

The Arousing of Thought 15-22

Gurdjieff puts a significant amount of effort into preparing the reader to read his book. It's clear that he knows the reader will miss most of what he is trying to convey on the first few readings of the book, even though it is there on the page. The diligent reader will, however, return again and again to the text knowing that they never fully understood the words on previous readings. Eventually the reader will realize that they will need to know more about themselves just to read the book.

Hobbies

In view of the fact that I have happened here accidentally to touch upon a question which has lately become one of my so to speak "hobbies," namely, the process of human mentation,...

hobby: 1400, *hobi*, "small, active horse," short for *hobyn* (mid-14c.; late 13c. in Anglo-Latin), probably originally a proper name for a horse (compare *dobbin*), a diminutive of Robert or Robin. The modern sense of "a favorite pursuit, object, or topic" is from 1816, a shortening of *hobbyhorse*. It was also used in the "morris horse" (morris dancing) sense (1760) and the "child's toy horse" sense (1680s).

The horse is a primary metaphor for the emotional center. His use of the word could also be viewed as ironic. He never happens upon this topic, accidentally in the previous paragraph.

In view of the fact that I have happened here accidentally to touch upon a question which has lately become one of my so to speak "hobbies," namely, the process of human mentation, I consider it possible, without waiting for the corresponding place predetermined by me for the elucidation of this question, to state already now in this first chapter at least something concerning that axiom which has accidentally become known to me, that on Earth in the past it has been usual in every century that every man, in whom there arises the boldness to attain the right to be considered by others and to consider himself a "conscious thinker," should be informed while still in the early years of his responsible existence that man has in general two kinds of mentation: one kind, mentation by thought, in which words, always possessing a relative sense, are employed; and the other kind, which is proper to all animals as well as to man, which I would call "mentation by form."

The second kind of mentation, that is, "mentation by form," by which, strictly speaking, the exact sense of all

Conscious Thinker

that on Earth in the past it has been usual in every century that every man, in whom there arises the boldness to attain the right to be considered by others and to consider himself a "conscious thinker," should be informed while still in the early years of his responsible existence that man has in general two kinds of mentation: one kind, mentation by thought, in which words, always possessing a relative sense, are employed; and the other kind, which is proper to all animals as well as to man, which I would call "mentation by form."

It is clearly an "inexactitude" to suggest that anything of the kind "has been usual." The phrase "in whom there arises the boldness to attain the right to be considered by others and to consider himself a 'conscious thinker,'" is curious.

It implies that "boldness" is required of those who wish to be a "conscious thinker." "Bold" means "brave, confident, strong," both in current usage and also etymologically. "Conscious thinker," is most likely wrapped in quotes to highlight the fact that "conscious thinking" is different from our normal thinking.

Mentation by Thought

Gurdjieff insists that there are two kinds of "mentation." He chooses the word "mentation" rather than "thinking" for a reason. "Mentation" is an act of the mind whereas "mentation by thought" is an act led by the intellectual center, depending heavily on its use and manipulation of words. This he signals in the phrase: "in which words, always possessing a relative sense, are employed."

We can reference *In Search of the Miraculous* by P D Ouspensky for a more complete description of mentation by thought. Ouspensky writes:

"The division of man into seven categories, or seven numbers, explains thousands of things which otherwise cannot be understood. This division gives the first

conception of relativity as applied to man. Things may be one thing or another thing according to the kind of man from whose point of view, or in relation to whom, they are taken.

"In accordance with this, all the inner and all the outer manifestations of man, all that belongs to man, and all that is created by him, is also divided into seven categories.

"It can now be said that there exists a knowledge number one, based upon imitation or upon instincts, or learned by heart, crammed or drilled into a man. Number one, if he is man number one in the full sense of the term, learns everything like a parrot or a monkey.

