayers and petitions to this being. A further irritant was his choice of Beelzebub, a fallen angel, as the central character in *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*.

Gurdjieff taught a version of the history of Christianity completely at variance with orthodox Christian dogma. He argued that the Christian religion existed many millennia before the birth of Jesus Christ:

The Christian church, the Christian form of worship, was not invented by the fathers of the church. It was all taken in a ready made form from Egypt, only not from the Egypt that we know but from one which we do not know . . . Only small bits of it survived in historical times, and these bits have been preserved in secret and so well that we do not even know where they have been preserved. It will seem strange to many people when I say that this prehistoric Egypt was Christian many thousands of years before the birth of Christ, that is to say, that its religion was composed of the same principles and ideas that constitute true Christianity. (11)

Perhaps the most controversial of Gurdjieff’s ideas, particularly offensive to Christians, was his radical reinterpretation of what occurred at the Last Supper. He claimed that Christ’s disciples actually ate his flesh and drank his blood, not bread and wine, as part of a sacramental ceremony: “[His disciples] wanted to establish a permanent link with Christ . . . The Last Supper was a *magical ceremony* similar to ‘blood-brotherhood’ for establishing a connection between ‘astral bodies’.” (12)

Authority and Mandate to Teach

Critics have questioned whether Gurdjieff was ever in fact given the authority and mandate to teach. Three points of view, which reflect their degrees of skepticism, have gained currency among his critics:

- Gurdjieff did not receive valid teachings or transmission from an authentic spiritual lineage.
- He was transmitted real esoteric knowledge from an authentic source, but was not given formal authorization to teach.
- He was an authentic spiritual teacher, but the validity and relevance of his teaching mission ended with his death.

In discussing the transmission of esoteric knowledge, Gurdjieff sometimes alluded to an unbroken line of initiates or an 'inner circle of humanity' who are the custodians of an ancient knowledge of human spiritual development. Gurdjieff's father, a storyteller who passed on to his young son legends of antiquity, was probably the first to suggest to him the possibility of some unseen influence linking all generations:

As a youth, Gurdjieff became obsessed with the idea that there was a purpose and aim behind human life which was hardly ever glimpsed in the ceaseless generations of man. He became convinced that in former epochs man had possessed genuine knowledge of such matters, and that this knowledge was still preserved, somehow, somewhere. (13)

This belief has been decried by some critics, who object to the exclusivity implied in a spiritual transmission outside the boundaries of traditional teaching frameworks. Some of the most virulent critics of the 'inner circle of initiates' concept are those associated with the traditionalist metaphysical school of René Guénon:

Since Gurdjieff claimed to be the recipient of teachings transmitted from antiquity, all depends on being able to determine whether or not the spiritual organization(s) involved and the line(s) of transmission are authentic, valid, and orthodox . . . It goes without saying that anyone purporting to come from the fastnesses of Central Asia with a teaching for the West about the regeneration of mankind could simplify matters enormously by presenting clear and unequivocal credentials. (14)

Guénon and his followers claim that the transmission of a valid spiritual teaching through an unbroken line of teachers and their successors ensures the authenticity of the teaching. This view is echoed in other spiritual traditions like Zen Buddhism:

Starting from the time of the Buddha Shakyamuni, correct Buddhism has been transmitted from master to disciple. Where the master's enlightenment has been authentic and sanctioned by *his* master, he has been able to sanction the enlightenment of his disciples by using his own experience

as a guide . . . It is necessary, first of all, in order to ensure the transmission of true Buddhism from master to disciple. If this hadn't been done, there would be no authentic Zen today. (15)

However, others have argued that transmission of a spiritual teaching such as Zen Buddhism from one teacher to another does not necessarily guarantee that it will not be distorted: "There is at present no way for people in the modern West to verify the historical authenticity of any of the Zen lineages – in the sense of proving or disproving the understanding and teaching of each and every link in a lineage – to ascertain whether any deviation occurred along the way." (16)

Whether or not the teachings that Gurdjieff was imparting were part of an authentic spiritual transmission may ultimately be a moot point, since it may not be possible to verify that the teachings he imparted were preserved in their original form through an accurate chain of transmission.

