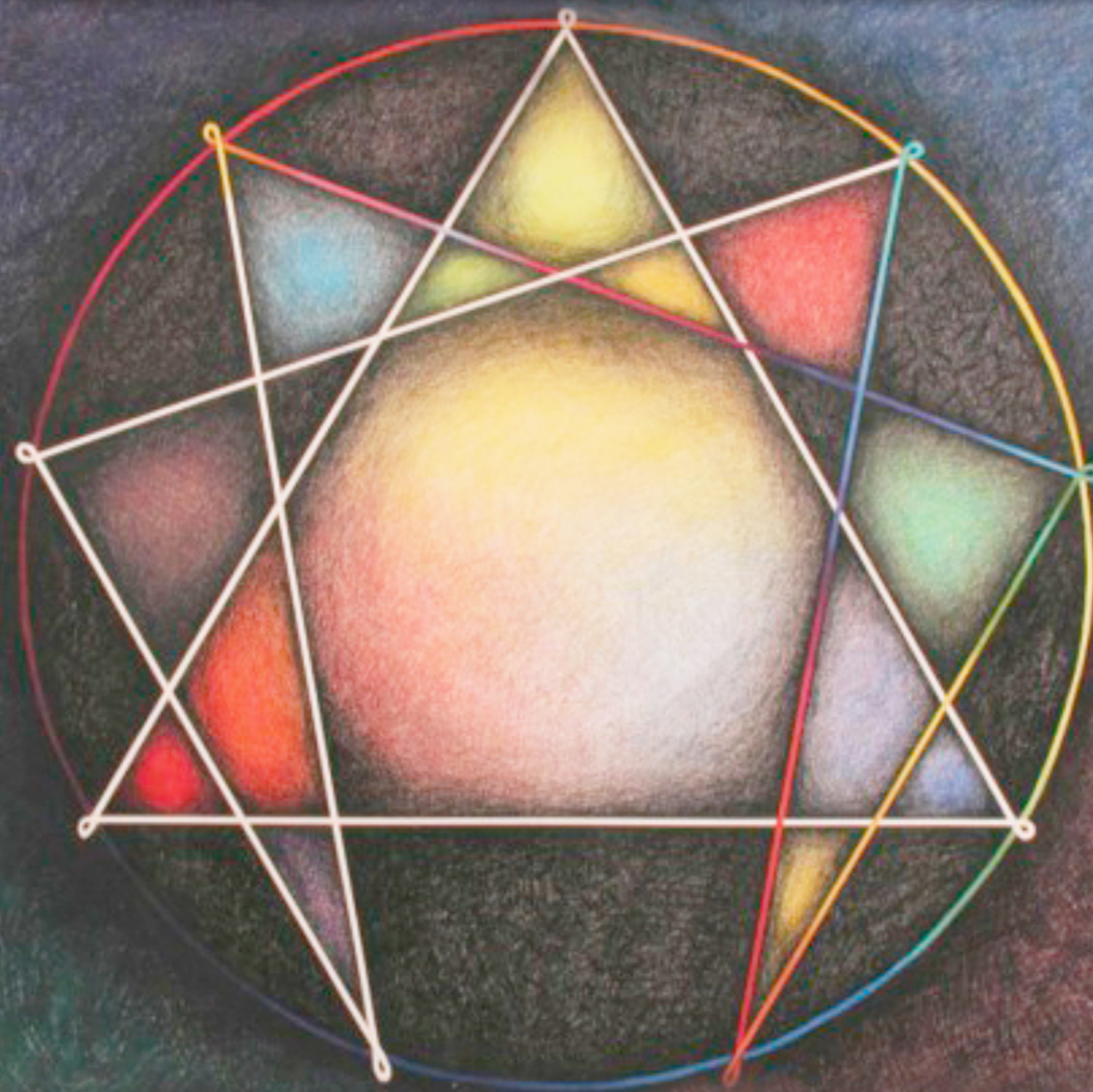


# THE LAW OF THREE

*Essays on the Gurdjieff Ideas*



LEE VAN LAER

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# The Law of Three



## Essays on the Gurdjieff Ideas

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# Foreword

A number of years ago, one of my friends asked me why I was in the Gurdjieff work.

What did I get out of it? Why bother?

Those questions have followed me for many years now. It's always seemed odd that practice I found so vital was so obscure, even uninteresting, to others. So, 5 years ago, I sat down and decided to write a public weblog of my practical experiences in the Gurdjieff work.

The aim was simply to put the work in front of other people so that they could see what an individual in it was up to. Over the years, my inquiries have inevitably branched out into a wide range of territory, because the Gurdjieff work touches on all aspects of life. Although I did not have any such intention when I began writing, it's possible to say that the [Zen, Yoga, Gurdjieff Blog](#) may well, by now, be the world's most extensive commentary on the Gurdjieff teachings.

It would be a mistake to assign Gurdjieff's ideas or the practice he brought to the West to an obscure corner of the

spiritual universe. The Gurdjieff work is a vibrant, living experience that touches every other inner work and religious practice, providing threads that connect all of them into one seamless whole, if enough is understood and

*Gallery The Law Of Three.1 Banteay Srei, Cambodia*



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enough time is spent living the experience. The Gurdjieff Work is Christian. It is Muslim. It is Hindu, it is Buddhist, it is Judaic, it is Sufic.

If any esoteric practice represents a true bridge between the various world religions, we find it in the ideas of Mr. Gurdjieff. And if there is any hope of re-cementing, reconnecting, the fractured religious understandings of mankind, they lie here, in this teaching, and most particularly in Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson.

The group of essays in this book was originally published in the Zen, Yoga, Gurdjieff blog, but they have been reorganized and considerably enhanced with a wide variety of web links and photographs. While all of the work is, in fact, in the public domain and can be downloaded for free, this e-book provides a greatly enhanced walk-through of the Gurdjieff experience, albeit on a microcosmic scale.

All of the ideas in these essays are derived from the Gurdjieff teachings; many are my own original (or, in some cases, not so original) interpretations. Any errors in interpretation or transmission are my own. Because this work is a living work, and in constant movement, readers should understand that everything is constantly open to question. As one of the essays points out, everything is only true within the limits of its own range.

Among the many people who have supported my own search over the years are Henry and Betty Brown, Ellen

Backer, Martha Heynemann, Tom and Mia Healey, other members of the Brown and Welch groups, and all of my other brothers and sisters in this work, every one of whom has acted as my teacher at one time or another. My thanks to them for the continuing support in a lifetime of work.

Thanks are also due to the worldwide leadership of the Gurdjieff Foundation for keeping the Gurdjieff work alive under what are always difficult circumstances.

Perhaps most especially, thanks must be extended to Jeanne de Salzmann and to Mr. Gurdjieff himself. Although they are no longer here, they are still very much alive, and very much with us.

I respectfully ask you to take good care.

Lee van Laer

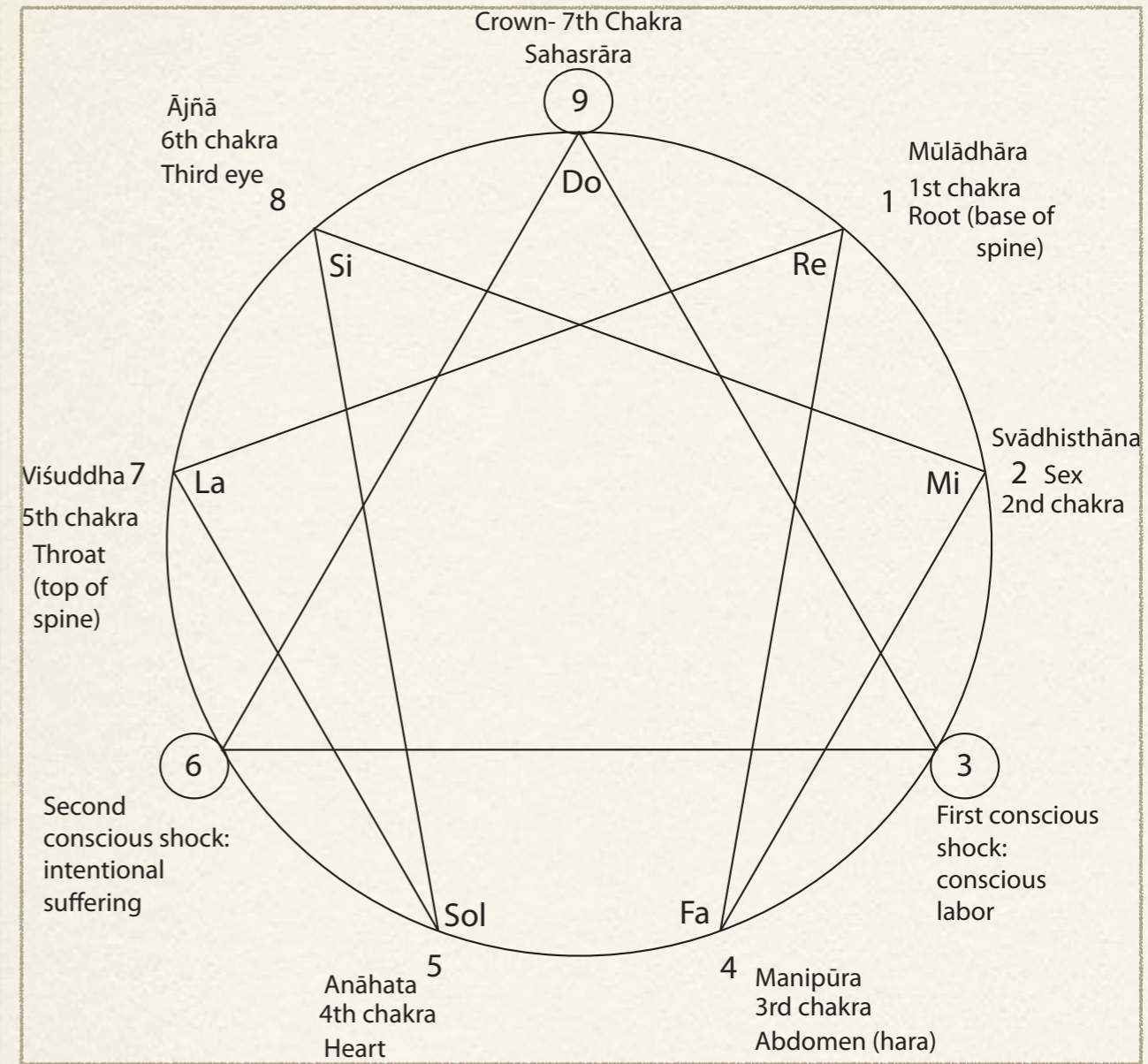
January 2012

## Chapter 1

# THE LAW OF THREE

This collection of essays investigates various aspects of [G. I. Gurdjieff's Enneagram](#), particularly in iteration of principles of the Law of Three.

*Figure 1.1*  
Gurdjieff's Enneagram, showing the location of traditional yogic chakras on the diagram



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When the Armenian mystic [G.I. Gurdjieff](#) first made his appearance in Moscow in the early 20th century, he brought with him a teaching that most would agree had never been seen before, at least in the form he transmitted it in. Attracting fascination from the intelligentsia of Moscow, including his famous pupil [P.D. Ouspensky](#), he gathered an entourage of followers who studied his movements and ideas throughout the greater part of the 20th century.

A great deal of controversy arose, and continues to exist, over how much of Gurdjieff's work was original. Some claimed he stole it from other sources; others called him a charlatan. Some of his work can clearly be identified as consonant with other major teachings from traditions such as Christianity (including [Hesychasm](#) and other Eastern Orthodox practices) Sufism, Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, and Hindu yoga sources.

However much he may have begged, borrowed, or stolen, one thing is certain. The [enneagram](#), the unique symbol he centered his work around, had never been seen before — in any other esoteric tradition. The symbol is undoubtedly unique and original; it is, furthermore, clearly derived from the ancient yoga schools, as the reader will see, and it represents clear evidence that Gurdjieff did indeed, as he claimed, penetrate and study at secret esoteric schools which had preserved their knowledge from the outside world for millennia.

The Enneagram, as a symbolic entity, embodies two major cosmic laws introduced in the Gurdjieff system: the law of 3 and the law of 7, also known as the law of octaves. Although the law of 7 is an independent law, the law of octaves actually embodies *both* the law of 3 and the law of 7, since, according to the system, the development of the octave is functionally impossible without the interaction of the law of 3.

The material in this book presumes a familiarity with Gurdjieff's teachings. Those without a background in these matters may want to refer to [In Search Of The Miraculous](#) by [P. D. Ouspensky](#) for seminal material on the subject.

## Chapter 2

# THE TWO PRAYERS

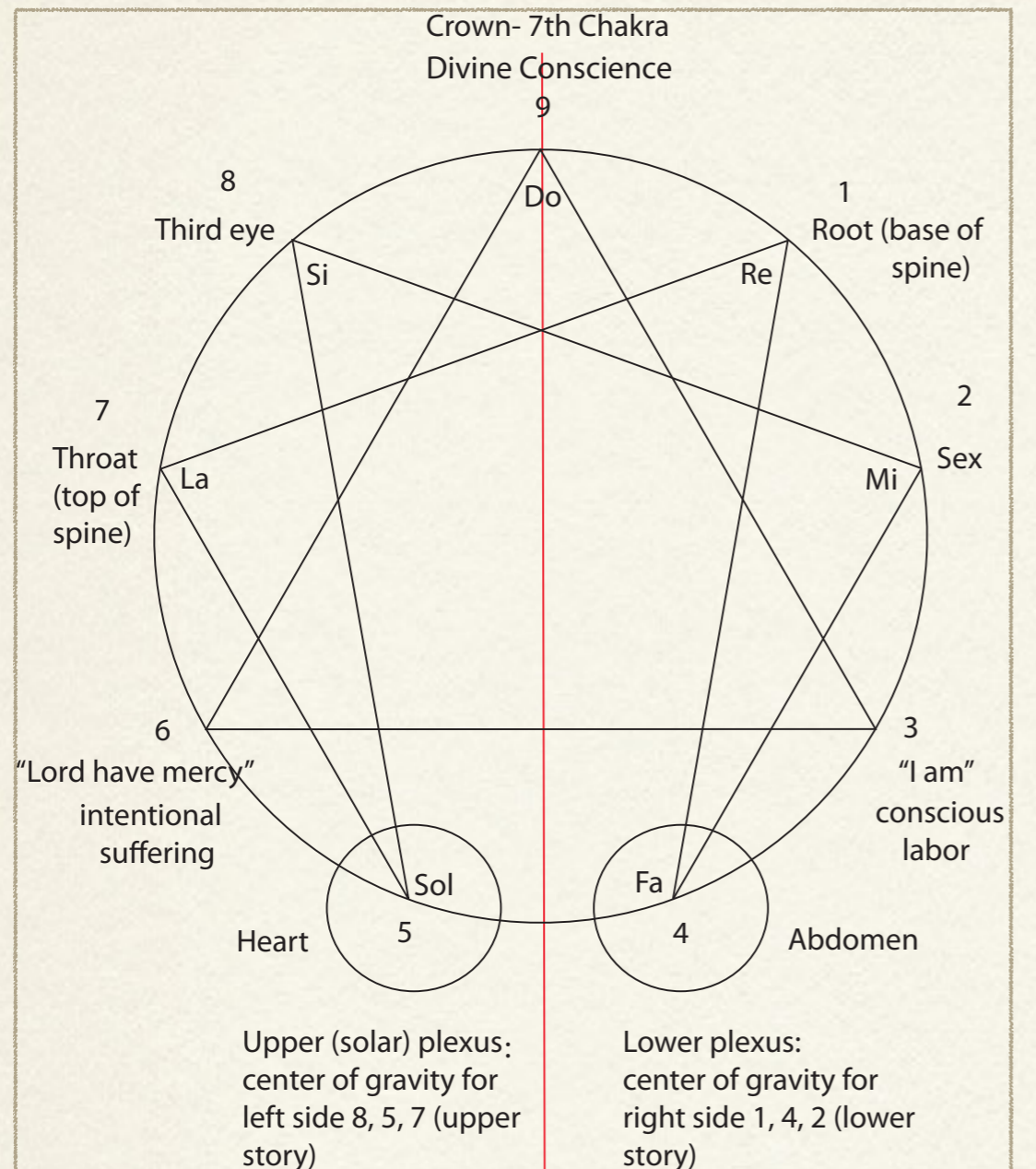
An examination of the Gurdjieff ideas, combined with the study of the Enneagram, illuminates the universal nature of the symbol and its connection to other spiritual questions.

Icon

Photograph by the Author



Figure 2.1 Centers of gravity on the enneagram



# Centers of Gravity and Conscious Shocks

One of the unanswered questions about the Enneagram diagram which Gurdjieff brought to the West in the early 20th century was the reason the second conscious shock, which ought to be located between 8 and 9, or "si" and "do," is instead found between 5 and 7.

At the time he introduced the diagram and discussed the shocks, Gurdjieff explained that the incorrect location was an indicator of the type of work that was needed to provide the shock.

In order to explain this in more detail, we will need to take a look at the diagram in several new contexts.

When divided by a line down the middle, the two sides of the Enneagram symmetrically represent the upper and lower stories of man's chakras, or energy centers. (See diagram.)

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The right side of the diagram represents the lower story, and the left side of the diagram represents the upper story. They are two triads, or separate systems, joined together into one harmonious whole within the context of the entire diagram. There is a fundamental difference between the two, because the upper story represents a different level of working than the lower story. One could approximate a rather crude summary by saying that the right side relates to the corporeal centers, and the right to the astral centers.

It's worth noting that the Star of David, an incomplete version of the Enneagram, clearly conveys the existence of the triads, although in an almost uselessly simplified version. It does however preserve some of the understanding by inverting one of the two triangles, indicating its involutory nature (see below.)

In addition, the position of Christ on the right hand of God the Father assigns His Presence to the LEFT side of the Enneagram —if we understand the view to be from the perspective of the diagram itself, not our own— for reasons which may eventually become clear.

### **Centers of gravity**

Jeanne De Salzman and others have often referred to the “center of gravity” in man as though there were only a

single center of gravity. This isn't exactly the case, however.

The dominant center of gravity for the lower story is found in position 4, which represents the lower portion of the central nervous system plexus, located in the center of lower part of the torso. Physically speaking, this lower portion of the plexus is located in the abdomen, below the navel.

The center of gravity for the upper story is found in position 5, and is commonly referred to as the solar plexus. This location corresponds to the center of the spine, and occupies the heart position in the Chakra system.

Esoteric systems from the East including Zen, Tai Chi, Qigong, and some yoga practices all strongly emphasize the center of gravity for the body and all the other centers as the lower portion of the nervous system complexes, located in the abdomen.

What is not elaborated by these practices is that although this is a location that does confer great power if developed fully, it only represents half of the question. Because of its specific nature it's no surprise we see its long-time association with both martial arts and magical or healing powers, especially in Taosim, Tai Chi and Qigong. We might surmise that Dogen's outright contempt for such homegrown practices —many of which now appear to be slowly assimilating into mainstream Buddhism and other esoteric prac-

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tices — stemmed solely from his superior understanding of their exact nature.

I'll probably upset the aficionados by saying this, but in reality, work to develop and contain the energy in the lower portion of the torso, that is, the abdomen, remains at best an incomplete understanding of the entire energy system.

The Enneagram specifically reveals this simply through its visual impression: we can easily see how both 4 (abdomen) and 5 (heart) anchor the triads 1, 4, 2 and 8, 5, 7 on either side of the diagram. As is always the case, the information implicit in the Enneagram is unmistakable, once one sees it.

Work on the lower story is accomplished through what Gurdjieff referred to as the first conscious shock. This shock, coming at position 3, is represented by what is called “conscious labor.” Because this is a physical work as much as anything, and because it involves the acquisition of power (which, readers will recall, Gurdjieff told Ouspensky was in fact the aim of the Fakir), it is a discipline that relates more or less directly to the practice of Hatha Yoga. Logically enough, this physical yoga—including its influence on both the triad it belongs to and the diagram in its entirety—is the first stage of work for man.

Work on the higher story—that is, the left side of the diagram—, as Gurdjieff taught it, is accomplished through the

second conscious shock, associated with what he called intentional suffering.

Earlier work on this material has verified that the opening of the emotional center is ultimately essential to inner effort. The reason that the second conscious shock is placed next to the heart is specifically to indicate that what is necessary for the second stage of work is the opening of the heart.

Paradoxically, this must take place long before the energy that is required for the passage from 8 to 9, or “si” to “do,” arrives. The opening of the heart establishes the center of gravity for the work of intentional suffering and the completion of the left side of the diagram. We see here a visual illustration of the mysterious parable, “To he who has shall much be given,” embedded within the enneagram’s geometry itself.

Readers might find it interesting to ponder the essential nature of the first shock, which is egoistic and involutionary, and the second, which is compassionate and evolutionary.

These two characters neatly incorporate other understandings in the Gurdjieff system which are beyond the scope of this essay.

*Gallery 2.1*



Bas relief, Angkor Wat, Cambodia

Photograph by the Author

## SECTION 2

# Djana and Bhakti Yoga

It is arguably self evident that Gurdjieff began his work with a strong intellectual influence: the influence of the Yogi, or, as it is generally known, Djana Yoga. He himself explained to his protégés that a man who completed this work would know what was necessary to complete the work of both Bhakti and Hatha Yoga, that is, the Way of the Monk and the Way of the Fakir. Esotericists can reasonably assume that by the time he encountered Ouspensky, Gurdjieff had already fully completed the Way of the Yogi. In addition to the formidable and even daunting potpourri of theoretical information he imparted, he certainly began teaching his students many Hatha Yoga techniques, although largely in secret.

Nonetheless, as his work progressed, it became increasingly compassionate and emotional, while aggressively de-emphasizing some of the other practical work (especially intellectual theory) and it is quite clear (to this author, at least) that he ultimately understood that, in the end, no matter how much intelligence you have, it is fundamentally impossible to

complete the work depicted in the Enneagram without the full participation of the emotional center.

In other words, the final step on Gurdjieff's path was the path of Love.

We can thus say, with some degree of certainty, that the man did indeed embody a fully realized incarnation that blended all three paths, as he said was necessary. The culmination of his path was, however, firmly grounded in Love. Hence the unusually strong affinity between the Gurdjieff Work, Christianity, and Sufism.

*Gallery 2.2 Standing Ganesha, India,  
Tamil Nadu, 12 century  
Metropolitan Museum, New York*





Bas relief, Angkor Wat, Cambodia

Photograph by the Author

SECTION 3

# Harmonious Development

The Enneagram does not represent a static system offering a linear progression of development up through a series of numbers from 1 to 9. In this system, all of the notes already exist: that is to say, as is physically true within man, all of the energy centers are already there, and in constant motion. What is left to man is to connect them, or form right relationships with them.

