



Views from the Real World

Early Talks of
Gurdjieff

As Recollected by his Pupils

Paris, 1922

**Views from the
Real World**

Early Talks
in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London,
Paris, New York and Chicago
As Recollected by his Pupils

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First Edition

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Contents

Introduction by Jeanne de Salzmann

I

Glimpses of Truth 9

II

"When speaking on different subjects..." 41
"For an exact study, an exact language is needed..." 59
"Man is a plural being..." 73
One-sided development 79
"What is the method of the Institute?" 81
"Self-observation is very difficult..." 84
"How can we gain attention?" 85
"Everyone is in great need of one particular exercise..." 89
"Every animal works according to its constitution..." 97
"For one section of the people here, their stay has
become completely useless..." 101

III

Energy—sleep 105
"Is there a way of prolonging life?" 111
The education of children 114
Formatory apparatus 118
Body, essence and personality 125
Essence and personality 131
Separation of oneself from oneself 136
The stop exercise 142
The three powers—economy 145
Experiments with breathing 149
First talk in Berlin 152
"All exercises ... can be divided into seven categories..." 155
"As it is with everything, so it is with movements..." 158
The actor 160
Creative art—associations 163
Questions and answers on art, etc. 165

IV

| | |
|--|-----|
| God the Word | 176 |
| "Everywhere and always there is affirmation and negation..." | 179 |
| "It is impossible to be impartial..." | 186 |
| "Everything in the world is material..." | 188 |
| "Working on oneself is not so difficult as wishing to work..." | 192 |

V

| | |
|---|-----|
| "To all my questions..." | 197 |
| "Now I am sitting here..." | 203 |
| The two rivers | 210 |
| "There are two kinds of love..." | 217 |
| "Has free will a place in your teaching?" | 220 |
| Fears—identification | 225 |
| "Man is subject to many influences..." | 227 |
| "Liberation leads to liberation..." | 238 |

VI

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| The aphorisms | 243 |
| <i>Back Cover</i> | 246 |

Introduction

Gurdjieff is becoming well known as a pioneer of the new current of thought about man's situation, such as has been provided throughout the ages at times of transition in human history.

A quarter century after his death, his name has emerged from a background of rumor and he is recognized today as a great spiritual force, who saw clearly the direction modern civilization is taking and who set to work behind the scenes to prepare people in the West to discover for themselves and eventually to diffuse among mankind the certainty that Being is the only indestructible reality.

The outline of his life is familiar to readers of his Second and Third Series, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (published in 1963) and *Life Is Real Only Then, When "I Am"* (privately printed in 1975).

Born on the frontier of Russia and Turkey in 1877 "in strange, almost biblical circumstances," his education as a boy left him with many unanswered questions and he set out when quite young in search of men who had achieved a complete knowledge of human life. His early travels to unidentified places in Central Asia and the Middle East lasted twenty years.

On his return, he began to gather pupils in Moscow before the first World War and continued his work with a small party of followers while moving, during the year of the Russian revolution, to Essentuki in the Caucasus, and then through Tiflis, Constantinople, Berlin and London to the Chateau du Priure near Paris, where he reopened his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in 1922 on a larger scale.

After his first visit to America in 1924, a motor accident interrupted further plans for the Institute. From 1924 to 1935, he turned all his energies to writing.

The rest of his life was spent in intensive work, chiefly with French pupils in Paris where, after completing arrangements for posthumous publication in New York and London of his First Series, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, he died in 1949.

What does his teaching consist of? And is it intelligible to everybody?

He showed that the evolution of man—a theme prominent in the scientific thinking of his youth—cannot be approached through mass influences but is the result of individual inner growth; that such an inner opening was the aim of all religions, of all the Ways, but requires a direct and precise knowledge of changes in the quality of each man's inner consciousness: a knowledge which had been preserved in places he had visited, but can only be acquired with an experienced guide through prolonged self-study and "work on oneself."

Through the order of his ideas, and the exercises which he changed repeatedly, the minds of all who came to him were opened to the most complete dissatisfaction with themselves and at the same time to the vast scale of their inner possibilities, in a way that none of them ever forgot.

The statement of his teaching which Gurdjieff presented in *Beelzebub's Tales* has to be searched for within a panorama of the whole history of human culture, from the creation of life on the planet through the rise and fall of civilizations up to modern times.

