

Insights into the Gurdjieff Work



We are the Gurdjieff foundation of Georgia
and this is a collaboration of some of the
members and friends of the group.

Preface

Madame de Salzman, Mr. Gurdjieff's closest student, said to us at the New York Foundation that we were not working hard enough, too many distorted events were occurring. That was in 1988.

So, this is a new call in these difficult times, to work on ourselves according to the extraordinary system that Mr. Gurdjieff brought, in an effort to help heal ourselves, this planet and all life on it.

This system, which is available without complicated initiation, shimmers around us all, but we do not see what it needs from us. We must see the truth of our situation and then act to become real human beings, not automatons. But "to see" is a huge undertaking because we think that we already know ourselves. We need to realize the lie of this and make honest efforts to see reality with all its warts and blemishes in order to fulfill what is perhaps our true purpose on this earth.

- *Zuki Fishman*

Introduction

A mystic and a spiritual teacher G. I. Gurdjieff appeared first in Russia and later in France at the turn of the twentieth century.

He had brought from his travels to the East a body of ideas and practices unknown until then in Europe. Nowadays the teaching is called the Gurdjieff Work, or the Fourth Way.

Gurdjieff started to gather groups of intellectuals and artists to develop their spiritual beings and to offer a way to work with their existential questions without the need to sacrifice their regular lives.

Since its beginnings The Gurdjieff Teaching has spread out throughout the world. In America all the major cities have at least a group or foundation carrying on the legacy of these ideas.

In the 1920s the “*Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man*” was established in France. Inside the property pupils learned and lived the ideas. Special sacred dances - rhythmic movements - were practiced in their study hall. The walls were decorated with these Sayings or Aphorisms, 38 in total. We will present some of them in this booklet.

Gurdjieff left a way for modern man to find meaning and purpose in life, and to actualize the inner potential that remains dormant for most of us.

On meditation

We normally sit either cross-legged or on a chair with a relaxed, straight back.

The idea is to relax the whole body and bring the mind, body and heart together.

You drop your thoughts, freeing the mind from the inner chatter of the automatic superficial mind.

We don't want to change anything, but to watch. The effort is towards observation of how I am in the present moment without criticism.



Temple dances or Sacred movements:

These movements have been practiced since Babylonian times.

You move into taking certain special postures which constantly change, following the music and rhythm. The demand is on your attention to be in the present moment.

One experiences that the mind has to be active while the body is in motion and that they bring a demand where the student has little time to be distracted.

The experience of one of our students follows:

It is not easy to explain the ideas behind the movements when talking to others about the “Work” In the movements you are reminded that the goal is not about “doing” but being centered and continuing with the continuity on being internally focus and aware.

Sacred movements are one of the more powerful ways to get in touch with unconscious thought-patterns as we deal with life.

It creates clarity through the impressions we see, feel, hear as we do the movements in a group. If you look at the temple Dances as a mindful exercise, you are aware that the movements require deep attention and absolute concentration; Through this a level of self-awareness continuously reveals itself. For people that are interested in mindfulness, this is a powerful tool.

Participating in the movements and experiencing more and more self-awareness creates a deeper integration of the mind, body and heart.

When working as a group doing the movements, we all begin to come together moving as a unit. One body, one energy, and there is a heart connection that occurs, a feeling of unity and oneness.



Group Work

One of the principles of the Gurdjieff's Work is that without a group nothing is possible.

The group keeps the student focus on the path of self-development.

It also has demands that help situate the person in his or her own current circumstances, for instance one has to show up regularly and it is expected that during the exchanges all the members of the group try to make an effort to stay engaged in the present moment, to ponder on questions and work on materials of the group.

By myself alone efforts cannot be maintained for long. No one of us has the constancy and the intensity for a period long enough to bring forth a positive change. On the other hand, several people Working towards the same Aim have a chance.

From Madame Jeanne De Salzmann's *The Reality of Being*: "We can do nothing without one another. The exchange we have together is more necessary than our daily bread. We make efforts alone—we struggle alone, suffer alone, respond alone. But a moment comes when exchange is indisputable, when we need to nourish one another with the fruits of our efforts."

Our Three Centers

Human beings have three main parts, or centers, which are completely different from each other: the Intellect (Mind), the Body and the Emotions. Yet, we spend most of our lives in only one of them: the mind. Well, not exactly... we spend most of our lives in the most automatic part of the mind, one in which our thoughts flood our mind non-stop, whether we want these thoughts or not. We will call this small, automatic part of the mind our “head.”