Thus, the idea that one should concentrate on any one part of the diagram at the exclusion of others is a mistaken one. This is where works such as Hatha Yoga, Zen, Qingong and Tai Chi, may stumble, if stumble they do, because they all presume the concentration of power in the abdomen as the aim of work.

The Enneagram clearly shows why there is much more to the question of development. All the notes need to be worked on at once. This is a subtle practice that does not admit to aggressive manipulation or specific techniques that concentrate on one or another point. It is a gentle, long-term process. All

of the other techniques can produce remarkable results, but all of them will inevitably tend to be lopsided.

Only Gurdjieff understood the inner energy system in enough detail to present a work that was fully balanced; only the Enneagram provides a simple tool for understanding the relationships properly.

*Gallery 2.4 Dancing celestial  
India (Uttar Pradesh) 12th century  
Metropolitan Museum, New York*





Bas relief, Angkor Wat, Cambodia

Photograph by the Author

I AM—I WISH TO BE

LORD HAVE MERCY

## The Two Prayers

There are only two principal prayers found in the Gurdjieff work. This may seem odd in what is so clearly a religious practice, despite any protestations to the contrary. We needn't feel this is so unusual, however; the early [Hesychasts](#) and the writers of the [Philokalia](#) managed to reduce their practice to a single prayer, the "Lord have Mercy" prayer alone, which was deemed fully sufficient to achieve salvation.

One could argue that point; however, what is certain is that Gurdjieff reduced the essential prayers in his system to the only two he considered as absolutely necessary, according to the science of the Enneagram.

This is because each prayer is specifically related to one side of the Enneagram.

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## **I am—I wish to be**

This prayer is the Abrahamic prayer, that is, the Old Testament prayer for being that founded the work leading to Christianity. It derives from the statement that the Lord made to Moses when he encountered the Lord in the form of a [burning bush](#): “I am that I am.”

This prayer is specifically related to the first conscious shock, conscious labor, which is a work of essential affirmation and conscious labor. This particular work relates to the energy on the right side of the body (in yoga, the “right channel,” or “golden thread,” running down from the right temple through the bottom of the foot) –an energy which, esoterically speaking, is directly related to the work of the individual and their own personal effort. This work might be contextualized as an effort to show oneself as worthy through preparation, although there are many other dimensions to it.

## **Lord have Mercy**

This prayer is the Christian prayer, i.e., the New Testament prayer that represents the “new covenant” of Love brought by Christ. It is furthermore—unmistakably—the [Prayer of the Heart](#) as practiced by the Early Church Fathers of the Philokalia. It belongs to the second conscious

shock, and the left side of the Enneagram. This work relates to the energy on the left side (yoga: “left channel”) of the body, which is sent from above (the Right Hand of God the Father) as help. The prayer itself represents a call for help, and is in fact the core of the practice of both Christianity and Islam—that is, submission.

Both prayers are necessary in order to foster harmonious development, and stand in complete technical accord with the principles expounded in the science of octaves.

Because each one is specifically associated with a conscious shock, we see that worship, in both the old and New Testament form, is actually an essential—perhaps *the* most essential—component of the Gurdjieff system. It is just worship in what one might call an unfamiliar context.

This makes perfect sense, because if we wish to discover a truly effective worship, certainly, it won't be one we're familiar with.

## **Prayers and Conscious Shocks**

Each of the 2 conscious shocks—in the form of prayer—takes on a dual role of both holy affirming and holy denying. This relationship is complex, but important to try and understand.

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## I am—I wish to be

The first shock, conscious labor, is accompanied by a prayer of affirmation of the self.

This is entirely appropriate, because it takes place on the right side of the enneagram, which is the corporeal, or incarnated, side of the diagram. It corresponds exactly to Gurdjieff's comment that a man must become a conscious egoist in order to work. Embodied in this flesh, a human being's first task is to affirm themselves consciously. This means to take responsibility for one's Being.

This is actually a holy denying action, since one must paradoxically deny the Lord in order to affirm oneself. It's notable that Gurdjieff's mythological protagonist Beelzebub fell from grace in heaven specifically because he affirmed himself and his own ideas, instead of His Endlessness. We see a direct connection here between Beelzebub's actions and the first conscious shock, as well as an explanation of why he is banished—that is, incarnated—in the solar system.

There is, in other words, a little Beelzebub in all of us.

The energy of the first conscious shock is involutionary. It is a folding inward of the higher towards the self, a gathering of energies. This shock is affirming from the perspective of the self, but denying from the perspective of the Lord. Nonetheless, it is absolutely necessary as part of the

process. One might say that one has to leave the Lord in order to come back. The parable of the prodigal son comes to mind.

The understanding also casts a light on the ideas of original sin in Christianity; man begins from a point where holy denying (affirmation of the self, which may be perceived as sinful) is a requirement for his existence and development, not an option. This is consistent with some of [Meister Eckhart](#)'s views on the nature of sin, as well as [Brother Lawrence](#)'s observation that he put his sins between himself and God, to advise God that he was not worthy, and that God studiously ignored him, and continued to send blessings anyway.

The path is fraught with danger because the path must be fraught with danger. (Job 5:7: Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.) No one is exempt from negotiating this territory. The difference between the conscious egoist and the unconscious egoist is that the conscious egoist is aware of the danger; the unconscious egoist blithely ignores it.

One important esoteric meaning of the first prayer is to overcome the fear of the self. This particular point of work is extensive, personal, and beyond the scope of this essay. It's worth pointing out, however, that Jeanne De Salzmann often commented that we wish not to be—that we turn away from what we are. This turning away stems from a

root fear which must ultimately be confronted in order for what Gurdjieff called “Real I” to appear.

### Lord have mercy.

The second conscious shock, intentional suffering, requires a movement into the emotional and spiritual side of the enneagram.

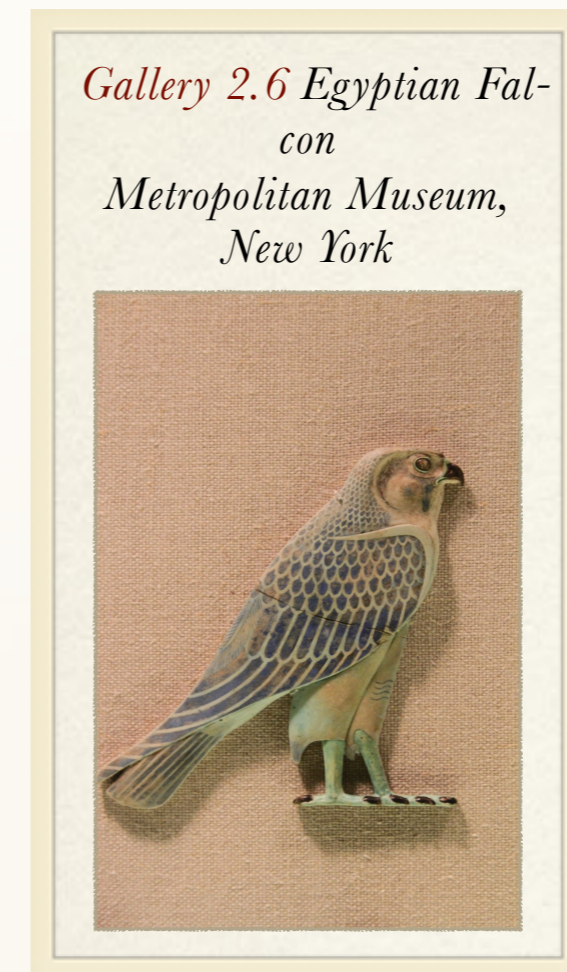
The shock that is required here is the exact opposite of the first shock—this is a holy affirming action—that is, it is a surrender to His Endlessness. In other words, it is the surrender of the ego which was painstakingly and actively affirmed in the first stage of work, and an affirmation of the Lord. The shock is, of course, a holy denying action in relation to the ego. And this shock consists, above all, of opening the heart—an esoteric process known since time immemorial, and completely embodied in the Eastern orthodox Prayer of the Heart, or the Jesus prayer. (The maze at [Chartres](#) physically represents the path to the heart. Its center is located at the exact same distance horizontally from the church door as is the image of Jesus at the center of the West Rose Window, on the facade.)

Ultimately, we are required to surrender everything we have gained in order to complete the process. The evolutionary process of the second shock is a returning outward of everything that was folded inward in the first stage.

And, in the same way that organic molecules must without fail be correctly folded in order to do their jobs, what was folded inward in the first stage must be rightly folded, lest what is emitted in the second stage during the unfolding be corrupted.

Why does it work this way? Well, Gurdjieff gave us an oblique answer to that in his conversations with Ouspensky. He pointed out that men already think that they have will, and so make no effort to acquire it.

In the same spirit, it is impossible to surrender your ego to God if you don't have one.



As Gurdjieff explained it, what we think is ego, or "I," is actually just false personality—a construction of the intellectual mind. Hence the work to acquire a real ego, in order to have something to give up or offer, makes perfect sense.

The shocks are not one-dimensional. Each shock actually embodies both a yes and a no—the two shocks manifest an internal friction that maintains a dynamic action. The beauty of understanding the

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system from this perspective is that the reconciling factor always remains "do," regardless of which role the shocks play, and which perspective they are viewed from.

The action of the Lord is always necessary in order to reconcile our contradictions.

## Chapter 2

# REALMS AND CENTERS

The Enneagram represents a fractal structure depicting the circulation of energy both from the top to the bottom of the universe, and within each level of the universe.

This complex yet mathematically integrated structure accurately anticipates the modern study of fractals and their relationship to the organization of information and the matter.

Photograph by the author

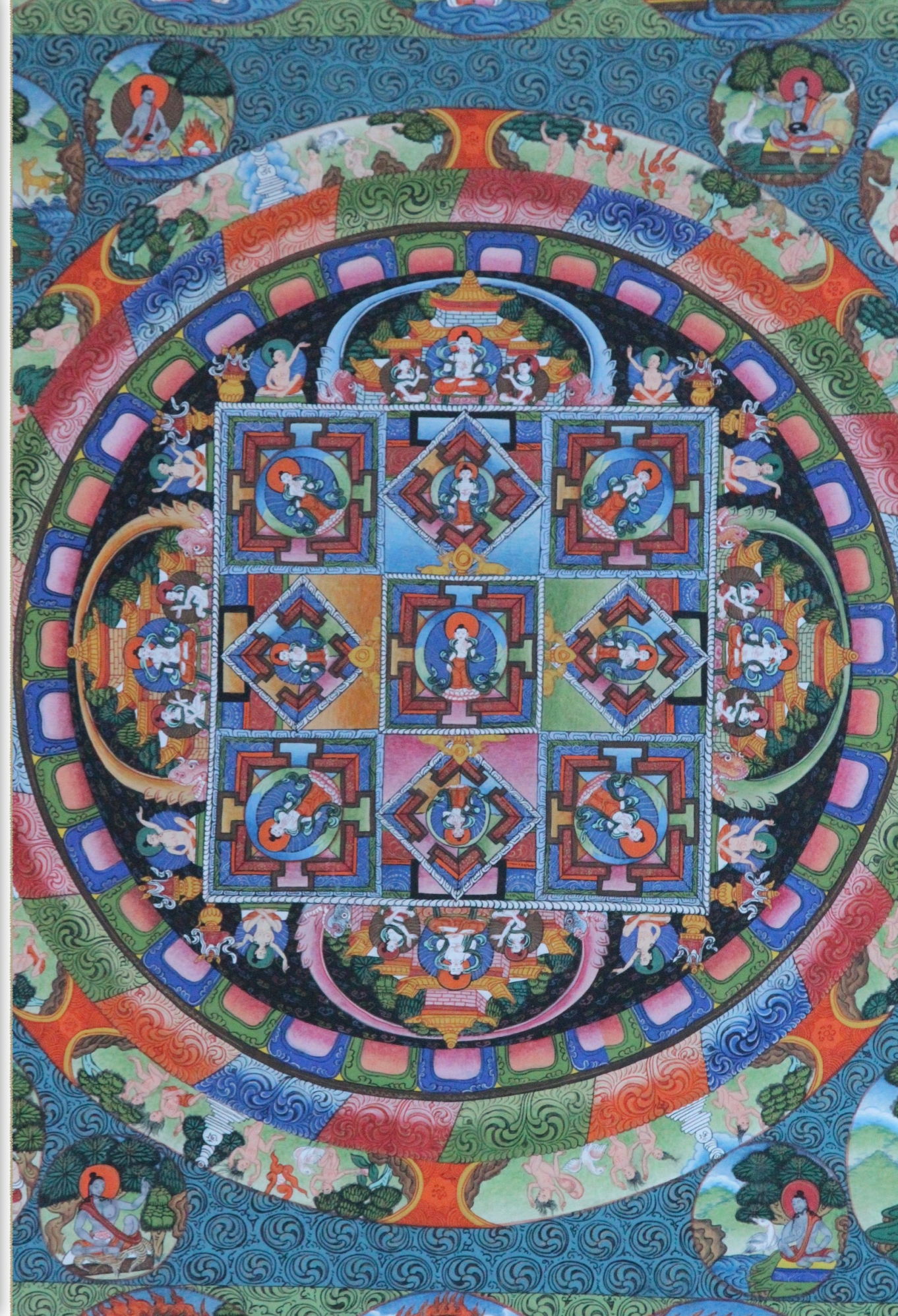
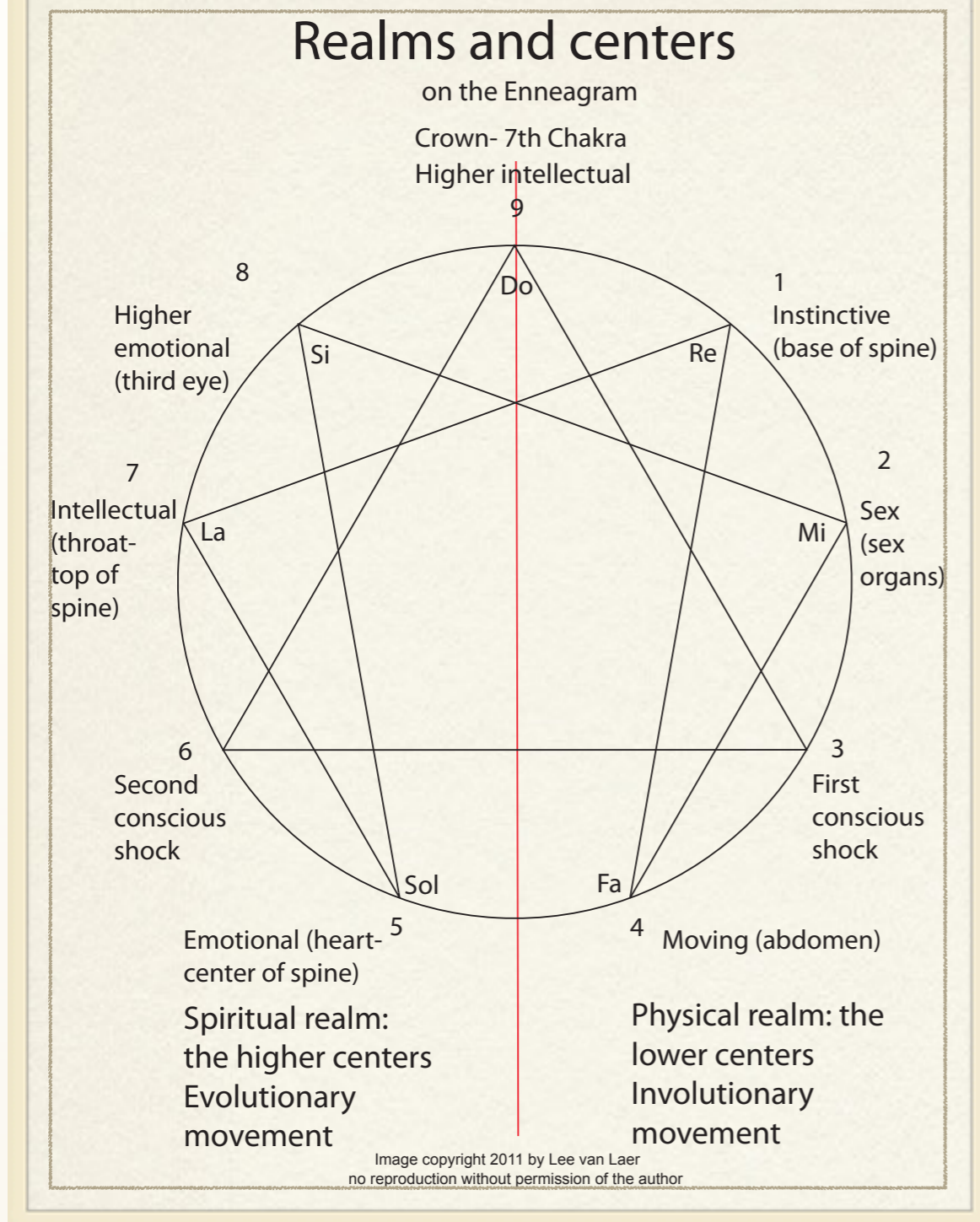


Figure 3.1



# Desires & Non-Desires

In relation to involution and evolution

One of the remarks that Gurdjieff's saintly protagonist Ashieta Shiemash made to his followers was as follows:

"And so, only he who consciously assists the process of this inner struggle, and consciously assists the "nondesires" to prevail over the "desires," behaves in accordance with the Being of our Common Father Creator Himself; whereas he who consciously assists the contrary only increases His sorrow." (See G. I. Gurdjieff's [Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson](#), pg. 340.)

This reminds us of Gurdjieff's premise of non-identification, or, if we are Buddhists, the cultivation of detachment; and Christian asceticism is not far off this mark either. Nonetheless, followers of the Gurdjieff method continue to question each other and themselves about exactly what was meant by this.

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Returning once again to the character and nature of the two conscious shocks, and the prayers associated with them, we can perhaps begin to develop a deeper perspective on this thorny question.

In the preceding passage, Ashieta Shiemash lays out what could be considered an encapsulation of the forces in action on the opposite sides of the enneagram:

"And we must be suffering, because this being-impulse can come to its full manifestation in us only through *the constant struggle between two quite opposite complexes of functioning issuing from two sources of quite opposite origin*, that is to say, through the constant struggle between the processes of the functioning of our planetary body and the *parallel processes* of the functionings arising progressively in accordance with the coating and perfecting of our higher being-bodies within this planetary body of ours, which processes in their totality actualize every kind of reason in three-centered beings.

"Consequently, like all three-centered beings of our Great Universe, we men existing on the Earth, owing to the presence in us also of the factors for engendering the divine impulse of Objective Conscience, must always inevitably struggle with the two quite opposite functionings arising and proceeding in our common presence, the results of which are always sensed by us either as "desires" or as "non desires." (Italics are mine.)

If we understand the "two opposite complexes of functioning" as referring to the two opposite sides of the enneagram, we can see that the desires belong to the right side of the diagram, which represents both the physical incarnation ("the functioning of our planetary body") and the involuntary forces of self-affirmation. The non-desires, on the other hand, clearly represent the evolutionary forces of surrender (intentional suffering) represented on the left side of the diagram, which represent the higher centers. (ibid.)

In other words, the struggle between desires and non-desires is a representation of the struggle between the self and Godhead, in which the self must be utterly surrendered in order to complete Gurdjieff's second conscious shock. The action, in fact, has little to do with man's involvement with the external world, but is rather an inner interaction that has been progressively misunderstood and literalized until the exoteric interpretation focuses on our outward behavior, emotional tastes, and moral compasses. Hence Beelzebub's utter contempt for man's ideas about good and evil. (See Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson, Pgs. 1040-1046)

The question of the struggle between desire and non-desire must ultimately draw a man much more deeply into the nature of his personal manifestation relative to a higher authority. Once again, we encounter a taste of Meister Eckhart's direction here. Or, to put it in Christ's words, once a man gains the whole world (his ego, his self, and his rela-

relationship to the external) he runs the risk of losing his soul in the process.

If we were to extrapolate any further, we might surmise that the impulse of divine conscience, also mentioned in this particular passage, represents the reconciling force or "do" that mediates all of the interplay between these opposing forces. It is, after all, a specifically designated divine force active in all of the three brained beings of the universe, qualifying it for that role. Hence its position in the diagram that opens the essay.

What we see in the Enneagram is a map of the vast cosmological engine in which energy, on its involutory path, is separated from its parent source—the Father—undergoes a painful process of individuation—and then discovers that this must be surrendered if it is to return to the source. The entire process is a divine process—not belonging to man, and mediated entirely through the assistance of the divine, who must intervene (by way of the conscious shocks) on both sides of the process in order to help it along.

Thus, in a peculiar yet instructive paradigm, God intentionally causes man to fall away from him, and helps in the process, but then assists in his return. Echoes of certain sophisticated Christian theologies abound here. Sin—the involutory force—is necessary. Without it, there is no polarity, and without polarity, the movement of energy is impossible.

Here we furthermore encounter a powerful and comprehensive image of one of the basic Gurdjieffian practices: we forget ourselves, and we must return to ourselves.

The Enneagram has this basic principle of inner work built directly into its visual language, inserting the principle into the workings of the cosmos itself. We may feel alone and desperate in our perpetual forgetting of ourselves, for-

getting of our Divine nature, forgetting of the principles of inner work.

*Gallery 3.1 Buddha head,  
Shanghai Museum*



Yet, seen from the point of view of the Enneagram, the cosmos is manufactured with this challenge built into the very fabric of its own existence.

Even God, apparently, cannot remember himself sufficiently—perhaps, in the end, the price that He paid to create the cosmos, and one of the sources of His endless sorrow.



## *Chapter 4*

# WHY THE UNIVERSE WAS CREATED

The fundamental cosmological principles of the Gurdjieff work.

Facing page: M104, the sombrero galaxy

Image: Hubble telescope



# Yes, Really: Why the Universe Was Created

It takes a lot of chutzpah (a Yiddish slang word meaning, more or less, unbridled arrogance) to say that one knows why the universe was created, but in this particular instance, according to Gurdjieffian cosmology, it appears there may be a very specific reason, and an exact explanation as to why it works that way.

Every reader who is familiar with *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* knows the story about why His Endlessness (aka God) created the universe. It was to counteract the flow of time, which Gurdjieff called the Merciless Heropass.

No complete explanation, however, was given as to exactly why the universe was capable of accomplishing such a feat, although (as you will see) it appears Gurdjieff unabashedly dangled the prospect in front of his readers. I am going to offer a suggestion based on some fairly obvious deductions.

The matter is elucidated by the known fact that taking in impressions more deeply slows the flow of time to the perceiver.

Gallery 4.1 Mosaic, Rome



Photograph by the author

Long-time practitioners in the Gurdjieff Work have, in many cases, had their own practical experiences with this, and in any event the phenomenon is specifically remarked on in *Views From The Real World*.

From this point, we can rather easily extrapolate. But before we do so, allow me to remind readers of the principle, “as above—so below.” If this experience functions in this manner in human beings, since we are a model of the universe, so to speak, in miniature, we can reasonably presume that impressions have the same effect on God.

