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Introduction

Is the written word truly helpful for a discipline that is performed by the body? After long consideration and many thousands of movements classes, I realized that there was an enormous amount missing about this extraordinary art. Important material needed to be shared in order for the “Movements” to continue as Mr. Gurdjieff intended as part of his “Work.”

As the Movements move more and more into the general population, “teachers,” depending on where or by whom they have received the Movements, are often not given the guidelines and conditions under which to pass them on honorably and correctly. At this point in time, important conditions which may seem trivial need to be acknowledged. One needs to realize that this art form can only be transmitted in the manner it was intended by people who have been trained properly.

Movements are much better understood by being executed in a class of serious students with a truly knowledgeable instructor. But there are very few of those

CHAPTER 1

Creation and Execution

Parts of a “System” for Everyday Life

According to Mme. de Salzmann, whom Mr. Gurdjieff left in charge of The Work or The Fourth Way, the first beginning of the movements was in a hotel room in Tiflis.

She told me that Mr. Gurdjieff asked her to stand in an empty bed frame that was in a room.

He told her to raise her right leg, and then he left the room to make coffee. According to her, when she tried to put her leg down, he said, “keep leg up.” So she continued to stand on one leg for quite a while. Then he said, “change leg,” and she did. And those of you who have done it will recognize the beginnings of the First Obligatory.

Gurdjieff wanted the average person to understand the idea of “being” as it applies to their daily lives.

He wanted us to experience a “change of state.” We know that he studied medicine and the science of vibrations and that he was trying to find the most useful way to bring

Sacred Dances: The Gurdjieff Movements

people to a deeper connection to what we understand as “sensation” as the quickest way to self-observation and a change of “state.” From a meeting in 1922, he said:

“All centers should work simultaneously; great results can be obtained. Intellect (is) hampered by lack of physical movements, of which we have few, owing to the lack of use of limbs. More movements that we have, i.e., the greater the variety of physical work, dances, etc., the greater the possibility of getting new thoughts and ‘seeing’”. Development of the moving center wakens the other two. Real Work from the body upwards must begin from it. Every feeling stopped helps self-remembering by that feeling. All energy spent on conscious work is an investment that spent mechanically is lost forever. Study movements and postures and through them (one) can easily read emotions and thoughts”

Gurdjieff wished to help people learn to remember themselves “Always and Everywhere” – in other words, in their daily life. This self-remembering is an integral part of the understanding that is required for a change of Being. In order to increase the ability of people to be present in themselves, he needed to find a way to correct the years of bad education and lopsidedness of humans.

A way in which all three centers could be involved properly, and the proper functioning of the body could be free to work in harmony without each center interfering with the others. When asked why he didn’t start with psychology as Jung did or many other psychiatrists, he laughed and said that when everyone was collected around the “front door” (the head), he decided to go

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improvised at the piano for the original Movements classes), provides beautiful fuel for the emotional center as well as a “call” to the body to move in time with the beat.



Photo of Thomas De Hartmann from the Gurdjieff International Review.

There is also Project work for the emotional center. This began as making costumes and stage sets for the original Movements demonstrations given by Mr. Gurdjieff. Notably the stage ballet *The Struggle of the Magicians* with scenery by Alexandre de Salzmann, who was a noted stage designer of his time.

CHAPTER 2

A Three Centered Approach

As part of the understanding of the Movements, we must acknowledge their structure right away, following the Law of Three, which is a very important concept in the Work.

There are three major components which must be present to have a proper Movements class in which the pupils receive an impression of themselves.

There must be:

- 3) The class
- 4) The instructor
- 5) The musician

These three are equal, and the quality of their attention contributes to the outcome of the class and the impression received by everyone present.

1) The Class

MOST IMPORTANT: Movements are never done by one person alone. They are a group activity, and this group of people is representative of a microcosm of the universe.

A Three Centered Approach

“demonstration” as an additional demand on the pupils.

