

Notes of Talks by G. I. Gurdjieff

Three Compilations

With Bibliographic Notes by J. Walter Driscoll

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Symbolism and the Enneagram.

G. I. Gurdjieff

Variants of an Early Lecture Developed between 1915 and the 1920s

The first published account of Gurdjieff's lecture on symbolism and the enneagram takes the form of a synopsis, with paraphrases and quotes in C. S. Nott's *Teachings of Gurdjieff*¹ The passage, from pages 77-80, reads:

“On several occasions Gurdjieff spoke about symbols and their use, among them the Enneagram, which contains among other things the working of the Law of Three, the Law of Seven, and the Law of Ninefoldness, the keys to which may be found in *Beelzebub's Tales*. A great deal of material was put together in the form of ‘A Lecture on Symbolism’. Briefly the idea is that every man has in him a desire for knowledge, differing only in intensity, but the mind of a seeking man often comes up against a blank wall when he asks ‘Why?’—though usually the question is ‘How?’ not ‘Why?’ Man does not realize that under the surface of things is hidden the oneness of all that exists. Man has always sought this oneness in religions and philosophies, and has tried to define it in words—which become dead and empty. Words and ideas change according to time and place, but unity, oneness, is eternal and unchanging. Certain men of real understanding, realizing the inadequacy of words, have, through the ages, constructed symbols for the passing down of real knowledge. One who studies a symbol and arrives at an understanding of it, realizes that he has the symbol in himself. ‘Everything in the world is one and is governed by uniform laws.’ As in the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus: ‘As above, so below.’ The laws of the cosmos may be found in the atom; but the nearest object for man to study is himself. In this respect the formula used by Socrates (though originating in Egypt), ‘Know thyself’, is full of meaning. By studying the laws of the universe man may see the working of the law in himself, and when he seriously struggles with his denying part, his negative part, he will be engaging in the struggle that goes on in the whole of the universe—‘the divine warfare’—and he will be constructing in himself the great symbol which issues from remote times and which we know as Solomon's Seal. Solomon's Seal is in every man who looks into himself’.

Gurdjieff in his teaching always tried to make us understand that we must use it in our life-work. The struggle between 'Yes' and 'No' goes on endlessly. We are full of idle wishes—'it wishes'—and to these we must oppose our 'I' wish. If this is done in the right way, a good result follows.

He gave as an example the following: 'Suppose I very much need some information, or something, from someone. But this someone has offended me. "It" does not wish humbly to ask, and I shall have to struggle with my self-love and self-pride, which would suffer in the case of refusal. If I persist in my struggle against the denying part and overcome the inertia set up, and go to the person, something in me will be strengthened and my understanding will have deepened. On the other hand, if I do not go, though I shall have saved nervous energy and possible unpleasantness, my understanding will not have increased.'

Later he spoke about initiation. 'Initiation is usually regarded as an act by which a man who knows transfers to another man knowledge and power, which become the latter's inalienable possession with no effort on his part. This, of course, can never be. There is only self-initiation, which is acquired by constant effort. It is impossible to give to a man anything that could become his own without effort on his part. One can only show and direct, but not initiate. One can only give to a man just as much as he is ready to receive.

As I have said, Gurdjieff always followed up a talk on theory with practical work; and I, with others, found myself being manoeuvred into situations in which I became conscious of 'Yes, here is something I ought to do'; 'No' from the body, a resistance accompanied by all kinds of reasonable excuses to make myself not go on with the struggle. When the effort was made, the neutralizing force came into play, and a feeling of growing strength was experienced. Sometimes the effort was not made, with a consequent feeling of weakness in the solar plexus.

While taking part in a certain dance based on what is called the 'Enneagram' something began to work in me, in my feelings; it was occasioned partly by the music, partly by the postures and movements. The music was a simple recurring melody and harmony, but arranged in such a way, and so beautifully, that it pierced the depths of one's being. It was as if I were understanding something, becoming conscious, partaking in a ritual. I sensed something of the meaning of the enneagram of the law of eternal recurrence, eternal repetition, and of the possibilities of a way out, and in time the enneagram became for me a living moving symbol that gave me a feeling of joy whenever I looked at it. I could learn something every time I pondered it."

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Three Versions of the Lecture on Symbolism and the Enneagram

Three versions of the text of Gurdjieff's lecture are in circulation. All three vary slightly but **very significantly** from each other in various brief passages, punctuation, italics, sentence length, paragraphing and illustrations. In apparent chronological order, these are:

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A Lecture by Gurdjieff: The Enneagram. 23 page typescript that appears to be from a manual typewriter. Diagrams on pages 3, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, and the next-to-last unnumbered page, are drawn roughly but clearly by hand. Page 23 is followed by an unnumbered page and a note after the text for "Page (5). The note continues for an additional unnumbered page, then breaks off at the bottom, with an incomplete sentence, " It is possible to teach a man mathematics, but an understanding of the truth he conquers for himself. And woe to man, if under the " Illustrations are drawn freehand. The text begins:

In every man there has been implanted a need (desire for) knowledge, differing only in its intensity. But the passive human mind, while utilizing every means possible to it of taking in (and working over) impressions, often gets into an impasse in trying to find an answer to the question "Why".