Gurdjieff referred to time as the "unique subjective." (see Beelzebub's tales, pgs. 118-124.) In saying so, he carried on in considerable detail to explain that the perception of

time is unique to the observer, in other words, malleable depending on conditions. (This is, by the way, consistent with the Einsteinian view of the flow of time.) One ultimately wonders why he went to such lengths—somewhere around four pages—to make the point.

So here it is, hidden, as it were, in plain sight:

Because taking in impressions more deeply (i.e., consciously),

and in greater quantity, slows the perception of the flow of time, we can understand that the universe was created, and functions as, the perceptive organ for God. It was created in order to change the flow of impressions into the God-head and thus slow the action of time.

I will forward to you the suggestion that this is the specific action that the well-known trogoautoegocrat, or “law of reciprocal feeding,” cited by Beelzebub manifests.

Consciousness, in all its forms, acts as a sensory tool for His Endlessness to take in impressions, hence the understanding that we are all receivers. The more conscious impressions that God receives through His sensory organ (the universe), and the deeper the impressions are, the more time slows down.

This action effectively extends the life of His Endlessness and the place of His existence.

Hence the essential responsibility of all living organisms to improve their sensitivity and receive deeper impressions. They benefit not only themselves, but the livelihood of the universe and of God himself, when undertaking this work. This explains why the task of conscious beings is so essential, and why God needs man as much as man needs God.

Furthermore, nature is designed to extract the maximum number of impressions that it can—whether conscious or unconscious—as deeply as it can, in order to make sure that the uniquely perceived flow of time is slowed to the

*Reclining Buddha,  
Bangkok*



maximum extent possible. This is why Gurdjieff explained that what nature cannot get in terms of quality, it will extract in terms of quantity. The universe is furthermore constructed in levels so that both conscious and unconscious impressions can be extracted from every level, from the microcosmos to the macrocosmos.

The universe is, in other words, a tool designed for self observation, or, as Gurdjieff called it, self remembering— an activity that even God Himself is engaged in, through the instrument of his creation.

This particular suggestion offers a further explanation as to why so much emphasis is placed on the action of taking in impressions in Gurdjieff's Work: a unique feature not generally reproduced in other works, and certainly not explained elsewhere in anywhere near the detail that he explained it.

Seeing human beings—and all conscious organisms, human or otherwise—as particles in the body of God, sensory particles, as so many teachings do, fits rather neatly into this particular suggestion. The point is that the particles in the body of God have a function related to world creation and world maintenance, as Gurdjieff called it.

The third [obligolnian striving](#), "the conscious striving to know ever more and more about the laws of world creation and world maintenance" (Beelzebub's tales: page 352, second edition) actually refers (among other things) specifi-

cally to this question. The striving consists of an effort to understand the role of the impressions, why we are created to take them in, and the action that they have both in a personal and a universal sense. Students of Gurdjieff's chemical factory (as found in Ouspensky's *In Search Of The Miraculous*) will notice that the taking in of impressions is capable of creating higher substances that reach all the way, so to speak, to God Himself. This, too, fits in rather neatly with the critical role impressions play in counteracting the Merciless Heropass.

*Gallery 4.2 Bas relief, Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



I daresay a careful examination of this understanding may lead to explanations for other peculiar yet significant features in regard to this question of impressions, and their unique role in Gurdjieff's cosmology.

I leave it to readers to further ponder the matter, and see whether they think this particular point of view is correct.

*Chapter 5*

# SERVING THE MOON

Considering the circulation  
of energy, and how it serves  
the cosmos

Tibetan Thangka

Photograph by the Author



Gallery 5.1



The Infinite Light Of The Soul  
Oil on canvas  
By the author

## SECTION 7

# Serving the Moon: maybe it's not so bad after all

The place of the moon in Gurdjieffian cosmology and mythology cannot be underestimated. It plays a central role in the downfall of man's psyche.

Among the many hundreds of references to the moon in his various works, in 1924 in New York, Gurdjieff said the following:

"The moon is man's big enemy. We serve the moon. Last time you heard about kundabuffer. Kundabuffer is the moon's representative on earth. We are like the moon's sheep, which it cleans, feeds and shears, and keeps for its own purposes. But when it is hungry it kills a lot of them. All organic life works for the moon. Passive man serves involution; and active man, evolution. You must choose. In both cases we are slaves, but there is a principle: in one service you can hope for a career; in the other you receive much but without a career. In both cases we have a master. Inside us we also have a moon, a sun and so on. We are a whole system. If you know what your moon is and does, you can understand the cosmos." (Views From The Real World, page 198, E. P. Dutton 1975.)

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It is of course impossible to boil even a fraction of what Gurdjieff said about the moon into a single essay. We can, however, investigate just a few points.

First of all, as was pointed out in a comment on this blog a week or two ago, the root Sanskrit word "Kunda" has direct associations with both the moon and with feminine nature, fecundity, receptivity. An organ— or action— that buffers this might be construed as something that blocks that which is received. In a general sense, it prevents insemination.

In order to understand Gurdjieff's comment more thoroughly, it's necessary to understand that in his ray of creation, both in evolutionary and involutory forces are at work. Energy descends from the sun, passes through the shock of organic life on earth, and moves on to the moon as the end of the involutory process. This is the stage at which man “feeds” the moon in Gurdjieff's cosmology. A widespread assumption appears to be that this is the whole and the end of the matter.

What is overlooked is that inevitably, there must also be an evolutionary force that begins with the moon and moves upwards, back towards its original source; the ray of creation allows for no other possibility; the movement of evolutionary energy is directly incorporated into Gurdjieff's Enneagram, where the right side may be said to represent involution, and the left evolution.

Hence the comments about how an active man can serve evolution. You will notice that even in this case, a man is still a “slave;” and he still serves the moon, although in a different capacity than in the involutory phase. An active man serves the moon in the evolutionary phase as the energy moves back towards the absolute.

This means that in the evolutionary phase of the solar system octave, man receives energy from the moon and passes it upwards, rather than feeding the moon with energy of his own. In other words, we might suggest that an active man is able to turn the moon not into an enemy, but a provider.

It is in understanding the entire circulation of the energy system that we begin to understand Gurdjieff's cosmology, not just an understanding about the downward movement of energy. Just as man receives energy from higher sources in order to do his inner work, so he can— and also must— receive energy from sources below him and pass them onwards in order to work.

Above all, we might say that organic life on earth in general, and man in particular, serve as stewards in the circulation of energy. Because the moon was created by accident, a great deal of extra energy needed to be sent to it to support it in its initial phases of development. This energy had to come from organic life on earth, particularly man; and because he was going to have to give all of what he was in his existence to an entity that was unable, at the time, to reciprocally feed him, it was a one-way exchange. This is

why the organ kundabuffer was originally implanted in man; heavenly forces understood that beings forced, so to speak, to serve involuntarily in such an exchange would feel despair, and refuse to do the necessary work. The only way to get this horse to move forward was to put blinders on it.

In Beelzebub's Tales, Beelzebub explains that it is no longer necessary for man to serve the moon in the way that was needed when the organ kundabuffer was created. The removal of the organ kundabuffer made it possible for man once again to receive the beneficial and inseminating evolutionary emanations from the moon; in this way, it was possible for the law of reciprocal feeding to once again act normally on earth.

Of course, Beelzebub expounds ad infinitum about why this natural process continues to be frustrated, even up to the present day.

Misconceptions about the exact nature of man's relationship with the moon continue to confuse the issue. For example, we need the moon; without it, organic life on earth would not exist, a point made by biologists, who advise us that the stabilizing effect of the moon's gravity prevents fluctuations in the earth's rotation which would cause earth's climate to be unpredictable and erratic. The moon is, in other words, a vital "anchor" for life on earth.

Understanding the moon in the context of its anchoring role and the nature of the circulation of inner energy may help shed light on some of our lunar questions. In addition, readers who follow the link to descriptions of the Sanskrit meanings of the phonetic components of Kunda will find a rich source of associations which illustrate just how appropriate the word is to this question.

Perhaps it's peculiar that Gurdjieff referred to the moon as man's "big enemy." In one sense, this is absolutely true;

if a man is asleep, unconscious, the moon takes his energy and nothing more need be said about the matter.

However, as the passage from Views intimates, a man who makes a conscious effort to take his place in the ray of creation will discover that that energy consciously used to support the cosmos—whether inner or outer—is returned to him in a different way.

*Gallery 5.2 Bas Relief, Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



## *Chapter 6*

# ENDLESSNESS

Unlike many cosmologies, Gurdjieff does not propose a God of unlimited power.

Juvenile Great Horned  
Owl

Photograph by the Author



*Gallery 6.1*

Image: Hubble telescope

# Even endlessness has its limits

While chatting about time (which is seemingly the subject of the week, or perhaps month, or even year... or forever) this evening, a delightful irony occurred to me.

Gurdjieff's God was not a God of unlimited power. He has, for example, no absolute control over time. Yet, even though time brings an end to everything (a fact which Gurdjieff's name for it, the Merciless Heropass, alludes to) he chose to refer to God as His Endlessness throughout *Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson*. Not only did he do this, but he introduced a cosmology in which God creates the universe because time is eroding the substance of his place of existence. The obvious inference is that this could bring God to an end.

So here we have a God referred to as His Endlessness, confronted with an even greater force that appears to be able to bring about His Ending. This strikes me as an exquisite and intentional irony: and no accident on the part of Gurdjieff. The very foundation of his cosmology itself was deliberately planted in dualistic thinking on the grandest of all possible scales: endlessness, or infinity, and zero, or, the erosion and

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disappearance of everything that infinity relies on in order to manifest.

Trapped between the Scylla and Charybdis of His Most Holy Eminence's absolute endlessness and the ultimate, Heropassian threat of nothingness, God is forced to create a universe: a third force that mediates between the two original opposing forces. The universe, moreover, is not just a static object: it is a series of events in motion, a relationship.

Or, if you will (and Gurdjieff also says this) a machine.

This relationship is, furthermore, a force based on awareness. The very act of awareness itself, the act of seeing, is already the whole force that sustains and extends the life of the universe. (Are we asked to subscribe to the anthropomorphic principal? *Au contraire*; because it isn't all about man. The very matter of the universe is a mediator of consciousness in and of itself; consciousness permeates it at every level.)

In other words, the universe is third force. Material reality and its expression of consciousness is third force. To say that mankind is "third force blind" is to say that man does not understand his relationship to material reality and his own expression of consciousness. Instead of living within, of inhabiting, his awareness, he stands outside of it, in a peculiar separation from his natural place and state.

Jeanne de Salzman was famous for asking pupils to see their lack. In doing so, what does our existence consist of, and where is our attention located in it? We have thought: the intellect, the thinking center; and we have matter, the material world, the "body" of the universe. We are usually just stuck in our thoughts. Or, we are gratifying the pleasures of the flesh, and what needs to take place is stopped in our bodies. The mind and the body—thought and matter—do not come together. Even if they do, something is missing; there ought to be a glue that holds all of this together, but it's not there.

What is it?

The driver shows up and climbs onto his carriage; but there is no horse. It has wandered off. The driver, impressed with his carriage, doesn't spend much time thinking about the fact that it can't go anywhere without a horse. After all, it's one terrific carriage.

All of this is a roundabout way of saying that what is lacking is feeling. The sensitivity of emotion that could connect our thinking process with the material of our aliveness is not present. We need to see our lack, to be in front of that question over and over again, and understand that the reconciling force—"the universe"—needs to be created in us.

It needs to be in movement.

It needs to be made of feeling.

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In this way, we are responsible for the recapitulation, during our lifetime, of the entirety of Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson. It is not just an allegorical tale about the universe and earth; it is a mirror in which the life of a single man, from birth to death, is reflected.

*Chapter 7*

THE DEVIL  
WITHIN US

Materiality and the world of the flesh, seen from a  
Gurdjieffian perspective

Folk art Sculptures  
Chichen Itza, Mexico  
Photograph by the Author



## Sympathy for our personal Devil

In Dante's *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil have to climb over the body of the Devil in order to enter Purgatory—the place where sins can be expiated.

Traditionally, the Devil represents not only sin, but materiality—that is to say carnal existence. This is because carnal existence and sin are, at least in Christian conception, inextricably intertwined.

The act of climbing over the Devil's body is, above all, an act of intimacy. The symbolic implication of Dante's vision is that before he can even begin to work to attain salvation, man must become directly intimate with his material nature, his carnal nature, his sinful nature.

The premise presents a striking contradiction to any routinely moralistic understanding. Dante's image—more than a little sophisticated for its era—eschews any predictable religious expectations of abstinence. Rather than avoiding our sinful nature, the inference is that we must be in close touch with it and see it.

*Gallery 7.1*



Mephistopheles

Oil on canvas

By the author

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Taking sin in the broader Augustinian context of everything we do—in St. Augustine's conception, our nature is inherently sinful, because of our separation from God—we must come into intimate contact with everything we do, with ourselves as we are, in the world, in order to begin to approach a place where the expiation of sin becomes possible. So above all, we have to be what we are, not create a construction of “goodness” in our behavior which will gain us merit. If we are bad, we have to be bad: but above all, however we are, we need to become aware of it, to see it. It is the awareness of our nature, regardless of its character, that earns us a place in purgatory.

And this is, in Gurdjieff's cosmology, a specific kind of awareness: not an intellectual awareness, but an awareness that in itself is intimate, comprised as it is of awareness in the body, awareness in the mind, and awareness in the emotions — what Gurdjieff referred to as “three centered being.”

Pondering the commingling of the soul with matter is an inevitability in religious cosmologies, which generally propose dualistic explanations: either Augustinian, i.e., tragic (as in the case of original sin) or Dionysian, ecstatic, when the incarnation of material existence is seen as a reason for sublime joy. Both of these theological propositions achieve their substantiality through their inherent partiality. (One might cogently argue that the tension between conservative and liberal forces in the world is essentially a product of

the long-standing tension between competing Augustinian and Dionysian philosophies.)

In Gurdjieff's involutory and evolutionary universe, incarnation is, conversely, an objective necessity. There is no overt need to reject it or affirm it; it is the inevitable consequence of creation, and must be interpreted not in terms of good or bad, but in terms of service. It is not, in other words, a matter of state requiring action, but of action as a consequence of state. One does not work to be good—or to be bad. One simply works in order to be. And Being does not emanate from duality, but can only be resolved through Trinity.

The ideas of good and evil are treated at some length in Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson. Gurdjieff's discourse (see pages 1034-1046) indicates that the original conception of good and evil was originally meant to describe the involutory and evolutionary movement of energy—downwards through the ray of creation to the manifestation of “I am,” or, conscious separation from God (the prime source of arising), and back upwards towards the prime source through the action of surrender—“Lord have mercy.” Good and evil, in other words, originally had nothing to do with an external agency of better or worse moral nature that acts on man.

Man is, in this cosmology, entirely responsible for all of his action — an important point of the parable about Makary Kronbernkzion. “The Devil made me do it” is a

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worthless excuse, unless one admits that one is, himself, the Devil.

How often do we ascribe the blame for our emotional state to outside agencies? Based on my recent observations of myself, I would say, nearly always. There is the possibility for an inner action wherein the usual reaction of emotion is transcended by an action of feeling; yet this is rare.

Only an unrelenting inner contact with the truth of the situation might serve to convince me of the fact that I am like this. I have to climb over the body of my own inner

Devil, come into contact with all of its parts, in order to know that I am indeed the Devil.

It would be terribly mistaken to interpret this as any kind of moral license. Climbing over the body of one's inner devil is an organic action of intimacy, not a psychological exercise or an excuse for licentious behavior. It involves coming directly to terms with the inescapable, carnal fact of one's organic existence— and is intimately tied to Gurdjieff's idea of a man needing to perpetually sense the inevitability of his own death.

*Gallery 7.2 Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



## *Chapter 8*

# NOT HOLDING ON

Understanding and seeing the balance between essence and personality is a path towards tasting the law of 3 in action within our own Being.

Buddha, Lingyin Temple,  
Hangzhou, China

Photograph by the Author





Photograph by the author

## It's not like that

I recently acquired a new book on Dogen's Genjo Koan—“Three commentaries— including the essential 19th century commentary by Nishiari Bokusan.

Those interested in connections between the Gurdjieff teaching and Dogen's conception of Zen will find this fine book well worth reading. Bokusan's discourse on form and emptiness (pages 34-36) bears, in my eyes, a striking relationship to Jeanne de Salzmann's practice of standing between the inner and the outer— the positioning of the attention in an unattached manner.

Bokusan says, "To selflessly see the inside and outside of the world together as one is Genjo Koan. Here, there is no yardstick with which to measure delusion and enlightenment." (Dogen's Genjo Koan — three commentaries, p. 39, 2011, Counterpoint-Berkeley.) It would be tempting to see the material in this book as theoretical, but it just simply isn't. In fact, Bokusan says, “Then what in the world is Genjo koan? First of all, you should get it right down in your hara. This cannot be done solely by thinking. On the other hand, you cannot

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grasp it without knowing the basic principle. So first I will explain it for the moment in an analytical fashion.” (ibid, p. 13.)

What Bokusan is saying here is that we have to know this material in our guts, organically. But we begin with the mind, because we must begin there.

What does all of this mean in simple, practical terms?

I want things to be like this, or like that. But things are not "like" anything. Things are just like themselves. Each event, condition, circumstance, and object has an essential nature that belongs exclusively to it, and is already whole.

My disjointed inner connections fail to perceive that: when the centers don't work together properly, each one divides the whole world into its own slice of pie. But the world is not a slice of pie; it is a whole pie, and no matter how many tiny slices of it you make, all of them are just pie.

There isn't any reason to hold on to life. It comes and it goes, and it is always here. Inhabiting life involves standing between Being and not Being. This is, in a way, one of the points of the first three brief paragraphs of the Genjo Koan.

I think I am going to get rid of something in order to become whole; get rid of my delusions, get rid of my personality, what have you. If I obtain a spiritual paring knife, and I peel off all the bad parts, there will be a pure and good

"me" that emerges (if there's anything left.) This delusion arises naturally from an essential lack of love of Self and an essential dissatisfaction with Self; if I have no respect for Self, I have no respect for God. Whatever there is is already here.

Respect that.

Existence and non-existence of this and that have nothing to do with the Buddha Dharma; it is not a question of existence or nonexistence, it is always a question of relationship. When I see material—for example, a ladle over the stove, or a flower—I think I am seeing a ladle or a flower, but I am seeing relationships. Ladles and flowers are complete expressions of relationship, and completely represent the arising and existence of relationship. Moreover, I am not seeing relationship; I am actually just relationship within relationship. There is no separation between relationship and relationship. We are all together here in a single complete expression of the Dharma.

The position I am in is constantly moving and requires constant examination. I don't come from anywhere, and I don't get anywhere; I am perpetually here, poised within this flow of events, yet in some peculiar way not connected to them in any immediate fashion. My manifestation has no material substance; it is not grounded. It is an abstraction. Why is this so? I need to keep asking myself that.

Gurdjieff made much of the difference between essence and personality. In his eyes, modern man was far too absorbed in personality; certainly, our media culture reinforces that impression. If we were going to simplify the question, we might say that personality is a product of the outer nature of man, and essence is a product of his inner nature. Essence, unlike personality, has the capacity to be here now. It is not a quality of definition and division; it is a quality of sensation and substance. Essence knows that it is alive, and participating; it inhabits. Every time my own sense of essence begins to predominate, the sense of gravity within life increases. Here and now is a location to be inhabited, not a premise to theorize about.

We need both essence and personality; and we need a balance between them. Dogen's Buddha Dharma most certainly touches on the question of the balance between these two qualities, even if he uses a different language to express it.

*Gallery 8.2 Apsara, Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



*Chapter 9*

INFLUENCES

Essence is more closely connected to higher influences than personality.

Sandstone Carving  
Banteay Srei, Cambodia  
Photograph by the Author



# Influences

## A Christmas Eve essay

An influence is a force that "flows inwards." This relates to the idea, frequently discussed in this blog, that information means that which is inwardly formed.

All of the impressions we take in flow inwards into our bodies, creating an inner solar system — or, if you will, cosmos. So influences can mean, broadly speaking, impressions.

We have little understanding that anything is actually forming within us; because of our inherent abstraction from our organic nature, we don't see how the material that flows into us actually creates us. We somehow take it for granted that we have some kind of mastery over life and its influences, when in fact the exact opposite is true.

A man or woman can choose which influences he will come under. There are higher influences, and lower ones. We can generally see the quality of influences a man, or society, is under by the results. The cathedral at Chartres, for example, is a product of higher influences, as are Beethoven's symphonies, or Leonardo's art. Lower, or horizontal, influences (such as

*Gallery 9.1*



Outer Banks, Kitty Hawk,  
North Carolina  
Photograph by the author

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science, which is of extreme utility, but within the sense we're able to understand it, absolutely limited to the horizontal sphere) are unable to produce anything approaching great works of art, literature, or music. Atheism, for all its belligerent bluster, is fundamentally impotent in these areas because of its absolute denial of higher influences—a blind man that doesn't know he is blind. Or, perhaps, merely a bland man—one without any salt in him. The colossal oppressions, depressions, and serial failures of professedly atheist societies such as the Soviet Union underscores how utterly worthless enterprises lacking any higher influences are in the long run.

The most important higher influences within the range of man's world all emanate from the sun. Gurdjieff made it quite clear that sacred, or higher, emanations all operate according to harmonious, or musically consonant, principles as expressed in the law of octaves.

Take a look at the following remarkable video at the [NASA SOHO site](#). Readers are encouraged to watch the video at least through the first 1:35, at which time they will see the most remarkable thing: an enneagram representing the way in which the internal musical vibrations of the sun interact. This image does not just "look like" an enneagram: it is an enneagram, albeit upside down. That is, a scientific analysis of the way internal waves propagate in the sun does indeed follow Gurdjieff's diagram. These waves pro-

duce "notes", or vibrations, that reverberate throughout the solar system.

Personality is very poor at taking in influences. Being outwardly formed and outwardly directed, operating on ego at the expense of essence, it has no weight or center of gravity to anchor it. Consequently it gets tossed about in every direction by outside forces. One might call it the source of what is "outformation:" a cacophony of facts, ideas, opinions and premises colliding in a bumper-car arena, where there is a great deal of exciting action, leading absolutely nowhere.

Soon the ride is over and we die.

Essence, on the other hand, is firmly anchored. If anything at all is inwardly formed, it is formed through, and in, essence. If we examine the enneagram on this point in some more detail, the relationship may become clearer. More on this in the next post.

In the meantime, it is worth or while to consider what influences we are under. Christmas, and Christ himself, symbolize an opportunity for man to intentionally put himself under the highest possible influences, influences, moreover, with a reciprocal relationship to us. These solar influences harmoniously correspond to man's essential wish, and can help us to develop Being. Hence Gurdjieff's Christmas instructions to his pupils to seek Christ, and call Him to us.

