

Meeting on 9 September 1948

GURDJIEFF

Livingston Hall, London UK

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About sixty years ago a small group of people came together in the Caucasus to study two questions: firstly, to verify or disprove the reality of what are sometimes called supernatural or super-normal phenomena and, secondly, to enquire whether the traditional knowledge about such phenomena which were supposed to exist in the East still existed and could be found.

Out of this gradually a society formed which took the name '*Seekers of the Truth*'. That group grew to something like forty members at its maximum and comprised a number of very remarkable people – specialists in a number of domains. These were very experienced and well-known explorers and travelers, archaeologists, historians, doctors, engineers, chemists and other scientists. The group began a series of researches to try to find an answer to these two questions, and they continued to work for something like twenty years. They organized expeditions: some were very big and important expeditions lasting as long as two years and in which as many as thirty to forty people took part. Some were smaller expeditions with just a couple of people going out to investigate some particular line which had suggested itself. They visited Egypt, Abyssinia and other parts of Africa and nearly all parts of Asia: Turkestan, Tibet, China, India, Arabia, Persia, the Near East and also the Far East. They even sent an expedition as far as Australia and the Polynesian islands.

Their travels and searches were only one part of their work; they also made very intensive documentary studies. Among the members of this group they knew at least forty different languages. They studied ancient and medieval literature of nearly all the countries of the East, very often in difficult manuscripts – difficult to procure and difficult to read. With the help of the indications from these studies they planned their expeditions. More often than not, these were quite fruitless: either no trace remained of the ancient schools they hoped to find, or the documents themselves proved to have been erroneous and misleading.

But gradually their work began to give results. Little by little they learned of points of contact from which they were able to make more definite plans for their journeys. Several times it happened that, apparently quite by accident, they met very remarkable people – sometimes individuals, sometimes communities living together in a monastery – and sometimes (this happened twice or at the most three times) they came in contact with very ancient brotherhoods, with an organization of perhaps several monasteries situated in different countries. They were able to enter the monasteries of Christian orders, of Moslem, Buddhist, Lamaist, Hindu and Chinese monks. They met solitary dervishes and Buddhist recluses. They even finally came into direct touch with a very ancient brotherhood that was not connected with any one religion, but accepted people from any

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religion, provided they were searching after the truth. Through these contacts and from these very remarkable people they met, they began to collect knowledge about the history of mankind and about the traditions, some going back thousands of years, of former epochs. They were able to learn about special arts, like music, dancing, painting, sculpture. They learned quite new facts about sciences like astronomy, physiology, psychology. They were able to find information about special methods of developing the higher possibilities inherent in the human nature. Little by little all that they learned began to form a definite pattern, so that they were able to recognize that the knowledge which they gained from many different sources all led to a single and coherent system of ideas about man and his place in the universe. The pattern was by no means evident from the first, but became clearer and clearer until in the early years of this century they realized that they had found as much as it was possible to find. I think that this conviction finally crystallized in their minds when at last they reached a school, or brotherhood, on a very high level beyond which they realized it was impossible for them to penetrate. Indeed, they were not then able to penetrate to the heart of this brotherhood.

From that time members of the Group – *Seekers of the Truth* – undertook various kinds of tasks for themselves. In the course of their very difficult travels some were killed. For example, one of the most difficult journeys which they took was a journey into the most terrible desert in the world, the Gobi desert, to find the remains of the city of Gob. This place had never been reached by any explorers. In this expedition one of their most valuable members was killed. They made journeys across the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush. In one of these, two of them were killed by an avalanche; others of them grew old. In various ways they lost members of their group. One of them was the famous Professor of Archaeology Skridlov who remained in one of the monasteries. Another was the famous Russian explorer, Prince Yuri Lubovedsky, who had travelled all over the world. He also remained and entered a monastery, in fact, one of the highest orders, about which I have spoken. Another became the Assistant Prior of the Essence Order, which is one of the oldest brotherhoods in the world. It goes back 1,000 years before Christ, and it is said that some of the disciples of Christ were trained by them.

