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Chapter 5

‘Only This Will Bring Results’: Practising Gurdjieff’s Exercises in a Search Culture

Exercises, exercises, thousands and thousands of times. Only this will bring results.
*G.I. Gurdjieff*¹

1 Context

This chapter will examine the claim that “individuals actively search for transformative experiences, inducing consciousness-alterations through practices and reflecting critically on the long process as ‘experientialist philosophers’”² by focusing on the exercises taught by the Greek-Armenian teacher, G.I. Gurdjieff (1866?–1949), from 1915 until his death. However, Gurdjieff taught that people are metaphorically ‘asleep’ in their waking lives and that ‘consciousness-alteration’ was not possible until the subject first learned how to ‘wake up’. The quotation marks in the title of Gurdjieff’s posthumous collection of talks and essays, *Life is Real only Then, When ‘I Am,’*³ indicate the goal of waking up: to become what Gurdjieff elsewhere calls ‘Real I.’ To achieve this end, Gurdjieff taught a number of exercises to the ‘experientialist philosophers’ who came his way, based in a form of training in proprioceptive sensitivity to the body and its manifold ‘states’. We examine the content of the exercises taught by Gurdjieff within an interwar context (1918–1939) of a search for meaning in an increasingly ‘post-Christian’ culture. This ‘search culture’ included Spiritualist, Theosophical and other proto-‘new age’ subjects and authorities who approached ‘religion’ in a ‘mystically’ and ‘spiritually’ inclined mode, includ-

1 Gurdjieff, meeting nineteen, Paris, undated [December 1943?] in Anonymous 2009, 100.

2 A preliminary version of this chapter was presented by the second-named author at the conference ‘Intentional Transformative Experiences: Theorising Self-Cultivation in Religion and Philosophy,’ Institute for the Science of Religion, University of Bern, Switzerland, 28/8/21–30/8/21. But the roots go back to a symposium organised by Professor Carole Cusack at the University of Sydney, 3/12/19, under the title ‘Studying G.I. Gurdjieff: Scholars and Practitioners in Conversation’; our thanks to Carole for organizing this event and for introducing the authors in person.

3 Gurdjieff 1978.

ing significant Modernist writers, editors and musicians.⁴ This culture was characterized by widespread questioning of truths mandated by established religions, the Christian churches in particular. A habitus of ‘seekership’ emerged in which subjects identified as ‘seekers’ and engaged with the multiple new authorities who were promising a ‘taste for things that are true.’⁵

Gurdjieff was not by any means the sole such authority in interwar search culture, but he is significant due to his contact with literary and artistic elites of the period and his more diffuse and enduring influence on the post-1960s ‘New Age movement.’⁶ Many figures in the movement that arose around his work, including Gurdjieff himself as originator, P.D. Ouspensky (1878–1947) as follower, A.R. Orage (1873–1934) as associate, J.G. Bennett (1897–1974) as syncretizer and Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990) as anointed successor, self-identified as ‘seekers’ implicitly or explicitly. Such self-identification signaled an appetite to sift the real from the *ersatz*. Seekership as a *modus operandi* resurfaced in the post-1960s period where, in a Gurdjieffian context, the motif was reproduced in *Search: Journey on the Inner Path*⁷ edited by Jean Sulzberger (1922–2016), a longstanding member of the Gurdjieff Society in New York. This anthology of writings was introduced by Henri Tracol (1909–1997) of the Gurdjieff Society in Paris in which he writes “Man is born a seeker”:

Equipped as he is by nature for vibrating to a vast range of impressions, is he not predestined to an endless wondering? Bound by necessity to select from these impressions those suitable for conscious assimilation—and thereby to approach a genuine perception of his own identity—is he not singled out for continuous self-interrogation?⁸

But Tracol warns against self-indulgence:

No real knowledge can ever be attained by mere chance [. . .] Letting oneself drift into persuasive ‘visions’ and ‘discoveries’ [. . .] or yielding to the spell of what could be called ‘search for the sake of searching’, is merely to indulge in daydreaming [. . .] Then how is one to set about an authentic quest? Instead of surrendering at once to the call of any partic-

4 For examples, each of whom eventually found satisfaction in Gurdjieff’s teaching, see the New Zealand short story writer, Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923), the English editor of *The New Age*, A.R. Orage (1873–1934) and the Ukrainian composer, Thomas de Hartmann (1884–1956).

5 To cite the title of a collection of talks by the French Gurdjieffian, Henri Tracol (1994). Seekership is defined by Campbell (2002:15) as the behaviour of ‘persons who have adopted a problem-solving perspective while defining conventional religious institutions and beliefs as inadequate.’

6 Heelas (1996, 47–48) cites Gurdjieff as one of three key ‘context setters’ in New Age pedagogy alongside C.G. Jung and H.P. Blavatsky.

7 Sulzberger 1979.

8 Tracol 1979, xv.

ular 'way,' one should first try with humility to discern some of the prerequisites for setting off on the right foot.⁹

G.I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866?–1949) was born in Gyumri, Armenia, then part of the extensive Russian empire, and first came to public notice as an independent teacher in Moscow and St. Petersburg around 1912.¹⁰ Attracted to Gurdjieff was a group attached to the writer and philosopher, P.D. Ouspensky, author in 1914 of a Russian bestseller later translated into English as *A New Model of the Universe: Principles of the Psychological Method in its Application to Problems of Science, Religion and Art*.¹¹ In the wake of the Russian revolution in 1917 and resulting civil war, Gurdjieff's group migrated to the Greek-Russian town of Yessentuki and then to Tbilisi in Georgia. In 1922 the group reformed at the Château Le Prieuré at Fontainebleau-Avon near Paris under the name 'The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man.'¹²

The methodology of 'search' can be seen to begin already at the point where the reader starts to sift the evidence for Gurdjieff's biography and reputation and hence the reliability of his authority in search culture. Since the empirical evidence for much of Gurdjieff's early life is either incomplete or unreliable, the historiography has become colored by highly speculative and normative claims. Many of Gurdjieff's autobiographical assertions are unverifiable or fictionalized although perhaps were never intended to be understood other than metaphorically. This interpretation is implied in the subtitle of the biography by James Moore (1929–2017): 'the anatomy of a myth.'¹³ As befits a 'mythic' biography, Gurdjieff's parentage, date and place of birth, and youthful travels are all disputed.¹⁴

⁹ Tracol 1979, xvi.

¹⁰ Sutcliffe and Willmet 2020.

¹¹ Ouspensky 1931.

¹² Moore 1991; Taylor 2012.

¹³ Moore 1991.

