

SAYINGS  
FROM  
THE GURDJIEFF WORK



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## THE CURATOR'S PREFACE

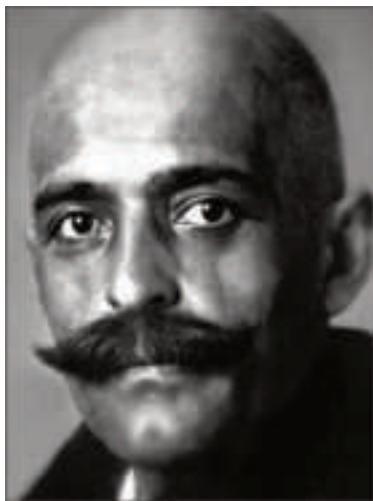
This book needs little introduction. It is a curated collection of sayings, saws and aphorisms assembled from the now-substantial reservoir of books about Gurdjieff and the Work. Its curator gathered some of its contents over many years, keeping notes of adages and observations that had an impact on him. He had been fascinated by epigrams, proverbs and pithy sayings ever since he was a child. Gurdjieff's natural ability to pepper his conversation with colorful words enthralled his mind and invaded his thoughts.

The curator has done his best to give the source of the many sayings he included in this book, and in most

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*We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our  
little life is rounded with a sleep.*

*~ William Shakespeare*



### GURDJIEFF IN FRAGMENTS

A great deal is unknown about G. I. Gurdjieff. On one hand he left a dramatic and substantial inheritance in the form of his teachings, the books he authored, music he composed with Thomas De Hartmann and, of course the movements. He also prepared and educated many pupils, who subsequently passed much of this inheritance to their own pupils, and their pupil's pupils.

However, he bequeathed his biographers very little to conjure with. He spoke very little about his origins and his early life, or even his travels and travails before he emerged in Moscow in 1912. His "autobiography," under the title of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, is primarily a teaching

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allegory written for his followers. It makes no attempt to provide a reliable record of his past, or of the lives of the characters that adorn its pages. Some of the details it includes may be accurate, but they may also have been deliberately changed to better suit the allegorical interpretation of the text.

Even if we knew much more, how would that help our Work? The details of his teaching are far more important. That is where we begin this book. The sayings and quotations we reproduce below come from *In Search of the Miraculous*, Peter Ouspensky's faithful record of Gurdjieff's early lectures, otherwise referred to as *Fragments*.

From Chapter 1 ...

*In India there are only 'philosophical' schools. It was divided up in that way long ago; in India there was 'philosophy,' in Egypt 'theory,' and in present-day Persia, Mesopotamia, and Turkestan – 'practice.'*

*All the people you see, all the people you know, all the people you may get to know, are machines, ...*

*A great deal can be found by reading. For instance, take yourself: you might already know a great deal if you knew how to read.<sup>1</sup>*

*Man is born, lives, dies, builds houses, writes books, not as he wants to, but as it happens. Everything happens.*

*In the language which people speak they cannot understand one another.*

---

<sup>1</sup> said to Ouspensky



### SAYINGS OF POPULAR WISDOM

**G**urdjieff used various “sayings of popular wisdom,” usually of Russian origin, in conversation and in his writings. He thought of them, or at least some of them, as legominisms, knowledge handed down through history to the present era. He makes allusion to such sayings in the preface to *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*, with the words:

*ACCORDING TO the numerous deductions and conclusions made by me during experimental elucidations concerning the productivity of the perception by contemporary people of new impressions from what is heard and read, and also according to the thought of one of the*

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*of popular wisdom which have reached our days through "legominisms" from the ancient days.<sup>1</sup>*

Below we list some sayings of popular wisdom of Russian origin that could be regarded as legominisms:

*What you seek will find you.*

*Diseases come on horseback but steal away on foot.*

*Take time when time is, for time will away.*

*Happiness is not a horse, you cannot harness it.*

*You cannot die twice, but once you will.*

*Only the grave will cure the hunchback.*

*The alphabet is the first step to wisdom.*

*The still lagoon is where the devils live.*

*Seek advice from experience not age.*

*If, if, if, – if mushrooms grow in your mouth.*

*Words can kill before a spear is thrown.*

*Life is short, the tasks are numerous.*

*The greatest king must at last be put to bed with a shovel.*

*To know everything is to know nothing.*

*God does not give horns to the cow that butts.*

*The fall of a leaf is a whisper to the living.*

*Never blame the mirror.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Life is Real Only Then, when 'I Am'* by G. I. Gurdjieff, Prologue, p55



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were rendered in phonetic English. The pupils had to learn the alphabet to decipher what was written. In the following illustration, the alphabet is applied to one of Gurdjieff's Study House aphorisms.



The others are as follows:

*Like what "it" does not like.*

*The highest that a man can attain is to be able to do.*

*The worse the conditions of life the more productive the work, always provided you remember the work.*

*Remember yourself always and everywhere.*

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

## SAYINGS RECORDED BY PUPILS

*Fight against suggestion.*

*Think of what you feel, and feel what you think.*

*Before seeking the way we must realize our nothingness.*

*The greater the understanding, the fewer the words.*

*Imagination wastes very much energy.*

*Every emotion has its opposite. To be free, must transcend both.*

*We must suffer for our sins before we can begin real development.*

*Observing people's reactions on each other is more amusing than a cinema.*

*Actions in one center react on all others (even outside the body), and a man's intelligence varies according to his capacity to localize these actions.*

*Kundalini at base of spine prevents our seeing things as they are; it is the representative of the moon; it is necessary for life, for if we saw things as they were we'd hang ourselves.*

*He who knows what his moon is and does can understand the cosmos.*

*Do not express feelings, save the energy.*

*To see your real character, watch your imagination.*

*Speak to no one who desires not to listen.*

*I do nothing. The senses move among the objects of the*

## GURDJIEFF ON FOOD

panions for drinking water before a meal...