Others, taking the knowledge they had gained, undertook various tasks. One of them learned that his task was to transmit this knowledge which had been gained to the western world, and after a number of years of preparation he began to undertake this task. This was Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, the teacher from whom we have learnt all that we have learnt about our System. He, when first the group – *Seekers of the Truth* – was formed, that is, sixty years ago, was a very young man. He is now 82. He took part in all the expeditions and was certainly the most daring and resourceful of them all.

I remember when I first heard about him, nearly thirty years ago, in Constantinople, when he was coming from Tiflis to Constantinople, I was told about him as a great traveler, and one who knew twenty different languages. This interested me very much because I was interested in the languages of the peoples of Trans-Caspia, Turkestan and Central Asia. I tried to meet as many people as I could from whom I could learn these languages and the ways of these people. But Mr. Gurdjieff was not only a man of extraordinary resource and energy; he was also a man who had been prepared in a very extraordinary way for this task from his earliest childhood. He undertook great

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labours and sufferings during all this long period of learning during which he and his companions gradually found their way, first of all from seeking on the outside and finding nothing, then beginning to find traces, but then towards the end, beginning to be sought themselves which brought them into contacts which they never could have found by any ordinary means. His labours and sufferings during that period were very great. Then somewhere about 1908, that phase of their work was ended; all the material was collected and he in particular realized that the time had come for him to undertake the next phase of the task. For a few years, he undertook preparatory work of another kind, that is, by very great efforts he collected large financial resources with which to establish an organization through which these ideas could be transmitted in a number of different ways. That second, relatively short, phase was completed about 1913. Then the work of actualisation began. Many preparations were made for establishing this work in Russia: land and buildings were bought in Moscow and outside Moscow. A great number of instruments were procured for research purposes and various other things, and particularly for the study of music and dancing, that is, sacred temple dances in which certain ancient data had been preserved in a very pure form. There were also sections for research in astronomy, physiology, psychology and so on. Altogether he prepared a very considerable organization for the transmission of the knowledge they had acquired from the schools with which they had come in contact, in a form which could be assimilated by the western world.

Then the 1914 war came, at first appearing only to be a temporary break, a slowing down of the tempo, but ultimately the Revolution in Russia meant the complete destruction of everything that had been prepared – the loss of all the material resources which had been accumulated, the death of several of the people who had participated in it and the separation of others, some electing to remain inside Russia and some deciding to go abroad. So that the second phase of the Endeavour to establish an organization in Russia lasted from 1913 to 1918-19 when it came to an end and some remained and some went abroad. There was at no time any particular hostility on the part of the Soviet Authorities. On the contrary, when they left Russia most extraordinary facilities were given to them by the Bolshevik authorities and some remained inside Russia to work there.

The second phase lasted from 1919-24. During this time, Mr. Gurdjieff started a group – this time not including any of the original members of the group '*Seekers of the Truth*' – most of whom had by now either died or gone into seclusion in monasteries, or undertaken some special work. His group was formed from pupils that he had collected round him, since he had begun the actualisation of his work in Russia. This small group for some time remained in the Caucasus mountains, under conditions of the utmost difficulty, and reached Tiflis, the capital of Georgia in 1919 or the beginning of 1920. At that time, there was a Socialist government in Georgia which was holding together against the threat from the Bolsheviks, and conditions in Georgia were relatively favourable for a period of time. They worked there and began to establish the work in the form of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. Mr. Gurdjieff began to train people in the sacred dances and special exercises for the development of physical powers.