¹⁴ Gurdjieff was probably born in 1866 (possibly later) in Alexandropol, now Gyumri, in Armenia (then under Russian control) to an ethnic Greek father and Armenian mother, and educated in Kars, a Russian stronghold acquired during the 1877–1878 war with Ottoman Turks (Moore 1991). Paul Beekman Taylor argues that Gurdjieff was the son of neighbors and informally adopted when the Gurdjieff family left Kars, assuming the identity of a deceased son (Taylor 2012, 161ff). The implication that Gurdjieff was in effect a 'changeling' enhances the myth through the folkloric motif of the coming of a savior wrapped in mystery and portent (Sutcliffe and Willmet 2020, 546). Scholarship on the wider Gurdjieff movement includes Webb (1980), Needleman and Baker (1996), Rawlinson (1997, 282–313), Cusack and Norman (2012), Cusack and Sutcliffe (2015) and a series of publication by Azize (for example: 2012, 2013, 2020).

The ‘myth’ is further complicated by the stylized narrative of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*,¹⁵ one of three authorized texts in the Gurdjieff canon, which purports to be an account of Gurdjieff’s early life. *Meetings* appears to have been started in Russian in 1927, then translated into English under the direction of A.R. Orage (see above), but only published posthumously. The uncertainty of the length of time taken to compose in Russian, and also to translate into English, as well as the long wait until publication in 1963, means that it is unclear who exactly was able to read and comment on the typescript of *Meetings* and when. More saliently, it makes it difficult to explore the possibility of cross-fertilization between *Meetings*—particularly during the process of translating into English—and the content of a new interwar genre of ‘searches,’ ‘quests’ and ‘adventures.’¹⁶

In *Meetings* Gurdjieff narrates his travels in Egypt, Persia, Tibet, and Mongolia as part of a group called the ‘seekers of truth.’¹⁷ There is little corroboration for his itinerary and no ‘seekers of truth’ can be reliably identified nor the ‘remarkable men’ whom they meet. The allegorical tone intensifies in Gurdjieff’s meeting with a certain ‘Father Giovanni,’ an ex-Catholic priest now resident in a monastery overseen by a ‘World Brotherhood’ into which “any man could enter, irrespective of the religion to which he had formerly belonged”.¹⁸

Among the adepts of this monastery there were former Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Lamaists, and even one Shamanist. All were united by God the Truth [. . .] All the brethren [. . .] lived together in such amity that, in spite of the specific traits and properties of the representatives of the different religions, [we] could never tell to which religion this or that brother had formerly belonged.¹⁹

This describes a community that has rejected exclusivism and as such forms the ideal group for the sincere seeker. Read in this way, Gurdjieff’s narrative of the interaction between ‘seekers’ and ‘remarkable men’ becomes a metaphor for a normative search for a universal or perennial truth underlying the everyday experience of ethnic and cultural difference(s) in late modernity.

The narrative of *Meetings* also introduces the reader to an “elderly, intelligent Persian” whose intelligence is constituted “not only by knowledge but by *being*.”²⁰ ‘Being’ is contrasted with the “complete lack of any knowledge of reality and of any genuine understanding” found in contemporary (secular) European literature, which

¹⁵ Gurdjieff [1963] 2015.

¹⁶ For example Brunton 1934; Landau 1935; see Sutcliffe 2024.

¹⁷ For a synopsis, see Cusack 2011, 78–83.

¹⁸ Gurdjieff 2015, 235.

¹⁹ Gurdjieff 2015, 236.

²⁰ Gurdjieff 2015, 10; emphasis added.

in turn is compared unfavorably with the content of *The Thousand and One Nights* which “anyone hearing or reading [. . .] feels clearly that everything in it is fantasy, but fantasy *corresponding to truth*.”²¹ The testimony to ‘being’ by the Persian elder encourages an interpretation of *Meetings* as a form of ‘reverse mission’ whereby Gurdjieff’s group, serving historically as the envoi of (unidentified) ‘remarkable men,’ brings post-Enlightenment and post-Colonial salvific knowledge back into Europe.

The difficulty of search as method (success is not guaranteed) explains the poignancy of Webb’s claim, in the introduction to *The Harmonious Circle* (his pioneering attempt to understand the Gurdjieff movement in the round) that a “biographer in search of the authentic Gurdjieff begins by suspecting a campaign of mystification” and even “a deliberate policy of obstruction.”²² Webb probably exaggerates the obstacles due to his sensitivity to researching in a milieu in which Gurdjieff himself had died only twenty-five years earlier, many second-generation practitioners were still alive and active, and the official Gurdjieff Societies in London, Paris, New York and Caracas would be keen to protect their reputation during the popularization of so-called ‘new age’ and ‘esoteric’ teachings.

Access to Gurdjieffian groups and sources is changing slowly. In 2016 members of the Gurdjieff Society attended a research paper at the University of Edinburgh by Dr. John Willmetts about the Scottish-born psychiatrist, Dr. Maurice Nicoll (1884–1953), who began his ‘search’ as an associate of Carl G. Jung before switching allegiance to Gurdjieff and later Ouspensky. These members told Dr. Willmetts that “the [Gurdjieff] Society, though not anxious to invite the interest of those engaged purely in research, was open to those showing an appropriate personal interest.”²³ They put Dr. Willmetts in touch with a former senior member of the Gurdjieff Society in London which led to the acquisition of a private collection of Nicoll’s diaries by Edinburgh University research collections. But when Dr. Willmetts was invited to a gathering to explore conducting his own research within the group, he was politely but firmly rebuffed:

On being asked ‘what do you want?’ he [Willmetts] suggested that he wished to explore the possibility of entering ‘the Work’ [. . .] After further discussion, during which his [Willmetts’s] articulation of his view of his personal situation in Nicollian terms was dismissed as ‘mere words,’ the group leader concluded that he [Willmetts] would be better pursuing his studies by himself [. . .] When he found himself in unfortunate circumstances would be the correct time to make another approach, since he presently seemed [. . .] not to be in need of anything that the Society felt able to offer.²⁴

²¹ Gurdjieff 2015, 20; emphasis added.

²² Webb 1980, 11.

²³ Willmetts and Sutcliffe 2016, 79.

²⁴ Willmetts and Sutcliffe 2016, 79–80.

The authors were disappointed but in contrast to Webb's paranoia, concluded:

There seems to us no evidence for a 'wall of silence' on the part of current practitioners. As with many 'secret' or 'hidden' or simply 'private' groups, there appears instead to be a practical policy in place to safeguard important knowledge [. . .] This is an understandable position from the perspective of the need to create conditions to support a level of concentration necessary to master a subtle discipline such as 'the Work'.²⁵

Thus, the problems faced by the 'seekers after truth' in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* are reproduced in current challenges to both seekers and researchers in finding a reliable source.

