

Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson
A Commentary

Volume 1: up to page



Compiled and Edited
by
Robin Bloor



KARNAK PRESS

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A Commentary**

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DEDICATION

To G. Gurdjieff

and also to the editors:

**Alfred Richard Orage,
Louise March and Jean De Salzmann**

“The proper reading of this book requires a kind of reading of which none of us is at present at all capable, for we lack the form of logic necessary. The exact sequence of ideas, even words, is necessary—as they appear in the book.

The preface is to the book what the overture is to an opera. Though frankly I did not and you probably will not understand this at all, yet you cannot afford to miss it.

The entire book is a parable, and a series of parables. The ‘sower’ etc. in the Bible obviously does not refer to agriculture.”

~ Alfred Richard Orage

Foreword

This volume and all the other volumes in this series is intended to provide a comprehensive and detailed commentary on Gurdjieff's magnum opus. The bulk of the commentary comes from study group meetings that began in October 2025, but some date back to previous study group meetings.

It is likely that, with time, this book and other volumes in the series will be updated. The editor acknowledges the observations and contributions made by the attendees of all the study groups he has participated in.

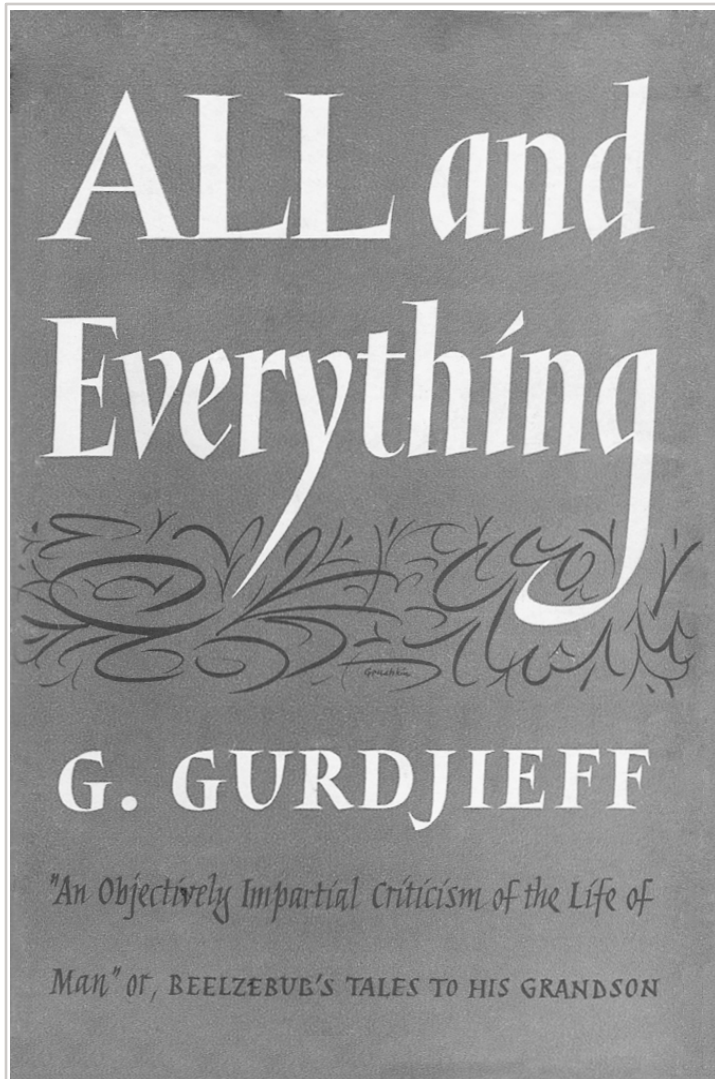


Figure 1. The original cover of the dust jacket of the first English edition of *The Tales*.

The Cover and Preface

On the opposite page we show a copy of the front face of the dust jacket of the first edition of *The Tales*.

It is possible, and in our view likely, that Gurdjieff himself determined to some degree the design of the dust jacket. One of us had a conversation about this with Paul Beekman Taylor, who was a child at the Prieuré. Taylor considered it possible that Gurdjieff designed that cover, noting that, at one time, Gurdjieff created a scrap book for several of his children and illustrated the cover himself.

There are several anecdotal stories about Gurdjieff doing design work, including a reference in *Meetings With Remarkable Men* to drawing a monogram on a shield for a neighbor. So it is quite likely that Gurdjieff sketched out a design for the cover and gave it to someone to complete prior to publication.

The actual design was most likely done by Philip Grushkin, a relatively well known cover designer of that era. If you examine the cover on the page opposite closely, his signature can be found among the swirls below the book's title. For those who are interested, a Google search¹ will provide further information about him.

On the next page you will see an image of the front cover of the first German edition of the *Tales*. As you can see it's form is very similar to the first English edition.