After a certain time, a series of demonstrations were given in one of the big theatres of Tiflis. These demonstrations attracted so much attention that the theatre was crowded, and the demonstrations had to be repeated about three or four times. At that time, there was a very great

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amount of feeling and thought in the Caucasus – I remember it very well because I was in close touch with the Caucasus in those days – and there was a constant coming and going of people. It was unlike any other period I have known, because there had been such a churning-up of feeling after the Great War and the revolution in Russia, and as a result of the Turkish invasion and then the Turkish withdrawal, all of which had happened one on top of the other during that period. With people in this receptive emotional state, there was a very remarkable response to Mr. Gurdjieff's work. Unfortunately, there was made, in my view, a great mistake on the part of our own British military authorities, when we withdrew our military support from the governments of these countries of the Caucasus. As a result, they collapsed and there was complete chaos in the Caucasus. Work became impossible, and Mr. Gurdjieff decided to move with his people to Constantinople, and during a short period, he again began at Yemenidji Sokak the same work on the movements and also lectures on some of the special ideas which they had learned in the course of the work of the Group – *Seekers of the Truth*.

Very little time after this, one of Mr. Gurdjieff's pupils who had joined him in 1915 – that is Mr. Ouspensky – came by an independent route from the north Caucasus, and joined him in Constantinople. At that time, Mrs. Bennett and I came in touch with them. This was our first contact with that work. Mr. Gurdjieff's work was transferred first to Berlin, with the idea that perhaps Berlin might be a centre from which there could be contacts both with the East and with the West. There was a question of taking over the Dalcroze Institute, but it soon became clear that Germany was an impossible place to work. Mr. Gurdjieff finally decided upon Paris, and in late 1922 he established the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at the Chateau du Prieuré at Fontainebleau.

Many of us, including some of you who are here, went at that time to the Prieuré. This was the headquarters of the Institute during 1923 and 1924. There we saw and participated both in the study of the system and in the physical methods which are called 'movements' and sacred dances. A number of Americans came over and they asked Mr. Gurdjieff to come and found a branch of the Institute in America, and in 1924 he went to America for a short journey.

During all this time, he was having to carry a very heavy burden of responsibility. The material resources which had been collected in Russia had been entirely lost in the Revolution and in their travels. On him fell almost entirely the burden, not only of teaching but also of making the necessary money (and that in a foreign country in which he scarcely knew the language or customs) for maintaining the work. He did this partly by his special medical training and technical knowledge and partly by his skill in organization. But it was a very heavy strain, and he hoped by going to America to secure financial help which would relieve this and enable him to devote more of his time to teaching. In this respect the journey was successful. He came back to Fontainebleau and then something happened; it was the greatest but not by any means the only very great misfortune – or better to say, tragedy – which the whole of this work has had to meet and overcome. All through it has seemed as if, ever since the first actualisation began in 1913, every difficulty possible arose against the work. Difficulties from the extraordinary political situation, difficulties from accidents and deaths – and then there occurred in 1924

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this first of the major tragedies. When driving back from Paris one evening when very tired, Mr. Gurdjieff's car ran into a tree and he was very nearly killed. He would certainly have died if it had not been for the extraordinary power which he had by that time acquired over his own body, but it meant that for several months he had to lie still and recover. His whole body was very seriously damaged. He therefore decided it was impossible to continue to carry the burden of the Institute with its heavy material needs. It was also impossible to overcome the difficulty that, in his absence as an active participant, a large number of unprepared people, people who had not got the requisite understanding, would certainly have brought it all into quite wrong lines. He, therefore, decided to disband the whole of this organization, and to close the Institute at Fontainebleau. He sent away the greater number of the people who had been with him, retaining around him only a few people who had the necessary understanding. This accident, or this misfortune, involved a great deal of suffering both physical and spiritual in that it showed the shallowness of many of the pretensions of the people who claimed to be devoted to the work, and to the furthering of its objectives. Thus, it marked a very important stage, a very necessary stage in the work.