Fortunately, some record exists of his actual words and his direct instructions given in conversations, talks and lectures at the Prieure, and as he traveled from one city to the next with his pupils, often in difficult conditions. These are the talks contained in this book.

They consist of notes put together from memory by some of those who heard the talks and recorded them faithfully afterwards. Treasured and carefully protected from misuse, even the fact of the existence of these notes became known only gradually.

Incomplete as they are, even fragmentary in some cases, the collection is an authentic rendering of Gurdjieff's approach to work on oneself, as expressed to his pupils at the required moment. Moreover, even in these notes from memory, it is striking that regardless of the variety of his audiences—on some occasions, people long familiar with his idea, on others people invited to meet him for the first time—there is always the same human tone of voice, the same man evoking an intimate response in each of his listeners.

In her foreword to the first edition of this book, Jeanne de Salzmann, who spent thirty years with Gurdjieff from 1919 in Tiflis until his death, and participated in all the stages of his work, even carrying the responsibility for his groups in the last ten years of his life, states that:

"Today, when Gurdjieff's teaching is being studied and put into practice by sizeable research groups in America, Europe and even Asia, it seems desirable to shed some light on a fundamental characteristic of his teaching, namely, that while the truth sought for was always the same, the forms through which he helped his pupils approach it served only for a limited time. As soon as a new understanding had been reached, the form would change.

"Readings, talks, discussions and studies, which had been the main feature of work for a period of time and had stimulated the intelligence to the point of opening it to an entirely new way of seeing, were for some reason or other suddenly brought to an end.

"This put the pupil on the spot. What his intellect had become capable of conceiving had now to be experienced with his feeling.

"Unexpected conditions were brought about in order to upset habits. The only possibility of facing the new situation was through a deep self-examination, with that total sincerity which alone can change the quality of human feeling.

"Then the body, in its turn, was required to collect all the energy of its attention, to attune itself to an order which it was there to serve.

"After this, the experience could follow its course on another level.

"As Gurdjieff himself used to say: 'All the parts which constitute the human being must be informed—informed in the only way which is appropriate for each of them—otherwise the development will be lopsided and unable to go further.'

"The ideas are a summons, a summons towards another world, a call from one who knows and who is able to show us the way. But the transformation of the human being requires something more. It can only be achieved if there is a real meeting between the conscious force which descends and the total commitment that answers it. This brings about a fusion.

"A new life can then appear in a new set of conditions which only someone with an objective consciousness can create and develop.

"But to understand this one must have passed through all the stages of this development. Without such experience and understanding the work will lose its effectiveness and the conditions will be wrongly

interpreted; they will not be brought at the right moment and situations and efforts will remain on the level of ordinary life, uselessly repeating themselves."

Glimpses of Truth is an account of a conversation with Gurdjieff written by a Moscow pupil in 1914 and mentioned by P. D. Ouspensky in *In Search of the Miraculous*. It is the first—and probably the only—example of a series of essays on Gurdjieff's ideas projected by him at that period. The author of it is not known.

The Talks have been compared and regrouped with the help of Madame Thomas de Hartmann, who from 1917 in Essentuki was present at all these meetings and could thus guarantee their authenticity.

It will be noticed that passages in several of the talks (including those beginning "For an exact study," "To all my questions" and "The two rivers") are in fact expressions of the material which Gurdjieff used later in only a slightly different form when writing the last chapter of *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*.

Some of the Aphorisms have been published before in accounts of life at the Prieure. They were inscribed in a special alphabet, known only to the pupils, above the walls of the Study House where his talks were given.

I

1914

Glimpses of Truth

written by one of Gurdjieff's circle in Moscow

Strange events, incomprehensible from the ordinary point of view, have guided my life. I mean those events which influence a man's inner life, radically changing its direction and aim and creating new epochs in it. I call them incomprehensible because their connection was clear only to me. It was as though some invisible person, in pursuit of a definite aim, had placed in the path of my life circumstances which, at the very moment of my need, I found there as if by chance. Guided by such events, I became accustomed from my early years to look with great penetration into the circumstances surrounding me and to try to grasp the principle connecting them, and to find in their interrelations a broader, more complete explanation. I must say that in every exterior result it was the hidden cause evoking it that interested me most.