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(See Frank Sinclair's "Without Benefit of Clergy" for a detailed recounting of that instruction.)

The direction Gurdjieff gave was one aimed at inward formation and the development of essence, under the influence of God.

*Chapter 10*

# ESSENCE AND INFLUENCES

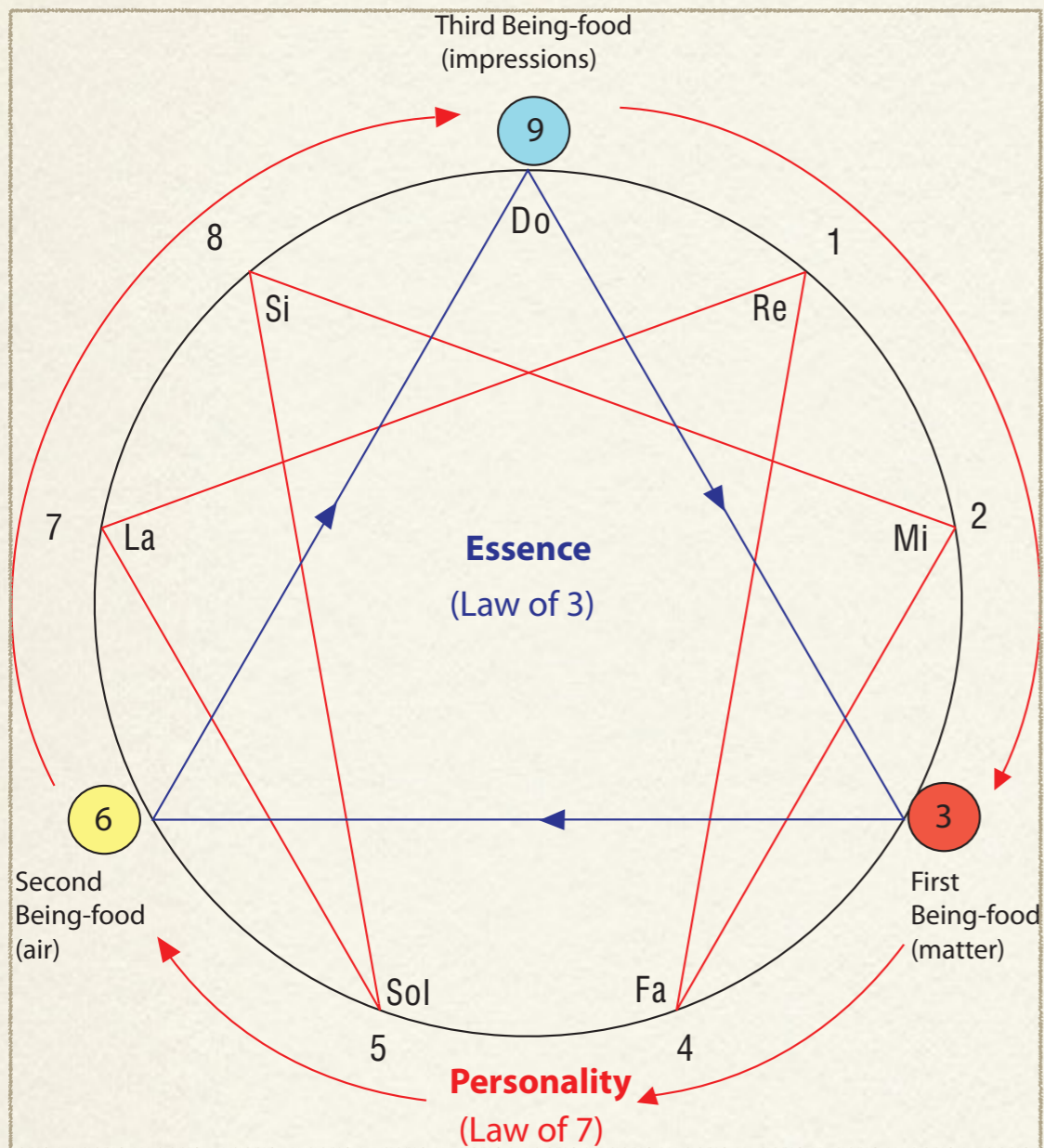
The role of essence in the application of conscious  
shocks

Mayan Terra Cotta Figurine,  
Campeche Museum, Mexico

Photograph by the Author



Figure 10.1 Essence and personality on the enneagram



## Work is essential

The enneagram is not only able, in one way or another, to define and describe all of Gurdjieff's ideas; it's often the best tool for the task. Referring to my simplified and somewhat concise [diagram of essence and personality](#), readers will see that essence is related to the law of three, and is connected to influences from a higher level, whereas personality belongs to the circular, or horizontal, rotation of the octave, and is consequently only able to act on this level. (The enneagram represents the intersection of two worlds, and the multiplications represent the movement of energy within a specific horizontal level. See [chakras and the enneagram](#) for more detailed material on the subject.)

Essence, under the influence of a higher "do," is a stable entity—personality is not. Furthermore, essence itself arises in and carries the influences from the level above us. It is, in other words, directly connected to the idea of a "soul," and explains why all infants arrive on the planet with already defined characteristics, which have been instilled in it in its origins at the astral, or planetary, level. Those interested in the

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ideas surrounding reincarnation (which Gurdjieff disavowed in his writings, but — as I was once told by someone who knew & worked with him personally — actually affirmed in personal exchanges) may begin to intuit more about that question by studying this version of the diagram.

According to my interpretation, the diagram furthermore illustrates that the conscious shocks in man are connected with the action of essence, and that its role in the regulation and development of personality are absolutely... well, essential... if it is to develop a right relationship in its action. Personality, by its nature, has a great deal of centrifugal force, due to the rotating nature of its cycle around the perimeter of the octave. It thus tends to force life outward, away from being, by "throwing off" arriving impressions. Essence, on the other hand, has by its own inward nature an inherent ability to take impressions into a stable center. When Zen masters ask students to know something "in their hara," or gut, they are basically asking that impressions be taken in by essence, rather than toyed with by personality. Essence has a tactile organic quality and an ability to sense which is mostly lacking in personality.

We may hereby infer that conscious labor and intentional suffering are actions of essence, informed (inwardly formed) with the participation of influences from a higher level. No wonder Gurdjieff told Ouspensky that a man's es-

sence must develop — without it, all inner work must inevitably stall.

The three being foods are also connected to the action of essence and the shocks. The first being-food is a physical representation of conscious labor, and the second being-food, air, is connected to the action of intentional suffering. The third being food of impressions is actually a link, in its entirety, to the level above us — which is why, in the right state, taking in very nearly any impression whatsoever, a man is able to sense the sacred nature of existence. The three being foods are, moreover, intimately connected to the action of essence in man, as this version of the enneagram makes clear. Awareness of one's self while one eats or breathes — both essential practices in many spiritual disciplines — are meant to help the development of a deeper connection to essence. Taking in the three being-foods consciously helps essence grow. Need we any clearer explanation of exactly why Gurdjieff wanted his pupils to prepare and eat their food with a right attention? Perhaps not. Let us not forget, furthermore, the central role the preparation and consumption of meals plays in Christ's teaching. There are no coincidences here.

Speaking in broader terms, mankind evolved on the planet specifically to take in impressions of the natural world. These feed both essence and personality in a specific way that ordinary, "manmade" impressions cannot. (Prominent biologists such as Edward O. Wilson have come to the

exact same conclusions, albeit via a different route.) Mankind's longstanding and romantic infatuation with impressions of nature is the residual echo of a faint realization that such food is the most important food one can take in. Nonetheless, it does a man little or no good without the right corresponding development in all his parts.

A better connection between the centers can open the body, mind, and emotions to a more immediate and more deeply essential impression of nature. In moments such as this, personality takes a distinct back seat.

*Gallery 10.1 Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



*Chapter 11*

TRUTH,  
WITHIN  
LIMITS

Everything is true within the limits of its own range

Grace Church, Nyack, NY  
Photograph by the author



*Gallery 11.1*



West Lake, Hangzhou, China

Photograph by the author

## What is truth?

It's commonly agreed that a spiritual search is a search for Truth. The ragtag band of adventurers who set out through the remote parts of Asia to discover hidden esoteric knowledge in the late part of the nineteenth century, of which Gurdjieff was a member, referred to itself as the "Seekers of Truth."

Here I introduce and discuss a fundamental concept in relationship to the nature of truth.

*Everything is true, within the limits of its own range.*

Those familiar with Gurdjieff's autobiography, "[Meetings With Remarkable Men](#)," may remember the story of the Yezidi boy. Gurdjieff repeated this tale, which is actually a parable of sorts, because it bears on this particular question.

He reports as follows: "if a circle is drawn around a [Yezidi](#), he cannot of his own volition escape from it. Within the circle he can move freely, and the larger the circle, the larger the space in which he can move, but get out of it he cannot. Some strange force, much more powerful than his normal strength,

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keeps him inside... if a Yezidi is forcibly dragged out of the circle, he immediately falls into the state called catalepsy..." (Meetings With Remarkable Men, p. 65, E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., New York 1963.)

This isn't really a story about a primitive superstitious tribesman. It is a story about us, as we are, and the nature of identification— or, as the Buddhists might call it, attachment. It represents an inner action in man.

We are all victims of our own view about the truth. Truth exists in a continuum, which consists of all and everything— everything that is. There is no thing that is not true, as it arises and exists, within the limits of its own range. Falsehood itself is true within the range of its own falsehood. A lie lives within the truth of its own lie. There is, in other words, a totality of manifestation within which all that takes place is true. Delusional beliefs are absolutely true for those in the grip of delusion, and this is the story of the Yezidis.

I draw a circle around myself with the truths that I have, those that lie within my range of understanding. Anything that comes from outside that range, that circle, paralyzes me. I am asleep to it, catatonic, and unable to move once I come under its influence. My understanding and my ability to act lie only within the limited circle of "truth" which is drawn around me.

I identify with the beliefs that I have. I think that they "are" me... that my truths are true, and the truths of others are false. I'm not able to see that everything is true. So I react to the things I think are not true.

Even more to the point, perhaps, in the book, someone else draws the circle. So I am not even living within the circle of my own truth: I am living within the circle of what is circumscribed by external influences. If it were my own circle of truth, I might have some power over it; but it doesn't belong to me.

Within the horizontal range of manifestation, I am absolutely convinced that it's necessary for me to live within this circle in the sand and even defend it... at least I think it is. All of our culture and society is constructed on this idea. And it is indeed connected to the action of egoism, but not the action of conscious egoism, which is a healthy affirmation of Being. It is the action of what one might call negative egoism, denying egoism, which stakes its existence on the premise that there is only one circle.

Philosophies and religions draw larger circles, but they are still circles. Any astute student of these disciplines will notice that no matter how expansive a religious practice or philosophy becomes, it reaches a point where it breaks down and cannot explain one phenomenon or another. For example, the religious or moral principle that one must always unerringly tell the truth breaks down if you are a Dutch family during the second world war hiding Jews in

your attic, and the Nazis come pounding on your door to ask you if you have any Jews up there... this is not in the least a hypothetical example. There are many situations like this in real life. A trip the [Anne Frank House](#) in Amsterdam can serve as a compelling reminder.

This principle of encirclement, which is in some ways an action that defines the ego, or the “I am” of any given system, can be seen acting on the level of solar systems and galaxies. Each one exists within the range of its own circle, and has its own complete truth within that range. So the phenomenon takes place on every level.

The action itself is both healthy and necessary, but a belief in the action as exclusive— which is how ego in human beings manifests— is pathological.

The idea of the Dharma as an all-encompassing, or transcendental, truth that is irrevocable and fundamental, superseding the act of encirclement— and thus, by definition, affirming what we might call “freedom,” or, inner action unconstrained by encirclement— is an idea common, in one way or another, to every religion. The idea, however, requires that we surrender our idea of the circle. As with the Yezidi tribesmen, our own idea of the circle is delusional—it is an artificial construct, a fantasy. Outsiders scratch their head in bafflement as to why the Yezidi can't break out of the circle, which is clearly an imaginary entity.

To remember that everything is true within the limits of its own range is actually an active stance that brings us to the threshold of compassion.

When we speak of self remembering, we speak of reattaching the limbs of the self—putting its members back together. The self has limbs, arms and legs, which can allow it to move outside the circle, but they aren't connected. The self must recall that it has them, and know that there is a

circle; furthermore, it must understand that the circle, although it is clearly there in the sand around it, is imaginary and limited.

The man who sees he stands within his own circle and is helpless invokes the prayer, “Lord have Mercy”—because, like the Yezidi, only the agency of an outside force which is able to see the circle can help him break free.

*Gallery 11.2 Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



## *Chapter 12*

# ESSENCE, INTUITION, AND CONSCIENCE

The question of conscience occupies a central place in Gurdjieff's understanding of man's psyche. But what is its relationship to our other parts?



*Gallery 12.1*



photograph by the author

## Can we trust ourselves?

This morning, I was thinking about the idea of conscience, which Gurdjieff considered to be the only undamaged part of man's psyche.

The dictionary defines conscience as an inner feeling or voice which serves as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of behavior. Gurdjieff's understanding of the word does not appear to be that different, but a close examination of his treatment of the concept in *Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson* is well worthwhile.

The first place where we encounter the idea is on page 175, where he mentions that the priest Abdil— one of his early true friends on earth— did not have the property of conscience completely atrophied in him. The result, as Gurdjieff explains it, was that he was compassionate and sensitive to the beings around him.

We encounter the idea for the second time on page 184, where the awareness of conscience may allow men to observe

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the eighteenth commandment of our common creator: “love everything that breathes.”

Moving further into the text, on page 282, he mentions that the emblem of the Society of Akhldanns in the city of Samlios was a statue referred to as Conscience. Among its many unusual properties, its head, remarkably, was "in the form of the breasts of a virgin, meaning that "love" should predominate always and in everything during the inner and outer functionings evoked by one's consciousness..."

Lastly— at least for the purposes of this essay— the critical evaluation that the Very Saintly Ashieta Shiemash delivered under the title “The Terror of the Situation” definitively concluded that the only hope for correcting man's psychological aberrations was to allow the functioning of sacred conscience to pass from the subconscious, where some portion of it was still intact, into the functioning of man's ordinary consciousness.

I draw some distinct conclusions of my own from this very brief recap. (In point of fact, before writing this essay, I searched through the entire text of Beelzebub and extracted every significant explanation about the nature and action of conscience from the text—with some admittedly subjective editing, the document ran to over twenty pages long.)

From the beginning, we see that objective conscience, the only sacred feature still undamaged in man's psyche (sub-

merged in the subconscious though it may be) is essentially connected to a quality of feeling that involves compassion. It is, also, inextricably intertwined with the idea that it evokes a feeling of what we might call objective love. The point is, once again, that love in one form or another is an essential quality in Gurdjieff's work. Far from failing to mention love, he links it directly to the only portion of man's being which might still function properly.

Man has, in other words, the potential to discover an objective love within him.

These statements in Beelzebub underscore the essential similarities between Gurdjieff's work, the Buddhist practice of compassion, and the Christian and Sufic understanding of love. Readers will recall that according to Gurdjieff, the Buddha himself introduced the idea of “intentional suffering,” an idea bearing more than a passing relationship to the question of remorse of conscience.

The connections between compassion, love, and conscience are, in my experience, rarely discussed in the Gurdjieff work, despite the fact that the essential nature of our inner work must inevitably be to awaken the roots of conscience and allow them to participate in our ordinary being. What else are we attempting, if not this? If we are not repeatedly and ever more deeply humbled by the action of conscience, we are not working— not in any sense. This is a question that every single human being in any spiritual

work ought to be holding in front of them at every moment of their lives– and yet it is so easily dismissed.

There is no instant of such dismissal in which egoism has not triumphed over conscience.

This holds true more than anything for those in the Gurdjieff work, who profess to follow his ideas, and yet so often blithely ignore them in almost every routine action we undertake.

It's not that difficult to see when I lack. It is possible– in point of fact, if there is any real impulse to work, it is not even possible– it is probable.

One is left with the prospect that what is actually going on is that I do not want to see.

And this is why it was referred to as The Terror of the Situation.

*Gallery 12.2 Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



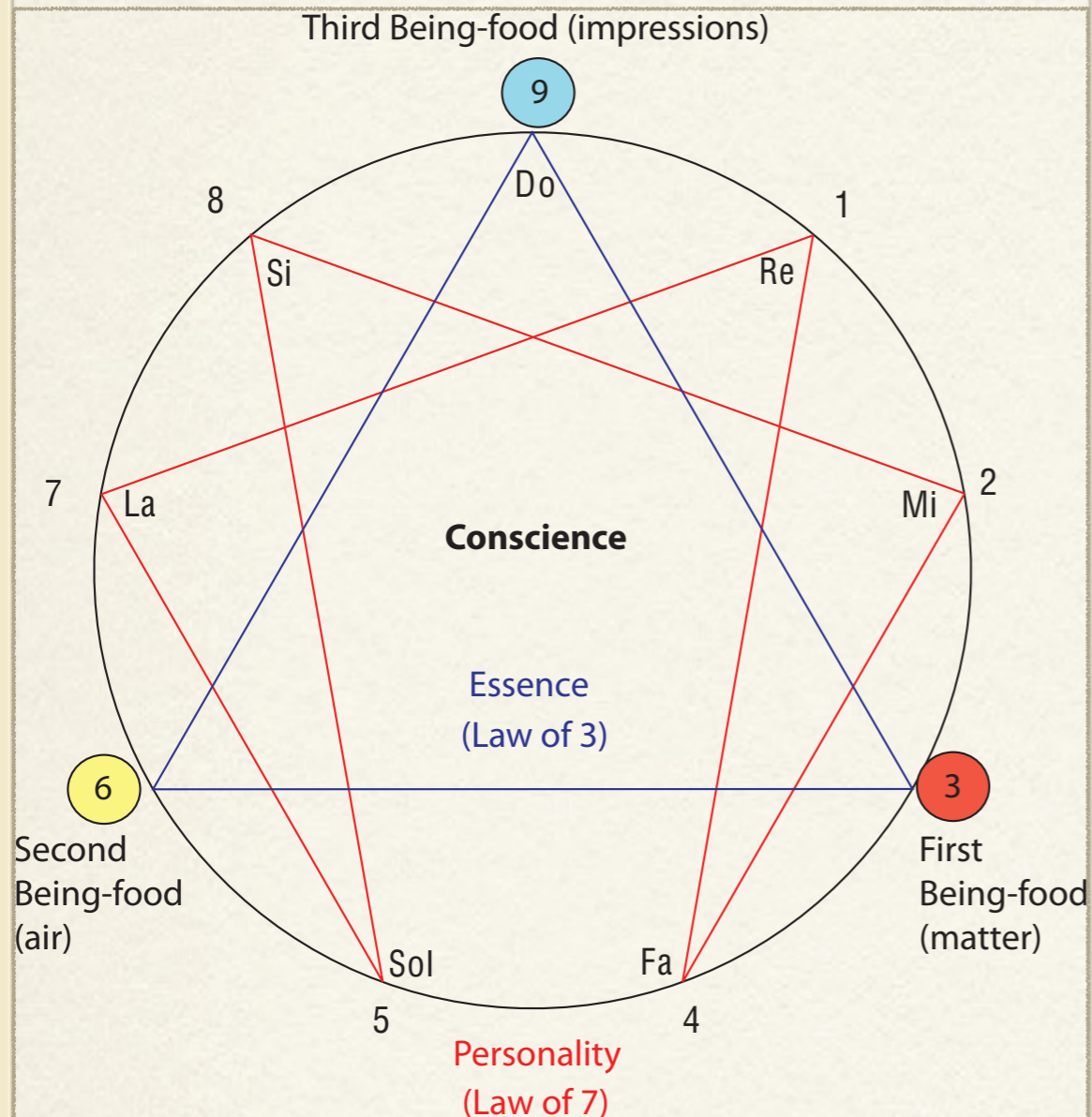
# Essence, Intuition, and Conscience

Conscience is a discriminatory mechanism which in ordinary life—as well as in his attitude towards higher influences—can allow a man to choose what the Buddhists would call "right action."

In late Middle English, the word intuition originally connoted a spiritual insight or immediate spiritual communication; today, we use the word to indicate an instinctive understanding or action. Either way, we can understand intuition as being connected to our submerged conscience. I don't mean this by way of psychic activity, that is, the paranormal sensing of events (as in seeing the future, for example) but rather in the sense of knowing what is right.

Cosmologies without an inherent understanding of, and discrimination between, right and wrong are, in my eyes, next to worthless. The entire text of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* is, by and large, an exhaustive discrimination between right and wrong practices within the sensory range, psychic, and social manifestations of mankind. There is a right and there is a wrong in Beelzebub's universe; having himself fallen afoul of

Figure 12.1 Conscience, Essence, and Being-Foods



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the borders between right and wrong practice—which, by the way, are determined according to universal cosmological Laws—, he is banished to the solar system to reflect on his transgressions. In the course of things, he uncovers an opportunity to delve further into, perhaps, the same sort of questions that plagued his own misunderstandings, by examining mankind.

The general gist of the book is that humanity has, over the course of thousands of years, lost nearly all of its ability to practice such discrimination in a manner proper for three-brained beings. The one part of his psyche—conscience—that man is yet able to trust lies buried in him—hidden—not participating in his day-to-day life. According to Beelzebub, this part may, with effort, yet become reactivated in man, participating once again in his conscious Being.

Discrimination involves making choices. Every human being is inevitably, as a result of events, circumstances, objects, and relationships, required to make discriminating choices in life. These choices play a role as reconciling factors, mediating the opposing forces he or she encounters. And the whole point of life, according to Gurdjieff, is to learn how to make choices that embody the characteristics of responsible individuals. The five obligolnian strivings emphasize it; Gurdjieff's remarks to Ouspensky about the behavior of tramps and lunatics underscore it.

Conscience—and therefore intuition—play no small part in the awakening of such impulses. As Beelzebub says, per the understandings of the Society of Akhldanns, "Every deed of

a man is good in the objective sense if it is done according to his conscience, and every deed is bad if from it he later experiences remorse."

A right attention towards life is necessary; a clarity whereby one sees where one is. Following this, the action of an inner part must come into play. This part is closely connected to essence; essence, as the innermost part of man's psyche, and the one having an ability to make a more direct contact with higher influences, acts wholly in concert with conscience, which has (appropriately) secluded itself in close proximity to essence.

The association makes perfect sense; conscience being a divine impulse, it belongs most properly to that portion of the enneagram circumscribed by the law of three. I thus propose the following addition to yesterday's diagram, placing conscience in the center of the stable triangle described by essence. Conscience must be under divine influence; accordingly, I can't reasonably assign it any other position on the enneagram.