The second viewpoint, that Gurdjieff lacked formal permission to teach, is somewhat more generous than that of the traditionalist school, but is still critical of Gurdjieff's decision to teach. A prime advocate of this position is the Sufi teacher Omar Ali-Shah, brother of Idries Shah. He maintains that permission to teach the Fourth Way path must be conferred by a series of teachers who have been responsible for the student's spiritual development. No one, he asserts, should seek to teach others without a mandate from his or her teachers, and in this sense Gurdjieff was remiss:

Gurdjieff certainly had been passed from Master to Master and he had most certainly assimilated various techniques, terms of reference, music, movement and other things; but he was not mandated to teach . . . Anybody from our Tradition who is sent to a particular area must and does have a mandate from his teachers. That is his only authority to teach. Without that mandate, a person who has learnt or assimilated certain things can do a lot of damage. That is why there is such an insistence on the production of an actual mandate . . . Gurdjieff did not have such a mandate. (17)

A further reason for insisting on a mandate to teach was that Gurdjieff began teaching in a Western culture that had virtually no previous experience with Eastern esoteric teachers. Potential students had no way of judging whether or not Gurdjieff was an authentic spiritual guide with authorization to teach from a legitimate lineage or tradition.

P.D. Ouspensky maintained, after he separated from his teacher, that progress on the Fourth Way path beyond a certain stage requires direct contact with the source of the teaching:

I am still as certain as ever that there is a great Source from which our system has come. Mr. Gurdjieff must have had contact with that Source, but I do not believe that it was a complete contact. Something is missing, and he has not been able to find it. If we cannot find it through him, then our only hope is to have a direct contact with the Source. (18)

Ali-Shah agrees that Gurdjieff did not have an ongoing connection with the source of his teaching, in which a consistent current of spiritual energy passes between the two. Ouspensky's stated desire to make that link with the source of the teaching (19) only serves to highlight for Ali-Shah Gurdjieff's presumption to teach without a clear mandate: "Ouspensky too did not have the contact, but the difference between them was that he was certainly more conscious of the fact that a very positive thread of that type had to be searched for, and found . . . the difference between Ouspensky and Gurdjieff was that Ouspensky had a conscience." (20)

The final point of view acknowledges that Gurdjieff was taught by authentic schools of esoteric knowledge and was mandated to teach but maintains that effective transmission of his teaching lasted only as long as Gurdjieff was alive. Rafael Lefort (21), who purportedly travelled throughout the East in search of Gurdjieff's teachers and sources of knowledge, asked Sheikh Daud Yusuf whether Gurdjieff's teaching authority was transmitted to any of his students:

Gurdjieff passed his authority to none . . . There was value when it was projected, in the place where it was projected. It was only one step towards a fuller realization of the complete message. A step towards preparing a climate of a certain character. He charged none to carry the dead embers into the future under the name of a burning fire. (22)

Lefort concludes that Gurdjieff was taught, prepared and supervised for a specific task by the 'Guardians of the Tradition' as "he bore all the signs of being in the ranks of those who are sent out to learn and be fashioned and then taught and sent out to teach." (23) Lefort also claims that Gurdjieff reported back regularly to his teachers on the results of the experiments he was instructed to perform.

Lefort suggests that Gurdjieff's task was to teach certain ideas and practices and prepare the West for a "certain purpose" related to the introduction of esoteric teachings from some primary 'Centre' or source of higher knowledge. However, Lefort believed that after Gurdjieff's death his teachings were diluted and became inflexible and unresponsive to the spiritual needs of the contemporary world:

A teaching that is designed to be transmitted at a specific time lasts only as long as the pause until another stage comes into being . . . Gurdjieff had certain things to say and he said them. The moment that the fragments he had were directed to another sphere, then his teaching ceased to have any value. What exists in the West, based on what he did and said and not on what he knew, is a shadow of subjective imagination. It has become a way of existence rather than a path towards something. (24)

