

Georgi Ivanovich Gurdjieff - Knight of the Supremacy of the Will

by Sir Hasein, K.Tr. (around 1995/6 CE)

(Originally written for a book that never got published.)

Will, in Gurdjieff's sense, is the capacity of an Initiated Being to stand separate from inner and outer stimuli, and to actualize his own initiative in everything -- to See, Understand and Act as an Essence independent of the natural/habitual flow of associations and events. The two main methods of achieving and actualizing such an ability to Be and to Do (and not merely "happen" and "be done to") -- these abilities being the hallmarks of Will -- are conscious labour and voluntary suffering. These concepts and the many trapezoidal qualities in Gurdjieff's (henceforth abbreviated as 'G') teachings have challenged and fascinated me for seven years now. It is time I honoured this Hero of mine by recasting into the World of Horrors a shadow of what I've gained.

With respect to his life career G is one of the best examples of a "Cosmic" or "Universal" Knight. A Cosmic Knight is one who Quests for the Graal in the heart of every tradition (in contrast to someone who furthers a particular tradition or folk), reconstructs and synthetizes the supracultural essence into a form that suits the mentality of the times, and then dedicates the rest of his life to disseminating it into the World.

This pattern can clearly be seen in G's life (?-1949). He dedicated himself to seeking the truth; accumulated wide and varied materials and personal contacts via expeditions etc; tested his first syntheses to see how they worked; and then actually instituted and maintained esoteric groups (first in the East and then in the West). This is not the place to go into the details of G's life, but it is important to realize that even during his teaching period G repeatedly reconfigured his approach to better match the mindsets of his students. F.ex. from the pseudo-scientific vocabulary of the "Ouspensky period" he switched into the "mytho-religious" mode that we find in his Magnum Opus, Beelzebub's Tales. The present day followers of G often spend a lot of time arguing which of the approaches is best, seldom realizing that there can be no final formulation of G's "system" (except provisional ones in the Hearts of those who use his methods in the spirit that he intended them to be used).

Gurdjieff was a Left-Hand Path (LHP) Initiate. All who claim otherwise have never finished reading Beelzebub's Tales. The main body of G's cosmology is neoplatonic, and this framework can be used both on the Right-Hand Path (RHP) and the LHP.

The essence of G's cosmological thinking is that Great Nature, God, the

Absolute, aka "Our Common Father Endlessness" needs outside help to evolve. Here is the RHP side of the coin -- we must "help God" (= the totality of the Universe). But the curious turn is that this is best achieved by pursuing LHP Initiation! We help God by conscious labour (Self-determined effort) and voluntary suffering. By these actions we are simultaneously taking care of our Cosmic obligations (RHP) and creating for ourselves a higher soul (LHP).

But this kind of initiation is far from easy, and so, for G the history of the Earth (or mankind or an individual man) is a series of catastrophes. The whole of Beelzebub's Tales tells of the efforts of the Messengers from Above (initiates) who try to work for the good of the people on Earth (by bringing detailed instructions on how to conduct their lives). Each time, however, the maleficent tendencies inherited from unfortunate cosmic incidents of the past (such as the "psycho-organic need to wiseacre") and the abnormal conditions of life (such as mechanical education) established by mankind reduce all the efforts to nothing.

Gurdjieff's psychology is likewise perfectly in line with the LHP. All Gurdjieff's metaphors of Man, such as "three-brained/centered machine" (Tetartocosmos); "carriage, horse and driver" (organic instinct, feeling, mind); and "food factory" are intended to make man see the defects in his normal functioning and to learn how to correct them. It should come as no surprise that all the aims to be reached by these "repairs" reflect vintage LHP thinking:

(A) Prolongation and intensification of man's active/conscious life (per the principle that time is relative to the flow of associations, and associations can be controlled).

(B) Enlargening man's horizons. The intellectual side of this is transforming the silly prison of man's ungoverned associations/"selves" into a co-ordinated and harmonized high-quality instrument of knowledge or Objective Reason. The emotional side is the Quest for an impartial and permanent "conscience" (sense of loyalty to one's Higher Self) through emotional understanding of one's actual inner condition and situation in the Universe (this is what G means by voluntary suffering, accepting and assimilating painful truths).

(C) Becoming Potent and independent in the sense that one can Be separate from the outer world and Do things voluntarily (per the principle that one should seek to do what cannot be done automatically and without thought, thereby creating a "something" that is not automatic).

(D) Becoming quasi-divine and immortal by developing and crystallizing this "something" that is independent of all the brains (i.e. intellectual, emotional and bodily associations) into a "higher body", an immortal germ of Self-awareness.