The salient point is that essence, conscience, and intuition have a close relationship to one another. Intuition, moreover, ought to be an essential and spiritual sense of what is right and wrong, not a moral one. Moral choices are only able to describe themselves within the horizontal action of the multiplications and the perimeter of the enneagram. Intuitive, or conscience-based choices, are always born from emanations that originate in higher influences. This is why the folkloric understanding of intuition and its value has always placed it

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higher on the scale of man's understanding than rational thought, which belongs to a different and subordinate sphere.

Freedom of action involves freedom from the centrifugal force of personality; a cessation of erratic rotation. That rotation must be balanced by the counterweight and shocks of essence. Anchored in an organic state of being, conscience can express itself through the absolute freedom of intuition, which in an unmediated state lacks the capacity for error. So in a sense, when we speak of "being free" and "inner freedom," we speak of being in touch with our native, informed (inwardly formed) intuition, which does not need the interference of the mind to understand or manifest right action.

This capacity, like Zen's "going beyond," transcends action of the conceptual mind and the dualistic formulations of enlightenment and delusion. The intuition of conscience is able to strike a single blow that penetrates to the heart of the matter. Meeting the moment, it knows at once what is needed.

Why do we need attention?

Solely to make it possible for this element of our psyche, acting through essence, to be allowed to discover its rightful expression.

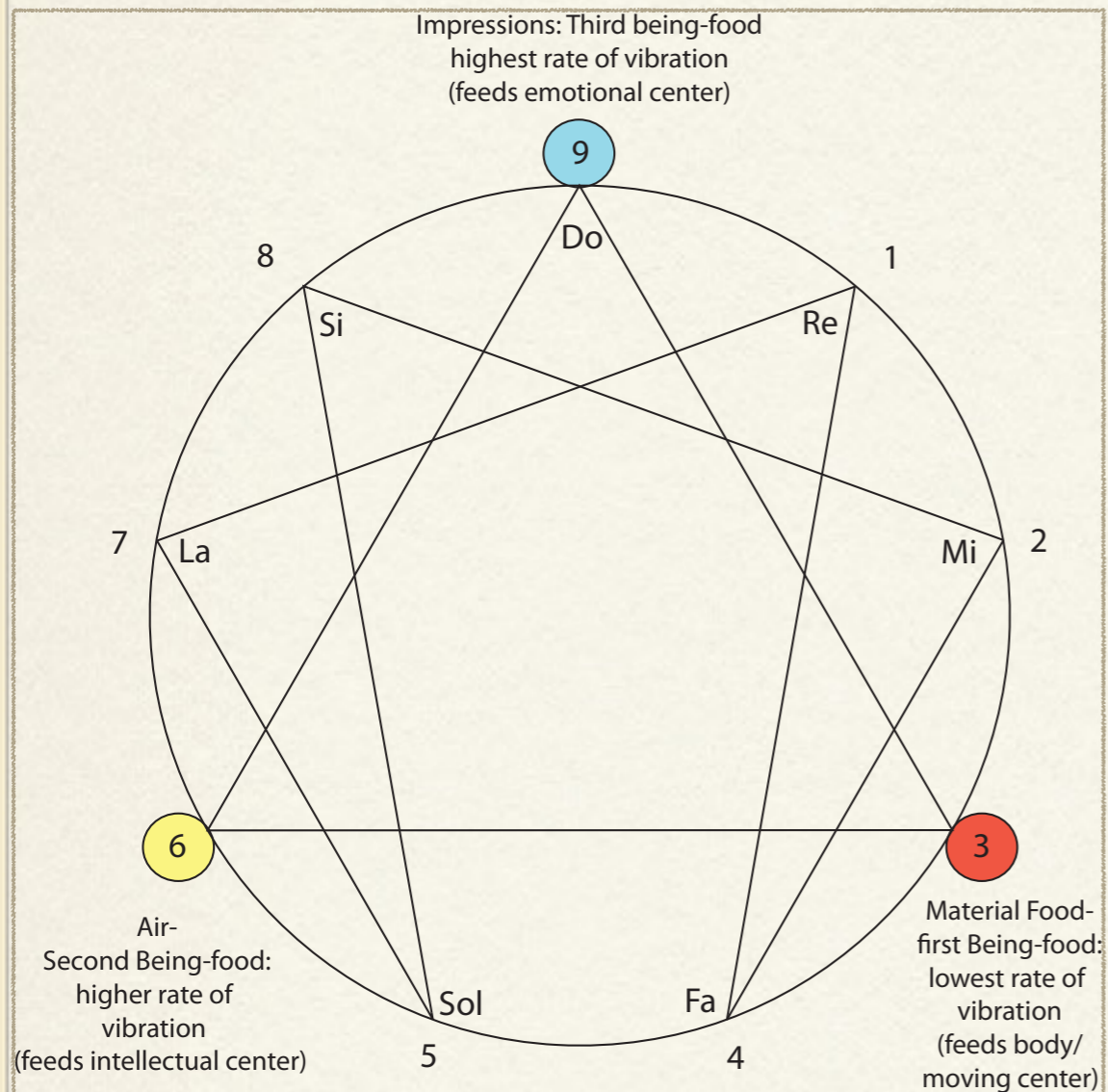
*Chapter 13*

THE  
UNIVERSAL  
OCTAVE

The Enneagram is a model of the universe. But what does that actually mean?

Photograph by the author



*Figure 13.1 Being-Foods in Man*

# The universal octave—or, how the universe gets its food

In my general ponderings about the enneagram, essence, conscience, and related topics, this morning, my questions came around to an old subject—that is, being-foods in man and the universe.

Because, as Gurdjieff taught us, man is an accurate model of the universe in miniature, we can readily understand the idea that the universe has three being-foods, just as man does.

It's not difficult to relate man's three being foods to the law of three on the enneagram, and I have done so in the accompanying diagram. Each type of food, having a different rate of vibration, is appropriate to a different center, whose rate of vibration is at a corresponding speed.

What we see is that each center has a food appropriate to its own work.

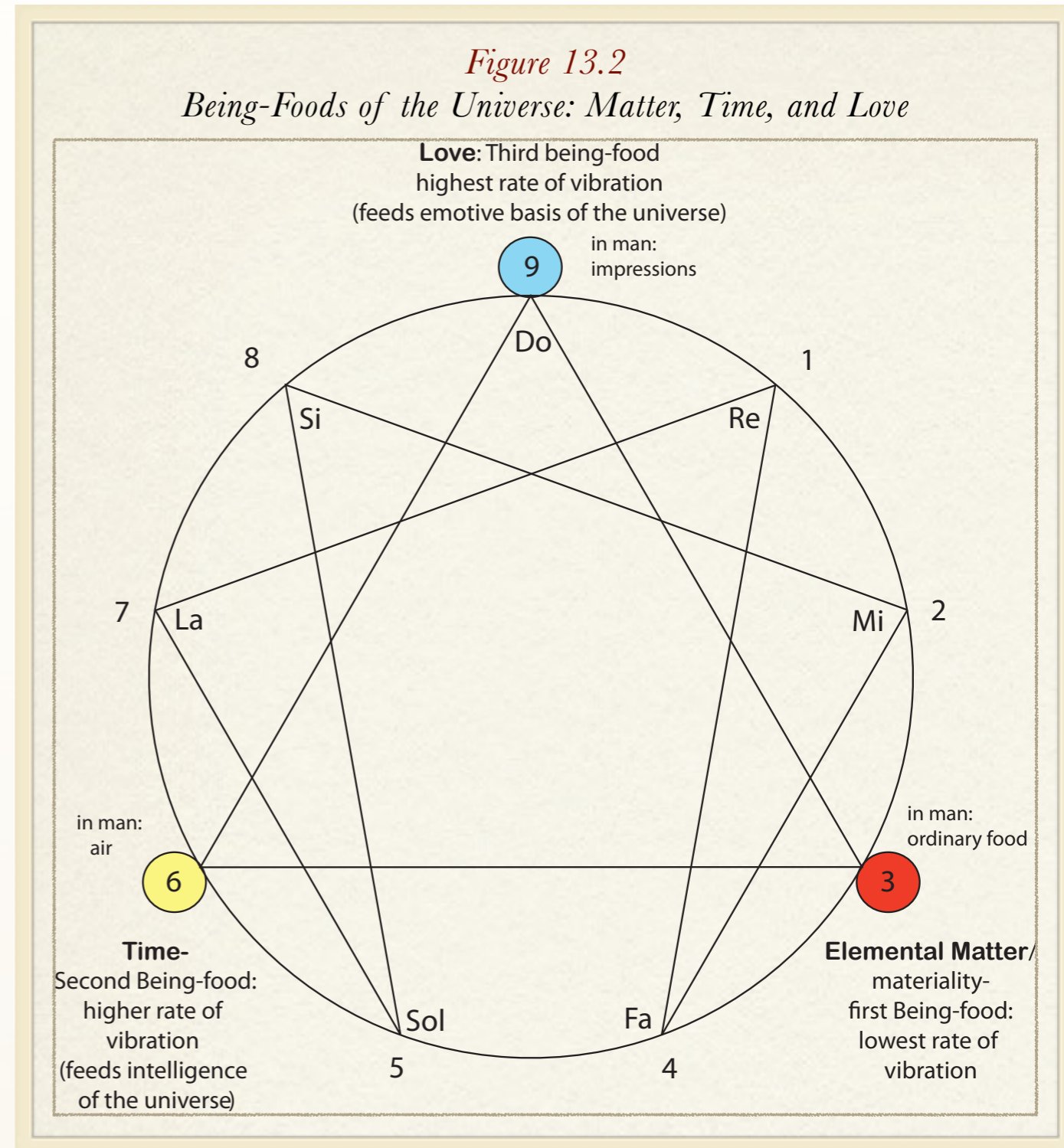
What makes the subject more interesting to me is what happens when we look at the same diagram as applied to the universe.

The creation and nature of material reality, the flow of time, and the relationship between the consciousness of man and the consciousness of God are all intimately connected.

The bottom line here is that the universe, like human beings, feeds on the material around it, and is constructed of it. The law of Trogoautoegocrat– I eat myself– is wholly expressed in the enneagram.

Matter itself–elemental matter—is the first being-food of the universe, the material food of the universe, which represents the initial incarnation of the divine in the flow of material downwards through the rate of creation. It's easy to understand how this works: the physical body, or moving center, of the universe, the vehicle through which all of the universe is expressed, is composed of matter. Matter itself represents the Holy Denying force: energy, emitted from the wholeness of God, manifests itself as its own “I am–I wish to be” – a separate entity from God.

Time is the second being-food of the universe, playing the same role that air plays for man. Gurdjieff said to Ouspensky, " Time is breath– try to understand this." (In Search Of The Miraculous, P. D. Ouspensky, page 213, Paul H. Crompton Ltd. edition 2004.) Given that air is, in man, the



"food" of intellectual center, let's take a shot at it, presuming that time plays a similar role in the universe.

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The intelligence of the universe, its character and everything it knows, develops only through time. It is the progressive and interactive nature of relationship that creates meaning. The intellect of the universe, its ability to see, think, and understand itself, can only be developed by consuming the medium of time. Matter must surrender itself back into God through time: everything submits itself to time, creating its relationship to the second prayer, "Lord have Mercy." (See the diagram at this link for the position of the two prayers on the enneagram.)

The prayer "Lord have Mercy" is located on the diagram at the same place where Time, the Merciless Heropass, acts as the second shock in the universal octave. Time has no mercy... hence the prayer to the Lord to provide it.

The third being-food of the universe is Love. This force is at the highest rate of vibration, representing the point at which Divine Influence initiates and informs the entire octave of the universe. It corresponds to the food of impressions in man; and indeed, in the essay on the flow of time and its nature (see the above link) it turns out that the consumption of impressions is essential to the identity of Divinity, in its ongoing effort to know itself fully. This subject is treated in more detail in the essay on Chakras and the Enneagram.

Anyway, I thought readers would find this line of inquiry interesting. It's far from a complete work; nonetheless, the suggestions are provocative. I have added a complete page

of diagrams of various kinds to my [Doremishock website](#) so that readers can browse through the iterations of the enneagrams I have created in my various essays without having to read all the ponderous material that accompanies them. (I have to confess that I myself find it painfully difficult to slog through endless pages of esoteric material— an exquisite irony, isn't it? ...Just looking at the pictures should provide an easy browsing experience that won't drive you completely nuts, and, in some cases, if you truly think about them, you will figure out much of what is said in the essays.)

In summing all of this up, it occurred to me that it's possible to distill Gurdjieff's approach into a very few concise words. The Work consists of the following efforts and responsibilities, each one related to its own position on the enneagram in the law of three:

Always Beginning (note "do")

Always Working (first conscious shock — conscious labor)

Always Giving Back (second conscious shock — intentional suffering)

These three principles, applied throughout the development of any object, event, condition, or circumstance, are what we might call right action.

There are some further important inferences to draw here from the nature of time, its position on the diagram, and

the sorrow of His Endlessness, but they cannot be addressed in this essay, which has more than enough theory in it already.

On a more practical note, it's hardly a theoretical exer-

We are always in the midst of taking in all three being-foods.

To be human— to be a man without quotation marks— is to sense this organically.

*Gallery 13.1*



cise to try and have a conscious impression of the digestion, breathing, and impressions (especially as they may arrive under the influence of forces above the top of the head.)

*Chapter 14*

DOGEN'S LAW  
OF THREE

What is the relationship between Gurdjieff's law of three and Buddhist doctrine?



Gallery 14.1



Horseshoe Crab, Kitty Hawk, NC  
Photograph by the author

SECTION 17

## Dogen's Genjo Koan and the law of three

Dogen's Genjo Koan, constituting his most essential expounding of the Dharma—opens with three sections:

"When all dharmas are Buddha dharma, there are delusion, realization, practice, birth and death, buddhas and sentient beings.

"When the myriad dharmas are without a self, there is no delusion, no realization, no Buddha, no sentient being, no birth and death.

"The Buddha way, basically, is leaping clear of abundance and lack; thus there are birth and death, delusion and realization, sentient beings and buddhas. Yet in attachment blossoms just fall, and in aversion weeds just spread." (Dogen's Genjo Koan— Three commentaries, P.23, Counterpoint, Berkely, 2011.)

These three propositions accurately mirror Gurdjieff's Law of Three. Dogen's first paragraph describes Holy Affirming; the second, Holy Denying; and his third expounds the principle of Holy reconciling.

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Interested readers who pick up a copy of the book will discover that much of Bokusan's commentary on the nature of Genjo Koan is closely related to this question. Genjo Koan, loosely interpreted, means "the hidden, whole action of impartiality." (See pages 13-14.) Bokusan's detailed iteration of syllabic meaning notwithstanding, the interpreted gist of the title is broadly consonant with Gurdjieff's "impartial being-mentation." And, indeed, a close reading of the text as Bokusan's commentary develops reveals just such a thrust.

In Dogen's Zen, the resolution of conceptual thought, and consequent duality, is attained through the action of third force, Gurdjieff's Holy Reconciling. This is "going beyond."

Bokusan comments: "Buddha dharma is like this. As being, non-being, form, and emptiness go beyond being and non-being, form and emptiness, there are distinctly being and non being, form and emptiness. Sentient beings, Buddhas, delusion and enlightenment are all like this... This is something that can only be understood by those who have departed from all views and attained true liberation. It cannot be seen with the eyes of those who are eager to be enlightened. Genjo Koan comes forth when this eagerness is removed. What happens in the place beyond being and non-being? Only after going beyond do the three realms come together and sentient beings come together. This is Genjo Koan.

To tell you the truth, even when we are deluded we are within the three realms. Even when we are enlightened we are within the three realms." (ibid, p.36.)

The three realms can be understood as three forces of Holy Affirming, Holy Denying, and Holy Reconciling. Only by the action of third force — going beyond — can the three realms be brought together within the manifestation of sentient (three brained) beings. Just like Gurdjieff, Dogen indicates that we are third force blind — we don't understand going beyond. This blindness towards third force is both a central tenet of Gurdjieff practice and an overarching theme in Buddhism.

Broadly speaking, the forces of cause and effect — a perennial question in Zen — can be understood as related to affirming and denying forces. Reconciliation comes through action — and that action can, perhaps, furthermore be broadly understood as understanding. Understanding — insight — is repeatedly presented in Zen practice as a transcendental action that resolves the paradox of causes and effects — which cannot be denied, but are not in fact separated. Readers who pick up a copy of the book will find that throughout the text, Bokusan's commentaries repeatedly bring up points that are very strongly consonant with comments and observations made by Jeanne de Salzmann in [The Reality of Being](#).

This raises interesting questions about de Salzmann's trip to Japan with [William Segal](#), her meetings with [Suzuki](#) and

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Nakagawa, and later consequences for the Gurdjieff work. Her insights — though undeniably and inseparably in a direct line that evolved from her work with Gurdjieff — unmistakably echo Zen insight and Zen practice, and her introduction of Zen-type sittings to the everyday practice in the Gurdjieff Foundation's work must have followed directly on her discovery of the similarities between Zen understanding and objective understanding, as taught and practiced by Gurdjieff himself.

De Salzmann, in other words, understood both aim and practice in Zen, and how closely related they were to Gurdjieff's own work and aims.

*Gallery 14.2*



*Chapter 15*

THE SACRED  
BEGINNING

Every beginning moment arises from influences from a higher level, and is always connected to them.

Stupa, West Lake, Hangzhou, China

Photograph by the author



*Gallery 15.1*



Frog Dreams By Moonlight  
Colored Pencil Drawing  
by the author, 1989

SECTION 18

## Let's start here

This morning, I was pondering the role of beginnings and the note "do" on the enneagram.

Beginnings may look quite ordinary to us. The first note in the octave looks like it's at a low level. We tend to get the impression that when we begin, we start at the "bottom" and work our way "up."

It isn't quite that way. Every beginning is a sacred beginning that emanates from a higher influence. Remember, the note "do" is located on the apex of the triangle representing the law of three. It's actually the highest influence that affects the entire existence and process of the octave. From that initial note, as the octave develops, the energy has to descend and incarnate itself before it can begin its journey back to the higher source it came from. The use of the terms up and down is relative; change in rates of vibration are omnidirectional. The enneagram is, in a certain way, a diagram of a cosmic electrical circuit. In the multiplications, we see a complex field of interaction where higher rates of vibration continually inform lower ones—and vice versa. Energy doesn't evolve in a

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linear fashion — 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 — but in a much more complex one: 1,4,2,8,5,7.

The beginning of every moment, every object, event, circumstance, and condition, is a sacred moment. Reality always begins as it emanates from a higher source. The cyclical process whereby it recognizes itself and then returns itself to the source that it came from is not a journey from down here to up there. It is a journey through relationship in which all directions have a value and each one supports the others.

Our dualistic view of our own lives and relationships contradicts this truth. We don't see that every relationship and direction we engage in—or that engages us—is part of a mutually supportive whole, that in its collective nature expresses the Dharma. The whole point of Dogen's Genjo Koan is to express this wholeness of relationship, which is most certainly part of what we have forgotten when we say we do not remember ourselves.

In a certain sense, the beginning is the most sacred moment of all. If it is rightly recognized and valued, we start out by sensing the divine origin of every action. To truly be aware of this would create a fundamental inner transformation of attitude. That is, of course, an extraordinarily high aspiration which we can't speak of except theoretically.

Everything is under divine influence, higher influence, entering each octave of relationship from the highest possible

point within that octave, and then returning to it. It is the iteration and expression of that energy as it develops that determines a man's right work and right action. When we consider this, we can perhaps begin to glean an understanding of Meister Eckhart's contention that all actions originate in God, serve God, and return to God. In the end, there is nothing but the Dharma—there is nothing but God. Every human being, in the course of all of their actions and their entire lives, is a steward of this sacred process that begins at the first note. Hence the overarching emphasis on service and stewardship that permeates the New Testament in the Christian Bible.

To live in the moment—presuming one had the faintest clue of what that means (and although we talk about it great deal, we do not have much of a taste of this) would be to eternally and consciously sense the sacred nature of Being.

It's a ridiculously tall order, I think you'll agree. Here we are, helpless little "slugs," as Hassein described us to his grandfather Beelzebub. Yet we have a wish to sense the sacred nature our existence and the sacred nature of every action. We're very fortunate slugs indeed to have this impulse.

Everything is sacred. Do we know the taste of that? These are not just words; and the inadequacy of words does not take anything away from the truth here. Man is created with an organic ability to know this, to know that

he stands at the note “do” at every moment of his life. And to know that life emanates from its first to its last instant, in every expression and iteration, from a sacred source.

A right valuation of this could mean everything to our work. Doesn't the world look quite different if it is all precious, instead of something shrink wrapped and disposable,

which is the way most of our culture presents everything to us?

Yes, a tall order indeed. Yet perhaps we could all join one another together this year in an effort to understand this forever arising, forever existing initial impulse and its sacred nature.

*Gallery 15.2 The Dream of the Fish  
drawing by the author, colored pencil on paper, 30" x 40"*



## *Chapter 16*

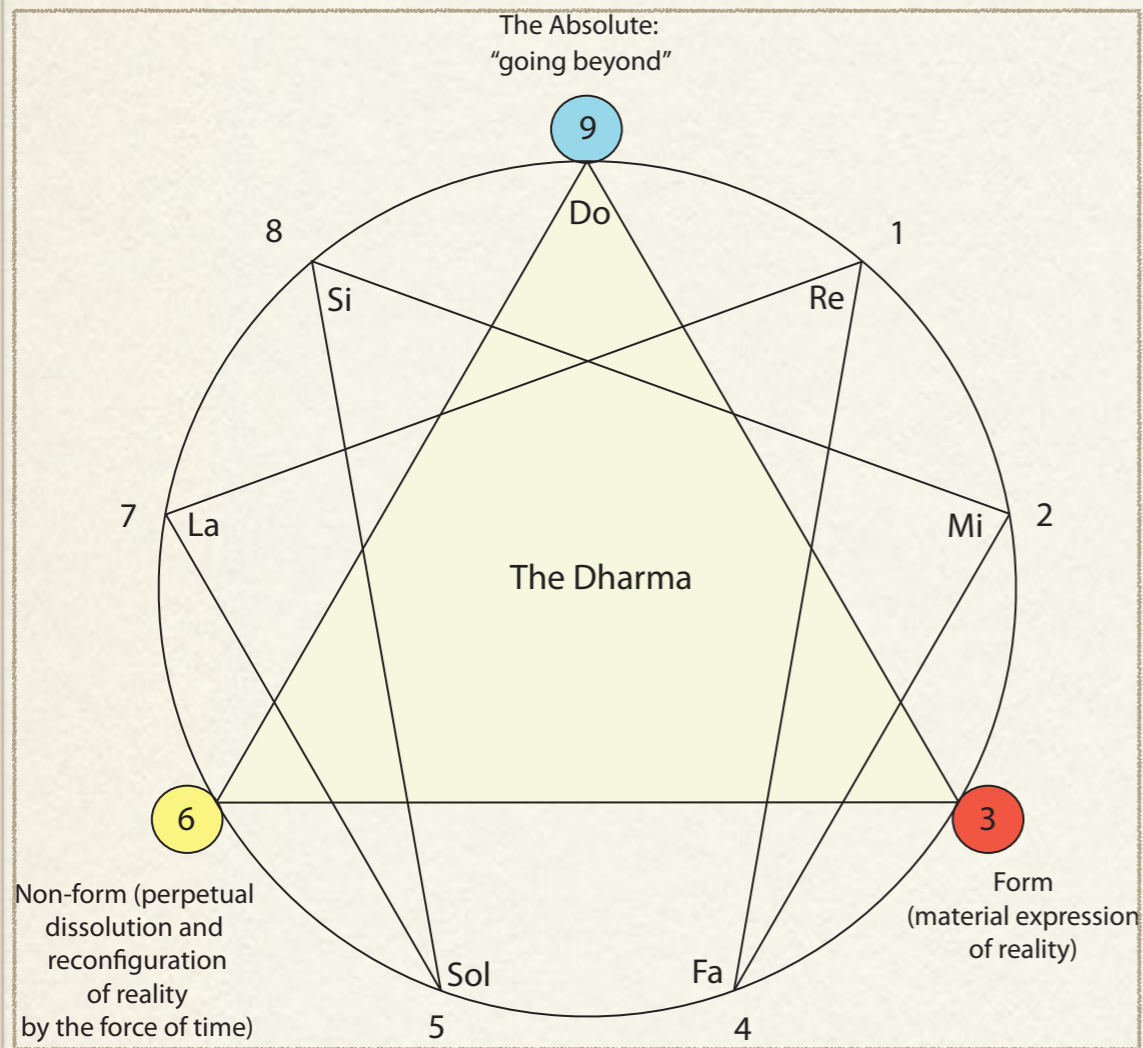
# TIME AND NECESSITY

The relationship between Time, the Universe, and the Dharma: Buddhist doctrine viewed from the perspective of the law of three



# Who needs a universe, anyway?

*Figure 16.1 Form, Non-Form and the Dharma on the Enneagram*



On Jan 1, 2012, I went upstate and stood at my sister's grave.