Commentary

Gurdjieff spoke of the nature and characteristics of esoteric knowledge only in the most general terms, alluding to a 'Great Knowledge' which is passed down through the ages by initiates. During a talk to his students at Essentuki in 1918 he described how this knowledge is transmitted: "It is communicated openly after a definite trial to those who seek it and is preserved by oral transmission in the chain of those who know." (25)

Many of Gurdjieff's followers believe that his teaching was handed down orally through the ages by initiates versed in esoteric knowledge, independent of traditional channels of spiritual transmission. Margaret Anderson suspected that this teaching was a "science belonging to the knowledge of antiquity" (26) and that it was transmitted to Gurdjieff at some point in his search for esoteric knowledge.

Attempts to identify the specific source(s) of this teaching from Gurdjieff's writings and talks or the independent investigations of others have been inconclusive. Some believe he contacted a school of wisdom located in Central Asia, perhaps the Sarmoung Brotherhood, while others propose that his teaching was a composite of the many spiritual traditions he encountered in his years of travel in the East. Yet others point to his statement that his teaching was essentially esoteric Christianity. When asked about the source of his teachings, Gurdjieff gave vague and conflicting answers, sometimes suggesting that he originated the system of ideas that he transmitted to the West (27), while at other times hinting that he was in contact with others who guided his teaching mission.

Senior students of Gurdjieff have recorded conversations with their teacher which strongly imply that he was not working alone or independently. John Bennett claimed that on more than one occasion Gurdjieff stated that "Every man must have a teacher. Even I, Gurdjieff, have my teacher." (28) And, A.R. Orage reported that Gurdjieff once remarked, "I am small compared with those who sent me." (29) Bennett, after carefully reviewing the available evidence that Gurdjieff had been initiated by a school of esoteric knowledge, concluded that he "was not taking decisions entirely on his own initiative, but was consulting with the school with which he had previously been connected." (30)

Other events in Gurdjieff's life also suggest that he was entrusted with a sacred task, to introduce an ancient spiritual teaching to the West and prepare the ground for those who would follow. After seeing the first proofs of the American Edition of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, he told his pupils that his work was now completed and his task in life was coming to an end. And near the end of his life, Gurdjieff was asked what would follow when he died. He is said to have replied: "Another will come. You will not be left alone." (31)

Perhaps we will never know the circumstances by which Gurdjieff received the esoteric knowledge he possessed. By their very nature much of the inner content of esoteric teachings are transmitted orally, hidden from view and therefore essentially invisible.

The question of Gurdjieff's validity as an authentic spiritual teacher can also be approached through the historical record of how and whom he taught. Throughout the years of his teaching in the West, he attracted students of the highest quality. These included important writers and intellectuals (P.D. Ouspensky, A.R. Orage, Jean Toomer, John Bennett), physicians (Maurice Nicoll, Kenneth Walker, William Welch), artists and musicians (Alexander de Salzmann, Thomas de Hartmann, Frank Lloyd Wright) and accomplished dancers (Olga Ivanovna Hinzenburg, Jeanne de Salzmann, Jessmin Howarth).

The forms that Gurdjieff created to transmit his teachings to the West are also instructive. The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at the Prieuré was the quintessential model for intensive group work as an integral component of the spiritual path. Although this great experiment in the power of a consciously directed spiritual community was drawn to a premature close by Gurdjieff's automobile accident in 1924, it remains the clearest example of the possibilities of accelerated spiritual growth through a multifaceted approach that engaged body, emotions and mind simultaneously:

All serious accounts of the conditions Gurdjieff created at the Prieuré give the impression of a community life pulsating with the uncompromising search for truth, engaging all sides of human nature – demanding physical work, intensive emotional interactions, and the study of a vast range of ideas about humanity and the universal world. These accounts invariably speak of the encounter with oneself that these conditions made possible and the experience of the self which accompanied this encounter. (32)

Gurdjieff's writings, especially *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, are considered by some to be examples of objective art, which touch the essence and heart of those who read and hear their words, and awaken the human aspiration for a connection with the sacred. The level of the ideas expressed in these books and in those of other pupils (P.D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* and Jeanne de Salzmann's *The Reality of Being*) are of the highest order and point to a conscious source for their powerful spiritual impact.