As noted, Gurdjieff and his associates found themselves amongst numerous other interwar proponents of an ethics and practice of search. Indeed, an argument could be made that search is a ubiquitous historical and cross-cultural method. Walter Burkert has argued that search provides the "deepest deep structure" of some of the earliest known tales such as the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh²⁶ which also happens to be one of the stories sung by Gurdjieff's *ashok* father.²⁷ Many teachers promised 'mystical' or 'esoteric' instruction after the carnage of the 1914–1918 war and the search for fresh ideas and 'new starts' was formative for intellectuals, writers and artists in drawing rooms, salons and lecture halls in London, Paris and Berlin. These networks crossed boundaries between literary, political, psychological and religious domains and attracted cultural 'taste makers' as well as curious lay persons. To cite only figures with links to the Gurdjieff circle, in London the poet T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) and the psychiatrist Maurice Nicoll (1884–1953) attended talks by P.D. Ouspensky and lectures at the Quest Society by G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933) who was previously personal secretary to Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society. Writers such as Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)—who spent the last weeks of her life with Gurdjieff at Fontainebleau—and her husband, John Middleton Murry (1889–1957), and her rival Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), were amongst many literary modernists who agonized over questions of the meaning of the 'inner life'.²⁸ A.R. Orage began his search with the Theosophical Society, Nietzsche and Guild Socialism, before becoming editor of *The New Age* from 1907, then joining Gurdjieff in Fontainebleau in 1922²⁹ before finally becoming Gurdjieff's agent in the US.

²⁵ Willmetts and Sutcliffe 2016, 83.

²⁶ Sutcliffe 2022, 217.

²⁷ Gurdjieff 2015, 35–37.

²⁸ Carswell 1978.

²⁹ Martin 1967; Thatcher 1970.

A colorful picture of interwar search culture is given by Romauld (Rom) Landau in *God is My Adventure: A Book on Modern Mystics, Masters and Teachers*.³⁰ Landau was a Polish-English sculptor and writer who spoke at the 1936 World Congress of Faiths in London as a 'student of modern mysticism.'³¹ *God is My Adventure* records Landau's meetings with various 'mystics, masters and teachers' in European cities in the 1920s and early 1930s including Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), Meher Baba (1894–1969), Frank Buchman (1878–1961), Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) and—not least—Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Landau was hostile to Gurdjieff but more positively disposed to Ouspensky and particularly to Steiner. The point here is less Landau's prejudices than the popularity of his narrative enquiry.³²

Landau describes himself as someone who "since [he] was a boy" was "attracted by those regions of truth that the official religions and sciences are shy of exploring."³³ He describes his book as a personal selection of some of the "most interesting figures in contemporary spiritual life,"³⁴ whom he proposes to engage "not as the scholar but as the ordinary man who tries to find God in daily life."³⁵ His narrative is thus "the confession of an adventure [. . .] a search for God."³⁶ In the 1941 Faber reissue, Landau warms to this theme, attributing its success to the fact that "people are always eager to learn from the spiritual experiences of a *fellow seeker*."³⁷ Many of his readers, he claims, are "disillusioned by the Churches [and] only too willing to delve into the ways and methods of unorthodox schools of thought, yet without at the same time feeling compelled to accept this or that method as the only valid one."³⁸ He continues:

The seeker may, and indeed does, demand that those of whose findings he reads, should have a definite viewpoint of their own. But he will draw back as soon as he suspects that he is being pontifically forced by the author into accepting a certain point of view.³⁹

³⁰ Landau 1935.

³¹ Millard 1936, 484.

³² *God is My Adventure* was reprinted seven times in the late 1930s before transferring in 1941 to the taste-making publisher, Faber and Faber, co-directed by T.S. Eliot. Here it underwent three reprints by 1945 and was still in paperback as late as 1964.

³³ Landau 1935, vii.

³⁴ Landau 1935, vii.

³⁵ Landau 1935, viii.

³⁶ Landau 1935, viii.

³⁷ Landau 1943, 7; emphasis added.

³⁸ Landau 1943, 7.

³⁹ Landau 1943, 7.

Furthermore “none of the doctrines [. . .] had the monopoly of the ‘whole’ truth” but should be understood as “complementary to, rather than exclusive of, one another.”⁴⁰

In these remarks Landau summarizes the presenting psychological features of interwar ‘search culture’: introversion, dissatisfaction, independence, exploration. Search culture forms a significant dimension of what the sociologist Colin Campbell later called the ‘cultic milieu’ to denote a sub-culture of heterodox religion from within which individual ‘cults’ were generated, and back into which most sooner or later dissolved. The concept shows that Campbell was less interested in specific ‘cults’ than in the features of the environment (the ‘milieu’) which facilitated their formation. A vital structural role was played in this milieu by seekers, whom he described as persons who have “adopted a problem-solving perspective while defining conventional religious institutions and beliefs as inadequate.”⁴¹ Such persons, and the cultic milieu in which they operated, were “united and identified by the existence of an ideology of seekership and by seekership institutions.”⁴² For Campbell, therefore, the activity of ‘seeking,’ captured in the 1930s by *God is My Adventure*, is not an idiosyncratic or aimless project but a socialized form of behavior typical of the ‘local’ cultic milieu, re-defined as a field of multiple co-existing religious authorities.⁴³

2 Content

So far we have profiled search culture in the interwar period within which Gurdjieff himself, and many of his associates and descendants, positioned themselves and presented their particular ‘goods of salvation’ (*les biens de salud* to cite Bourdieu, following Weber). But how exactly was Gurdjieff’s teaching differentiated within this search culture, and what in particular did he offer that other authorities were perceived to lack? To address this question requires moving from the context of search culture, in which Gurdjieff perforce advertised his teachings, to the content of his practices. Gurdjieff’s ‘movements’ or ‘sacred dances’ formed part of his earliest public presentations in the 1920s and were also excerpted in Peter Brook’s 1979 film of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*,⁴⁴ so these practices are relatively well-known. In contrast Sophia Wellbeloved, a member of the Gurdjieff

⁴⁰ Landau 1943, 8.

⁴¹ Campbell 2002, 14.

⁴² Campbell 2002, 19.

⁴³ For a fuller account of Landau and the interwar ‘guru field,’ see Sutcliffe (2024).

⁴⁴ Cusack 2011.