Gurdjieff has been a hard piece to swallow for westerners, perhaps because his methods were so "eastern" after all. Especially G's vision of the role of the Teacher has repeatedly been seen as unethical and impractical for Western mentalities. There are a wealth of famous examples. To test his pupils G would heartily seek to tempt them to go against their Self-determined aims (f.ex. by flattering or insulting them). He would encourage critical thinking by decidedly giving (especially to new-comers) an impression of charlatanism (though always answering sincere questions). He would also create conditions (physical and emotional difficulties) for intensive work on oneself that have been thought of as too hard. A good example would be his way of teaching the essence of Magus Buddha's Word Anatta. G would repeatedly push his pupils to their limits, demanding maximum effort with maximum attention, making everything seem to last forever or be needed immediately. When the pupil had done real well f.ex. in building something, G would thank him and then destroy the product (hopefully making the student realize that only the effort counts, especially in creating a dynamic Self).

Those who entered the Priure must have felt much like Nicholas (in John Fowles' *The Magus*) upon going to visit Conchis: everything was artificial and possibly for the purpose of teaching, but there seemed to be no way of knowing what was the point of each lecture. Nevertheless, all of this was only an expression of G's commitment to always teaching indirectly (he felt anything else would make for mechanicalness).

Gurdjieff is also interesting as a fore-runner of many actual themes within the Order of the Trapezoid. I'll mention seven points to honour Gurdjieff (I bet the best among us can mention a couple more).

(1) G may not have been a direct forefunner of the mad labs of the O.Tr., but his writings contain many accounts of machines that are built to reveal the hidden workings of the cosmos, and to effect desired transformations. G was, however, a master of the application of the Law of the Trapezoid (in its broader sense). His legacy contains many pieces of music, dance etc. that are designed to effect precise and universally valid responses in human beings.

(2) The Gurdjieffian Enneagram (symbolising the union of the Law of Three and the Law of Seven) is in many ways analogous to the Seal of Runa. The Enneagram is based on the symbolic values of 3 and 6 (which are characteristic of the RHP, consider f.ex. the trinity and the Seal of Solomon), whereas the Seal of the O.Tr. is based on 4 and 5 (the Trapezoid and the Pentagram). Both, however, share the Mystery of 9, and teach how to escape mechanicalness and to use one's fate to overcome death. These cosmological symbols are meant to be read both from the realms of Being and Becoming, and especially in the latter realm (that of linear time) a lot of convergences appear (which is to be expected since G's ideas on Becoming were so LHP).

(3) G's idea that a man's state of being depends on the quality and quantity of his impressions (which naturally fall into polar opposites), and the way he sought to help people to get the extreme impressions they needed, could be considered a historical example of the Way of Wotan as taught within the O.Tr.

(4) His teaching of not expressing negative emotions is similar to the essence of the Knightly code of conduct (i.e. consciously using outer friction to fuel the inner Quest, thereby furthering both one's Self and folk).

(5) He used neomythology, not exactly as the O.Tr. does (i.e. to discover Hidden things about ourselves and to create new vistas of reality), but to help others realize the "Cosmic Truths" that he knew. While G's neomythology has a very convincing tone, its content rebels against everything we have been taught and thus believe to "know". G's strange renderings of humanity's past are obviously not to be swallowed at face value. Rather one should Understand (with the whole of oneself, especially with one's feelings) that it doesn't matter whether what G describes as actual events really took place or not -- the spiritual conditions/qualities that he describes nevertheless do exist, within us. And often to our detriment.

(6) The extent to which G's views have become subtly established in many aspects of our culture (from cognitivist psychology to the world of art) shows that his realmagic worked. Indeed, those who read and are transformed by this Book of Heroes may be interested in G's version of it, Meetings with Remarkable Men.

(7) G's idea of the World as a system run by reciprocal maintenance (its parts "eating" each other or transmuting energies for each other) is quite similar in principle to our idea of a living Aeon. Seen from one perspective, the Aeon of Set is composed of LHP Initiates who transform themselves, each other and the social medium to "vibrate faster, to produce lighter atoms", as G might have put it, and thereby evolve and survive.

When G died the 4th Way movement more or less froze. Not that there aren't thousands who adhere to all the trappings that G left behind, but few have been able to take his teachings in the sense that he intended, i.e. the way he himself did: One should get the essential and recast the truths according to one's own genius.

In my opinion the Order of the Trapezoid is the initiatory School that currently best resonates with the "outer-space" side of Gurdjieff's teachings. Herein is the Gate to the Angular Realm of the Sovereign Will.

Hail, Gurdjieff, the Magus of the Word Aletheia (Not-Forgetting, Truth)!

BEGINNER'S BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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- * David Kherdian: *On a Spaceship with Beelzebub*. A well-written account of a modern Gurdjieffian's experiences in the 4th Way groups.
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