The ideas which had been brought together by the Group – *Seekers of the Truth* – together with the teaching which they had received from the Great Brotherhoods with which they had come into contact, had at first been expressed in one particular form, using a certain extraordinarily valuable symbolism which had been worked out partly by the members of the group, and partly suggested to them by certain ancient symbolisms which they had found in the course of their researches. That is the system that many of you have been studying for a number of years. In 1925, Mr. Gurdjieff himself came to the conclusion that this form had a certain tendency to produce a theoretical approach, and a lack of balance, or a 'lopsidedness' in understanding. He, therefore, decided then, after a very long meditation during the period of his severe illness, to express once again the whole of this teaching which had been obtained, in another form, that is, in the form of books which he decided to write. For this purpose, he resolved to withdraw from all active external work. He announced his intention to the people who had been connected with him in a little book, "*The Herald of Coming Good*", which some of you may have read.

Between about 1925-26 and 1937 or 1938, during some twelve years, he occupied himself mainly with working out this system of presentation in three series of books. The first series was concerned with showing people how to think objectively about the human problem, and for this purpose he put it in the form of a kind of eastern tale in which the earth was seen through the eyes of Beings of a higher level and different order, who came to the earth from other parts of the universe with particular tasks to perform. In this way, the history of mankind over many thousands of years is described. In the course of this series, the particular difficulties and failures in human understanding and the development of the particular weaknesses in the human nature are shown in a very objective and forceful manner. Practical teaching is also given as to how to work, how it is possible to liberate oneself from the consequences of this unfortunate situation into which mankind has come. That series of books is called "*Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*". Beelzebub is the hero; he is represented as an archangel who has been exiled to our solar system on account of some early fault which he had committed. He has been endeavoring to redeem this by certain labours to be performed in the solar system and he relates in these tales what he did on the Earth

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and how he studied mankind and the problem of putting right the faults, or overcoming the misfortunes, of the human race.

The second series deals with the actual work of the group, *'The Seekers of the Truth'*, with biographies of the people who formed it, accounts of their travels and journals and how and where they found the teachings out of which our system was constructed. It is called "*Remarkable People I Have Met*". [1]

The third series is called "*Life Is Real Only Then, When "I AM"*". This is entirely concerned with the practical work of the creation in man of his own higher being, and with showing how man can fulfill the tasks which he was created to fulfill, and how a new world can be built.

These books were completed shortly before the beginning of this war. Once again plans for carrying out the task which had been imposed on him were made by Mr. Gurdjieff, but the Second World War came and once again the work was retarded. During the war, he and a very small group of people lived under conditions of almost indescribable hardship through the German occupation in Paris, during which they continued to work. Finally, Mr. Gurdjieff decided this year, in 1948, that the time had come when it was necessary to make an energetic move to get this task of actualisation under way before further catastrophe should overtake the world. Those who at different times had been his pupils, some of whom had gone by this time all over the world – America, South America, Asia, Africa, and countries of Europe – were given the opportunity to go to see him in Paris, to come into contact again. Some of them had always been in contact with him, and had begun before the war the study of these books about which I have been speaking. Others, like myself, had not seen him for many years, but I told you when we had our last meeting here in July I was going to Paris. I think I told you then that I was going to see him; perhaps I did not mention his name, but it was to him I referred.

Before I went to Paris, I went to America, where I met Madame Ouspensky, and spoke with her. She is very ill, suffering from an incurable illness, but those of you who have known her will have known what a great power she had and with what singleness of heart and understanding she did everything. When I went to America, I found her even more worthy of respect and love than she had been when I had last seen her, seven or eight years earlier. One of the first things that she did when I went to her room, was to give me St. John's Gospel to read, and I think I quoted to you before from the Fourth Chapter where after the Disciples with misunderstanding brought Him meat because He spoke of not having meat, and He said: "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work". (John 4.34) Then he said "Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest". I realized that when she gave me these verses of St. John to read, she meant to indicate that she had understood that the time had now come when we must set our hands to the harvest, and reap, as the next verses say, of that which we have not sown. After a few weeks in America, during which I was in very close touch with the group of people that is with Madame Ouspensky at Mendham in New Jersey, I returned to England and, almost at once, went over to Paris.

[1] Published as Meetings with Remarkable Men.