Society in London c. 1962–1975, describes the teaching of certain exercises ‘to relax unnecessary tensions’:

These exercises always began with the muscles of the face. Sensing exercises in which attention is transferred from one part of the body to another, exercises in which movements were made in conjunction with moving the attention internally in the body, these exercises could be further complicated through repetition of words and through breathing patterns.⁴⁵

Full details of these and related exercises have since been made public in the work of Joseph Azize⁴⁶ and in the publication of transcripts of Gurdjieff's group meetings between 1935 and 1946.⁴⁷ The practical significance of these exercises, only hinted at by Wellbeloved,⁴⁸ is becoming clearer. Until recently they were hardly discussed. The obvious exception is the ‘Stop’ exercise which is found in Gurdjieff's earliest teaching as a ‘special exercise’ for exposing one's automatism:

At a word or sign, previously agreed upon, from the teacher, all the pupils [. . .] have to arrest their movements at once, no matter what they are doing, and remain stockstill in the posture in which the signal has caught them. Moreover not only do they cease to move, but they must keep their eyes on the same spot at which they were looking at the moment of the signal, retain the smile on their faces [. . .] keep the mouth open [. . .] maintain the facial expression and the tension of all the muscles of the body exactly in the same position in which they were caught by the signal. In this ‘stopped’ state a man must also stop the flow of his thoughts and concentrate the whole of his attention on preserving the tension of the muscles in the various parts of the body [. . .] watching this tension all the time and leading [. . .] his attention from one part of the body to another.⁴⁹

That various other exercises were being taught by Gurdjieff, especially during his mature years, is indicated in the 1949 diaries of visits to Gurdjieff by J.G. Bennett and Elizabeth Bennett, first published in 1980 as *Idiots in Paris*.⁵⁰ John Bennett's entries in particular suggest that exercises tailored to specific individuals, including himself, were being taught by Gurdjieff in his final years. In his first entry, dated July 23, 1949, Bennett notes that he has just completed a “thirty hours’ fast” following which he “spent an hour on my knees.” During this period, after forty minutes he writes: “I found I had the power to reach the Collected State [. . .] [in

⁴⁵ Wellbeloved 2003, 75.

⁴⁶ Azize 2013, 2017, 2020.

⁴⁷ Anonymous 2009, 2012.

⁴⁸ Wellbeloved 2003, 75–76.

⁴⁹ Ouspensky 1950, 353. The stop exercise was included in Gurdjieff's public demonstrations of the Movements of Sacred Dances in Paris in 1923 and New York in 1924. For more on the Movements, which are certainly ‘practices’ but not ‘exercises’ in the sense described here, see de Dampierre (1996), Azize (2012) and Van Dulleman (2014).

⁵⁰ Bennett 1980.

which] I began to sense my existence differently.” He adds “I am not sure that I am *doing it rightly*, so I hope I shall have a *chance of asking*.”⁵¹ In other words, Bennett is practicing an exercise which, he recognizes, requires subtle proprioceptive correction in person with Gurdjieff to achieve its goal. A week later Bennett describes leading a group reading of the manuscript of *Beelzebub’s Tales to his Grandson*⁵² during a ‘seminar’ held at Bennett’s center in Coombe Springs near London. The forty participants were evidently following a stern regime:

We started at 8 p.m. on Friday and finish at 8 p.m. on Monday [. . .] We do a 6-hour cycle—4 hours reading, 2 hours for eating, sleeping, etc. Of the two hours, *half an hour is given to Movements*. On the whole everyone is standing up to it very well.⁵³

The aim of this ritual reading is, in Gurdjieff’s terminology, to engage all three ‘centers’ or ‘brains’ of the human being—emotional, physical, intellectual—to avoid a merely intellectual engagement with the text. Two days later Bennett records: “The effort of attention for the reading was sometimes almost beyond my power [. . .] my tongue got swollen and I had to keep drinking cold water to prevent it from being cut by my teeth.”⁵⁴ On August 5th he describes his “intensity of effort” over the past week: “not more than 3 and a half hours’ sleep, exercise* several times a day.”⁵⁵ On the evening of August 22nd Bennett describes kneeling “for an hour – 20 minutes with arms out sideways – and the first half hour I made the utmost effort to reach and keep the necessary state. I did not succeed, but I did the exercise better than before.”⁵⁶ Here, as with his first entry on the ‘collected state,’ the inference is that Bennett knows what to expect to experience but that he must proprioceptively fine-tune his practice to achieve it.

Between *Idiots in Paris* in 1980 and the publication more than 30 years later of the ‘Four Ideals’ exercise,⁵⁷ scant information on Gurdjieff’s exercises has been publicly available. And yet their practice appears to be essential if the practitioner is to realize what Bennett calls “the necessary state.” The epigram to this chapter—“Exercises, exercises, thousands and thousands of times. Only this will bring results”⁵⁸—echoes Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

51 Bennett 1980, 1; emphasis added.

52 Gurdjieff 1950.

53 Bennett 1980, 11; emphasis added.

54 Bennett 1980, 14.

55 Bennett 1980, 19; the asterisk in the original text indicates “inner or spiritual exercise.”

56 Bennett 1980, 40.

57 Azize 2013.

58 Anonymous 2009, 100.

Gurdjieff's pedagogy emphasizes the practical realization of different human "states." The exercises are designed to help achieve what Gurdjieff variously called the state of "self-remembering," and, in his later years, the "collected state" as described above, in which a person's many fluctuating "I's" or "selves" are to be brought under the influence of a more stable and permanent individuality or "I."⁵⁹ To achieve the valued state of 'being,' the exercitant must attain to this 'collected state' which can be recognized by the ability it confers to take or refrain from appropriate action in any circumstance. The profile Gurdjieff increasingly gave to the 'collected state' coincided with the 'contemplation-like' exercises⁶⁰ which he taught in the last fifteen years of his life to 'collect' one's dispersed attention and energies.⁶¹

The first phrase Gurdjieff coined for these exercises as a whole was 'Transformed-Contemplation.' This umbrella term first appeared in his idiosyncratic publication, *Herald of Coming Good*,⁶² but may have been programmatic as there is no evidence Gurdjieff had commenced teaching any such practical exercises.⁶³ Gurdjieff withdrew this booklet and seems never to have used the phrase otherwise. Rather, he began to refer to 'exercises' *simpliciter* and did not distinguish between what Azize finely differentiates as "exercises," "tasks" and "disciplines."⁶⁴ These exercises were presented as a practical method by means of which to 'do' (i.e., to practise) 'The Work' as Gurdjieff's system was known. Using Gurdjieff's terminology, these methods consist in:

59 There are intermediate stages in which destructive selves are sloughed off and fewer, more mature selves come to dominate: see the parable of the disordered house "in which there is a multitude of servants but no master and no steward" and where "the servants have all forgotten their duties; no one wants to do what he ought; everyone tries to be a master, if only for a moment"; as a result "the house is threatened with grave danger" (Ouspensky 1950, 60). Eventually, through practice many "very ordinary stupid small 'I's' [. . .] became impossible" (Ouspensky 1950, 380; here Ouspensky speaks from his own experience).