However, we will not be discussing the mind or the head here. Instead we will only zero in on the importance of our two other parts or centers, the ones which we, due to our “civilized” habits, ignore most of the time: The Body and the Emotions.

One of the aspects which makes the Gurdjieff Work quite different from other teachings and spiritual practices is the emphasis it places on paying attention to and working with these two centers, and this is partly so because the most important things that occur in our lives take place in these two centers.

The body is where everything vital takes place: digestion, breathing, heart beating, blood circulation, motor skills, etc. Its intelligence is taking care of thousands of functions in this moment to keep us alive; a work which our automatic head could never dream of doing. This amazing intelligence which we share with animals we call Instinct. But while animals are totally connected with it we, fascinated and hypnotized by our heads, continually ignore it and the more “civilized” and “educated” people are, the

more they will ignore it. People who live close to Nature, work in farms or have to be “street smart” tend to develop and use their instinct more.

The Emotional Center is equally necessary and amazing. Just like in our bodies, the most important things in our lives take place in this center: love of our family and friends, joy, fear, courage, inner peace, faith in ourselves or a higher being, etc., and just recently we have begun to hear about Emotional Intelligence. For instance mothers are very familiar with this quality of the emotional center, which we call Intuition, and through which we can know immediately, without thinking or reasoning, what a situation is. A quick glance at her small child, and a mother will instantly know something is wrong with him/her, and often times, what exactly is wrong.

If our emotional part, also familiarly known as our Heart, is not at peace, our lives will not be balanced and our head will not be able to think clearly when it needs to. Imagine for example that you are going for a job interview, self-confident, with your mind ready, and on the way a policeman gives you a ticket. You arrive at the interview pretty emotional and with a lowered self-confidence. The interviewer judges you “too emotional” for the job! Or instead, your wife gives birth and you are emotional with love in your heart thinking of her and the baby. As you are heading out, you receive a notice that your taxes are going to be audited. Instead of arriving at the maternity ward in the emotional state that you need, you are totally in your head thinking and worrying about those taxes.

Perhaps now you can understand better why the Gurdjieff Work assigns so much importance to connecting with these two centers. It stands to reason that functioning at Will from two or three centers, instead of only one (as we usually do) not only could make us more intelligent, but also more complete, more who we truly are.



Peering Through the Fog

“It was a wonderful October afternoon. The Sun was going down, the leaves were rustling in the gentle wind, and a wonderful scent summoned through the woods. In many ways it was a normal October afternoon. Walking from my office across the yard, I turned to head up the stairs to my parking space. Just then, out of nowhere, I looked down at myself, examining my hands, my feet, my posture.

‘Who is this?’ ran through my head. ‘Where am I, and why have I just been ceaselessly talking in my head?’ These and other thoughts rushed into my awareness. There was a terrifying sense of my own mechanicalness; how calculated and habitual I was. Who was really steering the ship? Was it really ‘me?’ And who was ‘me’ anyway?

This day ended up being a turning point for me. I realized just how much work remained to be done; how immense was the hill I had to climb to attain inner freedom. It was a few years later that I started understanding help, the need for a group united by a common aim and method. Fortunately, it was just at this time that the Gurdjieff Ideas crossed my path. Learning to work is a process, and I am still just beginning...”

APHORISM 27:

*Conscious faith is
freedom.*

*Emotional faith is
slavery.*

*Mechanical faith is
foolishness.*

Two very different brothers

In a remote village of a country there lived two brothers who were very poor. The younger one had a family and was considered by most to be a good, God fearing man, but a common man. The older one had lost his wife and a child in an accident and was considered to be a wise man. They lived and worked together in their modest farm.

One day the only horse they had to help them do all the work in the farm escaped to the adjacent, barren fields and disappeared. The younger brother could not believe his eyes and went on a rant: “Oh Lord, what are we poor men going to do now without our only horse?! What a disgrace! Why did such awful thing had to happen to us, good people and believers?!”

The older brother, quiet as usual, responded to him in a calm voice: “We don’t know if this is a disgrace or not my brother. All we know for sure right now is that our horse is gone.”

“That’s easy to say,” replied the younger brother in his excited and distressed voice, “but what are we going to do now without our only work horse?!” And he went on complaining, almost sobbing in desperation.