"The knowledge of man number two is merely the knowledge of what he likes; what he does not like he does not know. Always and in everything he wants something pleasant. Or, if he is a sick man, he will, on the contrary, know only what he dislikes, what repels him and what evokes in him fear, horror, and loathing.¹

"The knowledge of man number three is knowledge based upon subjectively logical thinking, upon words, upon literal understanding. It is the knowledge of bookworms, of scholastics...

Gurdjieff then goes on to explain that the division into seven categories needs to be applied to everything relating to man.

"The same order of division into seven categories must be applied to everything relating to man. There is art number one, that is the art of man number one, imitative, copying art, or crudely primitive and sensuous art such as the dances and music of savage peoples. There is art number two, sentimental art; art number three, intellectual, invented art; and there must be art number four, number five, and so on.

"In exactly the same way there exists the religion of man number one, that is to say, a religion consisting of rites, of external forms, of sacrifices and ceremonies of imposing splendor and brilliance, or, on the contrary, of a gloomy, cruel, and savage character, and so on. There is the religion

¹ *In Search of the Miraculous* by P D Ouspensky, p72-73

writing must be also perceived, and after conscious confrontation with information already possessed, be assimilated, is formed in people in dependence upon the conditions of geographical locality, climate, time, and, in general, upon the whole environment in which the arising of the given man has proceeded and in which his existence has flowed up to manhood.

Accordingly, in the brains of people of different races and conditions dwelling in different geographical localities, there are formed about one and the same thing or even idea, a number of quite independent forms, which during functioning, that is to say, association, evoke in their being some sensation or other which subjectively conditions a definite picturing, and which picturing is expressed by this, that, or the other word, that serves only for its outer subjective expression.

That is why each word, for the same thing or idea, almost always acquires for people of different geographical locality and race a very definite and entirely different so to say "inner content."

In other words, if in the entirety of any man who has arisen and been formed in any locality, from the results of the specific local influences and impressions a certain "form" has been composed, and this form evokes in him by association the sensation of a definite "inner content," and consequently of a definite picturing or notion for the expression of which he employs one or another word which has eventually become habitual, and as I have said, subjective to him, then the hearer of that word, in whose being, owing to different conditions of his arising and growth, there has been formed concerning the given word a form of a different "inner content," will always perceive and of course infallibly understand that same word in quite another sense.

This fact, by the way, can with attentive and impartial

of man number two; the religion of faith, love, adoration, impulse, enthusiasm, which soon becomes transformed into the religion of persecution, oppression, and extermination of 'heretics' and 'heathens.' There is the religion of man number three; the intellectual, theoretical religion of proofs and arguments, based upon logical deductions, considerations, and interpretations...¹

Mentation by Form

The second kind of mentation, that is, "mentation by form," by which, strictly speaking, the exact sense of all writing must be also perceived, and after conscious confrontation with information already possessed, be assimilated,...

It is necessary to analyze the text in some detail in order to grasp what Gurdjieff is trying to convey. We begin with the word "form."

form: c. 1200, *forme*, *fourme*, "semblance, image, likeness," from Old French *forme*, *fourme*, "physical form, appearance; pleasing looks; shape, image; way, manner" (12c.), from Latin *forma* "form, contour, figure, shape; appearance, looks; an outline, a model, pattern, design; sort, kind condition," a word of unknown prior origin. From c. 1300 as "physical shape (of something), contour, outline," of a person, "shape of the body;" also "appearance, likeness;" also "the imprint of an object." From c. 1300 as "correct or appropriate way of doing something; established procedure; traditional usage; formal etiquette." Mid-14c. as "instrument for shaping; a mould;" late 14c. as "way in which something is done," also "pattern of a manufactured object." Used widely from late 14c. in theology and Platonic philosophy with senses "archetype of a thing or class; Platonic essence of a thing; the formative principle."

The meaning Gurdjieff is indicating is closest the sense of the appears closest to "Platonic essence of a thing; the formative principle." However, he is strongly asserting that

¹ In Search of the Miraculous by P D Ouspensky, p73

within this mode of mentation each individual establishes (by habit) and entirely subjective inner meaning for every word.