60 Azize 2020, 3.

61 Gurdjieff's meetings in the 1940s contain many references to 'self-remembering' and the 'collected state' (Anonymous 2009; Gurdjieff 2020), but the latter phrase is not found in the earlier Russian teaching contained in *In Search of the Miraculous* (Ouspensky 1950) or in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (Gurdjieff 1950).

62 Gurdjieff 1933.

63 For more on Gurdjieff's comments on 'Transformed-Contemplation' in *Herald*, see Azize (2020, 119–24).

64 Azize (2020, 7) differentiates between 'tasks' as "occupations for the mind or body that were given on a particular occasion" and 'disciplines' as "occupations for the mind or body [. . .] to be used over a period of time."

internal practices designed to shift the exercitant out of a habitual state, using attention and intention to coordinate and develop their three centres, i.e. their faculties of mind, feeling and sensory awareness (including awareness of the breath) [. . .] in order to assimilate, transform and coat very fine substances in the exercitant's body.⁶⁵

In *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation and Exercises*, Azize⁶⁶ argues that Gurdjieff intended his exercises to function as aids for the 'crystallization of the soul' in the exercitant.⁶⁷ Gurdjieff was rarely so theologically explicit and more often averted to the need variously to 'remember oneself,' to collect one's attention, to come to one's own presence, or to have what he called the sense of 'I am.'⁶⁸ The American Modernist writer and publisher Jane Heap (1887–1964), a personal pupil of Gurdjieff who taught his system in the US, Paris and London, wrote in her notebook: "Gurdjieff says we have no real consciousness—he saw however that we have states of consciousness." Heap reflected that this "seems contradictory, but it is because we cannot think *in terms of method*. We think in ordinary categories."⁶⁹ That is, one can become aware of the variation in consciousness produced by one's varying states when one is able to observe oneself through a practical method. 'Consciousness' and 'state' are not reversible in this equation, for according to Gurdjieff, people have relatively little consciousness in most of their states, as Heap's notes suggest: "Fragments of consciousness not consciousness—but such as we are—can experience very different worlds—Our states similar to climate—When negative we live in quite a particular inner climate, happy mood different climate."⁷⁰ According to Heap, the distinctiveness of Gurdjieff's teaching therefore lies in his aim "to attain to a state of self-consciousness which we now assume [. . .] that we possess—Gurdjieff does not assume (as do other mystical and occult methods)—that we are self-conscious at all."⁷¹

In further French transcripts from 1944, Gurdjieff related the affirmation 'I am' both to the aim of his system as a whole and to the exercises for achieving that aim. On 13 February 1944 he said:

I now repeat that it is necessary to pay special attention to the exercise which each group has received, and to use the exercise as often as possible. This is the 'I AM' exercise. Without this exercise, one will never arrive at real 'I AM'.⁷²

⁶⁵ Azize 2020, 6–7.

⁶⁶ Azize 2020, 69, 297–98.

⁶⁷ Azize 2020, 298.

⁶⁸ Azize 2020, 298.

⁶⁹ Heap 1994, 135; emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Heap 1994, 135.

⁷¹ Heap 1994, 128.

⁷² Gurdjieff 2020, 102. Translation from the French here and below by Joseph Azize.

Gurdjieff repeatedly emphasises the need to practice for success. On 4 February he said:

There exists a law: no work is accomplished in vain [. . .] In the meantime, you have a way, a protector, a saviour: 'I AM.' Each time you have some doubt, an idea (that it is hopeless) or something like that, relax, remember yourself, and say: 'I AM.' These things [doubt, etc.] prevent you from keeping on the straight path, they make you go off to the right or to the left. But 'I AM' will bring you back to the way.⁷³

Similarly, on 22 February:

The exercise which we have prepared this evening is very important for the 'I am.' It will help you to enter more deeply still into your present (*présent*). You (now) feel 'I am' only with your head, not yet with all your presence. It is already something to sense it with your head, but when one can sense it with all one's being, there is no greater treasure. You will find a complete (*pleine*) satisfaction when you can really sense yourself with your whole presence.⁷⁴

The 1944 French transcripts further establish the importance of the affirmation 'I am' in Gurdjieff's later teaching. But how to affirm the phrase with 'whole presence' had to be learnt through practice since Gurdjieff insisted that no one use his exercises without making the effort to 'remember themselves'; that is, if affirmed with the intellect alone, the phrase would have no effect.⁷⁵ The centrality of 'I am' to Gurdjieff's teaching, and the effort to realize the collected state to which it pertains is shown by the fact that it was being taught by Gurdjieff in his final days.⁷⁶

The constant aim of the exercises is to achieve a state in which one's three main functions (intellect, feeling, and physical sensation), each considered by Gurdjieff to operate with its own "center" or "brain,"⁷⁷ are simultaneously consciously embraced, producing a unitive sense of presence and individuality which gives the sense of 'I am.'⁷⁸ The 'collected state' is therefore a three-centered, integrated consciousness: hence the name 'Institute for the *Harmonious* Development of Man.'⁷⁹ The experience of the sense of 'I am' could also be described as an active, *collecting*

⁷³ Gurdjieff 2020, 82–83.

⁷⁴ Gurdjieff 2020, 112.

⁷⁵ Gurdjieff 2020, 53–54, 95.

⁷⁶ Azize 2020, 296–97.

⁷⁷ Ouspensky 1950, 54–55.

⁷⁸ The prototypical 'I AM' statement is Exodus 3: 14. There is no evidence of connection between Gurdjieff's 'I Am' and the I AM movement of Guy and Edna Ballard in the 1930s. There are I AM references in other (very different) sources such as J. Middleton Murry's *To the Unknown God* (1924) within literary modernism and Eileen Caddy's *God Spoke to Me* (1971) in 'New Age' circles, but with no connection to either Gurdjieff or Ballard.

⁷⁹ Ouspensky 1950, 380; emphasis added.

(not merely *collected*) state. This is the implication of Jane Heap's observation that Gurdjieff's method of self-observation, defined as "the *impartial* awareness of the behavior of one's *own* body while it is taking place," is "a catalytic agent towards normality [. . .] *Catalytic because it does not produce direct results but enables more results to be produced.*"⁸⁰ There is an intimate connection between the practice of self-observation and the achievement of self-remembering. Gurdjieff described self-observation as 'the function of the master'⁸¹ or, in a different formulation but meaning the same, 'real I.'⁸²

Interpreting Gurdjieff across some thirty-five years, several languages, complex source types, and fluid terminology is a challenging task. Arguably an underlying metaphysical coherence can be glimpsed in the following lines of poetry cited by Gurdjieff in *Life Is Real, Only Then, When 'I Am'*:

If all men had a soul
Long ago there would have been no room left on earth
For poisonous plants or wild beasts,
And even evil would have ceased to exist.