Two days later, while the younger brother still continued in his distressful state, their horse suddenly returned from the endless barren fields, bringing along five more wild horses with him. The younger brother could not believe his own eyes again, while he quickly closed the gate

to make sure the horses did not go away. Jumping around, he began to scream: “Wow, this is awesome! - Now we are really going to progress with these six horses! -- Oh, we are so fortunate! -- We’ve got to celebrate this!

His older brother watched him with a smile and said: “Brother we really don’t know if this is fortunate or not. All we know is that now we have six horses.”

A week later, while trying to tame one of the wild horses, the younger brother’s son, a strong teenager who already helped with the farm work, fell off the horse and broke his leg. His dad was desperate: “Oh I can’t believe this! --Now that we have six horses and need his help in the farm more than ever, he breaks a leg! Bad luck is always after us! My poor son, what a terrible thing!

The older brother once more quietly told him: “Why get desperate? We don’t know if this is for the better or the worse. All we know is that my nephew has a broken leg.”

A few days later news was heard that their ambitious king had engaged their country in a war with a neighboring country. Soon, military envoys were in the area recruiting all the able young men they could to fight the king’s war. They visited the two brothers to enlist the strong teenager but found him in bed with a broken leg and quickly left. The younger brother was happy again: “Thank you Lord! This is so good! Now my son won’t have to go to that useless war and get killed for nothing!”

His older brother once more looked at him and quietly said: “Brother, we don’t know if this is good or bad. All we know right now is that the boy is not going to that war.”

And the story went on in this same fashion for many more years to come.



APHORISM 6:

Here
we can only
direct and create
conditions,
but not help.

On Aphorism 6:

When one reads the aphorism, one is inclined to think on the nature of help. What is help?

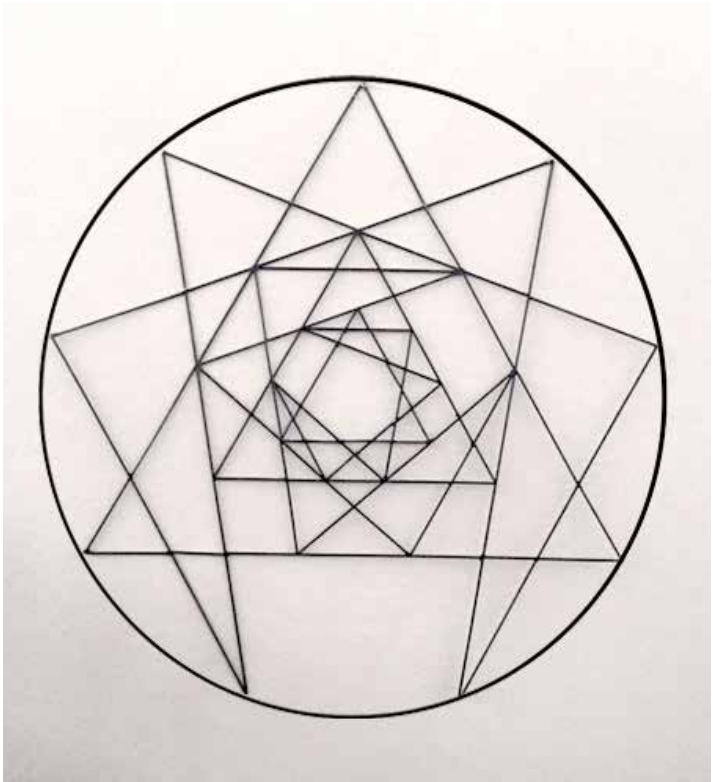
From the Merriam-Webster dictionary we read:

“to give assistance or support to, to make more pleasant or bearable and also the archaic: RESCUE, SAVE”.

It is in this archaic sense that the aphorism conveys a sense of responsibility for my own progress, my own change. It is as if it is telling us that something is up to us, and that individual action and Work are needed. Our wishes of a richer inner life and to be more connected with everything won't happen by themselves.

It speaks of two maps. One is outside, where working within a group provides favorable conditions for self-observation and inner awareness. The other is internal. It is our own efforts with all our insights plus all the limitations of our understanding

In a certain way it establishes a boundary where external influences cannot reach us unless there is something active, vigilant and wishful inside.



An Answer

The faraway visits me
the Higher eludes my search
How to serve the One?
How to pray?