One day in the course of my life, in this same apparently strange way, I found myself face to face with occultism, and became interested in it as though in a deep and harmonious philosophical system. But at the very moment when I had reached something more than mere interest, I again lost, as suddenly as I had found it, the possibility of proceeding with its systematic study. In other words, I was thrown entirely on my own resources. This loss seemed a senseless failure, but I later recognized in it a necessary stage in the course of my life and one full of deep meaning. This recognition came only much later, however. I did not deviate but went forward on my own responsibility and at my own risk. Insuperable obstacles confronted me, forcing me to retreat. Vast horizons opened to my vision and as I hastened forward I often slipped or became entangled. Losing, as it seemed, what I had discovered, I remained wandering round on the same spot, as though fogbound. In searching I made many efforts and did apparently useless work, rewarded inadequately by results. Today, I see that no effort went unrewarded and that every mistake served to guide me toward the truth.

I plunged into the study of occult literature, and without exaggeration can say that I not only read but mastered patiently and perseveringly the greater part of the available material, trying to grasp the sense and to understand what was hidden between the lines. All this only served to convince me that I would never succeed in finding what I sought in books: though I glimpsed the outlines of a majestic structure, I could not see it clearly and distinctly.

I searched for those who might have interests in common with me. Some seemed to have found something, but on closer examination I saw that they, like myself, were groping in the dark. I still hoped in the end to find what I needed; I looked for a living man, able to give me more than I could find in a book. Perseveringly and obstinately I sought and, after each failure, hope revived again and led me to a new search. With this in view I visited Egypt, India and other countries. Among those encountered were many who left no trace, but some were of great importance.

Several years passed; among my acquaintances I counted some to whom, by the community of our interests, I was bound more durably. One in close touch with me was a certain A. The two of us had spent not a few sleepless nights, racking our brains over several passages in a book we did not understand and searching for appropriate explanations. In this way we had come to know each other intimately.

But during the last six months I had begun to notice, first at rare intervals, and then more frequently, something odd about him. It was not that he had turned his back on me, but he had seemed to grow cooler toward the search, which had not ceased to be vital to me. At the same time I saw he had not forgotten it. He often expressed thoughts and made comments which became fully comprehensible only after long reflection. I remarked on it more than once, but he always skillfully avoided conversations on this subject.

I must confess that this growing indifference of A., who had been the constant companion of my work, led to gloomy reflections. Once I spoke to him openly about it—I scarcely remember in which way.

"Who told you," objected A., "that I am deserting you? Wait a little and you will see clearly that you are mistaken."

But for some reason neither these remarks, nor some others which at the time seemed strange to me, caught my interest. Perhaps because I was occupied in reconciling myself to the idea of my complete isolation.

So it continued. It is only now that I see how, in spite of an apparent capacity for observation and analysis, I overlooked the main factor, continually before my eyes, in a way which was unpardonable. But let the facts speak for themselves.

One day about the middle of November, I spent the evening with a friend of mine. The conversation was on a subject of little interest to me. During a pause in the talk, my host said, "By the way, knowing your partiality for occultism I think an item in today's *Golos Moskvi* [The Voice of Moscow] would interest you." And he pointed out an article headed "Round about the Theatre."

It spoke, giving a brief summary, about the scenario of a medieval mystery, *The Struggle of the Magicians*: a ballet written by G. I. Gurdjieff, an orientalist who was well-known in Moscow. The mention of occultism, the title itself and the contents of the scenario, aroused my great interest, but none of the people present could give any more information about it. My host, a keen amateur of ballet, admitted that in his circle he knew of no one corresponding to the description in the article. I cut it out, with his permission, and took it away with me.

I will not weary you with an exposition of my reasons for being interested in this article. But it was as a consequence of them that I took a firm resolve on Saturday morning to find Mr. Gurdjieff, the writer of the scenario, at all costs.

That same evening when A. called upon me, I showed him the article. I told him that it was my intention to search for Mr. Gurdjieff, and asked his opinion.

A. read the article and, glancing at me, said: "Well, I wish you success. As far as I am concerned, it does not interest me. Haven't we had enough of such tales?" And he put the article aside with an air of indifference. Such an attitude toward this

question was so chilling that I gave up and retreated into my thoughts; A. was also thoughtful. Our conversation was halted. There was a long silence, interrupted by A., who put his hand on my shoulder.

"Look here," he said, "don't be offended. I had my own reasons, which I will explain later, for answering you as I did. But first, I shall ask a few questions which are so serious"—he emphasized the word "so"—"you cannot know how serious they are." Somewhat astonished by this pronouncement, I answered, "Ask."