The poem implies that the aim of Gurdjieff's 'Work' is to create a 'soul,' not as a 'lazy fantasy' or a 'luxury for the indulger in suffering,' but as 'the determiner of personality,' 'the way and the link to the Maker and Creator' and as 'testimony of the merit/Of the essence of eternal Being.' The poem ends:

Leader of the will,
Its presence is 'I am,'
It is part of the All-Being,
It was so and always will be⁸³

These 'ancient Persian verses,' whether authentic or coined by Gurdjieff himself, convey the inter-connection between the production of a sense of 'I am' through assiduous practice of the exercises, and the coming into possession of a soul or a 'higher body.' Note the link in the poem between the consciously created soul, the 'Maker and Creator,' and 'All-Being.' Gurdjieff expressed a similar idea to Maurice Nicoll, "Behind real I lies God,"⁸⁴ and, from notes at Fontainebleau, "Self-love is 'I.' 'I' is God."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Heap 1994, 128; emphasis in original.

⁸¹ Anonymous 2014, 378.

⁸² Anonymous 2014, 250–52.

⁸³ Gurdjieff 1978, 160.

⁸⁴ Nicoll 1997, 14.

⁸⁵ Anonymous 2014, 242.

Azize has argued that Gurdjieff developed these exercises because he felt that his earlier methods were not working.⁸⁶ This seems in part based in his personal experience: in the (undated) prologue to *Life Is Real Only Then When 'I Am,'* he despairs that he has not been able to “reach a state where the functioning of my psyche in my usual waking state would flow in accordance with the previous instructions of my active consciousness.”⁸⁷ Although exercises were alluded to in the earliest years, the evidence suggests that Gurdjieff did not develop them until after 1930.⁸⁸ This interpretation is supported by analysis of unpublished correspondence between J.G. Bennett and the American Modernist writer Jean Toomer (1894–1967). Toomer had spent three periods studying with Gurdjieff at Fontainebleau in the 1920s but was not taught any exercises. But on 17 February 1953, he writes to J.G. Bennett (discussed above):

*What I did not know until first you and then J. de S. [Jeanne de Salzmann] said so, is that right in the Gurdjieff work are to be had inner exercises and practices that gradually enable one to relax and to relax down to the deep relaxation. What good news!*⁸⁹

Toomer's letter dwells on the personal impact of these newly revealed exercises. On page three, he eulogizes: “If want [sic. ‘what’] you are receiving now had been available to me, and to others including [A.R.] Orage, ten, fifteen years ago!” On page 4 of a letter of 19 January 1953, Toomer refers explicitly to ‘new practices’ which seem to be the exercises for relaxation, conscious sensation, and feeling ‘I’ described above. In a letter of 16 May 1953, Toomer again expresses his regret—“If only I’d been taught this years ago”—and his postscript attests to their corporeal impact: “Definitely there are more sensations in my body, and definitely I have more ability to make and maintain contact with them.”

The French transcript of a meeting on 25 February 1944 encapsulates the corporeality of Gurdjieff's pedagogy:

The exercise which you are doing will give you real ‘I AM.’ You could say ‘I AM’ for ten years with your head, but not with your whole presence. It is the preparation for an exercise thanks to which you will be able to actualise ‘I AM,’ even during your sleep. Now it does not exist, it is absolutely automatic. But we have a super-consciousness, and with this exercise you will be able to pass the night in this super-consciousness (*super-conscience*). Today

⁸⁶ Azize 2020, 300–5.

⁸⁷ Gurdjieff 1978, 20.

⁸⁸ Azize 2020, 99–111.

⁸⁹ Emphasis added. This and the following citations from Materials Related to Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, Jean Toomer Papers (JWJ Mss 1), Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990) worked closely with Gurdjieff and established the Gurdjieff Society after his death.

you do not really exist. You are a piece of meat, and bad meat which cannot even be cooked, at that. I received a ham today, and it is worth more than twenty people. This exercise is very difficult at the start, but little by little, it becomes easy. For the last exercise, there will be twenty-one things to do at the same time. For example, I have shown you a picture (*tableau*) where the people are doing forty-nine things at the same time, but we are doing less than half of that.⁹⁰

The significance of this passage is three-fold. First, Gurdjieff speaks of ‘super-consciousness’ where he previously spoke of ‘sub-’ or even ‘un-’ ‘conscious’, indicating his awareness of the fluidity of these terms in contemporary psychological discourse.⁹¹ Second, realizing the state of ‘I am’ can only be achieved through incremental practice which ‘little by little’ transforms the ‘bad meat’ of the human organism. Third, if the subject attempts these exercises within their ordinary state, they will merely reinforce ordinary psychological associations. To realize in practice a ‘three-centered’ consciousness, the exercitant must integrate the ‘super-consciousness (*super-conscience*).’

We can identify three proprioceptive dimensions to the practice of exercises such as ‘I Am’: relaxed sensation of the physical body, active sensation to bring the exercitant’s body into their conscious awareness, and a ‘spiritualized’ sensation related to the assimilation of the breath and the arousal of feeling.⁹² To practice these aims, three classes of exercise can be discerned: (1) the collected state exercise given in various forms, as discussed, (2) preparatory and assisting exercises to deepen the experience of the collected state exercise, and (3) advanced exercises which can only be done when ‘in’ the collected state. These correspond to the three exercises published in *Life is Real Only Then, when ‘I Am’*: the ‘Soil Preparing Exercise’ is preparatory, the ‘First Assisting Exercise’ is a simplified form of the Collected State Exercise, and the ‘Second Assisting Exercise’ is a template for advanced exercises. Logically ‘preparatory’ exercises should come first. But it seems that Gurdjieff began with the Collected State so that his students could visualize their aim. The preparatory exercises could then deepen their understanding.

⁹⁰ Gurdjieff 2020, 117. What Gurdjieff refers to by picture (*tableau*) is not clear; it may be a movement recently taught to the group.

⁹¹ On the prevalence of psychology in popular culture and literary-artistic circles in the early twentieth century, see Chapter One, ‘Practical Psychology’ and Chapter Three, ‘After the New Age’ in Thomson (2006).

⁹² ‘Spiritualized’ refers to the third force in Gurdjieff’s ‘Law of Three’ which describes the basic laws—affirming, denying and reconciling—which create the real world: “this third independent force is [. . .] the *spiritualizing* and reconciling source of every World formation” (Gurdjieff 1950, 1139; emphasis added).