Lord of All, pardon my complaints
my weaknesses and lacks
my permanent tomorrows
my spirit in rags

I judge others around me
forgetting the war's within,
forgetting that how I judge them
I will be judged in my Being

Reality suddenly tells me
no matter how much I learn
what I don't know will always be much larger
than what I've learned

From my boundless ignorance,
watching a newborn pure and tender
I awaken, listening to an answer:
Surrender.



APHORISM 26:

*Only he can
be just who
is able to
put himself
in the position
of others.*

A Snake In The Pantry.

Our Venezuelan group had a plot of land in the jungle, which it used as a retreat for inner work. The jungle in South America is normally full of life and also dangerous: poisonous snakes, spiders and many other animals which are considered a threat to human comfort, health or life.

Some shelters had been built there so that people could cook, sleep over, etc., and one of these shelters looked like a barn. Since it was next to the kitchen, it was used as the pantry. About 50 by 25 feet in size, with a pretty high roof, it served to store food and cooking utensils. Some of the food was kept in fridges, while other hung from the ceiling or the walls, such as banana bunches and other fruits, and also tubercles.

was this one corner in which large pots and pans were kept with a few other things, most of which were hardly ever used. It was under these quiet utensils that one day a woman ran into a fairly large snake, peacefully coiled against the corner. The woman promptly informed the people working in the kitchen and a couple of men went to “take care” of the situation.

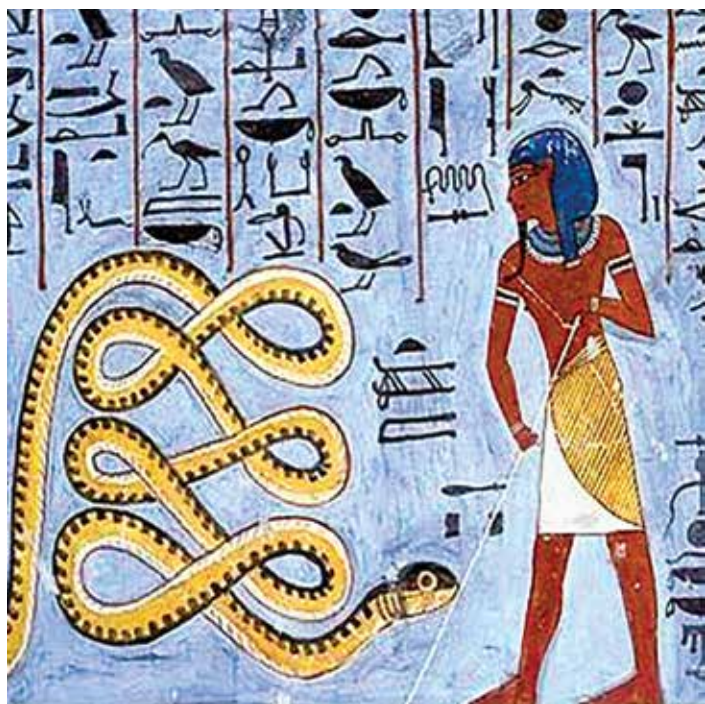
Most people coming to our groups, whether in Paris, Atlanta or Caracas, are very respectful of Mother Nature, so the men provided themselves with two long sticks and gently proceeded to remove the snake out of his

corner. It was a five-and-a-half-foot boa, quite harmless to humans due to its size and to being non-poisonous. He did not put too much resistance to the men since it apparently had become already used to the human presence in the pantry, and the men didn't take long in pushing the snake out through the back door and into the very near jungle, where it promptly disappeared.

the removal everyone went back to their own activities and the pantry was again considered the "safe place" it had always been.

next day everyone left the jungle and went back to the city, where they worked on themselves while going on with their daily lives.

Two weeks later, a few people who periodically kept an eye on the property, returned to check the shelters and make sure everything was as quiet as usual, and also checked the pantry from where the snake had been removed. As soon as they opened the pantry's door, they realized the big mistake they had made: the place looked like a mess, the food outside the fridges was mostly gone and the pantry was now..... packed with mice!