Less than three months ago, she was still alive. Aside from my own premonitory dream, there were no indications that she was about to die.

Blending seamlessly with the experience of standing there, knowing that the elemental remains of her body were under the earth in front of me, were the results of my numerous recent contemplations about the nature of incarnation and time.

We learn from the story of Christ—and other divine parables—that divinity repeatedly incarnates itself and is made manifest in the midst of man and his affairs. It seems like a special occasion; furthermore, it often seems, the way the story is told, as though it is a favor being done for us.

In fact, the incarnation of divinity is a necessity. The Divine must manifest in the midst of material reality; if there are any cosmological lessons to be learned from the vast expanse we traverse when reading Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson, it

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is that the higher must repeatedly descend for contact with the lower. Not only do all the messengers who visit Earth to try and straighten mankind's affairs out do this; Beelzebub himself recapitulates the process over and over again during the course of the book.

The nature of existence and the flow of time required the creation of material reality, and required the manifestation of the Divine within it. All of this because of the nature of Time. Time inexorably consumes everything; As Gurdjieff tells it, only by balancing the relationship between divinity and time with the material universe was it possible to preserve the nature of divinity itself.

The entire Passion of Christ, in which he ultimately—and unconditionally—accepts his fate in the garden of Gethsemane represents an acknowledgment of the inevitability of incarnation and all its consequences. God accepts his own suffering through expression and material reality in order to make the universe whole. In His effort to overcome the destructive nature of Time, all of God is repeatedly and forever given to us in this sacrificial act of embodiment and, afterwards, surrender.

In examining the history of known religious avatars over the last three thousand years, no other single act has ever more fully recapitulated the relationship between the divine and man, or completely illustrated the functional nature of the cosmos in relation to its ongoing creation and destruction, than Christ's sacrifice. The passion does not belong to

Christianity alone: incarnation and surrender are at the heart of the universal order, and Christ's action, on an esoteric level, describes not just the parameters of Christianity, but also that of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and every other legitimate religious practice.

The Divine incarnates in order to know itself, integrating both the understanding and actual process of time into Its own nature. In the original nature of the universe, before the establishment of the cosmos, Divinity and Time were opposed to one another in separation. A third force became necessary. The universe as we know it is that third force; and in its entirety, it is the complete expression of the Divine, manifest.

Matter is the eternal incarnation and reincarnation of living truth. Here we come close to touching on one of the overarching meanings of the Dharma.

Is this all theoretical? I think not. Go stand at the grave of a loved one, sense yourself, and contemplate.

We are all immediate and perpetual participants in this process; it is not an abstraction, but the immediate expression of every moment of our own lives. Our sensory tools—the body, thought, emotions—are specifically designed to collectively sense the nature of this question and our relationship to the whole.

These questions stand close to the nature of being-foods and the universal octave. They are also directly related to

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the Buddhist investigation of form and non-form. In order to visually clarify the relationship between Gurdjieff's enneagram, form, non-form, and the Dharma, consult the diagram at the beginning of the chapter, which is directly related to the diagram of being foods in the universe. ([Figure 12.2](#))

As readers will see, the enneagram provides a useful visual reference for the nature of relationship in the central questions of form and its meaning. This graphic should put to rest, in some ways, many of the questions about whether there is— or isn't— a form in spiritual work. The question is much like the beginning of a Persian fairy tale: there is a form, and there isn't a form. Both of these things are true, and both are quite necessary.

But there is also something else.

We talk about Time, the Merciless Heropass, as though it were somewhere else, and us not already in it. We talk about the Divine as though it were something other than ourselves, and the universe as we encounter it.

Yet here we are, right now, in this very moment in the middle of everything— right at the heart of the action.

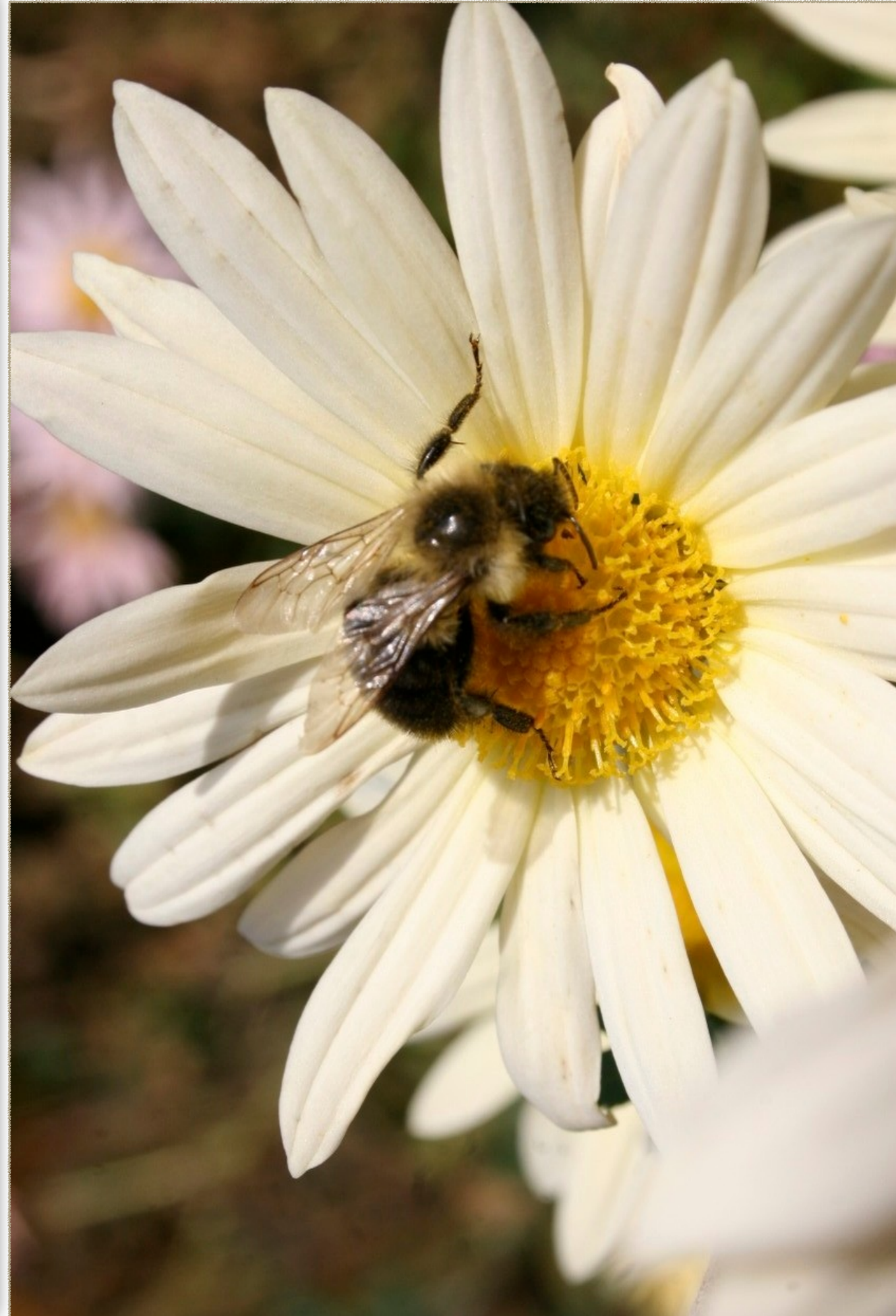
*Chapter 17*

←

# INTIMATE PRACTICE

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An intimate practice is necessary.



*Gallery 17.1*



Lotus

Photograph by the author

## A definite moment of intimate Practice

Intimate practice cannot be put on the table and served. It does not fit in dishes, and is never seen in the grocery stores where we exchange goods and services. The truly esoteric aspect of work is the quiet work of the inner self. It remains ever hidden; as it gains intelligence, it conceals itself naturally.

To hide naturally is to understand. All of the outward self is naturally unhidden; this outwardness is in its nature and is entirely right. The open nature of outwardness is a true nature, just as the hidden nature of inwardness is a true nature. So we have these two natures, and they are both true natures. There is no need to judge them; we need only inhabit them.

To discriminate is to see the difference between what must be outward and what must be inward. Outwardness and inwardness belong together; each must know its own nature and be whole unto itself. Perhaps the great difficulty is that we are confused about this question. To be inward and to be intimate is to practice and to pray in secret. This practice and this prayer belong to the inner nature, and are a matter strictly between God and a single soul. The relationship of the soul to

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God is like the relationship of a wife to a husband, or a mother to her child. Nine tenths of it need not be explained; it knows itself and does not need the knowing of others.

We live in an age where the outward display of everything is routine and expected. Men have forgotten what inwardness is, and don't understand what it is, as the parables say, to drink wine instead of water. Nowadays, men drink water and declare what wonderful wine it is. We compare vintages.

But there is no wine here. There are many glasses, and bottles everywhere, but this wine does not come in glasses and in bottles. Today's glasses and bottles are filled with snake oil.

To be intimate is to be precise. It is to put one's attention on a single very fine point, perhaps something that is very nearly insignificant and cannot be seen at all by anyone else. It is at the heart of the body and the heart of the mind and the heart of the feelings; it is a single, small thing, like the eye of a needle. The soul is a thread that can pass through that eye, if enough love and attention is paid to it.

So there is this opportunity to be intimate and to be precise, but it can't be squandered. It mustn't be advised or advertised. It needs to take place as though one had one small grain of sand between the thumb and the forefinger; it is an

act of love that is found only in the details, and not in the gross movements of life.

It is here—immediately here.

One practices as though one's hair is on fire without anyone else ever seeing it. Practice is like this; it is always within, never coming, and never going away. In the same way that the left hand and the right hand turn away from one another, so that one does not know what the other is doing, eyes look in two directions at the same time. Prayers live in the midst of sin; and hearts are open even though it looks like the doors of the house are closed, and no one is at home.

Men believe ten thousand things, yet nothing we believe is intimate. To understand one thing that is true is to become intimate. To have one thing that is intimate is already ten thousand things and more. There is no limit to intimacy; yet every object, event, condition, and circumstance is limited.

*Chapter 18*

INSIDE THE  
INNER SELF

Do we have an inner self? What does it mean to have an intimacy in relationship to it?

Photograph by the author



*Gallery 18.1*



Chaco Canyon, New Mexico

Photograph by the author

## Where did I leave my inner self?

Maybe I am clueless—in fact, it's certain that I am clueless, in many situations—but it never occurred to me that any confusion would arise between what inner and outer Being might consist of, or that questions might arise as to whether we do in fact have an inner and an outer Being.

The idea of the inner self is, after all, so ubiquitous in religion and esoteric practice that one assumes most of us are familiar with what that is; or at least have an idea that the concept is valid. Yet I discovered that friends and acquaintances were asking me what the inner self is, or even unable to say whether they thought they had one or not. This includes people who have spent the majority of an adult lifetime in an inner work.

Do we distinguish between our inner and outer work? Do we have a clear understanding of the idea that both exist?

When I speak of intimate practice, as I often do, I speak of a part within that is quite different than this part that runs life. It is a part that does not fare well, as [Ravi Ravindra](#) once said,

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"under the cold light of analysis." It is that part that can't be expressed in words.

The intimate practice is the silent part of the self that receives. It is the part that is fed most by impressions; it is an inwardly formed vibration that fills the body. It is definitely connected to the organic sense of being; all of the work we do with sensation, which is voluntary from the exoteric side of our work, eventually feeds and, with work, awakens this esoteric side of sensation, which then becomes voluntary from the esoteric side. The inner self, in other words, with enough food, awakens to reciprocally participate in action of the whole.

This part is sacred and intimate, and reaches towards the higher, pressing against the cloud of unknowing. It is active and sensate; it does not think in the way we think, it does not know in the way we know, it does not act in the way we act. Nevertheless, it is the same as us: it is us.

This part does think, it does act, it does know. But it is quite different than that outward part which is so easily consumed by the events in external life. It is not strong: we have been feeding our outer life for many years without attending to it properly. But it is there, a friend or lover that always waits for us, no matter how thick and uncomprehending we are, no matter how unfaithful we are.

This is a side of ourselves that we, perhaps, do not know or rarely see; nonetheless, it is that most vital part that

prays in secret and is rewarded in secret. It is what writes the poetry, sings the hymns, and mediates the remorse of conscience. If there is an inner heaven to lay our treasures up in, it is here. If there is anything that crafts a higher relationship in man, it is here. When there is exquisite joy, it is here. When there is exquisite sorrow, it is also here. Every real pearl encountered in a lifetime is found on this string, and this string alone.

If we don't know this part, it doesn't make us inadequate, insufficient, or inferior. It simply means that more effort is needed on our part. And this exoteric part of us—this outer part, which so clearly and definitely wishes to contact something higher—well, this is the part we have that can do the work to try and help us connect to this inner understanding and this inner experience. The experience is real and true; anyone who works can eventually come to this. It is said that we can come to this Way through five things: trust, certainty, patience, resolution, and veracity. ([Ibn 'Arabi](#), *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 23, Suhail Academy, Lahore 1985.)

The part that sees is not the same as our inner self or our outer self. This may not seem easy to understand, or be clear to us, unless we already understand a clear distinction between the inner and the outer parts; nonetheless, as has been indicated in earlier essays on these questions, it is definitely a different element in the tripartite composition of our inner life... one perhaps directly related to Gurdjieff's "deputy steward." Jeanne de Salzmann makes this abun-

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dantly clear in her repeated references to the need to stand between the inner and the outer in our work. This place between two worlds is occupied by an awareness different than the awareness of the one world, and equally different than the awareness of the other. That awareness is part of what helps to, as is mentioned in [Views From The Real World](#), "separate oneself from oneself." This standing between two worlds also occupies a significant meaning relative to the work outlined by the author of the Cloud Of Unknowing.

The simplest way to explain this is to refer readers to page 1091 of Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson*, in which he clearly indicates that man has three brains ("center of gravity localizations.") We can readily liken the inner, outer, and seeing manifestations of a man to this system of three minds, in which the harmonious interaction of the three leads to a fourth, "real," or transcendent mind, which according to the Law of Emergence has properties that manifest on a level higher than any of the three brains or minds can when acting independently.

Human beings readily exercise the exoteric part of their being. That's where most everyone is stuck. Monastics and contemplatives exercise the esoteric part of their being, sometimes at the expense of the exoteric. Take note, for example, the following quote:

"In making bread, water represents the active force, flour the passive force, and fire the neutralizing force. Bread is

the independent result, the fourth element arising from the action of these three forces. Each of the three forces is necessary for the bread to be made; if one of them is missing there will not be bread... Once made, bread has a fate of its own."

"What is difficult to understand is the nature of the river we spoke of earlier and the possibility of leaving it so that crystallization can take place. As you are now, you cannot do it; nor do you see the unfortunate consequences of not understanding this idea. It was precisely this lack of understanding that caused an asceticism to arise in many monasteries, where the monks too often exhausted themselves instead of developing." — G. I. Gurdjieff, from "Gurdjieff: A Master In Life, Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch, p. 56-57, Dolmen Meadow Editions 2006. Until the distinction between an intimate inner and active outer nature is clear, it remains as a vitally important point of our work.

In working, do not neglect this intimate action.

*Chapter 19*

OUTER  
ACTION

One cannot just go inside and stay inside.



# Get out there and get a life

It's sometimes said that every religion or work has three natures: an outer nature, an intermediary nature, and an inner nature.

When Gurdjieff described these three natures to Ouspensky, he called them the exoteric, mesoteric, and esoteric circles of a work.

While I was pondering this question this morning, it occurred to me that there are parallels in Buddhism—and in Christianity—that may help inform us on the structural nature of the question. The Buddhists have a well-known saying: “I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sanga.” The Christians refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Either way, there is the idea of a Trinity of investment: the inhabitation of three different aspects.

The inhabitation of three different aspects is a union of three different aspects. In the case of the Buddhists, the Buddha is an intercessor or—an intermediary—between the community (Sangha) and the absolute (the Dharma.) I believe we might

*Gallery 19.1*



Iris

Photograph by the author

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agree that the concept of Christianity is not that different. Christ is the intercessor between the community of the Holy Spirit, and the Absolute, that is, God the Father. In each case, it is recognized that the full inhabitation and relationship of all three forces is necessary, and that a personified, objective, or intimate, intercessor or agent is necessary. (I use the words personified, objective, and intimate because they each have a different nature, and all of them are true unto themselves, within context.)

Exoteric action is the action of the community. We can call it the Sangha; we can call it the Holy Spirit. Both are valid. In each case, there is an external action, an action of relationship in community, which we must inhabit in our spiritual work. In a certain not so abstract sense, this is actually is the locus of work for any Fourth Way work, that is, work in life. So we cannot ignore the community.

Mesoteric action is the action of the individual and the intercessor. An agency of help from a higher level that helps us see becomes an active force in the intersection of exoteric action and esoteric action. We are called to stand between two worlds: and we call on the example, or help of, the Buddha or Christ to support us in this work. It's another facet, another aspect, of the Lord have Mercy prayer. It is also the very work that Jeanne de Salzmann calls us to in *The Reality Of Being*. We are asked to stand between two worlds, to help join the inner and the outer, which need to be in relationship. This relationship cannot arise

without the intercession of a third force— and we become personally responsible for the action of that third force. The two worlds cannot join and create a whole without our action. So we have to exert action in three directions: we are required to exert exoteric action, in the community; we are required to exert mesoteric action, which joins the community to the higher; and we are required to exert esoteric action, which is a deep inner personal effort to come into relationship with the highest possible principle.

Esoteric action is an action directed towards the higher. Of course this is essential, but it is powerless without the other two elements. It might as well be locked up in a cave. And this is hardly where it wants to be. The esoteric has every wish to come into a full relationship with the exoteric, but it can't do so without the action of the mesoteric—that is, our own effort.

I took up this line of questioning specifically because my question to myself this morning was exactly what the nature of the exoteric work the Gurdjieff work ought to be engaged in is. It strikes me that Christians and Buddhists both have a strong sense of what exoteric work in their community, in relationship to other communities, consists of. The exoteric face of a work may not be where the romance lies, but it is what confers cultural strength, and without cultural strength, a work dies.

We must ask ourselves whether there hasn't been a gradual weakening of vision in t

erms of the understanding of exoteric action on the part of the Gurdjieff work over the last thirty or forty years. Gurdjieff himself had a strong understanding of it, but corresponding shocks to maintain that didn't arise, even though shocks that preserved and grew the esoteric end of the work were consistent and powerful.

Consequently, while a deep understanding of the aim of esoteric work and what it means to the individual has grown considerably over the years inside the Gurdjieff community, there has been an overall lack of concerted attention to exoteric work, and there is consequent confusion about what it should mean and what it might consist of.

The Gurdjieff work has deep esoteric aims related to higher levels; that is one thing. But, as the essay on escape from conditions points out, this does not issue an excuse from action in the ordinary world. We need to ask ourselves what our action here, in the ordinary world, on a horizontal level, ought to be. How do we put our community in relationship with the spiritual community at large? This needs to be understood from several points of view, not just the point of view of responsibility, but also the point of view of aim. What is the exoteric aim of the work? And if we don't quite know — well, isn't it our responsibility to form one?

Or should we just wrap ourselves in warm blankets and sit together quietly?

One exoteric aim of the work might be to help other paths see how we are all joined together. (And that is, indeed, the heart of the effort undertaken by Parabola magazine for over three decades now.) We are uniquely positioned at the heart of a higher understanding that emanated from what Gurdjieff called influences "C." At this level of understanding, we're told, all religious efforts are one effort. A compassionate and intelligent exoteric action on the part of the Gurdjieff work could be to make every effort to help all works see one another as one. Of course it's a lofty goal, and an unattainable aim; yet every step in that direc-

*Gallery 19.2 American Rhododendron*



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tion intelligibly serves, and service must be one of the chief considerations in undertaking a legitimate exoteric work.

Because of its comprehensive nature, and its sensitivity to the question of wholeness and partiality, we're in a unique position to use our skills and insights in service to the religious community at large in this manner. There is no need to "sell" the Fourth Way or act as a recruitment center; instead, using our own efforts to understand in light of Mr. Gurdjieff's teachings and system, we may be able to help others in their own search, by connecting it to everyone else's. We may, with the tools and insights we've been given, be able to help put the humpty-dumpty of mankind's religious practice back together again.

Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson is, at least in some measure, a step in that direction; and since Mr. Gurdjieff clearly intended this book to be a serious part of the exoteric, public face of his work, part of his exoteric aim for this work must have leaned in that direction.

The ideas in the Gurdjieff work are like ligaments. Do we each personally represent agents and forces that can help those ligaments do their job to reconnect the spiritual parts of the body of humanity?

It's worth considering.