Let us consider this front page, line by line. The “main title” is:

¹ Search on “This Just In: Book Jackets by Philip Grushkin” or “Dust Jacket Designer Philip Grushkin From Comps To Final”.

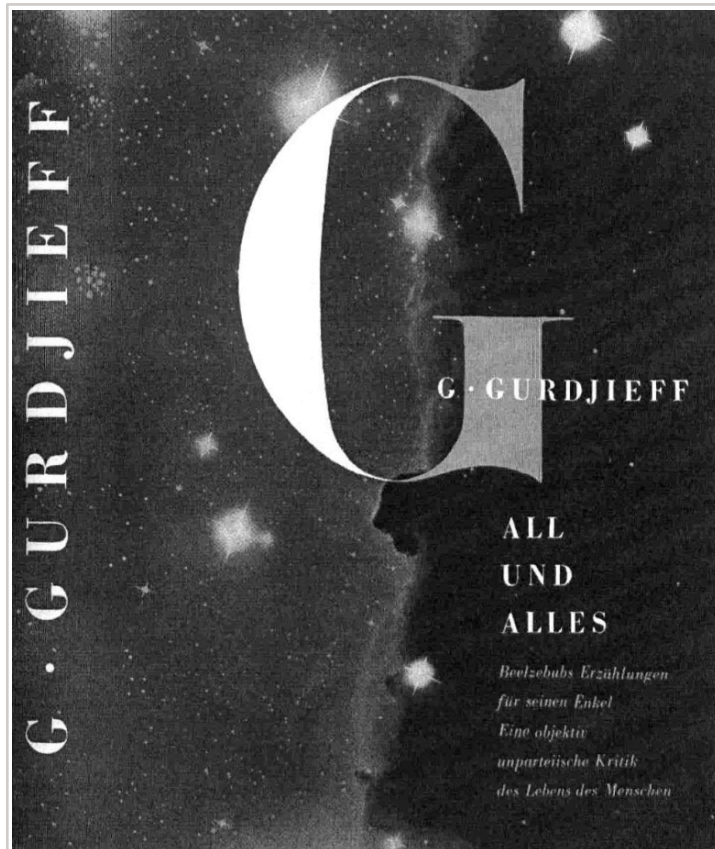


Figure 2. The original cover of the dust jacket of the first German edition of *The Tales*.

ALL and Everything

Note the typography:

“ALL” is fully capitalized. We take capitalization to indicate something holy. It seems likely that it indicates OUR ENDLESSNESS as a unity. In contrast, only the first letter of “Everything” is capitalized. It seems likely that “Everything” represents the multiplicity of the Megalocosmos—the fractioning of the everything down to our level and beneath. We wrapped “main title” in quotes because ALL and Everything is not the title of the book, but the title of three series of books.

Gurdjieff’s Name

Gurdjieff’s name is printed as G. GURDJIEFF, without the middle initial, and it is fully capitalized. This could be interpreted as normal typographic respect for the author. The font size is smaller than the title of the series, but, unusually, larger than the title(s) of the book itself.

We presume it to be an accidental error that subsequent editions of this book and all other books written by Gurdjieff list the author as G. I. Gurdjieff. This is the only edition of *The Tales* over which Gurdjieff had control of such details, and on the inside pages the name is also listed as G. GURDJIEFF. Gurdjieff had full control over the publication of *The Herald*, and everywhere his name is printed in that booklet it is G. GURDJIEFF.

The spine of the book just shows ALL and Everything and Gurdjieff’s name, without mention of the series title.

The Dual Title

Next on the cover is the series title,

“An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man” or, BEELZEBUB’S TALES TO HIS GRANDSON.

This is distinctly unusual, for three reasons. First, the font size is smaller than Gurdjieff's name. Second, it is not presented as a subtitle, since it does not follow the title ALL and Everything. And finally, there is not one title, but a dual title.

Dual titles for a book are rare. They were not so when Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* in 1818. And they still occur occasionally as in: *Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb*. Or the play, *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia*. Literary convention designates the first of the two titles to be the real title and the second to be a subtitle. So, on occasion, publishers of *Frankenstein* have dropped the second part of the title. Nevertheless, the reality is that a dual title means whatever the author intended and thus should probably be left undisturbed.

Gurdjieff chose "*An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*" to be the primary title and *BEELZEBUB'S TALES TO HIS GRANDSON* to be the alternative. The only time he references the book without mentioning both titles is in the book itself, where he mentions just the primary title:

"Or again, a being whose love resembled that of a contemporary terrestrial suitor for a rich widow—of course before he has received a single penny from her—would turn just as spiteful as one of those malicious persons who, foaming at the mouth, will hate that poor author who is now writing about you and me, in his work entitled *An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*.