APHORISM 9:

*The chief means of
happiness
in this life
is the ability to
consider externally
always,
internally never.*

On Aphorism 9:

Internal considering is so monumental, it affects everything. In an ordinary way it is simply blinding self-involvement, born out of one's mechanicality and anxiety which is how we live in the "sleep" that keeps us from living fully. One starts out thinking that one is being thoughtful of another, but one is not seeing the other. One, as a machine, is caught only in false personality, false images. We all go through life with a picture of ourselves as kind, loving, good, etc. But until we make conscious efforts, trying to be a human being and not an automaton, nothing can be different. External considering is not possible unless we are sincere with ourselves and see what is actually in front of us, the truth of what I am at this moment.

. Gurdjieff offers us a way to see how we are machines and how to be free.

All of life on earth would be different if people could really see one another.

This of course leads into the idea that I cannot have any relationship with another person if I am not present in their presence.

As has been said by Mr. Gurdjieff, a small number of conscious people could make the entire world a different place.



APHORISM 32:

*The energy spent
on active inner work
is then and there
transformed
into a fresh supply,
but that spent
passive work
is lost for ever.*

The Hare & the Tortoise

(*Aesop*)

A Hare was making fun of the Tortoise one day for being so slow.

“Do you ever get anywhere?” he asked with a mocking laugh.

“Yes,” replied the Tortoise, “and I get there sooner than you think. I’ll run you a race and prove it.”

The Hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the Tortoise, but for the fun of the thing he agreed. So, the Fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off.

The Hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the Tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try a race with a Hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the Tortoise should catch up.

The Tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the Hare was sleeping. But the Hare slept on very peacefully, and when at last he did wake up, the Tortoise was near the goal. The Hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the Tortoise in time.

Active Work goes a long way.



APHORISM 27:

If
you have not
by nature
a critical
mind
staying here
is useless.

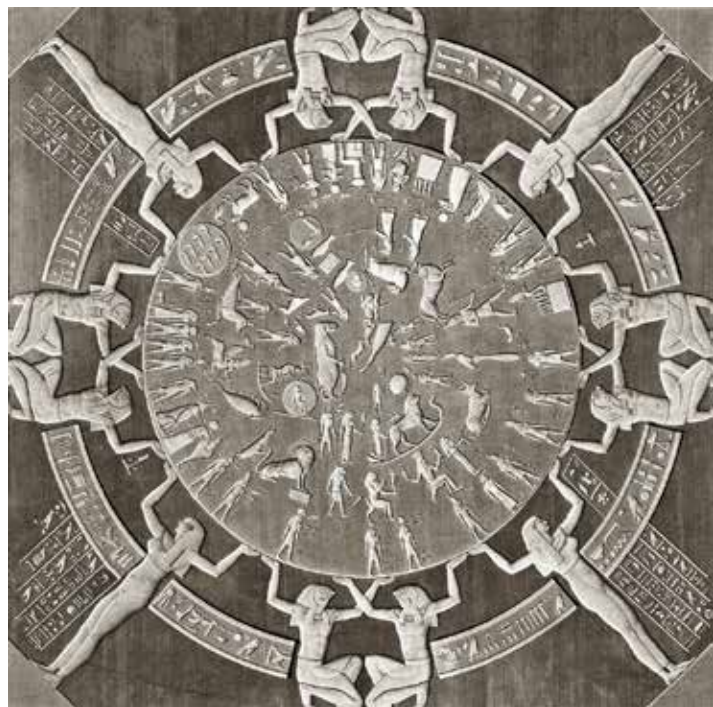
Excerpt taken from the book:

*Psychological Commentaries
of the Gurdjieff Ideas**

It has often been said that this work is to make us think. Mr. Ouspensky used to emphasize that people do not think. They read the newspapers instead or ask their friends what they ought to think or they follow the general consensus of opinion. This lack of individual thinking leads to mass -thinking. Mass thinking is directed by someone who tells people how to think by broadcasting, by propaganda. On one occasion, when I was talking to Mr. Ouspensky about this, he said that in the past century people used to think for themselves far more than they do nowadays. "People", he said, "used to think more individually. Today it could be said that people have given up thinking and simply wish to be told what to think. The Work," he added, "is to make us think for ourselves." On another occasion he said that the only way for a man to be awakened nowadays is through his thinking part. "Look at the increasing sleep of humanity", he added. "It is extraordinary that people give up the one thing that is left to them - namely, the power of thinking for themselves. All these books, papers, radios, and so on, prevent people from thinking, but they are supposed to increase thought." Now to think is quite different from to remember and it is again quite different from having fixed opinions.