Mme. de Salzmann made several Movements films intending to keep as much of this material alive and to see if “presence” could be transmitted through the medium of film – to show “inner work” and the quality it manifests. Since some positions, arrangements and displacements were adapted or altered for the films, they cannot be taken as exact reference material.

It is also important to note that Movements in the films made by Mme. de Salzmann were often edited from the originals. There are several reasons for this. Primarily it is for the safety of the material, which should not be copied because some of it is not complete. Secondly, it was for dramatic effect since the aim of the films was to express both the extraordinariness and the unusual nature of the content.

These films are usually only shown to members of the Gurdjieff Foundation groups, who all contributed to the making of these films.

To this day, they are under strict supervision. There have been, unfortunately, however, several pirated attempts which have shown up on the Internet, and this could not be more unfortunate because these are esoteric exercises, not dance forms for entertainment. And in any case, badly pirated films don't show the full view of each Movement, making it even more dangerous to try and reproduce them directly from a film. Mr. Gurdjieff said that if his Movements are not done in the correct tempo and with the correct weight and quality, they can produce *exactly the opposite effect to what was intended.*

CHAPTER 4

Positions and Exactness

Many people often ask me, “How important is it to do the positions of the Movement exactly?”

The answer is VERY, but with understanding.

Movements are an exact language and have been composed in as thorough a way as *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* was written. This means that every position has been carefully planned and thought out and has a specific function and meaning.

One of the aims of the movements is to provide “new” and “different” positions in order to bring the body out of its habitual postures and gestures. There are very few associative postures in Movements, and this is on purpose.

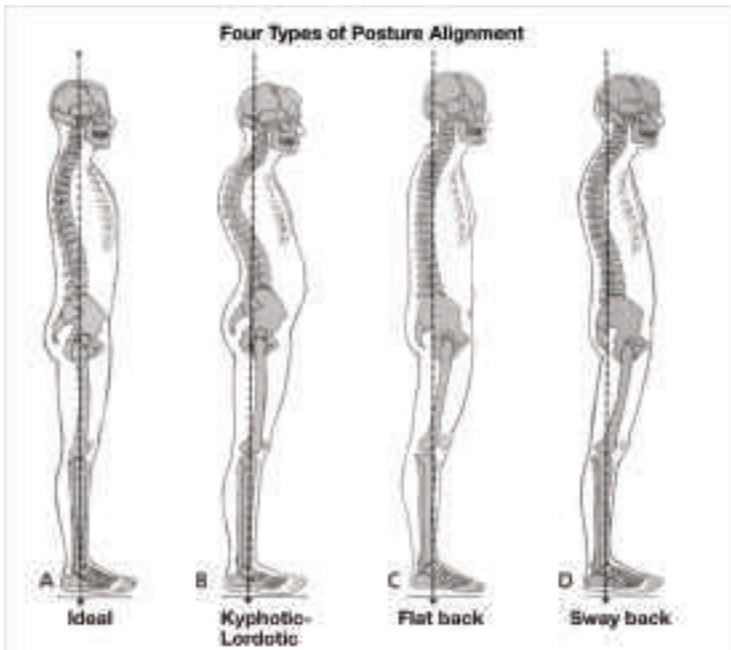
Mr. Gurdjieff had an incredible understanding of the human mechanism, which we call the body and how it functions. In composing the Movements, he utilizes every single part of the body in one way or another. Over the years, I have found this astounding that nothing has been left out. Everything is thought of. Even the tongue, fingers, eyes and toes. Everything.

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Here we see the limbs radiating out from the spine, which is the axis of the body.

So too, in the *First Obligatory*, we are advised by Mrs. Howarth to “pull the body upward while standing – out of your hips” to straighten the spine before we even begin.

This alignment allows the shoulder and pelvic girdles to hang straight down properly as opposed to the poor spinal alignment exhibited by most people upon standing. In the following diagram from Wikipedia, we can see the most common spinal positions.



The posture marked IDEAL above is the posture to begin *The First Obligatory*. In the Movement, we begin the