The Tales p973

We note here that the primary title is wrapped in quotes and the alternative title is not. Since "*An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*" is not something some individual has said, these are shock quotes, indicating that Gurdjieff wishes us to ponder the meaning of these words.

"*An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*"

Objectively: The meaning of "objectively" is "in a way uninfluenced by personal feelings or opinions."

Impartial: The meaning of "impartial" is "fair and just."

Criticism: The meaning of "criticism," when it does not refer to a review of a literary or artistic work, is: "an expression of disapproval of someone or something based on perceived faults or mistakes." It has negative overtones. The etymology goes back to the Greek *kritikos* referring to someone who is able to make judgements.

Life of Man: In the juxtaposition of "Life" and "Man," the word "Man" clearly denotes human beings in general, and thus we can take "Life of Man" to denote not just the span of time between birth and death, but also how modern human beings in general live their lives.

So, taken together, we receive the impression that the book will discuss the faults and errors of modern man and will do so without being influenced by any of Gurdjieff's personal feelings or subjective opinions and it will do so in a just manner.

BEELZEBUB'S TALES TO HIS GRANDSON

Tale: A tale is a narrative or story that may be true or otherwise. It can be used in the sense of simply communicating (a statement), or entertaining the listeners (with a narrative), or teaching (as in recounting a fable).

Beelzebub: The choice of Beelzebub as the protagonist of the story is partly explained by Gurdjieff in the first chapter, so we will leave it until later in this book to discuss that.

Grandson: Some commentators have suggested that Beelzebub represents Gurdjieff and that his grandchildren are the modern people of the Work who were born too late to ever meet Gurdjieff and hence to whom he can only speak through his writings. This theory implies that Gurdjieff's immediate pupils were his children and their pupils and pupil's pupils are his grandchildren.

Capitalization: Because this title is capitalized, we are inclined to regard it as referring to a sacred collection of tales.

Or

One theory for the existence of two titles for the first series is that this series is, in reality, two books woven together.

The first book is, as the primary title suggests, a withering criticism of many aspects of the life of both historical and modern man. If you were so inclined, you could take note of every criticism that Beelzebub makes of priests, scientists, doctors, kings, emperors, politicians and so on, and you would have an inventory of human failings.

The second book is, as P L Travers called it in her memorable description of the book, published in *The Gurdjieff International Review*, a “great, lumbering flying cathedral.” Its central arc is the flight of the Karnak and Beelzebub’s recounting of his experiences with “the three-brained beings of planet Earth.” It is an allegory, within which there are allegories, within which there are allegories. Included is a full creation myth and many obscurely described scientific ideas and information.

The first book is quite accessible to the reader who dares to persevere. The second book is where “the dog is buried.”

In his book, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, J. G. Bennett writes:

“If Gurdjieff had intended his meaning to be readily accessible to every reader, he would have written the book differently. He himself used to listen to chapters read aloud, and if he found that key passages were taken too easily – and therefore almost inevitably too superficially – he would rewrite them in order, as he put it, to “bury the dog deeper.” When people corrected him and said that he surely meant “bury the bone deeper,” he would turn on them and say it is not the ‘bones’ but the ‘dog’ that you have to find. The dog is Sirius, the dog star...”

It’s possible that Bennett is right that the dog is Sirius. However, there is another possibility. There is a German idiom “Da liegt der Hund begraben” (meaning “where the dog is buried”) that would be obscure to most English readers, but might well have been familiar to Gurdjieff..

G. GURDJIEFF

All and Everything

*Ten Books, in Three Series,
of which this is the First Series*

Original written in Russian and Armenian. Translations into other languages have been made under the personal direction of the author, by a group of translators chosen by him and specially trained according to their defined individualities, in conformity with the text to be translated and in relation to the philological particularities of each language.

The Philological Declaration

In the 1950 edition, the second page after the title page, is the copyright page. It is on this page that we find what we have called “the philological declaration,” hidden under the copyright notice:

COPYRIGHT, 1950, BY

G. GURDJIEFF

All rights reserved, including
the right to reproduce this book
or portions thereof in any form
first edition

We use the word “hidden” deliberately. If this is important text, (Gurdjieff suggested it was important by also including it in *The Herald of Coming Good*), but Gurdjieff does not call attention to it at all - instead burying it on a left hand copyright page that few readers will even glance at –and it does not appear at all in the original German version.

It is one of Gurdjieff’s “deceptions.” Only the attentive reader will notice it and read it. And even the reader who does is unlikely to pay much attention to it, since on the surface all it seems to say is “I originally wrote it in Russian and Armenian, and I personally supervised the translation to ensure it was done well.”

However, we the reader needs to take note of the word “philology” and consider what Gurdjieff is saying.