There are several examples of this latter exercise in Gurdjieff's published texts. As discussed in Azize,⁹³ the 'Genuine Being Duty Exercise' given by Beelzebub to his grandson Hussein in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (Gurdjieff 1999 [1950]) counts as a preparatory exercise because, as Beelzebub tells Hussein, it "prepar[es] yourself for the future" as a "responsible three-brained being":

At your age it is indispensably necessary that every day, at sunrise, while watching the reflection of its splendour, you bring about a contact between your consciousness and the various unconscious parts of your general presence. Try to make this state last and to convince the unconscious parts—as if they were conscious—that if they hinder your general functioning, they, in the period of your responsible age, not only cannot fulfil the good that befits them, but your general presence of which they are part will not be able to be a good servant of our COMMON ENDLESS CREATOR and by that will not even be worthy to pay for your arising and existence.⁹⁴

This exercise has an aim (to fulfil one's obligations) and a feeling element (to receive the splendour of dawn) which jointly facilitate contact between one's consciousness and 'various unconscious parts.' In short, attention is simultaneously directed into different but complementary proprioceptive tasks.

The paradigmatic preparatory exercise is 'preparing the soil.' A version of this exercise was described by Gurdjieff in New York probably in December 1930:

First, all one's attention must be divided into approximately three equal parts; each of these parts must be concentrated on one of the three fingers of the right or the left hand, for instance the forefinger, the third and the fourth, *constating* in one finger—the result proceeding in it of the organic process called 'sensing', in another—the result of the process called 'feeling', and with the third—making any rhythmical movement and at the same time automatically conducting with the flowing of mental association a sequential or varied manner of counting.⁹⁵

This exercise teaches how to raise physiological sensation to consciousness. More basic is an exercise designed for those who can 'remember their aim, but have no strength to do it':

Sit for a period of at least one hour alone. Make all muscles relaxed. Allow associations to proceed but do not be absorbed by them. Say to them: 'If you will let me do my business now, I will later grant your wishes'. Look at associations as another being to keep from iden-

⁹³ Azize 2020, 132–33.

⁹⁴ Gurdjieff 1999, 78. This is the 1950 version; a shorter form already appears in the 1931 manuscript (Azize 2020, 132–33).

⁹⁵ Gurdjieff 1978, 113; the term 'constating' is traced in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary to the French *constater* in 1773, meaning 'to establish, ascertain, state' with the sense of establishing a fact.

tifying yourself with them. At the end of an hour take a piece of paper and write your aim on it. Make this paper your God. Everything else is nothing. Take from your pocket and read it constantly everyday. In this way, it becomes part of you. At first theoretically, later actually.⁹⁶

Also preparatory is the exercise called ‘There Are Two Parts to Air.’ Dated 6 February 1931 in New York, Gurdjieff instructs the exercitant to consciously assimilate the ‘higher substances’ available in their in-breath. This ‘good part of air’ is that which ‘gives vivifyingness to “I”’:

The secret of being able to assimilate the involving part of air [the in-breath or inhalation] is to try to realize your own insignificance, and the insignificance of those around you. You are mortal and will die some day [. . .] Your neighbour [. . .] will also die [. . .] At present most of your suffering is ‘suffering in vain’ which comes from a feeling of anger and jealousy towards others [. . .] Put yourself in the position of others. They have the same significance as you [. . .] Only if you always see this insignificance until it becomes a habit whenever you see anyone, only then, you will be able to assimilate the good part of air and have a real ‘I’.⁹⁷

As for many interwar heterodox teachers, beathing is a crucial component of Gurdjieff’s exercises although, as here, the exercitant is instructed not to interfere with the breath. Breathing practices in contemporary search culture often involved holding or exhaling breath in recondite ways. Gurdjieff taught only observation of breathing. For example, Jean Toomer writes to J.G. Bennett on 16 May 1953 to say that he was told by his teacher, Henriette Lannes (1899–1980), that “G. [Gurdjieff] said breathing must not become shallow, must be and remain normal while doing the exercises, normal relative to the needs [of] one’s organism.” One week later, on 26 May 1953, Toomer writes reflexively: “In my experience when the inner work is done properly, the breathing spontaneously becomes deeper and more rhythmical.”⁹⁸

Gurdjieff improvised various other preparatory exercises for particular students, including exercises for the ‘three centers,’ a ‘filling-up’ exercise, and a counting exercise.⁹⁹ An ‘Exercise for Active Reasoning’ to ‘influence yourself through suggestion’ shows the influence of Gurdjieff’s early studies of hypnosis.¹⁰⁰ The ‘Atmosphere Exercise’ of 3 August 1944 is an interesting example:

⁹⁶ Anonymous 2014, 407.

⁹⁷ Anonymous 2014, 412.

⁹⁸ Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library: Materials related to Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, Jean Toomer Papers (JWJ Mss 1).

⁹⁹ Azize 2020, 191–93, 199–200, 207.

¹⁰⁰ Azize 2020, 204–5.

You represent to yourself that you are surrounded by an atmosphere. Like the earth, man also has an atmosphere, which surrounds him on all sides, for a metre, more or less [. . .] Your atmosphere is displaced in the direction in which your thought moves. [. . .] When you do this exercise, you represent to yourself that this atmosphere has limits [. . .] Then you concentrate all your attention on preventing your atmosphere from escaping beyond the limit [. . .] When you feel your atmosphere quietened, without waves, without movement, then with all your will you suck it into yourself—you conserve yourself in this atmosphere.¹⁰¹

Another example is the 'First Assisting Exercise' from December 1930 in which the exercitant is enjoined (in elaborate prose) to 'imagine' attaining the state of 'I am':

If the ordinary man [. . .] will, with conscious striving for the formation in himself of the genuine data which should be in the common presence of a real man, correctly and frequently pronounce these same and for him as yet empty words ['I am'] [. . .] he may thereby ultimately through frequent repetition gradually acquire in himself a so to say theoretical 'beginning' for the possibility of a real practical forming in himself of these data.¹⁰²

The fullest version of Gurdjieff's exercises is simply called 'The Preparation.' The basic framework consists in consciously sensing one's body in a relaxed state, being aware of feeling, and holding the intellect poised but not associating with external objects, other than to follow the instructions for each particular exercise.¹⁰³ Details and foci might change to meet specific needs of exercitants. For example, the exercise 'Make Strong! Not Easy Thing' foregrounds conscious awareness of the breath¹⁰⁴ as does 'Exercise for Feeling' taught by Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990) which ends with the words 'Lord Have Mercy.'¹⁰⁵ In autumn 1979 George Adie taught his Sydney group the 'Colour Spectrum' exercise which consists in rotating one's awareness around the entire body and visualising selected body parts (sometimes the whole body) as suffused with coloured light.¹⁰⁶ The 'Clear Impressions' exercise, taught by Adie in 1980, alternated the practise of the 'Collected State' with rotation of the head with eyes open, in order to continue to receive visual impressions but refusing to associate with them.¹⁰⁷ Adie described the pedagogical aim as

101 Anonymous 2009, 148–49; Azize 2020, 194–96.

102 Gurdjieff 1978, 133–34; Azize 2020, 151–52.

103 Azize 2020, 273–76, 279–83.

104 Anonymous 2014, 413; Azize 2020, 178–79.

105 De Salzmann 2010, 73; Azize 2020, 217–18.

106 Azize 2020, 253–58. The English architect George Adie (1901–1989) visited Gurdjieff in Paris in the late 1940s and became a core member of the Gurdjieff Society in London. He subsequently emigrated to Sydney where he established a group in direct lineage to Gurdjieff (Azize 2015).