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Then came the most extraordinary experience of my life – an experience such as very few people have ever had or are ever likely to have. When I met Mr. Gurdjieff I immediately understood and fully realized that he had attained to an even higher level of being than when I had been with him at Fontainebleau. Even then, twenty-five years ago, I had already known that he had powers that no ordinary man has, because of things he showed me and he did for me which could not be done by anyone who did not possess these higher powers. I had already, twenty-five years ago, realized that it is possible for man to have higher powers and higher modes of cognition, because of what I had been shown by Mr. Gurdjieff, at the Prieuré. But this time, when I came to Paris I realized that I was in contact with something incomparably greater, and that during this period of twenty-five years he had passed through a very great stage in his own inner work. After three days, he decided that it would be right to go away from Paris, as he had been working very hard. Although he is in his 83rd year, he had been teaching groups of French people the sacred dances and movements and demonstrating them himself. He had an extraordinary youthfulness and power, such as one could not imagine in a man of 82. He decided to drive down to Cannes, and he asked me and one or two other people to go with him, where we would have more time and opportunity for talk. I, therefore, prepared to go down to Cannes and sent for my car. He started on the Sunday.

Then the second great tragedy occurred. I call it a tragedy, although one must always understand that what looks from one aspect a tragedy may be, from another aspect, a very special kind of opportunity. While driving beyond Fontainebleau towards Nevers, suddenly an almost impossible accident occurred. A small lorry shot out of the side-road at high speed and, without the possibility of avoidance, ran straight into Mr. Gurdjieff's car. The driver of the lorry died almost immediately and everyone in both cars was seriously injured. Mr. Gurdjieff, who was driving, received the most terrible injuries that it is possible to imagine, which would certainly have killed any other man. The steering wheel of the car was broken, twisted right up, striking him in his solar plexus. The whole of his nervous system there was crushed. This would, under any other conditions, have caused paralysis and soon death. In addition, he sustained a fracture of a bone in the skull, a very severe laceration of his right leg and a number of other terrible wounds. The car caught fire but fortunately there was a garage at the crossroads and Mr. Gurdjieff, who alone of the occupants had retained consciousness, directed the rescue work and was removed from the completely smashed car after twenty minutes. His external wounds were treated in a local hospital and, against the vehement insistence of the doctors, he decided to return home the next day by ambulance. It chanced that I happened to be present at the moment when the ambulance arrived. I had gone round with my car, which had just reached Paris, to see if I could be of any use, thinking that he would have arrived several hours sooner, but there had been a very bad delay. Another man, who was in the car with Mr. Gurdjieff when the accident happened, had gone right through the windscreen – they were in two ambulances and had taken three and a half hours to make the journey.

So, it came about that I was standing at the door of his house as the ambulances came up. I had already heard by telephone that the accident had been very severe indeed, but I did not know how severe. I had heard that he was being brought home. It was a moment of extraordinary strain for

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me, because I felt that his own immediate people should look after him, and that I should go away, and would only be a nuisance by being there; but something made me struggle with this feeling and remain. I saw him step out of the ambulance unaided and walk into the house. This is literally the most extraordinary thing that I have ever seen, and one of the most extraordinary things perhaps that has ever been seen, because here was a man who was completely paralyzed, but was walking just by the strength of the power that he had over his own body. As I watched, I realized that this was so. I did not realize before what had happened but when I saw him, I was able to feel inside myself what was involved in this, and I went into the house. I realized then that all the people were completely exhausted because all of them had been up for thirty- six hours. It was about 8 p.m. and all had been in a state of intense anxiety since ten the previous evening. Some of them had been injured in the motor accident. They needed help so, I remained.

Then the second extraordinary thing happened. Mr. Gurdjieff invited us all to come to dine with him at his house, saying that we were to come that evening at 10:15 in the usual way. Here was a man who, by any ordinary calculations, should have been dead, or at least in a coma, and whose body was clearly terribly injured and bleeding terribly. All his body was covered with frightful wounds, and worst of all, of course, was this crushing of the main nerves of the sympathetic system. And yet he had invited us to come and eat with him. In fact, he came in and ate dinner in front of us. Those of you who know the consequences of the two kinds of injuries – both of the injury to the sympathetic system and the fracture of the skull with the internal haemorrhage inside the brain – will realize that it is almost impossible to conceive how food could be swallowed under these conditions. But he ate a little food, and then we went away.