*Not must drink before, drink after, otherwise you spoil appetite. Americans ignorant about food, not one thing they know, not even simplest medical knowledge they have. Only one small thing they do shows this, drinking glass of water before meals.*

*Body work twenty-four hours to make liquids necessary to digest food but before eating, they drink water which sucks out all these special liquids; dissolves them and they go off and when food comes, nothing there is for it to mix with, nothing for transformate; they eat only to make merde. Not only this they do but also they eat butter. Butter coats the stomach lining and all the insides, and what must pass through the walls cannot pass – they even eat chocolate before eating.*

*Chocolate coats inside and takes away all feeling of hunger, this is only for travellers, mountain climbers, etc., to eat only when they wish this effect when not can have food. This is why soldiers ate chocolate during war. But Americans eat before meals, such uneducate people they are.<sup>1</sup>*



On another occasion:

*The patron of Hotel Mondiale served boiled eel.*

*GURDJIEFF: Why you serve such thing? This is not fish, is serpent, is merde. Normal man not eat such thing. For him is like oyster. Only idiot or German eat such. For us is merde, like oyster.<sup>2</sup>*

*Thomas de Hartmann also tells us that: "... to taste life fully was one of Mr. Gurdjieff's principles. During our life*

<sup>1</sup> Gurdjieff and the women of the rope by solita solano, et al. p131

<sup>2</sup> Gurdjieff and the women of the rope by solita solano, et al. p134



### THE REFLECTIONS OF ORAGE

Alfred Richard Orage is regarded by many as Gurdjieff's premier pupil, having established The Work in America and collaborated with Gurdjieff over many years on his writings. Prior to his time with Gurdjieff in France and America, he was a leading literary light, editing the well-known literary magazine called *The New Age*, which was partially financed by George Bernard Shaw.

Consequently he was well-known in America, which proved useful in fund-raising, attracting people to the Work, and organizing publicity for Gurdjieff when he came to America. For six years Orage lived and taught in New York, returning each year to the Prieuré to work with

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Gurdjieff on his writings.

Orage taught the work in a distinctly different way to Ouspensky. This is well chronicled in C. Daly King's book, *The Oragean Version* – one of the more important books of the Work, as it includes a different set of diagrams relating to objective science than those found in *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Orage's sayings, spiced in a uniquely artistic manner, inject fresh flavor into the Work. Many, but not all, of those recorded below can be found (along with others) in a document entitled A R Orage - Aphorisms.<sup>1</sup>

*The purpose of the Gurdjieff method is to produce men – not 'men' in quotation marks. Monstrous genius is ruled out.*

*Consider the 'sly' man; he tries to be aware always.*

*Unless we can "remember" ourselves, we are completely mechanical. Self-observation is possible only through self-remembering. These are the first steps in self-consciousness.*

*Sons of God: they who understand and consciously cooperate.*

*A normal man is one who has not only actualized his potentialities but has freed himself from his subjectivity.*

*There is a complete protection available to you - silence.*

*Man is of the order of the moon: he collects impressions*

<sup>1</sup> A copy of this is available on [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com) and also from the Gurdjieff sharing Group on Facebook.



### THE WISDOM OF PETER OUSPENSKY

**P**eter Demianovich Ouspensky was Gurdjieff's most famous and influential pupil. In 1912, aged 34, he sprang to national fame in Russia through his book, *Tertium Organum*, which legitimately claimed to be in succession to Aristotle's *Organon* and Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*. Later, in London, while en route to the East, he met with A. R. Orage, who was an admirer of Ouspensky's essay on Tarot symbolism.

He first met Gurdjieff in April 1915, introduced by the musician Vladimir Pohl. It seems likely that Gurdjieff intended to attract Ouspensky. In 1916 Ouspensky became part of a group which included Anna Butkovsky-

## THE WISDOM OF PETER OUSPENSKY

*It is only when we realize that life is taking us nowhere that it begins to have meaning.*

*The first step in acquiring consciousness is the realization that we are not conscious.*

*The strangest and most fantastic fact about negative emotions is that people actually worship them.*

*There is no tyranny more ferocious than the tyranny of morality. Everything is sacrificed to it.*

*All dreams begin with "if."*

*When you become identified you cannot observe.*

*Divide in yourself the mechanical from the conscious, see how little there is of the conscious – how seldom it works.*

*You can understand other people only as much as you understand yourself and only on the level of your own being.*

*Do not seek attainment, seek the path – seek for the path within yourself.*

*The most difficult thing is to know what we do know, and what we do not know.*

*One cannot keep all the old views and opinions and acquire new ones.*

*Psychology is sometimes called a new science. This is quite wrong. Psychology is, perhaps, the oldest science, and, unfortunately, in its most essential features a forgotten science.*