*Gallery 19.3*



*Chapter 20*

# ESCAPE FROM CONDITIONS

In an inner work, outer action is indispensable

Greed

From "the seven deadly sins"

oil on canvas

Lee van Laer



*Gallery 20.1 Killing Fields Memorial,  
Siem Reap, Cambodia*



## The buck stops here

Today, a comment on the [Parabola](#) Facebook page about war criminals had me pondering questions of ethics, and the thought occurred to me that we are all war criminals.

This may seem like a ridiculous proposition to readers; nonetheless, if you follow my line of reasoning, I believe you will understand the proposition.

My family moved to [Hamburg](#), Germany when I was seven years old. The first week I was there, I met a middle-aged woman with a tattoo on her arm who had come out of the concentration camps. Wide-eyed and innocent as I was, she was wise enough to compassionately explain to me why she had this tattoo. The explanation boggled my young mind. And at nine years old, my parents took me to see [Bergen-Belsen](#), where Anne Frank died; this provided a permanent shock which cannot be described in ordinary words.

In summary, the question of man's inhumanity and our collective moral imperatives has been a living one for me since I was a very young person.

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We begin this line of questioning with the question of whether or not there are war criminals. If there is no right or wrong, there cannot be any war criminals— everyone does exactly as they please, and all things are equal.

If there are war criminals, however, right and wrong indubitably exist. (See the post on intuition and conscience—link below.)

Let us presume there are war criminals. We will now examine this question from the point of view of the Holocaust.

Once we agree right and wrong actions exist, let us propose, for example, that it is wrong to exterminate innocent Jews in gas chambers. It is, in fact, so wrong that one must stop this by any means possible. Eventually it becomes clear—as it unfortunately did—that merely discussing the matter over a cup of tea will not stop it. Only applying extreme physical force will work.

At this moment in time, a man who fights—who kills other men—to prevent this misdeed is not taking a wrong action. So he's not a war criminal. He fights on the side of the right. And the man who refuses to fight is in the wrong on one of two counts: either he is passively refusing to stop the crime, thus becoming complicit in the mass death of Jews, or he is outsourcing the fighting to others, thus becoming complicit in both their death and the death of the Jews, which, one might conceivably argue, is even more criminal.

In other words, to take no action whatsoever and still end up on the side of the “right”— attempting to escape conditions— is essentially impossible. This is the point that Krishna tried to impress upon [Arjuna](#) at the beginning of the [Bhagavad-Gita](#); so it is an ancient question. It raises deep questions about the legitimacy of absolute pacifism from any moral point of view: and to propose or presume the possibility of an absolutely pacifistic planet is an absurdity. Conditions are not so, and they will not be. To presume otherwise is naïve at best, no matter how many arguments get thrown at it.

In our own society— and traditionally, throughout history— if a man kills to prevent other men from doing wrong, suddenly, he is issued an official excuse — and, even more, he becomes a hero. Yet he has still killed.

So apparently, there is an escape from the conditions of the morality of killing, because there are other conditions. Here discrimination pits one condition against another and excuses one evil because it was necessary. Examining this case, we see that even from the most ordinary point of view, that of the human moral imperative of right and wrong, redemption is possible: that there are transcendental conditions, that is, conditions that allow escape from other conditions. In other words, even in a polarized world "limited" by the dualistic ideas of right and wrong, higher and lower principles must exist.

*Gallery 20.2 Bas-relief, Angkor*



Gurdjieff pointed out that we live in a universe of laws, and that a man is always under some law. It is up to a man to understand this and decide which laws he chooses to be under. There is no absolute escape from conditions. Pacifists, in other words, want to escape from conditions, but they can't. All of humanity—being born into this essential condition, which does as a matter of objective fact contain violence and inhumanity— is already complicit. We begin that way. The action of discrimination must become our guide; and we cannot deny at least the possibility of redemption under conditions of this kind.

This is, at least in part, the reason that Europe abolished the death penalty; an action the United States, due to its punitive moral attitude, has not seen fit to agree on. (Ironi-

cally, authorities generally agree that the traditional Tibetan legal system in place at the time the British originally invaded Tibet was rife with extreme punishments and human rights abuses, suggesting that we have sold ourselves a romanticized, Shangri-La version of what the actual conditions in Tibet's religious society were, up until the West and the Chinese began to interfere with them.)

The question of intuition and conscience comes into play here. We cannot control conditions; we can only become responsible to them. Responsibility is a complex question, not easily answered with reflexive emotional responses, which are partial. The reason that Gurdjieff used the analogy of a horse, carriage, and driver (concepts he took directly from an ancient yoga Sutra) for the being of man is because the horse isn't that smart. It's a horse. It is tremendously powerful and can run in any direction with great force, but it lacks intelligence. It is up to the driver to provide the intelligence needed to direct the horse properly. So knee-jerk reactions to the idea that so and so is a war criminal may be appealing, but they fail to examine the fundamental premise. One has to think about these things; thinking, however, is difficult and may lead one to painful realizations that don't fit with one's opinions. Hence, we usually avoid doing it.

This brings to mind a comment that [Krishnamurti](#) made at a meeting in Holland in the 1960's. One man maintained that the Nazis were more responsible than others for the

crimes that had been committed. Krishnamurti admonished the man by saying that we are all personally responsible.

Each of us, individually, he said, is responsible for the conditions. Not some other person.

One response we can choose to make in response to conditions is compassionate action— something that the Dalai Lama would surely endorse. (Highly recommended reading: *Tattoos on the Heart*, by [Gregory Boyle](#).)

So how can one escape from conditions? Transcendence—the action of the higher, third force, a reconciling factor, the Buddhist action of going beyond— is always an action from a higher level. We cannot escape from the conditions of contradiction on this level. Something else is necessary. A divine influence, which has a property often referred to as Mercy, must enter into the action of this level in order to reconcile. At the moment of death— the moment of surrender to the higher, which is the required second shock in the octave— Gurdjieff's prayer is "Lord have Mercy." This is the action that Christ took on the cross when he forgave the criminal being crucified next to him.

In other words, by Christ's example, even as we ourselves are crucified— brutally nailed to the horizontal action of this level— we can choose to discriminate by taking a compassionate action that shows mercy.

Students of the Gurdjieff system interested in the enneagram might here take note of the fact that the second con-

scious shock is located in the "wrong" place on the enneagram. This shock is actually supposed to be located between the numbers eight and nine—that is, between the notes "si" and "do."

The prayer of "Lord have mercy," in other words, must be invoked as man stands at the very threshold of the Lord— it is his last and most necessary prayer before his encounter with the Lord, that higher principle to which we must all answer in the end.

*Gallery 20.3 Angkor Wat, Cambodia*



*Chapter 21*

BRIAR PATCH

Even the Dalai Lama may not always be right...



*Gallery 21.1*



Angkor Wat

Photograph by the author

## SECTION 24

# Time isn't compassionate

Parabola recently published a link to Bob Thurman and the Dalai Lama's discourse on the [Kalachakra](#) on the Parabola Facebook page.

A few of the comments in it are worth examining relative to my recent essays on the law of three and the nature of time.

Thurman remarks ([see 2:40 onwards](#)) that time is, in the Kalachakra, viewed as infinitely compassionate. Gurdjieff, on the other hand, characterizes time as the “Merciless Heropass”—not a compassionate force at all, but, instead, an objective one.

The difference is interesting, given that some of Gurdjieff's cosmology appears to be derived from Tibetan sources. For example, one distinct connection between the Kalachakra and the Gurdjieff work is that, in the tradition, the Kalachakra originated as a work in life (see the “history and origin” section in the Wikipedia link.) The Kalachakra tantra, furthermore, emphasizes the similarities and correspondence between human beings and the cosmos—yet another striking point of similarity to Gurdjieff's cosmology as he expounded it to Ous-

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pensky in *In Search Of The Miraculous*. Finally, we might consider Thurman's remarks about time as a machine (3:50) whose ultimate action is to liberate Beings from suffering. If we are going to characterize the universe and the flow of time as a machine, I believe we can agree this at least presents a more optimistic point of view than Ouspensky did in his treatment of the same subject.

How could these exalted sources possibly get it wrong—or, to put it more bluntly, how dare a slug like me exercise so much chutzpah as to suggest the Dalai Lama and Thurman are mistaken?

Well then, dear readers. Put your incredulity aside for just a moment and allow me to try and explain. While most of what they say about compassionate practice and a positive view of time is quite wonderful, understanding this question without understanding it from the point of view of the law of three and the universal octave ([Figure 13.2](#)) may cause us to fall into the briar patch.

The Dalai Lama is entirely correct in referring to a universal force of compassion; nonetheless, Thurman ascribes this force to the action of time, instead of understanding the action of time as the formation of intelligence, which informs, but does not create, compassion. Compassion belongs to Love, which stands at the apex of the triangle in the law of three and is the reconciling force between matter and time.

Time is indeed a devourer, but this is not a negative characteristic, as suggested in the video. Nor is it a characteristic that needs to be "overcome." It is merely an existing characteristic, assuming—like Love and Matter—positive, negative, and reconciling roles by turn, in relationship to conditions. (In the action of the law of three, these three characteristics are not fixed, but fluid. Love, Time, and Matter each represent what Gurdjieff would have called "completed triads," that is, each one by itself is a harmonious blend of positive, negative, and reconciling elements. Each one has the capacity to express one of those three qualities in active manifestation, as necessary and appropriate in relationship to the actively expressed character of its partner elements in the triad.)

Manifestation and dissolution (form and non-form) are both real, and inescapable, as expounded in Dogen's *Great Practice*, found in the *Shōbōgenzō*. The action of going beyond—an essential Buddhist understanding—is where the question of compassion enters, as it balances the universal forces of creation and destruction.

What can we learn from this?

The law of three never excludes. It always integrates. Hence, every force is folded in to an action in relationship. There is no need to understand time as positive or negative; it is included in the whole of the force needed to turn the wheel of Dharma. It cannot act, however, without relation-

ship to both matter (material reality) and compassion, or love.

Understanding time as a being food of the universe, in the Gurdjieffian tradition, helps us to understand that awareness outside of time is not intelligent. Information—that which is inwardly formed—cannot act or produce a result in relationship without time. One might say, in some senses, that the wisdom, or intelligence, needed to inform compassion is discovered and developed within the properties of time. It's equally true that the power of expression is embodied in material reality. In other words, the shocks in the universal octave describe and embody the three main paths Gurdjieff laid out as the foundations of yoga— the Way of the Fakir, the Way of the Monk, and the Way of the Yogi.

Combining all three Ways into a “Fourth Way” gives us the path of the whole dharma— and Gurdjieff's law of three is the engine that turns the wheel of dharma ([Figure 16.1.](#))

While I liked the video and its overwhelmingly positive message (it's a little difficult to take a position against world peace, try though we may) its overwhelming emphasis on the "total positivity of time" raises some questions for me. To indicate that the ultimate action of time is to liberate beings into their "highest bliss" or their own “deepest reality” may be true — readers must decide for themselves — yet we might consider resisting the temptation to label this as “positive,” since it implies a polarity, an inher-

ent duality, rather than an absolute objectivity, which— like the Dharma— encompasses everything, all Truth.

*Gallery 21.2 Angkor, Cambodia*



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Here, I think, the message departs from both the deepest and most esoteric Buddhist doctrine, as well as Gurdjieff's vision of the universe. To say that everything is working towards a final “positive” outcome, rather than an outcome which is simply whole, appears to be a message designed more for its populist appeal than an objective vision of transcendence. Transcendence, after all, goes beyond positives and negatives—one of the main points of Zen Buddhist discourse, as expounded by Dogen and one, I believe, that even Tibetan Buddhists may agree on.

And we cannot come to grips with Gurdjieff's ideas about the Sorrow of His Endlessness if everything is ultimately going to turn out, as he would say, “roses, just roses.”

Don't get me wrong. I am all for a universe of loving compassion, and positive outcomes. These constructs are, however, inventions of the conceptual mind. In the end, what we seek is a mystery, and that mystery transcends the limitations of our ordinary understanding.

My overall concern here is that presenting Buddhist practice, one of the most deeply esoteric and richest traditions in the world, as some kind of fairytale where “everything comes out all right in the end” may play well to audiences, but has the unfortunate potential to sell both the practice, and its meaning, short.

Buddhist philosophy and practice—like the Gurdjieff work—is not merely a facile means of ensuring a final positive result.

Its aim is to help us see Truth.

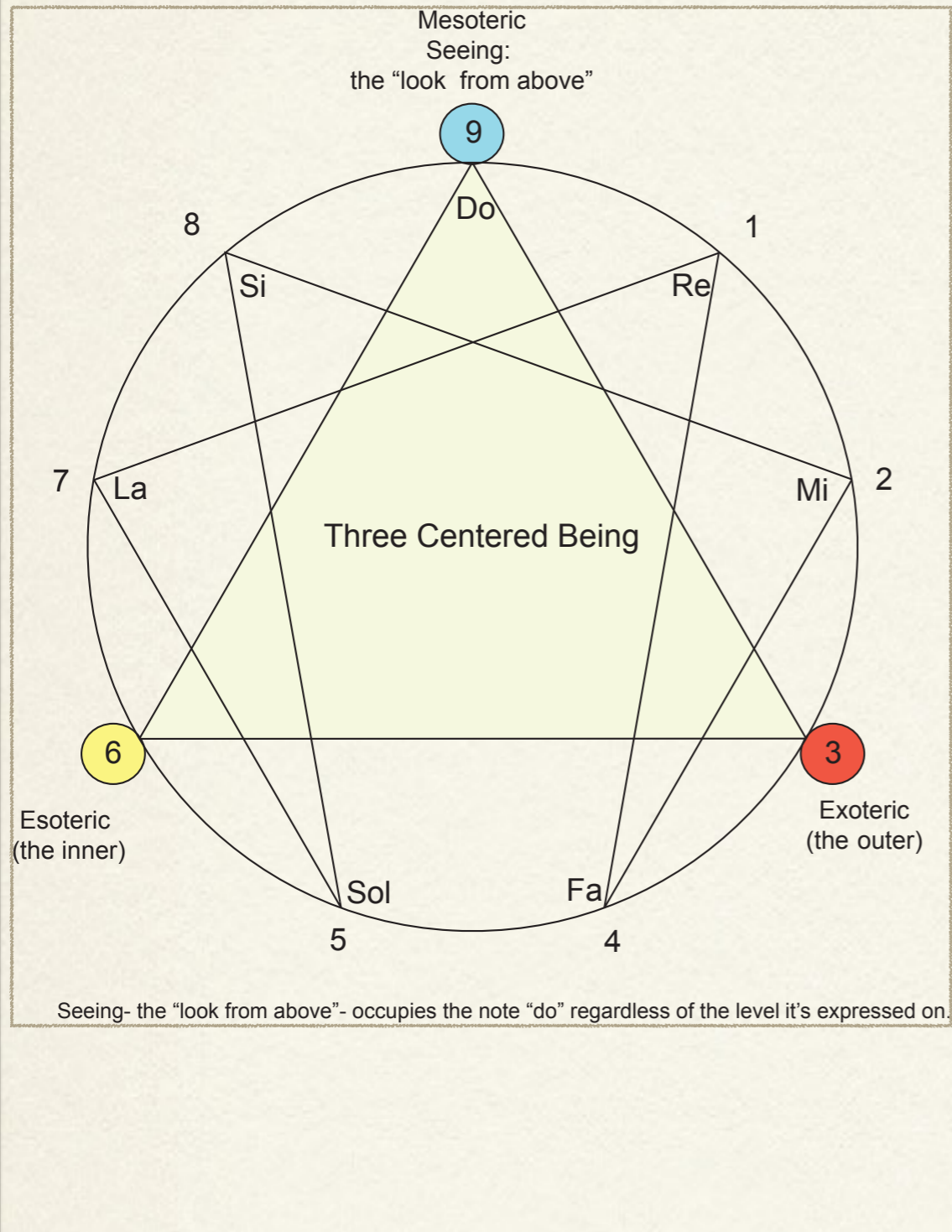
*Chapter 22*

THE LOOK  
FROM ABOVE

Intimate practice and the law of three, as Jeanne de  
Salzmann might see it

Mountain range, Alaska  
Photograph by the author



*Figure 22.1**The action of esoteric, mesoteric and exoteric influences*

## The middle path

The question of exoteric, mesoteric, and esoteric work is intimately tied into the Law of Three and the Way that it acts. Before readers continue with this essay, they ought to take a look at the following diagram of the relationships between esoteric, exoteric, and mesoteric forces.

The critical point of this diagram is that in it, the mesoteric force—the force which stands between and acts as the reconciling factor between the inner and the outer worlds—is found at the note "do."

To stand between—to see, which is the paramount activity which both Gurdjieff and Jeanne de Salzmann called us to—is to occupy this note, this vibration from a higher level, which both begins and ends the octave. Seeing, even on this level, is already at the same note of identity, the beginning, as the energy from the higher level that opens the initial impulse of the octave. (Readers will recall that Gurdjieff specifically told Ouspensky that every note in an octave is the "do" for an octave below it. (See the diagram of the fractal enneagram.)

*Figure 22.2 The fractal enneagram*

Gurdjieff's Enneagram is a fractal structure:  
each note is the "do" for an octave below it.

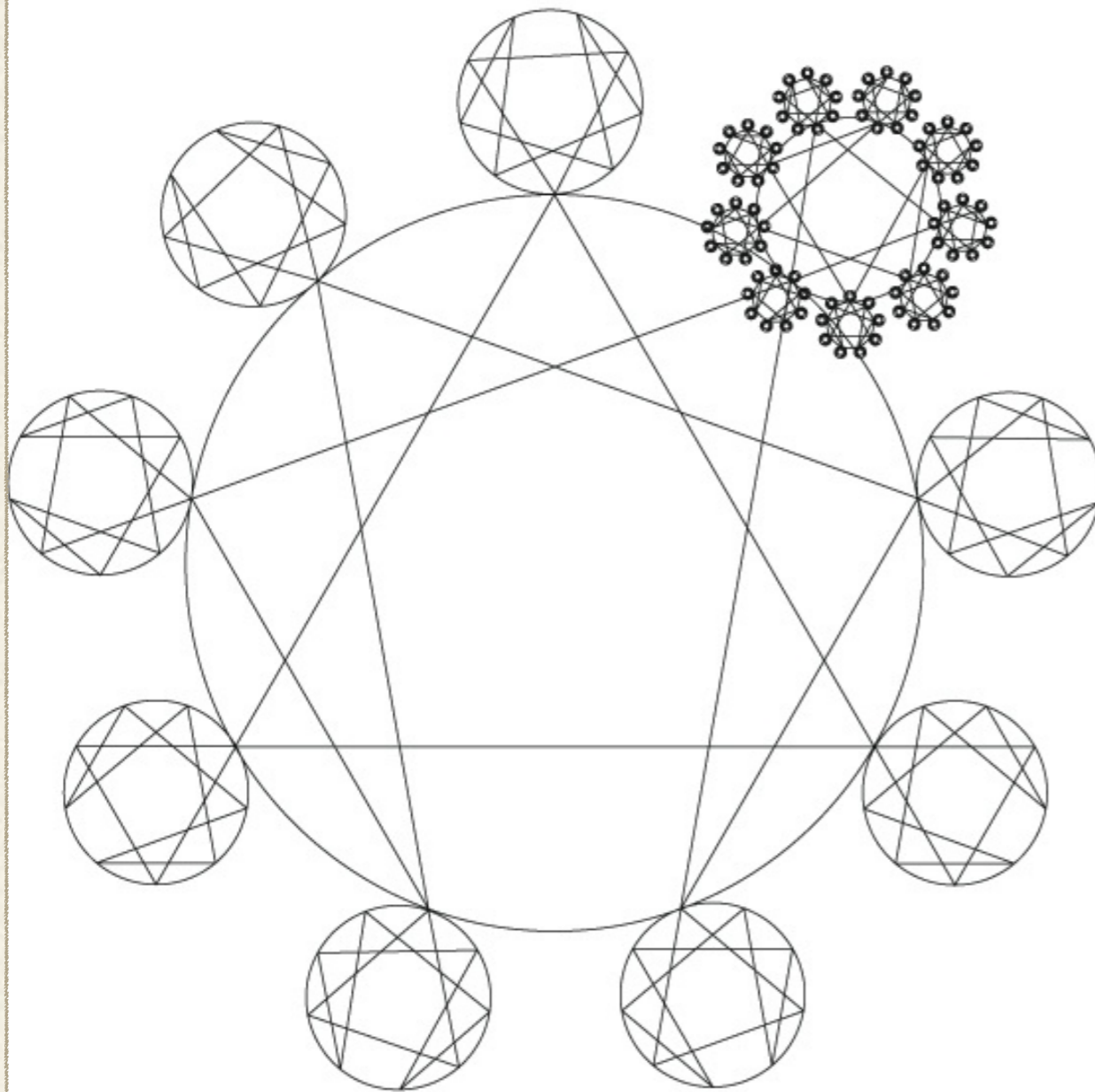


Image copyright 2011 by Lee van Laer  
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So when we engage in the act of seeing, even in an ordinary way and on our own level—that is to say, without any pretentious ideas that we're doing something special from a higher level, or experiencing the “look from above” that de Salzmann speaks of in *The Reality of Being*—we are already engaged in an activity connected, through relationship of vibration, to the entire Ray of Creation—since each note in the Ray of Creation is the "do" for an entire octave of its own.

And the consistent resonance of "do" reaches upwards and downwards through the entire structure.

Astute readers will immediately see echoes here of the many different traditions that do not inherently distinguish between the identity of man or his consciousness and God; the insistence among Zen Buddhists that there can be no essential difference, real or imagined, between enlightenment and non-enlightenment; and so on. The point is that whether or not we are conscious of it, we are (as Dogen repeatedly points out) already representatives of enlightenment—or, put otherwise, share an identity with God.

All of that sounds very nice, but, I'm sure you are thinking, we don't make very good Gods. Look at what a mess we're in.

And that's quite true. The question we face here is our need to strengthen the reconciling force, rather than focus-

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ing on our outwardness or our inwardness. That is done by seeing: an intentional act of attention, or mindfulness. Such action is essential in practices ranging from Christianity (such as the philokalia) to Buddhism. And to engage in this action in ordinary life, at an ordinary level, already creates a consonance of harmony between the parts that can help to receive echoes of the higher "do" that engendered the octave in the first place.

A harmonious blending of the inner and the outer by an awareness that participates creates a whole entity that becomes more open to influences of a higher level. This awareness, or mindfulness, is the essential third element; and the law of three is the engine that turns the wheel of the Dharma, providing the shocks that allow the octave to develop.

This means that even the most ordinary activity, with mindfulness, helps our work. It also means that, whether we are aware of it or not, our action and our being is fundamentally inspired by the divine and is always reaching back towards it, no matter how lowly or confused our action is. (This is a point I think Brother Lawrence might be quite in agreement with.) Hence discounting our ordinary action would be a terrible mistake. We need it— it needs us— and the divine influence needs it as well. In reality, there is no way to look down on the ordinary except through hubris.