These were the most extraordinary hours of my life, and the most extraordinary hours that anyone is likely to pass through either before or since for a very long time. Afterwards, other remarkable things happened. I have told you about this because it represents a further great stage.

Later, I realized that this was clearly a necessary stage in the payment for the whole of the possibility of the actualisation of his task. It is not possible to imagine such physical suffering, because anyone else would be either in a coma or dead under such conditions as he suffered during these days. It was only after three or four days, when he had entirely controlled his physical condition by his power over his own body, that he allowed doctors to come. After that he accepted ordinary medical treatment and recovered with extraordinary, unbelievable rapidity even for anyone with a small part of the injuries he received. After a few days, he spoke to me and said that this was a very convenient moment: he would have to rest because of his injuries. The Paris group had been sent away for a holiday at the seaside. Therefore, he had nothing else to do. He could not go on his own holiday as he had planned. It was, therefore, a good chance for me to bring over some of the people who had been studying with me and he could also give me certain guidance and help as to what I should do. Thus, it came about that I took more than twenty people to Paris, and some more will be able to go later.

We have thus reached the present moment. I have given you a short account of the history of our work over the past sixty years so far as I know it. The next phase is one in which we can and must ourselves participate. It concerns the dissemination of Mr. Gurdjieff's writings. Contained in these writings is the knowledge which is necessary for the salvation of mankind from this extraordinary

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situation into which we have come. I am quite convinced that it is only necessary now that there should be a sufficiently effective dissemination of them to bring about a radical change in the whole human situation. Some of you have heard very little, some of you have heard a great deal about the theory of the system in the form in which it was first taught about twenty-five years ago. That is undoubtedly a most valuable, almost necessary, preparation for those whose task it will be to transmit further to people. The time will certainly come when these writings will be accessible to all people and will produce their effects directly, but during the next stage what is required is that there should be a study of these writings, combined with the work on the practical methods. Some of these practical methods I have myself known and some of them I have taught to those of you who have had the opportunity of coming here and working together at Coombe Springs. Others I have known, but have not felt that I had the right authority to teach them to others. There are others again that I did not know, but which I have been learning during this time. There are others again which I do not yet know. All these methods are concerned with Being.

You have all heard about the three lines of development: Being, Knowledge and Understanding, and you all must realize that whereas the work on Knowledge has been able to proceed for those who have taken the trouble to try to learn, work on Being requires something more and something different. It not only requires the readiness to make sustained efforts, but it also requires guidance as to the particular type of effort which an individual requires. There is no such a thing as general work on Being. Work on Being is something which must correspond to the special structure of each essence and to the particular defects which have arisen in the personality of each person.

I have to some extent been concerned with helping a few of you in the study of the second part, that is, the study of the defects which have arisen in our own personalities, and the means by which these defects can be minimized. This is an important preparatory work before any positive work on Being can be undertaken. In some cases, this is a very painful process and involves conditions which appear for the person concerned to be exactly opposite to what they need. But, in general, this preparatory work has been done in the case of a number of you here. In the case of others, you have no idea yet of what is involved. But generally speaking, the other part, that is, the positive constructive work by which the 'higher being bodies' or the higher parts of man can be made actual, can be formed and developed, that work has not been begun.

Therefore, we now come in a double sense to a fresh starting-point in the work. In the first sense, I can look upon the last twenty-five years of my own work as preparation; some of you have known me the whole of this time, others for varying periods down to one year or even less. As I said when I gave the last talk of the preparatory period, on the 29th July, this length of time is in some strange way irrelevant. It seems possible for people to find their place independently of the length of time of the preparation period. So it happens that while some of you have come here with very little knowledge of what it is all about, having heard only a few lectures, and yet having made up your minds to hear a bit more – sometimes perhaps with considerable doubt as to where it is leading, and as to whether you want to continue – others have had sufficient time to be obliged to take responsible decisions for themselves, and have been unable to avoid the question of whether they wish to work seriously or not.