Man's eyes are dazzled by the bright play of the colors of multiformity, and under the glittering surface he does not see the hidden kernel of the one-ness of all that exists.

Symbolism. 17 page typescript, no date, place, or authorship indicated. Appears to be a late 20th century typescript, possibly electric typewriter or computer generated. Diagrams on pages 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17 are meticulously hand-drafted. The text begins:

In every man there has been implanted a need for knowledge, differing only in its intensity, and the passive human mind, while using every means of reception (taking in impressions) often gets into an impasse in trying to find an answer to the question "why".

His eyes are dazzled by the bright play of the colors of multiformity, and under the glittering surface he does not see the hidden kernel of the one-ness of all that exists.

A Lecture On Symbolism, by G. I. Gurdjieff. Diagrams by Jim Gomez.
McMinnville, Oregon: Stopinder Books, undated, 22 pages, paper-wrapped booklet.
(Presumably issued in 2002-2003 since the preamble makes reference to the illustrator's
article in the Winter 2002 issue of the magazine *Stopinder*.) The Text begins:

"In every man there has been implanted a need for knowledge, differing only in its intensity,
and the passive human mind, while utilizing every means of reception (taking in impressions)
often gets into an impasse in trying to find an answer to the question *why*."

"His eyes are dazzled by the bright play of the colors of multiformity, and under the glittering
surface he does not see the hidden kernel of the one-ness of all that exists."

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NOTES

¹ Pages 77-80. C. S. Nott. *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil*. An account of some years with
G. I. Gurdjieff and A. R. Orage in New York and at Fontainebleau-Avon. [First published anonymously.]
London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961. Reprinted numerous times.

² "The Task of Understanding" by Jim Gomez, *Stopinder: A Gurdjieff Journal for Our Time* (McMinnville,
Oregon), Issue # 7, Winter 2002, pp. 39-50. Gomez muses on the symbols discussed in Gurdjieff's lecture
and traces what he sees as the influence of this lecture on P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*
and on two passages in Jane Heap's Notes; *The Notes of Jane Heap*. Aurora, Ore.: Two Rivers Press, 1994.

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Notes of Talks by G. I. Gurdjieff

1918–1946

1— [Notes on 27] Lectures by Mr. Gurdjieff 1918 –1924. [Lectures are individually paged but total 124 pages. One lecture titled “Language” on the contents page is missing, one (January 20, 1923 is added from another source and 15 are variants of talks published in *Views from the Real World*.]

2— [Bernard Metz Notes on Meetings with G. I. Gurdjieff and A. R. Orage in London, Fontainbleau and New York between November 1921 and February 1924.] 23pages. [missing pages 19-23.]

“These notes are in the order in which I got them, meeting by meeting. They are almost all verbatim expressions from Mr. O. or Mr. G. taken down at meetings, or immediately afterwards, so take them for what they are worth. All notes are from Mr. O’s meetings unless otherwise stated.

3—[Kathryn Hulme’s and Solita Solano’s Notes on Gurdjieff’s Talks in Paris, Fontainbleau and various trips to America 1923-1933, 1935-1939 from a Library of Congress File.] The talks are individually numbered than this compilation is hand numbered to 139 pages. There are an additional 5 pages of fragments. _NOTE: Page 137, near bottom has “End Katie’s notes.” written in hand and the initials S[olita] S[olano] written in the bottom right corner.

4—Solata Solano’s Gurdjieff Notes [edited from her letters of October 1935 to January 1937, by Jane Heap. 56 hand numbered pages are missing pages 34-38, 52, 54-55 and two pages are numbered 41.

5—Knachschmidt & Co.: Kathryn Hulme’s Diary Excerpts, October 1935 to March 1937. 64 pages, missing pages 11-29.

6—The First Initiation (1941) [Two additional drafts, variously attributed to G. I. Gurdjieff and to Jeanne de Salzmann] and four 1943 Paris talks. [Translated from] *Premiere Initiation*, par G. I. Gurdjieff. *Question de Gurdjieff* (No. 50) ed. Albin Michel, 1989. [30 unnumbered pages.]

7—Eight Meetings with Gurdjieff in Paris, 1943, 1944 & 1946. [42 unnumbered pages.] A variant of the first of the 1943 talks was published as “Excerpts from a Meeting with G. I. Gurdjieff in 1943” in *Material for Thought* (San Francisco) Number 12, 1990.