Withdrawing from a strong, practical exoteric action— trying to eliminate the ego, rather than help it be what it is

and help our work— weakens the interaction. One needs a robust and well formed outer life for inner work to become whole. Hence Gurdjieff's absolutely right emphasis on conscious egoism.

To be sure, the tendency is to emphasize too much one or the other. It's the balance that counts—and seeing, self-remembering, helps to naturally establish that balance. Without it, the inner and outer qualities of a man remain locked in a struggle that may cost one—or both of them—their lives.

In the same way that this is true for an individual, it is also true for esoteric works. Esoteric works that lean too hard on the inner nature of work, neglecting outer responsibility— which must always manifest as a form of service— inevitably weaken and fall down, because the part that is supposed to be active, conscious, and seeing, has no strong exoteric material to put demands on it and balance the esoteric portion of the work.

Work, in other words, whether for an individual or a community, must be balanced between these three forces. If one loses any one of the threads here, many things suddenly become quite impossible, no matter how sincere the work is, and no matter how good the intentions are.

Subsequent essays over the next week will be exploring the possible natures and meanings of exoteric work for specific aspects of the Gurdjieff practice. Readers must keep in

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mind that these are not conclusions: they are questions, suggestions, explorations. What follows, is, in other words, a work in progress for the community.

*Chapter 23*

TO STAND  
BETWEEN

Do we have two natures? If we do, what does it mean  
to stand between them?

Photograph by the author



*Gallery 23.1*



Photograph by the author

## No Dog, No Buddha

One of the most ubiquitous themes in Jeanne de Salzmans' *The Reality Of Being* is the idea of standing between two worlds. This idea comes up over and over again, presented in multiple contexts.

Above all, it's quite important to see that there are two worlds. Our experience may seem seamless— or we may at least think it is seamless— but it is in fact divided between two natures. When discussing this matter, it's not uncommon to think of the two natures as a "higher" nature and a "lower" nature, or to think of it as the difference between personality and essence, as Gurdjieff might have put it.

It is, however, just as true to understand this as being an inner nature and an outer nature which meet the world, and each other.

To see is not to use one part to see the other. We are not in the business of using the inner nature to see the outer nature, or the outer nature to see the inner nature. What sees does not belong to the outer nature or the inner nature. It belongs to it-

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self. In the same way, the inner nature belongs to the inner nature, and the outer nature belongs to the outer nature. They belong to themselves, not to each other, and although they come into relationship with one another through the part that sees, they must not be confused with one another. If three things blend harmoniously to become one thing, that one thing is different than the three things that engendered it.

Even if there is some understanding in us regarding the two natures, there is still plenty of room for confusion. We may think the inner nature is "better" than the outer nature. It isn't; it's just quite different. The outer nature is equally vital in creating Being. Because the inner nature has definite qualities bringing it into contact with higher energies, we romance it—or let it romance us—instead of understanding it in an objective relationship, which is what seeing consists of. All of the emphasis we see around us today on yoga, Tibetan Buddhism, etc. is part of that romancing. It becomes a glamour, instead of a work in relationship that requires something more of us. The grooviness of it all, one might say, is just the enemy with a nice set of clothes on.

Even more, the belief arises that the inner nature should influence the outer nature, and even direct it. Well, that is like trying to use God as a fishing pole on Sunday afternoon. When we try to make the inner go out, or we try to make the outer go in, we always end up in a mess. We cannot do anything: and when we begin to intervene in this

way, instead of investing our effort in seeing, in standing between, many things go wrong. There are results; they are not harmonious. We need to have two natures, and not try to make one nature become another. This has something to do with the well-known Zen koans about the difference between red-bearded barbarians and barbarians with red beards.

When we speak of seeing our lack, it isn't necessarily a lack of inner Being or a lack of outer Being. Above all, it is a lack of seeing. When seeing is weak, the belief that I can do is strong.

If I see, I don't worry so much about this. I just see.

When I see moss, it's green. It looks like it is an outer event and condition; but it is an inner event, if the impression comes in rightly... so already, even with a simple activity like looking at moss, I'm probably confused about what is inner and what is outer. I need to be clear about the difference between the inner sensation and the inner life, and the outwardness that is inevitably and constantly required of me. I can't begin to stand between these two questions of manifestation and existence if I'm not aware of both of them at the same time.

Perhaps a strong impression arises in meditation that somehow the meditation is addressing this question. Overall, there is a belief that sitting a lot, meditating with vigor, immerses me in what is necessary. It's not so clearly seen

that what this immerses me in is largely an inner impression, which, although it definitely needs a great deal of strengthening in most cases, is just one partial element in a system of three forces.

I don't ever begin to balance this question until I act in life, until the seed of that meditation dwells actively within at the same time that all of the ordinary— and, I would like to stress this, not manipulated— activities of life are carried on.

This is a tricky thing, because the habits of every form encourage people to enthusiastically manipulate behavior to conform. The next thing you know, everyone is walking around with some variety of sage-like exterior that has been pasted over an inner and outer being that haven't actually changed very much. It's quite possible that there are more masks and lies behind the closed doors of the foundations, retreats, and ashrams than there are when two ordinary people sit down for couple coffee somewhere in a shop in, for example, Manhattan.

It is impossible to stand between the inner and outer qualities we wish to nourish, to have any real sense of presence, and to see what we are if we keep dressing it up so that it will look good both to ourselves and others. If we wish to stand between and to see, we must see what we really are. This requires a willingness to relax the façades and just be freer and more natural.

*Gallery 23.2 Bodhisattva, Tang dynasty  
Shanghai Museum*



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In other words, to stand between involves being ourselves, being exactly what we are, and not presenting the "adjusted version" that makes us nicer, groovier, or more spiritually intelligent and magnificent. It's all right to relax within life, and to be there as it happens.

*Chapter 24*

WELCOME TO  
THE MACHINE

Our mechanical nature is not the enemy.



*Gallery 24.1*

Cranes, Jiangsu, China  
Photograph by the author

## Relax. Everything is a machine, actually.

Some may view the idea of man as a machine from a pessimistic point of view; that is definitely the spin that Ouspensky put on it when he reported on his discussions with Gurdjieff.

Nonetheless, what is often overlooked is that Gurdjieff clearly said the whole universe is a machine. Everything in it is a machine. The word itself means a construction, or contrivance, which denotes something invented skillfully, or created. So when Gurdjieff said that the universe is a machine—or that man is a machine—the actual meaning of the word (as opposed to our negative fantasies about it) simply means that man is a creation... it doesn't sound quite as exciting or alarming when you strip all of the nonsense that has been attached to it over the years away, does it?

The idea of “escaping” from our mechanical nature by becoming conscious seems specious to me. Think about it. Gurdjieff clearly said everyone is under laws and influences, and that a man can only choose which ones he is under at best. There isn't any escape from the machine. The whole

Dharma—the entire cosmos—is the machine, and we couldn't escape from it without leaving it.

Just as the idea of a machine is poorly understood (in the Gurdjieff Work, the word is routinely slung about like hash in a cafeteria without being thought about) so is the idea of consciousness. Gurdjieff clearly told Ouspensky that there are different levels of consciousness. Inferences that there is only one level, or type, of “higher” consciousness are ridiculous. Consciousness inhabits a range of circumstances, all the way from the top to the bottom of the cosmos. Gurdjieff's remarks to Ouspensky also make that quite clear.

One can, undoubtedly, become more or less conscious, but this is all within the context of the machine—within creation, which is what the “machine” is. Creation contains consciousness. It is not all apportioned equally, any more than matter is apportioned equally—look at all the empty space in the universe.

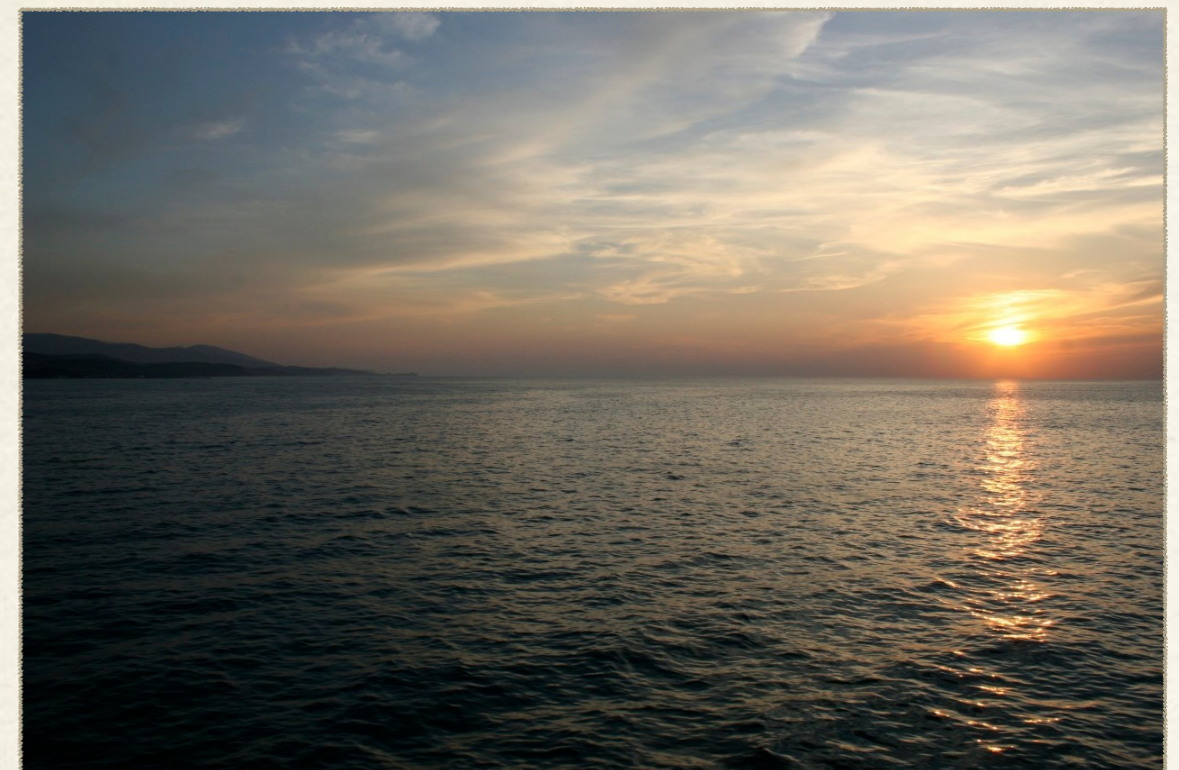
This is a rather long lead-in for a much more specific and interesting question. What we don't see is that our machine—a part of us that acts mechanically, that has an automatism in it—is absolutely essential. We need it. It actually forms a critical part of our inner being—it is closely linked to what supports, oddly enough, our essence.

Think of it this way: our mechanical part, including all our habits, is a part of the inner self. It may seem outward,

because it manifests outwardly, but the origin of all mechanical behavior is from the deepest part of the innermost self. That part is not an artificial or unnecessary part; it is an integral part of what is needed for the interface with outer life. It performs many functions—such as braking a car before it's too late—that could never be done without it. So it is a part of our intimate self, not our constructed self.

I think we can probably agree that all the parts of intimate self are necessary. They simply need to be balanced. When the mechanical part of the intimate self dominates, we are creatures of habit and reaction. But the mechanical part is not the whole story of the inner self.

*Gallery 24.2 Sunset, Sea of Marmara, Turkey*



In working on this, what is needed is a sympathy for, and understanding of, our mechanical nature. It isn't an enemy. It is there to support us. And it is there, whether we believe it or not, to support our efforts at consciousness, not undermine them. The difficulty is that because of its nature, it does not know how to do that. It is up to the other parts in us to develop an understanding of how to help it find its right place.

The culture of critique of mechanicality has, in my eyes, run its course. If we want to speak of a harmonious work, an integrated work, a work of understanding, we need to understand this idea quite differently than we do if we see it as an undermining factor to be expunged from our Being. And we need to understand consciousness as an evolving and changing entity with many aspects, not some magnificent fixed state of enlightenment we are striving towards.

The conventional conception of machinery generally conveys something fixed and rigid; These properties can be useful, but in a changing environment, they quickly become outdated. That's why a technological society throws so many machines away. They don't know how to change.

If our ideas become fixed and rigid, they may suffer the same fate.

*Gallery 24.3 Textile Machinery, Jinan, China*



*Chapter 25*

A BALANCED  
WORK

The critical question is a question of balance.



*Gallery 25.1*



Sheep, Turkey

Photograph by the author

# Koyaanisqatsi

(Koyannisqatsi means [life out of balance](#).)

There are times when the master buries the bone deep.

There are other times when he tells everyone he has buried the bone deep, causing all of his pupils to race around furiously digging holes, when actually, he left the bone right on the kitchen table.

We are about to examine what may be just such a case.

One of the most emphasized principles in the Gurdjieff system is that the work must be a balanced work. He called his Institute the Institute for Harmonious Development. Over and over again, he emphasized the need for three centered work, a work in which all of the centers were balanced. And his protégés—most notably Jeanne de Salzmänn—spoke about the need to balance work many times. In particular, de Salzmänn speaks in *The Reality Of Being* of getting the three centers to work at the same speed—something they emphatically do not under most circumstances.

Let's pause here for a moment and examine all of this information in the context of what Gurdjieff told Ouspensky about the wrong location of the second shock in the enneagram. The shock, he said, lawfully comes between the notes "Si" and "Do." The diagram, however, "wrongly" locates it between "Sol" and "La."

Aside from his cryptic remarks about the fact that the wrong location indicated the type of work that was necessary for the second shock, Gurdjieff never elaborated on this. Longtime readers of my material may recall that in the past, I've offered a few possibilities for what he meant by that remark.

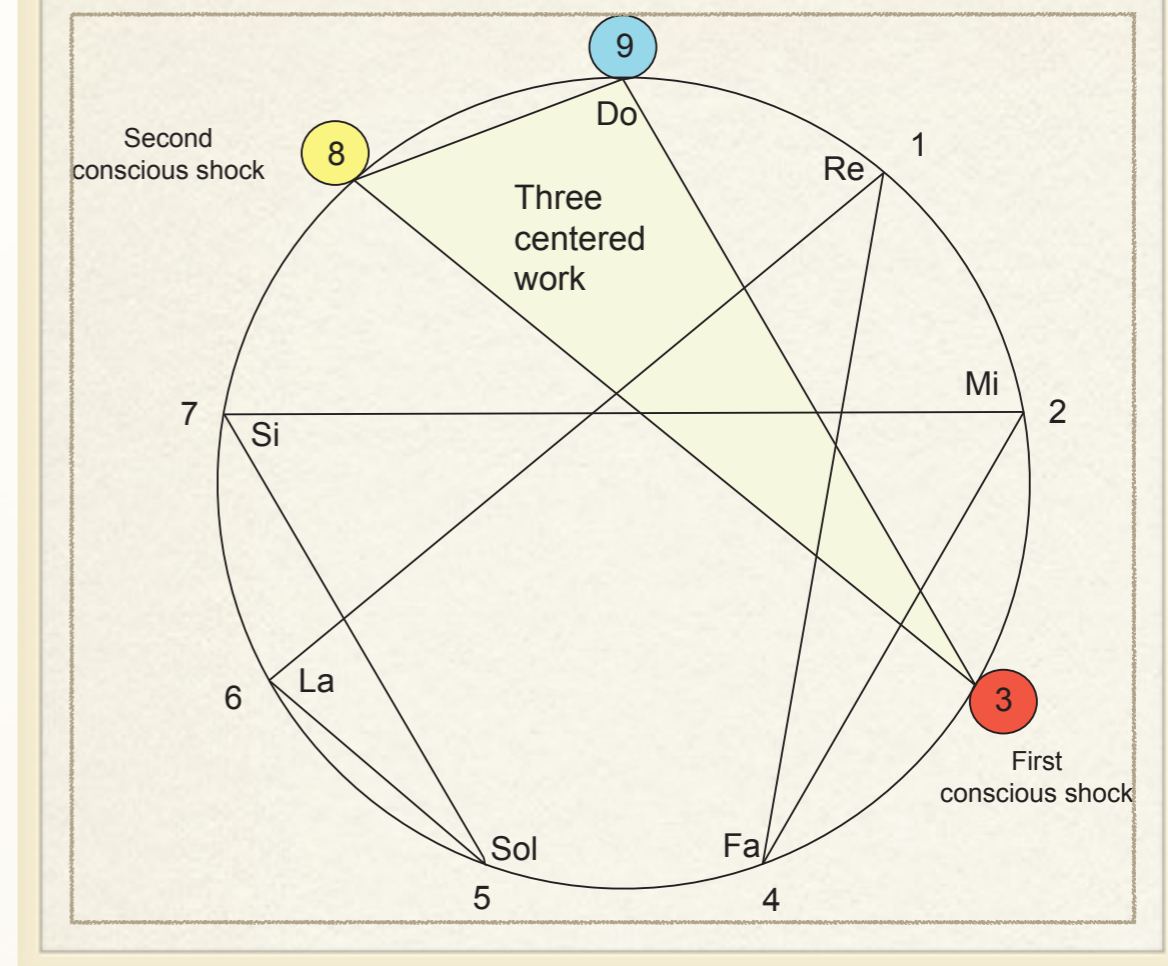
Today, I'm going to offer what is perhaps a simpler and more obvious one.

Take a look at the diagram of what the enneagram looks like when you locate the shock in the *correct* place. It's not a pretty sight, is it?

Let's take a brief excursion into what symbols are for. Symbols are meant to represent abstractions of principles; they are not literal, but, literally, figurative interpretations of ideas. Symbols commonly undergo manipulation in order to more effectively express ideas that cannot be expressed literally.

The simplest possible explanation of what Gurdjieff was trying to get Ouspensky to understand when he talked

*Figure 25.1 The accurate—but distressingly unbalanced—Enneagram*



about the shock being located in the "wrong" place on the diagram is that the type of work that is necessary to pass from "Si" to "Do" is a balanced work. The placement of the shock, in other words, creates a symmetrical and balanced diagram that properly represents the law of three functioning in a balanced way, instead of indicating one-sided or lopsided development of centers.

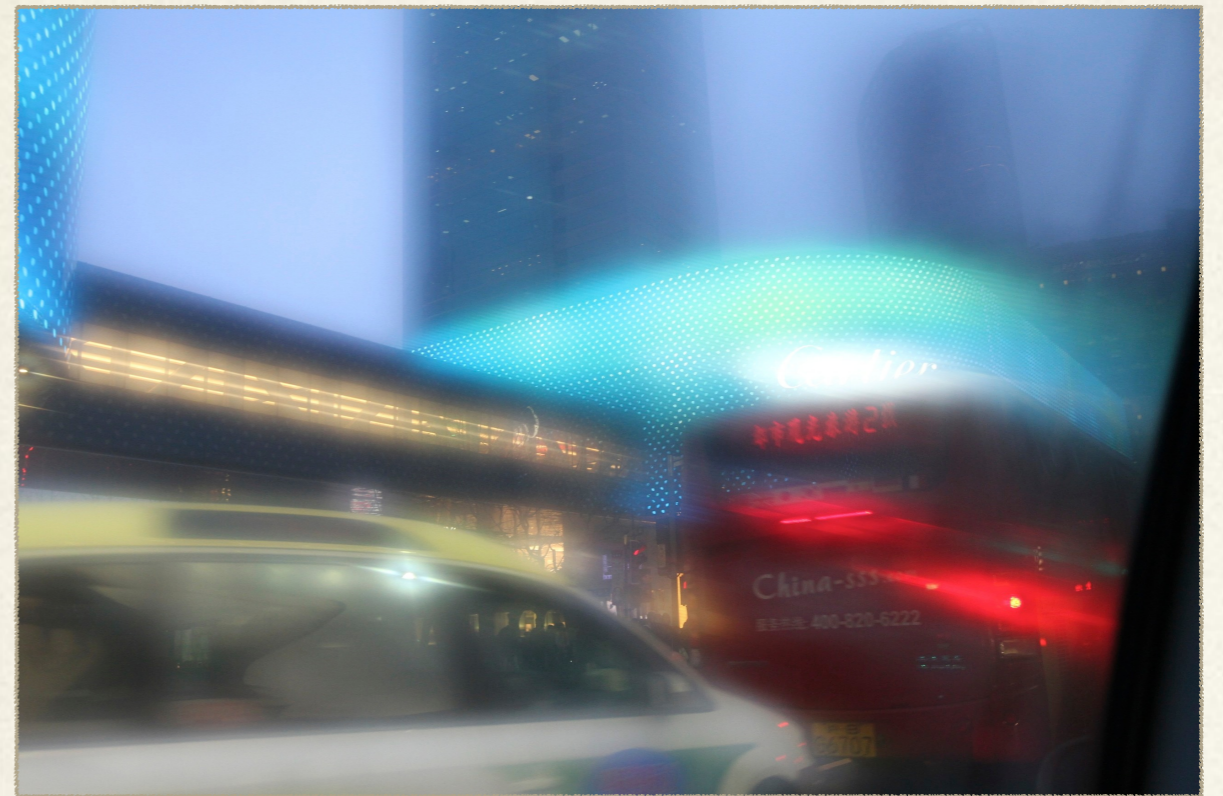
The symbol is absolutely worthless if you draw it literally. It isn't even a symbol anymore: it's a mish-mosh which con-

veys gibberish instead of harmony. So there is no choice in the matter: in order to create an effective symbol of inner work that is harmoniously balanced, the shock must be located where it is. There are no special esoteric secrets connected to this; the esoteric secret is right here on the kitchen table, where no one notices it—exactly like every other truth in life.

I suppose some may think it a bit sad to have to take this mysterious question and reduce it to such a simple point of view—especially those on an endless quest for secret magical knowledge—, but it's actually not simple at all. The most essential problem we all have in our work is that we aren't well-balanced. We aren't harmonious. And we need to keep that question in front of us at all times.

Seeing our lack is, in part, observing that imbalance up close and first-hand.

*Gallery 25.2 Shanghai street scene*



*Chapter 26*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Lee van Laer was born in Yonkers, New York, in 1955, and spent a good deal of his childhood in Hamburg, Germany. He has spent the majority of his adult life in the Gurdjieff work, and is an active associate of the New York Gurdjieff foundation. During his years at the foundation, he has had the privilege of studying and working with many people who knew Gurdjieff personally, and stands in a direct line of transmission of the teachings.

Mr. van Laer is an import professional by trade, and has traveled extensively worldwide, particularly in the Far East. He holds a degree in fine art from St. Lawrence University, and is a fine artist, musician, photographer, poet, and writer.

At the time of publication, he is the active poetry editor for Parabola magazine ( [www.Parabola.org](http://www.Parabola.org)).

Mr. van Laer's principal web site is at [www.nefersweetie.com](http://www.nefersweetie.com). His blog is at [www.zenyogagurdjieff.blogspot.com](http://www.zenyogagurdjieff.blogspot.com).