Philology and Meaning

Philology: The dictionary defines philology as “the branch of knowledge that deals with the structure, historical

development, and relationships of a language or languages.” This is a somewhat unsatisfactory definition in respect of “Gurdjieff’s philology,” since he had little respect for academic philologists. The etymology of “philology” is from the Greek *philologia* meaning “love of discussion, learning, and literature, or studiousness.” This itself derives from *philo*, “loving” and *logos* “word, speech.”

Modern philology embraces linguistics (the scientific study of language and its structure). This is a 20th century addition to philology, of which Gurdjieff might disapprove. Philology can also be defined as “the study of literary texts, as well as oral and written records, the establishment of their authenticity and their original form, and the determination of their meaning.”

Anecdotally Gurdjieff showed a strong interest in etymology, which is an indispensable part of philology in determining meaning. For example, if you know that a word only acquired a specific meaning in the 20th century and you encounter it in a 19th century text, you know to discard the 20th century meaning.

With *The Tales* we repeatedly encounter the need to explore the etymology of a word. In some contexts it is crucial. One example of this is: “The Law of Catching Up.”

You will never determine its meaning if you do not examine its etymology. Its modern use is from sport and that meaning is now completely dominant, but it is not the meaning that Gurdjieff intends.

In Summary

It appears that the philological declaration is simply a declaration that the book (which was originally written in Russian and Armenian) was translated with special attention to philology. Consequently we need to pay special attention to philology when we read it.

FIRST SERIES: Three books under the title of “An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man,” or, “Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson.”

SECOND SERIES: Three books under the common title of “Meetings with Remarkable Men.”

THIRD SERIES: Four books under the common title of “Life is Real Only Then, When ‘I Am.’”

All written according to entirely new principles of logical reasoning and strictly directed towards the solution of the following three cardinal problems:

FIRST SERIES: To destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world.

SECOND SERIES: To acquaint the reader with the material required for a new creation and to prove the soundness and good quality of it.

THIRD SERIES: To assist the arising, in the mentation and in the feelings of the reader, of a veritable, non-fantastic representation not of that illusory world which he now perceives, but of the world existing in reality.

The First Preface Page

Ten Books in Three Series

The title page of *The Tales* states that All and Everything comprises ten books divided into three series. The first series consists of three books, the second of three books and the third of four books. This is a glaring inexactitude. Gurdjieff published the First Series at the end of his life and made arrangements for the later publishing of the first book of the Second Series and the first book of the Third Series.

So there are five official books, while Gurdjieff states unambiguously there will be ten, and does so on the first page of every one of his books, as shown opposite.

Gurdjieff was precise in his use of language and in his choice of words. This becomes very clear as you become more familiar with his writing. So we note that the second series, where we only know of one book, and the third series, where we only know of one book, are described as “under the common title,” whereas the first series is described simply as “under the title.”

So, what are the other books under these common titles? There is little evidence of them. The image on the next page is from the first page of a typewritten draft of chapter six of *Meetings With Remarkable Men*.

It suggests that the title of the book was not decided at the time, and that at least two books were intended. We can speculate that the three chapters beginning with Ekim Bey formed the second book, and perhaps that the final chapter, The Material Question, formed the third book. Unless some further evidence emerges, this is only speculation.

E K K I M B E Y

The first chapter of the second book of the second series--

MEN I HAVE KNOWN BY Georges Gurdjieff

For Mary Buckley
Copied by B.B.Rosett
February 1944.

The third series book, *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* has three clear sections: The Prologue, A series of talks given by Gurdjieff to Orage's New York group and a final chapter entitled the Inner and Outer Worlds of Man. There isn't any way to represent it as four books. And with this book, there is also the mystery of the missing chapters.

Missing Chapters (or Books)

At three different points in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Gurdjieff announces the titles of three chapters that he claims will be included in the third series. These chapters do not appear.

The chapter titles he promises are:

The physical body of man, its needs according to law, and possibilities of manifestation;

The astral body of man, its needs and possibilities of manifestation according to law; and

The divine body of man, and its needs and possible manifestations according to law.)

The following entry appears in the book: *Gurdjieff and The Women of the Rope*.

Thursday, June 18 1936

Lunch. We read the entire Skridloff chapter and all of us were deeply moved by the last part, especially the talk of Father Giovanni about understanding, faith, etc. Last night Gurdjieff told Alice that the last three portraits in his "gallery"- Karpenko, Dr. Ekim Bey, and Skridloff, from

which three full books will flow, represent the astral body of man.

It seems that this is what Gurdjieff intended, but there is no evidence of such books.

An Unwritten Book

In *The Tales* on page 917 we read of another book which he suggest he might write, with a footnote that contains the following words:

Note: If anyone is very interested in the ideas presented in this chapter, I advise him to read, without fail, my proposed book entitled The Opiumists, if, of course, for the writing of this book there will be sufficient French armagnac and Khaizarian bastourma.