"Do, please, tell me why you wish to find this Mr. Gurdjieff? How will you look for him? What aim will you follow? And if your search is successful, in what way will you approach him?"

At first unwillingly, but encouraged by the seriousness of A.'s manner, as well as by questions he occasionally put, I explained the direction of my thinking.

When I had finished, A. went over what I had said and added, "I can tell you that you won't find anything."

"How can that be?" I replied. "It seems to me that the ballet scenario of *The Struggle of the Magicians*, apart from being dedicated to Geltzer, is hardly so unimportant that its author could be lost without a trace."

"It is not a question of the author. You may find him. But he won't talk with you as he could," said A.

I flared up at this: "Why do you imagine that he . . .?" "I do not imagine anything," A. interrupted. "I know. But not to keep you in suspense I tell you, I know this scenario well, very well. What is more I know its author, Mr. Gurdjieff, personally, and have known him for a long time. The way you have elected to find him might lead you to make his acquaintance, but not in the way that you would wish. Believe me, if you will allow me a piece of friendly advice, wait a little longer. I will try to arrange you a meeting with Mr. Gurdjieff in the way you wish . . . Well, I must be going."

In the greatest astonishment I seized him. "Wait! You can't go yet. How did you come to know him? Who is he? Why have you never told me about him before?"

"Not so many questions," said A. "I categorically refuse to answer them now. In due course I will answer. Set your mind at rest meanwhile; I promise to do everything I can to introduce you."

In spite of my most insistent demands A. refused to reply, adding that it was in my interest not to delay him any longer.

About two o'clock on Sunday, A. telephoned me and said briefly: "If you wish, be at the railroad station at seven o'clock." "And where are we going?" I asked. "To Mr. Gurdjieff," he replied, and hung up.

"He certainly does not stand on ceremony with me," flashed through my mind, "he did not even ask me whether I could go, and I happen to have some important business tonight. Besides, I have no idea how far we have to go. When shall we be back? How shall I explain at home?" But then I decided that A. was not likely to have overlooked the circumstances of my life; so the "important" business quickly lost its importance and I began to await the appointed hour. Being impatient, I arrived at the station almost an hour too early, and waited for A.

Finally he appeared. "Come, quick," he said, hurrying me. "I have the tickets. I was delayed and we are late."

A porter was following us with some big boxes. "What is that?" I asked A. "Are we going away for a year?" "No," he replied laughing. "I'll come back with you; the boxes don't concern us."

We took our seats and, being alone in the compartment, nobody disturbed our conversation.

"Are we going far?" I asked.

A. named one of the country resorts near Moscow and added, "To save you more enquiries I will tell you everything possible; but the greater part will be for you alone. Of course, you are right to be interested in Mr. Gurdjieff as a person, but

I will tell you only a few external facts about him, to give you your bearings. As for my personal opinions about him I will keep silent, so that you may take in your own impressions more fully. We shall return to this matter later."

Settling comfortably into his seat, he began to talk.

He told me that Mr. Gurdjieff had spent many years wandering in the East with a definite purpose and had been in places inaccessible to Europeans; that two or three years ago he had come to Russia and had then lived in Petersburg, devoting his efforts and his knowledge mainly to work of his own. Not long ago he had moved to Moscow and had rented a country house near the town, so as to be able to work in retirement undisturbed. In accordance with a rhythm known only to himself he would periodically visit Moscow, returning to his work again after a certain interval. He did not think it necessary, I gathered, to tell his Moscow acquaintances about his country house and he did not receive anyone there.

"As to how I came to know him," said A., "we will talk of that another time. That, too, is far from commonplace."

A. went on to say that very early in his acquaintance with Mr. Gurdjieff he had spoken about me and wished to introduce us; not only had he refused, but he had actually forbidden A. to tell me anything about him. On account of my persistent demand to make Mr. Gurdjieff's acquaintance and my aim of so doing, A. had decided to ask him once more. He had seen him, after leaving me the previous night, and Mr. Gurdjieff, after asking many detailed questions about me, had agreed to see me and himself had proposed that A. should bring me to him that evening, in the country.

"In spite of my knowing you for so many years," said A., "he certainly knows you better than I do, from what I have told him. Now you realize that it was not just imagination when I told you that you could not obtain anything in the ordinary way. Don't forget, a great exception is being made for you and none of those who know him have been where you are going. Even those closest to him do not suspect the existence of his retreat. You owe this exception to my recommendation, so please do not put me in an awkward position."