Gurdjieff's Movements and sacred dances, as well as the music that frequently accompanied their performance, have also been called examples of objective art. They evoke a sacred realm of being that transcends our ordinary perception of reality and point to the infinite possibilities that lie at the innermost depths of each human being.

The testimonials of Gurdjieff's students about their teacher's undeniable depth of knowledge and level of being also support the contention that Gurdjieff was an authentic spiritual teacher with the ability to awaken his students to a higher level of reality:

- “He had a presence impossible to describe . . . We immediately recognized Gurdjieff as a kind of man we had never seen.” (Margaret Anderson *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*)

- “We cannot judge Gurdjieff from our level. He lives from essence and, in a great measure, according to objective reason . . . For me Gurdjieff represents objective sanity. He lives the Teaching, while we talk about it.” (C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff*)
- “He was living permanently in a state of Awakeness . . . Gurdjieff manifested himself in ways . . . so different from those of others that they constituted a plain and perceptible difference in level of existence upon his part.” (C. Daly King *The States of Human Consciousness*)
- “I felt myself in a presence. He had a certain quality that one might call mythological . . . he was a man whom you recognized but you didn’t know what you were recognizing.” (P.L. Travers *The Life of P.L. Travers*)
- “It was not what he did but what he was – his expression, his gestures, his tone of voice as well as the words he said. In his presence one had the sense of being fed a new food, a food for which one had been starved all one’s life.” (A.L. Staveley *Memories of Gurdjieff*)
- “When you were near him, every attitude, every gesture was very different from ordinary life, he made you feel another dimension, another possibility of ‘being.’ Everything was wide awake, as though I had found a lost paradise.” (Solange Claustres in *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*)
- “Gurdjieff is not a single man but a multitude, a crowd of two thousand million men, as many as he is able to incarnate. A developed Being tries to incarnate in himself as many as possible, so that his experience can be complete. Through that multitude there walks a sage. In his talk there is always teaching. You must watch for it, not be put off.” (Jane Heap in *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission*)
- “The first impression of Gurdjieff was very strong, unforgettable. He had an expression I had never seen, and an intelligence, a force, that was different, not the usual intelligence of the thinking mind but a vision that could see everything. He was, at the same time, both kind and very, very demanding. You felt he would see you and show you what you were in a way you would never forget in your whole life.” (Jeanne de Salzmans *The Reality of Being*)

In his recent biography, William Patrick Patterson describes the formidable challenge of measuring and evaluating Gurdjieff’s stature as a spiritual teacher:

Unlike Mr. Gurdjieff’s students, who experienced him directly and in many settings and situations, our estimate of him is limited to his writings, his students’ personal accounts, and our own level of understanding. Those who

think they know Gurdjieff will relegate him to one end of the stick or the other. For most others the word most likely used will be *enigmatic*, which, interestingly, is defined by *Webster's* as having three meanings. The first, "to speak in riddles" or "an obscure speech or writing." The second, "something hard to understand or explain." And the third, "an inscrutable or mysterious person." Accordingly then, Gurdjieff is "an inscrutable or mysterious person who speaks in riddles and obscure speech or writing and is hard to understand or explain." The title of Margaret Anderson's book puts it more simply, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*. For those who believe they can know who Gurdjieff is if they know the facts of his life, the problem is, as Jane Heap warned the Rope: "You mustn't think of conscious beings as an extension of the consciousness you have. And understand, it's on a different plane. (33)

The weight of evidence supports the proposition that Gurdjieff was an authentic spiritual teacher with the capacity to awaken in others the 'germ of objective knowledge' and lead them to a higher level of being: "Gurdjieff was a spiritual 'master' in the traditional sense – not as a teacher of doctrine but as one who by his very presence awakens and helps others in their search for consciousness." (34) That he was imperfect and still struggling with his human weaknesses he readily admitted in his writings (*Life Is Real Only Then, When "I Am"*) and in conversations with students. ("Thousands more developed than me. I have far to go.")