If people take the work as a cut and dried subject that they simply store in their memory then they do not think about the ideas of the Work for themselves. When people cease to think for themselves, they surrender the one part of them that can still lead to awakening.

*Maurice Nicoll, an English writer and a student of Gurdjieff.



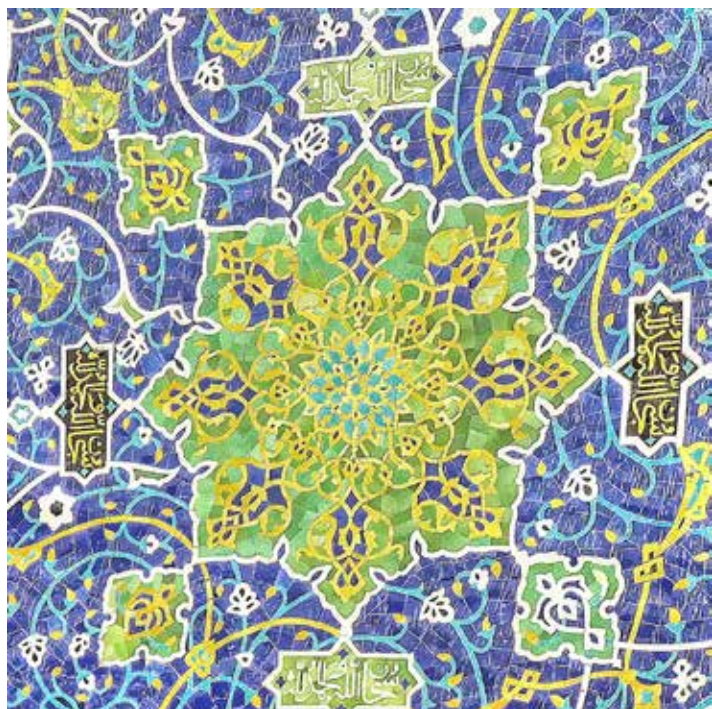
The Fairy

In the farthest loneliest corner of the forest
there's a fairy crouching, undecided, full of wishes
staring, listening, questioning, thinking.
Sensitive as a butterfly, warm as a lamb,
wistful as an orchid, incomplete.

Unreachable, longing to be reached.
Without eyes sharp enough, without ears sharp enough,
with a skin plenty sharp.
Why does she withdraw?
Asks the hummingbird.
“Oh, the fairy is not withdrawing, she's simply there,”
explains the squirrel, quickly pretending to know...

Then a Sunbeam speaks: “Wake up my dear!”
And the fairy then opens her Eye, understands.
But when the Evening returns, with its overwhelming
blanket, then what?
“She will crouch, listening, questioning and waiting,”
says the Moon, and she will ask me one more time:
“Where is my love?”
“And without hearing my answer
she will continue to speak:”

“Oh fear, master of human creatures!
Super clever indeed are thee.
What is your share in controlling lives?
your immensely successful treat?
No one likes you, but all obey you;
only heroes/heroines face you,
and only then you set them free!”



APHORISM 30:

*Rest comes not
from the quantity
of sleep but from
the quality of
sleep.*

Excerpt taken from the book:

*Gurdjieff: Essays and
Reflections on the
Man and His Teachings*

by Jacob Needleman, George Baker.

There are levels of sleep.

One can be one-sixth asleep, one-quarter, one-half, or fully. This depends, among other things, on how you have been during the day. If you dream, you are half asleep. In that case it is necessary to sleep, let us say, seven and a half hours. If you don't dream, four and a half hours is enough. There is even quality of sleep where one hour is enough. It isn't quantity, it's the quality that is important. You sleep seven and a half hours. Let's say you take about two hours to relax-not consciously but automatically. This takes time. You could begin today to relax consciously up until the time you fall asleep. On the one hand, relaxing yourself in this way will bring you a better quality of sleep; on the other hand, you will begin in this way to establish a discipline that will allow a relationship, a contact, between your awareness and your body.

An experience from Group Work.

I have experienced a slowing down of time when the body is relaxed. The mind is still and the feelings are relaxed. Time goes on, but there is awareness of much more. Much more perceived in the moment. I receive impressions from a flower, my breathing inside, and I am able to attend to the needs of my daughter in front of me. What is needed in this moment is understood. The body responds organically. I act to serve her needs. And I am still here, present in this service to another. Connected to another. Together. Timeless.





The Gurdjieff foundation of Georgia