107 Azize 2020, 261–65.

to become “free from thought” with “the windows of my eyes open, receiving impressions without words or explanations.”¹⁰⁸

Gurdjieff also taught more difficult exercises which assume achievement of the collected state by the exercitant and therefore include not only ‘receiving’ energy (or force) but ‘sending’ it elsewhere. Among these exercises are the ‘Web’ or ‘Network Exercise’ taught in Paris on 25 May 1944¹⁰⁹ and the ‘Help for the Deceased Exercise’, taught perhaps as early as 1939 in New York.¹¹⁰ Probably the most complex is the ‘Four Ideals,’¹¹¹ taught to George Adie on 1 October 1948, in which the exercitant attempts to contact four transcendent ‘ideals’ (named Christ, Buddha, Muhammad and Lama) which are visualised as being located above the exercitant in order to attract into the latter’s body the ‘higher substances’ produced by the prayers of their respective followers.¹¹² Gurdjieff may have taught an early version of this exercise to Olgivanna Lazovich (1898–1985) who later married the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) in Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1920 or 1921. Lazovich reports Gurdjieff’s instruction:

It is good to go to church because the building is filled with pure emanations. Open your circle then let them penetrate into your atmosphere; be completely relaxed; stay within yourself and receive. You will be purified by the inflow of vibrations of higher materiality.¹¹³

Lazovich duly frequented the Hagia Sophia mosque: “It was always beautiful there. I tried to receive the purity which permeated their temple of worship.”¹¹⁴ This indicates that Gurdjieff had formulated the key ingredients of the ‘Four Ideals Exercise’ as early as 1920–1921: in particular, the possibility to receive ‘vibrations of higher materiality’ through strategic participation in a traditional religious institution. But it is also significant in how it differs from the ‘Four Ideals’ as later taught to George Adie: for example, there is no indication that Gurdjieff first taught Lazovich the Collected State exercise.

It is difficult to convey the granularity of concentration, stability of proprioceptive focus and sheer stamina required to practice the more advanced exercises taught by Gurdjieff. They require, first, the internal amassing by the exercitant of a ‘fine energy or force’ and, second, the capacity to direct this force externally.

¹⁰⁸ Azize 2020, 265.

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous 2009, 135; Azize 2020, 200–2.

¹¹⁰ Azize 2021.

¹¹¹ Azize 2020, 231–33.

¹¹² Adie’s notes, including a diagram of the cosmology, are reproduced in Azize (2013, 200–3).

¹¹³ Fawcett-Yeske and Pfeiffer 2017, 39.

¹¹⁴ Fawcett-Yeske and Pfeiffer 2017, 40.

The 'Second Assisting' exercise from *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*¹¹⁵ is a good example of the demands made. The exercise begins with the exercitant internally sensing a selected body part whilst externally interacting with others as normal. As Gurdjieff narrates:

I am now sitting among you [. . .] and although I am looking at Mr L. yet I am intentionally directing all my attention, which you are not able to see, on my foot, and consequently any manifestation Mr L. produces within my organ of vision I see only automatically—my attention, which at the present moment is one whole, being in another place.¹¹⁶

Gurdjieff then divides his attention into two parts. Using the first part he becomes aware that some of the air he inhales remains within his body after exhalation "gradually penetrating inward [. . .] spreading through my whole organism." He then directs the second part of his attention to his 'head brain' where he detects "the arising of something very fine, almost imperceptible" which is nevertheless a "definite 'something' arising from [. . .] associations of previously consciously perceived impressions."¹¹⁷ The exercitant is thus taught to access a 'very fine' substance in the 'head brain' which can then be helped to 'flow directly into [their] solar plexus', to form the seat of 'I am'.¹¹⁸

3 Conclusion

Analyzing the content of Gurdjieff's exercises as a specific practical method for 'intentional transformation' within an interwar search culture can help us to understand how the Gurdjieff movement both differed from, yet was structurally invested in, a 'cultic milieu' (Campbell 2002) co-constituted by a *habitus* of seekership and multiple religious authorities. The exercises taught by Gurdjieff—which, in order to 'bring results,' should be done "thousands and thousands of times"¹¹⁹—offered a practical means in an often nebulous environment through which some form or degree of transformation could be achieved by a determined 'seeker'. Practicing by means of specific exercises a sense of a 'collected state', taught 'orally'—that is, in person—and often tailored to specific needs, was a distinctive 'find' for seekers in interwar search culture and, by extension, formed an invitation for those seekers who came (and continue to come) in subsequent iterations of search culture.

¹¹⁵ Gurdjieff 1978.

¹¹⁶ Gurdjieff 1978, 140.

¹¹⁷ Gurdjieff 1978, 141.

¹¹⁸ Gurdjieff 1978, 141.

¹¹⁹ Anonymous 2009, 100.

It could also be argued that the achievement of the ‘collected state’ is not an end in itself but a reinterpretation, by Gurdjieff, of the Orthodox Christian method of *theosis*,¹²⁰ in the sense that, as Gurdjieff said to Maurice Nicoll, “Behind real I lies God.”¹²¹ Azize has already explored some resonances of Gurdjieff’s teachings with Hesychast traditions although to fully relate Gurdjieff’s system to *theosis* would require a lengthy study.¹²²

Gurdjieff consistently said that to understand his approach required a preliminary stage of education or re-education.¹²³ Arguably this is the rationale for his panoply of ideas and may explain the appearance of a ‘bricolage’ of components in the development of the teaching of ‘The Work.’¹²⁴ Perhaps Gurdjieff was experimenting with his materials to find the right form of presentation to catch the attention of distracted seekers in a world of psychological uncertainty and religious crisis. In any case his exercises became a key component of his overall method and while they were never at the forefront of his outreach into search culture, for those who committed to his system, it would appear that they worked.

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¹²⁰ Coates 2020.

¹²¹ Nicoll 1997.

¹²² Azize 2020, 88–94.

¹²³ “In order to make possible the rounded perfecting of a man, a special corresponding correct education is indispensably necessary for each of these three parts, and not such a treatment as is given nowadays and also called ‘education’” (Gurdjieff 1999,1191). See also ‘Reflexes of Truth’ dated 1914 (Anonymous 2014, 23–25).

¹²⁴ Sutcliffe 2015.

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