Several more questions produced no reply from A., but when I asked him about *The Struggle of the Magicians* he told me its contents in some detail. When I questioned him about something which struck me as incongruous, A. told me Mr. Gurdjieff would speak about it himself, if he thought it necessary.

This conversation aroused in me a multitude of thoughts and conjectures. After a silence, I turned to A. with a question. A. gave me a somewhat perplexed glance and, after a short pause, said: "Collect your thoughts, or you will make a fool of yourself. We are nearly there. Don't make me regret having brought you. Remember what you said about your aim yesterday."

After this he said nothing.

At the station we left the train in silence and I offered to carry one of the boxes. It weighed at least seventy pounds, and the box carried by A. was probably no lighter. A four-seated sleigh was waiting for us. Silently we took our places, and drove all the way in the same deep silence. After about fifteen minutes the sleigh stopped before a gate. A large two-storied country house was dimly visible at the far end of the garden. Preceded by our driver carrying the luggage, we entered the unlocked gate and walked to the house along a path cleared of snow. The door was ajar. A. rang the bell.

After some time a voice asked, "Who's there?" A. gave his name. "How are you?" the same voice called through the half-open door. The driver carried the boxes into the house and went out again. "Let us go in, now," said A., who appeared to have been waiting for something.

We passed through a dark hallway into a dimly lit ante-room. A. closed the door after us; there was nobody in the room. "Take your things off," he said shortly, pointing to a peg. We removed our coats.

"Give me your hand; don't be afraid, you won't fall." Closing the door firmly behind him, A. led me forward into a completely dark room. The floor was covered with a soft carpet on which our steps made no sound. I put out my free hand in the dark and felt a heavy curtain, which ran the whole length of

what seemed to be a large room, forming a kind of passage to a second door. "Keep your aim before you," A. whispered, and lifting a carpet hung across a door, he pushed me ahead into a lighted room.

Opposite the door a middle-aged man was sitting against the wall on a low ottoman, with his feet crossed in Eastern fashion; he was smoking a curiously shaped water pipe which stood on a low table in front of him. Beside the pipe stood a small cup of coffee. These were the first things that caught my eye.

As we entered, Mr. Gurdjieff—for it was he—raised his hand and, glancing calmly at us, greeted us with a nod. Then he asked me to sit down, indicating the ottoman beside him. His complexion betrayed his Oriental origin. His eyes particularly attracted my attention, not so much in themselves as by the way he looked at me when he greeted me, not as if he saw me the first time but as though he had known me long and well. I sat down and glanced round the room. Its appearance was so unusual to a European that I wish to describe it in more detail. There was no area not covered, either by carpets or hangings of some sort. A single enormous rug covered the floor of this spacious room. Even its walls were hung with carpets which also draped the doors and windows; the ceiling was covered with ancient silk shawls of resplendent colors, astonishingly beautiful in their combination. These were drawn together in a strange pattern toward the center of the ceiling. The light was concealed behind a dull glass shade of peculiar form resembling a huge lotus flower, which produced a white, diffused glow.

Another lamp, which gave a similar light, stood on a high stand to the left of the ottoman on which we sat. Against the left-hand wall was an upright piano covered with antique draperies, which so camouflaged its form that without its candlesticks I should not have guessed what it was. On the wall over the piano, set against a large carpet, hung a collection of stringed instruments of unusual shapes, among which were also flutes. Two other collections also adorned the wall. One of ancient weapons with some slings, yataghans, daggers and other things, was behind and above our heads. On the oppo-

site wall, suspended by fine white wire, a number of old carved pipes were arranged in a harmonious group.

Underneath this latter collection, on the floor against the wall, lay a long row of big cushions covered with a single carpet. In the left-hand corner, at the end of the row, was a Dutch stove draped with an embroidered cloth. The corner on the right was decorated with a particularly fine color combination; in it hung an ikon of St. George the Victor, set with precious stones. Beneath it stood a cabinet in which were several small ivory statues of different sizes; I recognized Christ, Buddha, Moses and Mahomet; the rest I could not see very well.

Another low ottoman stood against the right-hand wall. On either side of it were two small carved ebony tables and on one was a coffee-pot with a heating lamp. Several cushions and hassocks were strewn about the room in careful disorder. All the furniture was adorned with tassels, gold embroidery and gems. As a whole, the room produced a strangely cosy impression which was enhanced by a delicate scent that mingled agreeably with an aroma of tobacco.