THE AUTHOR

As far as we are aware, there is no evidence that this book was ever completed.

New Principles of Logical Reasoning

Having described the three series, he declares these books to be:

All written according to entirely new principles of logical reasoning...

It could be argued that Gurdjieff is exposing the reader to unfamiliar forms of reasoning. To claim that he is employing entirely new principles of logical reasoning seems an excessive claim, but as he does not explain what he means by this, it could conceivably be true, given that this is a book like no other.

Cardinal problems

He directs this logical reasoning towards towards what he describes as three cardinal problems:

cardinal: This means "chief, principal or pivotal." Its etymology is curious. It comes from the Latin cardo

meaning “hinge, pivot, key.” The summer solstice was *cardo anni*, the turning point of the year. The pole star is the *cardo* of the sky. There are cardinal sins and cardinal virtues.

Gurdjieff does not specifically state what the problems are. Instead he includes their description in his proposed solution. We can state the problems as follows:

1st Problem: The beliefs and views, rooted in the reader over centuries, about everything existing in the world, hinder or prevent his evolution.

Solution: Destroy them.

Gurdjieff's states unambiguously that people are awash with unhelpful beliefs and views and he intends, with this first series, to destroy such beliefs and views, freeing the reader from their influence.

2nd Problem: The reader requires appropriate material in order to create a new way of being.

Solution: Provide the material.

Gurdjieff sees the second series as constructive, and in it he intends to provide guidelines on how to live

3rd Problem: The reader needs to perceive the world as it is.

Solution: Help him (in his mentation and his feelings).

The first and second series sets the reader on a particular course. However, Gurdjieff implies that these alone will not be enough to bring the reader in direct contact with reality as it is. The purpose of the third book is to make this possible.

Friendly Advice

[Written impromptu by the author on delivering this book, already prepared for publication, to the printer.]

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 sayings of popular wisdom I have just remembered, handed down to our days from very ancient times, which declares:

“Any prayer may be heard by the Higher Powers and a corresponding answer obtained only if it is uttered thrice:

Firstly—for the welfare or the peace of the souls of one’s parents.

Secondly—for the welfare of one’s neighbor.

And only thirdly—for oneself personally.”

I find it necessary on the first page of this book, quite ready for publication, to give the following advice:

“Read each of my written expositions thrice:

Firstly—at least as you have already become mechanized to read all your contemporary books and newspapers.

Secondly—as if you were reading aloud to another person.

And only thirdly—try and fathom the gist of my writings.”

Only then will you be able to count upon forming your own impartial judgment, proper to yourself alone, on my writings. And only then can my hope be actualized that according to your understanding you will obtain the specific benefit for yourself which I anticipate, and which I wish for you with all my being.

AUTHOR

The Friendly Advice

The page entitled “Friendly Advice” is placed immediately before the contents page in the 1950 edition. We presume the word “friendly” to indicate that you will be grateful for the advice given, if you follow it.

An Inexactitude

This page begins with:

[Written impromptu by the author on delivering this book, already prepared for publication, to the printer.]

In reading the sentence we get the impression that Gurdjieff, delivering the final draft of the book for publication, suddenly thought: “Hmm, maybe I should add a little advice at the beginning on how to read the book.” Deciding it was a good idea he immediately dashed off a few paragraphs and added them at the beginning of the manuscript. This could not have been the case.

Even if we imagined that there were a process by which an author could turn up to the printer and quickly add an extra page to the soon-to-be-printed manuscript (there isn’t), we would know without doubt that the sentence was untrue. This is because Gurdjieff printed this page of Friendly Advice with these same words in square parentheses in *The Herald of Coming Good*, which was published in 1933, 16 years before the final manuscript of *The Tales* was delivered.

Usually, the use of square parentheses around text indicates that the text added by someone other than the author. This is obviously not the case here. It suggests that the whole page was an after thought.

There is, however, another possibility which is that the sentence is true. This possibility stems from the etymology of “impromptu.”

impromptu: In normal usage the word “impromptu” means “without being planned” or “without being rehearsed.” However, etymologically, it comes from the Latin *in promptu*, which means “in readiness,” implying that the

performer of the act was “ready,” even if the act itself was not preconceived.

We can also consider the meaning of the word “on.”