About 400 pages total.

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Paris Meetings with G. Gurdjieff

December 1941 to February 1944

Dec. 7, 1941. 5 p. Question: “Something intolerable happens in my work.”

7th December, 1941. 18p. Q[uestion:] “Something intolerable happens in my work.”
[Expanded notes of same meeting as previous notes, with variants and more material.]

Thursday 11th March, 1943. 3 p. Lactin: “I am not able to stop associations while I work.”

Thursday 18th Marth, 1943. 3 p. Solange: “I am not able to sense myself.”

Thursday 29th April, 1943. 2 p. Lanctin: “You have advised me to read, to collect information, but what to begin with?”

Thursday, July 1, 1943. [30p.] S: “I am very often deceived in my opinion of others.”

[This document starts on age 6 with the above date centered at the top and includes notes on the following four meetings:] Page 10; Thursday, September 16, 1943. Gurdjieff: (He looks at Mme. V. sitting opposite and says to Mme. F.) “Now after the holidays your sister looks more like you.” Page 18; From Lecture (Q’s and A’s of French Group) Sept. 9, 1943. Q: “I wish to ask about work and fatigue”. Page 22; Thursday, September 30, 1943. JA: (begins to read the question he has written): “More and more, I feel how much my work is mental, how little it animates me.” Page 25; Meeting, Thursday, October, 21, 1943. Gurdjieff: “Mother, May I smoke?” (To Ja.) [Ends on page 35 with a question about conscious love; Gurdjieff’s response

includes the commandments of Ashiata Shiemash about Love, Hope, and Faith of consciousness.]

Thursday, July 22, 1943. 8 p. Reading of chapter on Ashiata Shiemash—Dinner—After Dinner. : turns to G. and asks: “Mr. Gurdjieff, may I ask a question?” G: “I have been Mr. Gurdjieff for a long time. What do you want to ask me?” A: “Since I came to the work I have learned many things but I have been able to put nothing into practice.”

Thursday, 25th September, 1943. 5 p. S: “I do not succeed in having emotion when I concentrate.”

Meeting of Saturday, October 3, 1943. 7p. After the reading of the “Introduction to the Second Series”, Mr. G. said – “I would like to know who has continued the exercise and who has not.”

Meeting of Thursday, Oct. 8, 19[4?]3. 10p. Being present: Mme. de S., Miss Gordon, Mlle. Abadi, Mlle. Regnault, Mme. Franc, Mlle. Leprudhomme, Mme. Tracol, Mle. Nano, Mechin, Lebeau, Dr. Aboulker, Luc Dietrich, Jacques and Alfred. Dinner after the reading. Mr. G: Young man, I noticed you a little while ago and then you disappeared. . . . Lebeau: Over the holidays my work consisted in playing all kinds of roles

Meeting of Thursday, 29th October, 1943. 12p. Reading: Purgatory. Dinner. (Mr. Gurdjieff reproaches the Director for not having indicated to him the presence of a new person) Mr. Gurdjieff: “And now, someone has perhaps something to say which interests me, so to say, a report, which interests everybody also?”

Meeting of Thursday, November 11, 1943. 11p. Reading: Good and Evil. Dinner. Mr. G: (to everybody) “You must be asking yourselves why I finish eating so late.”

Paris – January 11, 1944. 3p. Mr. G. has given an exercise and afterward he shows the group an engraving representing seven Oriental dancers, with headdresses like gigantic spherical hats surmounted by antennas; they are striking in cadence their tambourines and blowing into pipes like fifes under the direction of their chief who holds in his hand a sort of pendant.

Friday, Feb. 4, 1944. 6p. Ques: “Mr. G. May I ask you a question?” Mr. G. “Yes.” Same Person: “I would like to ask you if it is possible to develop faith, to make faith grow in oneself.”

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Undated

The Meaning of Life by Gurdjieff (originally read to us as “Pure and Impure Emotions”) 5p. “What is the meaning of life? There are many opinions on this subject.

General Course. 13p. [A series of nineteen questions and answers, undated, no names or indication of who is asking or answering, is given.] Q. “I never do a task thoroughly, I think about it, I do it, but only for a second.”

Fragment

[Gurdjieff’s Lectures. Page one is missing. Page two begins:] “The difference between essence and personality, can be seen only by conscious man.” Page 3 [bottom] Gurdjieff’s Lectures 3/4/23 & 12/6/23 Fasting, Prayer, Passion, Pacification, Confession, Pardon, Punishment, Repentance, Death, Ressurrection [sic Resurrection], Life. Page 4 [bottom] Gurdjieff Lecture 23/4/23 Two kinds of love, slavish and developed. Page 5 [middle] Gurdjieff Lecture 12/8/24 Gurdjieff once said at dinner, when we were paid for work he had to pay for meals, etc.

135 typescript pages

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