Having examined the room, I turned my eyes to Mr. Gurdjieff. He looked at me, and I had the distinct impression that he took me in the palm of his hand and weighed me. I smiled involuntarily, and he looked away from me calmly and without haste. Glancing at A., he said something to him. He did not look at me again in this way and the impression was not repeated.

A. was seated on a big cushion beside the ottoman, in the same posture as Mr. Gurdjieff, which seemed to have become habitual to him. Presently he rose and, taking two large pads of paper and two pencils from a small table, he gave one to Mr. Gurdjieff and kept the other. Indicating the coffee-pot he said to me, "When you want coffee, help yourself. I am going to have some now." Following his example, I poured out a cup and, returning to my place, put it beside the water pipe on the small table.

I then turned to Mr. Gurdjieff and, trying to express myself as briefly and definitely as possible, I explained why I had come. After a short silence, Mr. Gurdjieff said: "Well, let's not lose any precious time," and asked me what I really wanted.

To avoid repetition, I will note certain peculiarities of the conversation that followed. First of all I must mention a rather strange circumstance, one I did not notice at the moment, perhaps because I had not time to think about it. Mr. Gurdjieff spoke Russian neither fluently nor correctly. Sometimes he searched for a considerable time for the words and expressions he needed, and turned constantly to A. for help. He would say two or three words to him; A. seemed to catch his thought in the air, and to develop and complete it, and give it a form intelligible to me. He seemed well acquainted with the subject under discussion. When Mr. Gurdjieff spoke, A. watched him with attention. With a word Mr. Gurdjieff would show him some new meaning, and would swiftly change the direction of A.'s thought.

Of course A.'s knowledge of me very much helped him to enable me to understand Mr. Gurdjieff. Many times with a single hint A. would evoke a whole category of thoughts. He served as a sort of transmitter between Mr. Gurdjieff and myself. At first Mr. Gurdjieff had to appeal to A. constantly, but as the subject broadened and developed, embracing new areas, Mr. Gurdjieff turned to A. less and less often. His speech flowed more freely and naturally; the necessary words seemed to come of themselves, and I could have sworn that, by the end of the conversation, he was speaking the clearest unaccented Russian, his words succeeding one another fluently and calmly; they were rich in color, similes, vivid examples, broad and harmonious perspectives.

In addition, both of them illustrated the conversation with various diagrams and series of numbers, which, taken together, formed a graceful system of symbols—a sort of script—in which one number could express a whole group of ideas. They quoted numerous examples from physics and mechanics, and especially brought material from chemistry and mathematics.

Mr. Gurdjieff sometimes turned to A. with a short remark which referred to something A. was familiar with, and occasionally mentioned names. A. indicated by a nod that he understood, and the conversation proceeded without interruption. I also realized that, while teaching me, A. was learning himself.

Another peculiarity was that I had to ask very rarely. As soon as a question arose and before it could be formulated, the development of the thought had already given the answer. It was as though Mr. Gurdjieff had known in advance and anticipated the questions which might arise. Once or twice I made a false move by asking about some matter that I had not troubled to get clear myself. But I will speak about this at the right place.

I can best compare the direction of the current of the conversation to a spiral. Mr. Gurdjieff, having taken some main idea, and after having broadened it and given it depth, completed the cycle of his reasoning by a return to the starting point, which I saw, as it were, below me, more broadly and in greater detail. A new cycle, and again there was a clearer and more precise idea of the breadth of the original thought.

I do not know how I should have felt, had I been forced to speak with Mr. Gurdjieff *tete-a-tete*. The presence of A., his calm and serious enquiring attitude toward the conversation, must have impressed itself upon me without my knowing it.

Taken as a whole, what was said brought me an inexpressible pleasure I had never before experienced. The outlines of that majestic edifice which had been dark and incomprehensible to me, were now clearly delineated, and not only the outlines but some of the facade's details.

I should like to describe, even if it is only approximately, the essence of this conversation. Who knows but that it may not help someone in a position similar to my own? This is the purpose of my sketch.

"You are acquainted with occult literature," began Mr. Gurdjieff, "and so I will refer to the formula you know from the Emerald Tablets: 'As above, so below.' It is easy to start to build the foundation of our discussion from this. At the same time I must say that there is no need to use occultism as the base from which to approach the understanding of truth. Truth speaks for itself in whatever form it is manifested. You will understand this fully only in the course of time, but I wish to give you today at least a grain of understanding. So, I repeat, I begin with the occult formula because I am speaking to you. I know you have tried to decipher this formula. I know

that you 'understand' it. But the understanding you have now is only a dim and distant reflection of the divine brilliance.