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This is how it should be because if the work is to continue, it must continue by the mutual aid of people with different degrees of preparation and different degrees of understanding – with different specialties – and therefore able to make different contributions. So, I say that the first sense in which this is a new beginning is that we now have to leave behind the preparatory period, during which you and I have, either consciously or unconsciously, been preparing ourselves for the possibility of actualisation – of bringing into reality – what we have learnt in theory. The transition becomes possible because we now have re-established a contact with the source, and we have done so at the moment when for our master himself the final phase of actualisation after so many and such long sufferings has begun. The second sense I have just been speaking of, is that of a transition from theory to practice in the individual work of the people concerned, that is to say, people who have had a longer or shorter period of study on the theory of the possibility of self-creation can now, if they so decide, undertake the necessary efforts – and necessary conscious efforts – for the realization of this in themselves.

The outward new start and the inward new start of course are the two poles of the same thing. There cannot be outward actualisation without inward actualisation and there cannot be inward actualisation without outward actualisation. One cannot perform a task unless one has Being oneself, and one cannot acquire Being except in performing a task.

I decided that it would be best if I were to speak to you in this way historically and tell you how we arrived at this point. Having heard this, you can decide. It will not be necessary to make any kind of dramatic decision – I mean dramatic decision in the sense of saying “I now adhere to this forever to the exclusion of everything else” – because this is fantasy. We are not like that; we are not one; we are not permanent; we have no ‘I’; and dramatic decisions are only fantasy decisions. When I say ‘decide’, I mean that one sincerely wants to try to see where this will lead. I shall read here over the next few months the first of these series of books, Beelzebub’s Tales, and any of you who wish to may come to these readings. From among those who come to these readings, a certain number will be chosen to be given certain exercises to carry out. These will show whether and how they are able to make efforts. Out of these will be formed another group that will be shown special methods. You have heard about the principle of circles that in any work there are three circles – Exoteric, Mesoteric, and Esoteric – outer circle, middle circle, and inner circle. This applies both to group work and to the whole of that part of mankind which has attained Higher Being. This is its widest significance; but it applies also to every organization that is concerned with true work. In that way, we can say in the present case, that those who wish to come and hear this reading, will form the Exoteric Circle. From them nothing is expected, beyond an effort to attend to the reading. I do not propose to throw the Exoteric Circle open more widely, and I have wished to eliminate from the people who came before the summer those who came simply out of curiosity by asking them all to write and say what they wished to do. This does not mean because people wrote to me and said they seriously wished to study, that I took them as seriously as sometimes they seem to have taken themselves, but I wanted to find one hundred people who would really want to hear some more. Those are what I shall call the Exoteric Group for the purpose of this study.

Meeting on 9 September 1948 ~ Gurdjieff

Those of you who wish to prepare yourselves for more serious work must try to come into closer contact by coming to Coombe Springs, where you can be seen and where your possibilities and your needs as regards personal work can be better judged, or, if this is not possible, by some other way. We have organized our work at Coombe Springs precisely for this reason: that it provides conditions under which people can be seen and studied and their personal needs can be seen. These things show themselves very quickly under this kind of condition, and on the basis of that people can be shown particular methods of work. From these again further knowledge will be gained, further indications will be seen. Finally, they will be given the particular kind of personal work which is needed for the development of their own Being.

If you are able to understand the situation, you will see what a very big responsibility lies on those who do understand, because out of a handful of people in each of the different countries of the world, there has to be actualized the great task of trying to stem the tide of misunderstanding and falsification of the true purpose of human life, which is almost universal in all the activities of man at the present time. The task indeed looks as if it were quite impossible, but such is the force of valid ideas that they can overcome in the future as they have overcome in the past.