On: It will be a surprise to most readers that the preposition “on” has twelve possible meanings. They are as follows:

1. “in physical contact with”—as in “she was lying on the floor.”
2. “forming a part of”—as in “she had a scratch on her arm.”
3. “as a member of”—as in “she served on the board.”
4. “having something as a target or focus”—as in “she kept her eyes on the prize.”
5. “having something as a medium of storage or transmission”—as in “she stored his name on her computer.”
6. “in the course of”—as in “she was on her way.”
7. “indicating the day or part of a day when an event occurred”—as in “she did it on Thursday morning.”
8. “engaged in”—as in “she was on an errand.”
9. “regularly taking”—as in “she was on a course of antibiotics.”
10. “will be paid for by”—as in “the drinks are on her.”
11. “added to”—as in “the sales tax put a few cents on the price.”
12. “having as a topic”—as in “the author wrote his advice on delivering the book to the printer.”

Meaning 12 is the most likely meaning to apply if we want to take Gurdjieff’s words literally. The intended meaning would then be that the friendly advice was written in readiness, on the topic of delivering the book to the printer.

What is Heard and Read

Next we encounter 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...

Here Gurdjieff declares that he is very familiar with people’s perceptions of new impressions in respect of listening and reading, and that he has conducted experiments to understand the process. We should have little doubt that this is the case, given the many reports of him having *The Tales* read out and observing the reaction of the audience.

We then read:

...and also according to the thought of one of the sayings of popular wisdom I have just remembered, handed down to our days from very ancient times, which declares:

“Any prayer may be heard by the Higher Powers and a corresponding answer obtained only if it is uttered thrice:

Firstly—for the welfare or the peace of the souls of one’s parents.

Secondly—for the welfare of one’s neighbor.

And only thirdly—for oneself personally.”

Here Gurdjieff implies that there is a correspondence between the thought behind this ancient saying and the reading of *The Tales*, which relates specifically to prayer. He implies that there is a correspondence between the three modes of praying: for the welfare or the peace of the souls of one’s parents, for the welfare of one’s neighbor and for oneself personally, and the three modes of reading the book, which he is about to describe.

How To Read The Tales

In a few paragraphs Gurdjieff provides his advice on how to read *The Tales* and all his other books. The word “quite” as in “quite ready” can be taken to mean “thoroughly.”

Firstly

at least as you have already become mechanized to read all your contemporary books and newspapers.

Even diligent readers read mechanically. It is not done mindlessly—clearly information is absorbed—but it is done without a great deal of attention. It is perhaps worth noting here that The Tales defeats some people. They are not able to complete a first reading of the book.

Gurdjieff sees a parallel between reading mechanically and praying:

for the welfare or the peace of the souls of one's parents.

It may be easier to understand this if we refer to one of Gurdjieff's comments about one's parents:

All religions, all teachings come from God and speak in the name of God. This does not mean that God actually gave them, but they are connected with one whole and with what we call God.

For example: God said, Love thy parents and thou wilt love me. And indeed, whoever does not love his parents cannot love God. Before we go any further, let us pause and ask ourselves. Did we love our parents, did we love them as they deserved, or was it simply a case of "it loves," and how should we have loved?

Gurdjieff's Early Talks p419

The advice is to read "at least as you have already become mechanized to read" in the same way that one might pray "at least mechanically." Many of our mechanisms are bequeathed to us by our parents. We owe them.

Secondly

as if you were reading aloud to another person

On the surface of it, this is "an exercise" and not an easy one to carry out. We can read the book aloud to another person, or read it aloud when we are alone, but it is, in our opinion, more difficult to read "as if out loud." And, incidentally, to do

this we need to understand the typography and Gurdjieff's rhythm as a writer and how to pronounce the neologisms.

Those who are experienced in reading aloud to others will know that, when one does so, one splits one's attention between the act of reading and the act of listening to the words as you utter them. You attempt to consider the listener and you try to be eloquent. This is a distinctly different and, for some, unusual way of reading a book. It is a three-centered activity. The thinking center parses the words on the page, the voice (controlled by the moving center) is modulated by the emotional center and yet no sound is made. Control of one's breathing is also involved.

Gurdjieff sees a parallel between reading in this way and praying:

for the welfare of one's neighbor

This may be easier to appreciate if we refer to the following words that appear in The Tales:

...the commandment inculcated in me in my childhood, enjoining that "the highest aim and sense of human life is the striving to attain the welfare of one's neighbor," and that this is possible exclusively only by the conscious renunciation of one's own.

The Tales p1186

In order to read out loud effectively, one needs to be a willing and faithful servant to the listeners.

Thirdly

And only thirdly—try and fathom the gist of my writings

First, we note that Gurdjieff writes: "And only thirdly," advising that there should be no attempt to "try and fathom the gist" in either of the other two modes of reading.