His critics seem to miss the point by focusing on those aspects of his teaching and personal conduct that contradict their preconceptions of how a spiritual teacher should live their life and express their ideas. (35) In the 1930s Denis Saurat, professor of French Literature at King's College, Cambridge and noted author, described Gurdjieff in these terms:

Gurdjieff is a Lohan. A Lohan is a man who has gone to schools and by incredible exertions and study has perfected himself. He then comes back into ordinary life, sits in cafés, drinks, has women, and lives the life of a man, but more intensely. It was accepted that the rules of ordinary man did not apply to him. He teaches, and people come to him to learn objective truths. In the East a Lohan was understood. The West does not understand. A teacher in the West must appear to behave like an English gentleman. (36)

Gurdjieff's personal wish, he told his students, "was to live and teach so that there should be a new conception of God in the world, a change in the very meaning of the word." (37)

Perhaps the ultimate measure of a spiritual teacher, beyond personality, methods and capacity, is their breadth of vision and purity of intention:

Gurdjieff's fundamental aim was to help human beings awaken to the meaning of our existence and to the efforts we must make to realize that meaning in the midst of the life we have been given. As with every

messenger of the spirit, Gurdjieff's fundamental intention was ultimately for the sake of others, never only for himself . . . what may begin to touch us is the unique quality of selflessness in his actions, the sacrifices he made, both for those who came to him and for all of humanity. We begin to understand that his life was a work of love. (38)

NOTES

- (1) John G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 111.
- (2) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 36.
- (3) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. xiii.
- (4) Jeanne de Salzmann, who was Gurdjieff's pupil for more than forty years, believes that the ancient Fourth Way teaching he brought to the West contained knowledge from a higher level that could be understood only when it became a 'living' teaching. In *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010, p. 23) she writes:

The science underlying the Fourth Way is ancient, although it has been forgotten. It is a science that studies man not just as he is but as he can become. It regards man as having a possibility of evolving, and studies the facts, the principles and the laws of this evolution. This is an evolution of certain qualities that cannot develop by themselves. It cannot be mechanical. This evolution calls for conscious effort and for seeing . . . The Fourth Way is to be lived.

- (5) Whithall Perry *Gurdjieff in Light of Tradition* (Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1978), p. 46.
- (6) Some followers of established religions, especially Christians, have been critical of what they perceive as Gurdjieff's dismissal and contempt of religion. A closer examination of Gurdjieff's writings reveals a more complex and sophisticated point of view. Gurdjieff always respected the founders of the great world religions and the spiritual principles they conveyed. Rather, he took issue with the way that religious values and beliefs were practised by the majority of the followers of certain faiths. In a talk to his students recorded by P.D. Ouspensky (*In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949, p. 299) he elaborated:

Religion is doing: a man does not merely *think* his religion or feel it, he 'lives' his religion as much as he is able, otherwise it is not religion

but fantasy or philosophy. Whether he likes it or not he shows his attitude towards religion by his actions and he can show his attitude *only by his actions*. Therefore if his actions are opposed to those which are demanded by a given religion he cannot assert that he belongs to that religion. The vast majority of people who call themselves Christians have no right whatever to do so, because they not only fail to carry out the demands of their religion but they do not even think that these demands ought to be carried out . . . No one has a right to call themselves a Christian who does not carry out Christ's precepts.

- (7) G.I. Gurdjieff *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1950), pp. 702-703.
- (8) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 97.
- (9) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 304.
- (10) Luba Gurdjieff Everitt *Luba Gurdjieff: A Memoir with Gurdjieff* (Berkeley: California: SLG Books, 1997), p. 64.
- (11) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 302.
- (12) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), pp. 97-98.
- (13) Ernest Scott *The People of the Secret* (London: Octagon Press, 1983), pp. 157-158.
- (14) Whithall Perry *Gurdjieff: In Light of Tradition* (Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1978), p. 9.
- (15) Philip Kapleau *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 139.
- (16) Thomas Cleary *Transmission of Light* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. xx.
- (17) Omar Ali-Shah *The Sufi Tradition in the West* (New York: Alif, 1994), pp. 223-224.
- (18) John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 154.
- (19) In the late 1930s Ouspensky and some of his senior students attempted to make contact with representatives of certain Sufi Orders which they believed could lead

them to the source of Gurdjieff's teaching. But with the outbreak of the Second World War the project was abandoned.