"It is not about the formula itself that I shall speak to you—I am not going to analyze or decipher it. Our conversation will not be about the literal meaning; we shall take it only as a starting point for our discussion. And to give you an idea of our subject, I may say that I wish to speak about the overall unity of all that exists—about unity in multiplicity. I wish to show you two or three facets of a precious crystal, and to draw your attention to the pale images faintly reflected in them.

"I know you understand about the unity of the laws governing the universe, but this understanding is speculative—or rather, theoretical. It is not enough to understand with the mind, it is necessary to feel with your being the absolute truth and immutability of this fact; only then will you be able, consciously and with conviction, to say 'I know.'"

Such was the sense of the words with which Mr. Gurdjieff began the conversation. He then proceeded to describe vividly the sphere in which the life of all mankind moves, with a thought which illustrated the Hermetic formula he had quoted. By analogies he passed from the little ordinary happenings in the life of an individual to the great cycles in the life of the whole of mankind. By means of such parallels he underscored the cyclic action of the law of analogy within the diminutive sphere of terrestrial life. Then, in the same way, he passed from mankind to what I would call the life of the earth, representing it as an enormous organism like that of man, and in terms of physics, mechanics, biology and so on. I watched the illumination of his thought come increasingly into focus on one point. The inevitable conclusion of all that he said was the great law of tri-unity: the law of the three principles of action, resistance and equipoise: the active, passive and neutral principles. Now resting upon the solid foundation of the earth, and armed with this law, he applied it, with a bold flight of thought, to the whole solar system. Now his thought no longer moved toward this law of tri-unity, but already out from it, emphasizing it more and more, and manifesting it in the step nearest to man, that of Earth and Sun. Then, with a brief phrase, he passed beyond the limits of the solar system. Astronomical data first flashed forth, then appeared to dwindle and

disappear before the infinity of space. There remained only one great thought, issuing from the same great law. His words sounded slow and solemn, and at the very same moment seemed to diminish and lose their significance. Behind them could be sensed the pulse of a tremendous thought.

"We have come to the brink of the abyss which can never be bridged by ordinary human reason. Do you feel how superfluous and useless words have become? Do you feel how powerless reason by itself is here? We have approached the principle behind all principles." Having said this, he became silent, his gaze thoughtful.

Spellbound by the beauty and grandeur of this thought, I had gradually ceased to listen to the words. I could say that I felt them, that I grasped his thought not with my reason but by intuition. Man far below was reduced to nothingness, and disappeared leaving no trace. I was filled with a sense of closeness to the Great Inscrutable, and with the deep consciousness of my personal nothingness.

As though divining my thoughts, Mr. Gurdjieff asked: "We started with man, and where is he? But great, all-embracing is the law of unity. Everything in the Universe is one, the difference is only of scale; in the infinitely small we shall find the same laws as in the infinitely great. As above, so below.

"The sun has risen over the mountain tops above; the valley is still in darkness. So reason, transcending the human condition, regards the divine light, while for those dwelling below all is darkness. Again I repeat, all in the world is one; and since reason is also one, human reason forms a powerful instrument for investigation.

"Now, having come to the beginning, let us descend to the earth from which we came, we shall find its place in the order of the structure of the Universe. Look!"

He made a single sketch and, with a passing reference to the laws of mechanics, delineated the scheme of the construction of the Universe. With numbers and figures in harmonious, systematic columns, multiplicity within unity began to appear.

The figures began to be clothed with meaning, the ideas which had been dead began to come to life. One and the same law ruled all; with delighted understanding I pursued the harmonious development of the Universe. His scheme took its rise from a Great Beginning and ended with the earth.

While he made this exposition, Mr. Gurdjieff noted the necessity of what he called a "shock" reaching a given place from outside and connecting the two opposite principles into one balanced unity. This corresponded to the point of application of force in a balanced system of forces in mechanics.

"We have reached the point to which our terrestrial life is linked," Mr. Gurdjieff said, "and for the present will not go further. In order to examine more closely what has just been said, and to emphasize once more the unity of the laws, we will take a simple scale and apply it, increased proportionately to the measurement of the microcosmos." And he asked me to choose something familiar of regular structure, such as the spectrum of white light, musical scale, and so on. After having thought, I chose the musical scale.