If the intended meaning of "try and fathom the gist" is "try to fathom the gist" it is bad English, which is not at all likely. Even if Gurdjieff were capable of making such an error, he had Alfred Orage as his editorial assistant, who would never have

allowed such an elementary grammatical error to pass without comment.

try: Consider the etymology of “try.” The original meaning of this word is from the Anglo-French *trier* which meant “to examine judiciously or sit in judgement of” and from which comes the English word “trial.” It only later acquired the meaning of “to attempt to do.”

fathom: The noun “fathom” is a measure of six feet, which approximates to the length of arms stretched out sideways from finger tip to finger tip. The verb “fathom,” from Old English, means “to embrace, surround, envelop,” giving the sense of “getting your arms around.” It later came to mean “to get to the bottom of.”

gist: This is of French origin. Gite is French for a “domicile or habitation” and also has the meaning of something “covert.” An associated verb from Old French, *gésir* gives *gist en* (third person present indicative), meaning “it consists in” or “lies in.” The “gist” thus came to mean “the heart of” or “the essence of.”

To “try and fathom the gist” speaks of two efforts, not one. To sit in judgement over and to get to the essence.

Gurdjieff sees a parallel between reading in this way and praying:

And only thirdly—for oneself personally.

One way of thinking of the parallel between this three-part prayer and the reading of *The Tales* is to think of it in terms of body, essence and reason. The second reading is for growth of essence. The third reading is for growth of Reason.

Only Then

Gurdjieff concludes this page with:

Only then will you be able to count upon forming your own impartial judgment, proper to yourself alone, on my writings. And only then can my hope be actualized that according to your understanding you will obtain the specific

benefit for yourself which I anticipate, and which I wish for you with all my being.

These words imply a promise. As far as the reader is concerned, if he reads it in the manner described, he will be able to form his own “impartial judgement”—a rare capacity the reader probably never possessed before reading the book—and Gurdjieff’s hope for the reader, the nature of which he does not specifically state, will be actualized.

CONTENTS

I. The Arousing of Thought	3
II. Introduction: Why Beelzebub Was in Our Solar System	51
III. The Cause of the Delay in the Falling of the Ship Karnak	56
IV. The Law of Falling	66
V. The System of Archangel Hariton	70
VI. Perpetual Motion	73
VII. Becoming Aware of Genuine Being-Duty	76
VIII. The Impudent Brat Hassein, Beelzebub's Grandson, Dares to Call Men "Slugs"	79
IX. The Cause of the Genesis of the Moon	81
X. Why "Men" are not Men	87
XI. A Piquant Trait of the Peculiar Psyche of Contemporary Man	94
XII. The First "Growl"	98
XIII. Why in Man's Reason Fantasy May Be Perceived as Reality	103
XIV. The Beginnings of Perspectives Promising Nothing Very Cheerful.	106
XV. The First Descent of Beelzebub upon the Planet Earth	109
XVI. The Relative Understanding of Time	121
XVII. The Arch-Absurd: According to the Assertion of Beelzebub, Our Sun Neither Lights nor Heats	134
XVIII. The Arch-Preposterous	149

The Themes of The Tales

The Tales embodies multiple interweaving themes and arcs. In factual work there is usually a single linear theme. It is unusual for any fictional work to have more than three related interweaving themes.

A good example of three interweaving fictional themes is provided by Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the action passes between the dispute among the fairies, between Oberon and Titania, the encounters between the four "lovers" who enter the forest and the villagers (the mechanicals) who are rehearsing a play to perform at the court. These themes intersect and ultimately they all resolve happily.

The Tales can't be classified as a work of fact or fiction as it is a hybrid of both. And remarkably there are many more themes than you are likely to find in any other work. We believe it is worth enumerating and describing all these themes here, with reference to the list of contents.

Direct Teaching: The Preface pages, Chapters 1, The Arousing of Thought, and Chapter 48, From The Author are direct teaching by Gurdjieff partly prepare the reader for reading the book. This is supplemented at various points throughout.

Beelzebub's misbehavior, Exile and Redemption: This is one of the major themes of the first series, beginning in Chapter 2 and supplemented in many chapters that explain how Beelzebub redeemed himself until, in Chapter 47, The Inevitable Result of Impartial Mentation, is fully redeemed and perfected.

Mullah Nassr Eddin's Teaching. In many places throughout the first series, Mullah Nassr Eddin offers words of wisdom. These can be viewed as the observations of an impartial witness. This is similar if not identical to the role of the fool in some of Shakespeares plays.