- (20) Omar Ali-Shah *The Sufi Tradition in the West* (New York: Alif, 1994), p. 226.
- (21) Rafael Lefort is widely believed in spiritual circles to be a pseudonym of Idries Shah, the Sufi author and teacher. His book *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* is clearly constructed as a series of fables and is not meant to represent factual reality. However, it does present an interesting Sufi perspective on the nature of Gurdjieff's teaching mission and the sources of his knowledge.
- (22) Rafael Lefort *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p. 32.
- (23) Rafael Lefort *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p. 56.
- (24) Rafael Lefort *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p. 131.
- (25) G.I. Gurdjieff *Views From the Real World* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 56.
- (26) Margaret Anderson *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 6.
- (27) Thomas de Hartmann in *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 183) recorded Gurdjieff's response to a question by an English student at the Priuré in the 1920s regarding the source of his ideas:
- Q: Does the teaching of Mr. Gurdjieff form part of some historical school still in existence?
- A: My teaching is my own. It combines all the evidence of ancient truth that I collected in my travels with all the knowledge I have acquired through my own personal work.
- (28) John G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 80.
- (29) C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), p. 31.
- (30) John G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 173.
- (31) John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 284.

- (32) Jacob Needleman “Introduction” in *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* ed. Jacob Needleman (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. xxviii.
- (33) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), p. 470.
- (34) Jeanne de Salzmann *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. xiv.
- (35) In his essay “Who is Mr. Gurdjieff?” (in *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2009, pp. 272-285)), William Patrick Patterson explores the challenge presented by his belief that Gurdjieff was a ‘Messenger from Above,’ arguing that “there is a certain danger in even pondering who Gurdjieff was and what his teaching was meant for, because the answers, if affirmative, impose a responsibility so serious that no one wishes to face them.” He elaborates:

Who was George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff? How we relate to the teaching, its usefulness to us, depends on how we answer this question. If we take him as simply another spiritual teacher, say a crazy wisdom master, to borrow a category from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, then of course, all is well. There are more than a few whose Pure Reason is developed to that level. Putting Gurdjieff among them makes no trouble for us. But if we move the level to that of a Messenger from Above, to use Gurdjieff’s terminology, then are we not forced to live in total question? For what are our criteria, what are our referents? Are we so confident in our own impartiality and level of spiritual development that we can really decide who Gurdjieff was? Can we really judge the understanding, composed of knowledge and being, of a man the stature of Gurdjieff? Many do, of course, but then this is a time when there is a scarcity of many qualities, self-love and vanity, unfortunately, not among them. Lacking revelation or recognition, we cannot say with good conscience who Gurdjieff was. But we can recognize who *he* took himself to be. We can agree that he saw his mission as bringing a teaching to save the world from destroying itself. His actions matched his aim. He voluntarily put himself into the swirl of abnormal conditions that make up contemporary life and was largely misunderstood, vilified, and he suffered accordingly . . . Let us recognize that our conception of the great spiritual messengers to mankind, such as Jesus Christ, Moses and Buddha, are idealized in the extreme. They are portrayed as perfect in a way no incarnation taking human form could be. Therefore, since our picture of them is essentially unreal, any who come afterward – whether his mission is to speak to all or a part of mankind – will fail greatly in comparison. So, the simple fact is, can any of us truly define, let alone discern or judge, a *Messenger from Above*? The experience lies outside all ordinary categories.

- (36) C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), p. 47.

(37) Jeanne de Salzman *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), p. xiii.

(38) Jacob Needleman "Introduction" in *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* ed. Jacob Needleman (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008, p. xiv.