"You have made a good choice," said Mr. Gurdjieff. "As a matter of fact the musical scale, in the form in which it now exists, was constructed in ancient times by those possessed of great knowledge, and you will realize how much it can contribute to the understanding of the principal laws."

He said a few words about the laws of the scale's structure, and particularly stressed the gaps, as he called them, which exist in every octave between the notes mi and fa and also between si of one octave and do of the next. Between these notes there are missing half-tones, in both the ascending and descending scales. While in the ascending development of the octave, the notes do, re, fa, sol and la can pass into the next higher tones, the notes mi and si are deprived of this possibility. He explained how these two gaps, according to certain laws depending on the law of tri-unity, were filled in by new octaves of other orders, these octaves within the gaps playing a part similar to that of the half-tones in the evolutionary or involutory process of the octave. The principal octave was similar to a tree trunk, sending out branches of subordinate octaves. The seven principal notes of the octave and the two

gaps, "bearers of new directions," gave a total of nine links of a chain, or three groups of three links each.

After this he turned to the structural scheme of the Universe, and from it singled out that "ray" whose course led through the earth.

The original powerful octave, whose notes of apparently ever-lessening force included the sun, the earth and the moon, had inevitably fallen, according to the law of tri-unity, into three subordinate octaves. Here the role of the gaps in the octave and the differences in their nature were defined and made clear to me. Of the two intervals, mi-fa and si-do, one was more active—more of the nature of will—while the other played the passive part. The "shocks" of the original scheme, which was not altogether clear to me, were also the rule here, and appeared in a new light.

In the division of this "ray," the place, the role and the destiny of mankind became clear. Moreover the possibilities of the individual man were more apparent.

"It may seem to you," said Mr. Gurdjieff, "that in following the aim of unity, we have deviated from it somewhat in the direction of learning about multiplicity. What I am going to explain now you will no doubt understand. At the same time I am certain that this understanding will chiefly refer to the structural part of what is set forth. Try to fix your interest and attention not on its beauty, its harmony and its ingenuity—and even this side you will not understand entirely—but on the spirit, on what lies hidden behind the words, on the inner content. Otherwise you will see only form, deprived of life. Now, you will see one of the facets of the crystal and, if your eye could perceive the reflection in it, you would draw nearer to the truth itself."

Then Mr. Gurdjieff began to explain the way in which fundamental octaves are combined with secondary octaves subordinate to them; how these, in their turn, send forth new octaves of the next order, and so on. I could compare it to the process of growth or, more aptly, to the formation of a tree. Out of a straight vigorous trunk boughs branch out, producing in their turn small branches and twigs, and then leaves appear

on them. One could already sense the process of formation of veins.

I must admit that, in fact, my attention was chiefly attracted to the harmony and beauty of the system. In addition to the octaves growing, like branches from a trunk, Mr. Gurdjieff pointed out that each note of every octave appears, from another point of view, as a whole octave: the same was true everywhere. These "inner" octaves I should compare to the concentric layers of a tree trunk which fit one within the other.

All these explanations were given in very general terms. They emphasized the lawful character of the structure. But for the examples which accompanied it, it might have been found rather theoretical. The examples gave it life, and sometimes it seemed that I really began to guess what was hidden behind the words. I saw that in this consistency in the structure of the universe, all the possibilities, all the combinations without exception, had been foreseen; the infinity of infinities was foreshadowed. And yet, at the same time, I could not see it, because my reason faltered before the immensity of the concept. Again I was filled with a dual sensation—the nearness of the possibility of all-knowing and the consciousness of its inaccessibility.

Once more I heard Mr. Gurdjieff's words echoing my feelings: "No ordinary reason is enough to enable a man to take the Great Knowledge to himself, and make it his inalienable possession. Nevertheless it is possible for him. But first he must shake the dust from his feet. Vast efforts, tremendous labors, are needed to come into possession of the wings on which it is possible to rise. It is many times easier to drift with the current, to pass with it from one octave to another; but that takes immeasurably longer than, alone, to wish and to do. The way is hard, the ascent becomes increasingly steeper as it goes on, but one's strength also increases. A man becomes tempered and with each ascending step his view grows wider. Yes, there is the possibility."

I saw indeed that this possibility existed. Although not yet knowing what it was, I saw that it was there. I find it hard to put into words what became more and more understandable. I saw that the reign of law, now becoming apparent to me, was

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