Beelzebub's Tales to Hassein. This theme is set up in Chapter 3, The Cause of the Delay in the Falling of the Ship

XIX. Beelzebub's Tales about His Second Descent on the Planet Earth	177
XX. The Third Flight of Beelzebub to the Planet Earth	207
XXI. The First Visit of Beelzebub to India	227
XXII. Beelzebub for the First Time in Tibet	252
XXIII. The Fourth Personal Sojourn of Beelzebub on the Planet Earth	268
XXIV. Beelzebub's Flight to the Planet Earth for the Fifth Time	315
XXV. The Very Saintly Ashiata Shiemash, Sent from Above to the Earth	347
XXVI. The Legominism Concerning the Deliberations of the Very Saintly Ashiata Shiemash under the Title of "The Terror-of-the-Situation."	353
XXVII. The Organization for Man's Existence Created by the Very Saintly Ashiata Shiemash	366
XXVIII. The Chief Culprit in the Destruction of All the Very Saintly Labors of Ashiata Shiemash	390
SECOND BOOK	
XXXIX. The Fruits of Former Civilizations and the Blossoms of the Contemporary	413
XXX. Art	449
XXXI. The Sixth and Last Sojourn of Beelzebub on the Planet Earth	524
XXXII. Hypnotism	558
XXXIII. Beelzebub as Professional Hypnotist	579
XXXIV. Russia	591

Karnak – a justification is given for Beelzebub to begin his education of Hassein, and this continues in the many chapters that describe Beelzebub's visits to Earth, his interactions with Gornahoor Harharkh and with Angels and Archangels.

The Journey of the Karnak. The journey of the Karnak proceeds initially from Beelzebub's home planet, Karatas, for Beelzebub to attend a conference and then return. The action on the Karnak is referred to in various chapters. The final event is described in Chapter 47, The Inevitable Result of Impartial Mentation.

The Heavenly Realm. Incidentally at various times, we encounter the appearances, actions and explanations of various high individuals; angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim.

The History of Mankind. The history of mankind is told from Atlantis Chapter 15, *The First Descent of Beelzebub upon the Planet Earth* up to the present day. There is much in this that is allegorical to the point, where it could also be viewed as depicted the life of a single man.

Messengers from Above. Ashiata Shiemash (Chapters 25, 26, and 27) occupies the central role among all the mentioned messengers sent from above, but others are also discussed. This theme complements the theme of the descent of mankind.

Kundabuffer and The Descent of Mankind: The primary difficulty for humanity is depicted as being a result of an error (the implanting of Kundabuffer) on the part of a commission of Archangels. Strongly associated with this are the behavior of various Hasnamuss individuals, which could be the subject of a study in its own right.

Beelzebub's Sojourns. The sojourns tell stories of their own. We can examine what prompted each sojourn (Chapters 15, 19 - 24, 31) and how Beelzebub interfered in the affairs of men or simply observed them.

Gurdjieff's Travels: It will likely be noticed by the reader that Beelzebub's path on his sixth sojourn roughly follows

XXXV. The Change in the Appointed Course of the Falling of the Transspace Ship Karnak	657
XXXVI. Just a Wee Bit More about the Germans	660
XXXVII. France	663
XXXVIII. Religion	694
XXXIX. The Holy Planet "Purgatory"	744

THIRD BOOK

XL. Beelzebub Tells How People Learned and Again Forgot about the Fundamental Cosmic Law of Heptaparashinokh	813
XLI. The Bokharian Dervish Hadji-Asvatz-Troov	871
XLII. Beelzebub in America	918
XLIII. Beelzebub's Survey of the Process of the Periodic Reciprocal Destruction of Men, or Beelzebub's Opinion of War	1055
XLIV. In the Opinion of Beelzebub, Man's Understanding of Justice is for him in the Objective Sense an Accursed Mirage	1119
XLV. In the Opinion of Beelzebub, Man's Extraction of Electricity from Nature and Its Destruction During Its Use, Is One of the Chief Causes of the Shortening of the Life of Man	1145
XLVI. Beelzebub Explains to his Grandson the Significance of the Form and Sequence Which He Chose for Expounding the Information Concerning Man	1161
XLVII. The Inevitable Result of Impartial Mentation	1173
XLVIII. From the Author	1184

Gurdjieff's path from central Asia through Russia, Germany and France and finally to America.

Transspace Ships. This particular area of study involves considering the meaning of the various forms of transport which can be viewed allegorically as various changes of state, or means of self-observation. Connected with this are Beelzebub's various activities on Saturn and Mars.

HIS ENDLESSNESS and The Creation. *Chapter 39, The Holy Planet "Purgatory,"* contains the primary description of the creation, depicting its origin as being a struggle between The Heropass and HIS ENDLESSNESS. This sets up a cosmology which can be taken as the foundation of Objective Science.

Objective Science. There are many references throughout *The Tales* to aspects of Objective Science. It starts in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the last of which seems to be a description of the Enneagram. At many places the laws of Heptaparashinokh and Triamazikamno are described, and the concept of the Trogoautoegocrat is introduced. Okidanokh is also described and discussed.

How Should Men Live? Beelzebub sees the prevalence of war (reciprocal destruction) and man's use of electricity, as central problems for man that need to be resolved. Beelzebub's final words could be regarded as his suggested solution.

How to Work on Oneself. At various points important ideas about the physical and psychic life of man are elucidated and helpful advice is provided.