The text, if read seriously, obliges the reader to consider their personal "mentation by form." Their mode of inner association that links sounds to inner images, not well defined words. The implication is that, in "mentation by form," an image is invoked in association with a word or collection of words, through sensation. He writes:

Accordingly, in the brains of people of different races and conditions dwelling in different geographical localities, there are formed about one and the same thing or even idea, a number of quite independent forms, which during functioning, that is to say, association, evoke in their being some sensation or other which subjectively conditions a definite picturing, and which picturing is expressed by this, that, or the other word, that serves only for its outer subjective expression.

That is why each word, for the same thing or idea, almost always acquires for people of different geographical locality and race a very definite and entirely different so to say "inner content."

For example, if we consider a common word like "house," any image that might arise in association with that word would be different for someone from Paris compared to someone from New York, and different again for someone who lived in rural France or rural America. The subjective associations to it would be different, arising from the experience of a house, which would vary by culture and geographic location and would include personal experience.

Clearly the difference in meaning of conceptual words, such as "justice" or "intelligence," would be equally as tainted, if not more so, by the personal and cultural context within which they were experienced and the habitual associations that were formed.

Gurdjieff asserts in the text that "mentation by form" is proper to all animals as well as to man. This must mean that

"mentation by form" is primarily established by the emotional center and moving/instinctive centers.

As man has, additionally, an intellectual center, "the subjective experiences of the emotional center and moving/instinctive centers, naturally taint any intellectual definition that a man might attach to a given word. While "mentation by thought" is possible for man alone, it does not develop naturally. Mentation by form develops from the moment of birth and is the normal foundation of human mentation.

Must be perceived...

the exact sense of all writing must be also perceived, and after conscious confrontation with information already possessed, be assimilated,...

Gurdjieff says that the exact sense of all writing must also be perceived using "mentation by form." This is not avoidable. This is the mentation that we have established since being born and which is completely automatic for us. If we wanted with all our heart not to experience writing in this way, we still could not avoid doing so.

confrontation: 1630s, "action of bringing two parties face to face," for examination and discovery of the truth, from Medieval Latin *confrontationem* (nominative *confrontatio*), noun of action from past-participle stem of *confrontari*, from assimilated form of Latin *com* "with, together" + *frontem* (nominative *frons*) "forehead."

assimilate: early 15c., in physiology, "absorb into and make part of the body," from Latin *assimilatus*, past participle of *assimilare*, *assimulare* "to make like, copy, imitate, assume the form of; feign, pretend," from assimilated form of *ad* "to" + *simulare* "make similar," from *similis* "like, resembling, of the same kind." Meaning "make alike, cause to resemble," and intransitive sense "become incorporated into" are from 1620s. In linguistics, "bring into accordance or agreement in speech," from 1854.

Consequences

He talks about the consequences of the differences in the development of “mentation by form” in people with different upbringings, throwing more light on the process of mentation.

Accordingly, in the brains of people of different races and conditions dwelling in different geographical localities, there are formed about one and the same thing or even idea, a number of quite independent forms, which during functioning, that is to say, association, evoke in their being some sensation or other which subjectively conditions a definite picturing, and which is expressed by this, that, or the other word, that serves only for its outer subjective expression.

Here he describes a chain of links from a thing or idea to a form, which evokes a sensation, conditioning a picturing, which is expressed by a word.

evoke: 1620s, from French *évoquer* or directly from Latin *evocare* “call out, rouse, summon,” from assimilated form of *ex* “out” + *vocare* “to call.” Often more or less with a sense of “calling spirits,” or being called by them. Of feelings, memories, etc., by 1856.

condition: late 15c., “to make conditions, stipulate,” from condition (n.). Meaning “subject to something as a condition” is from 1520s; sense of “form a prerequisite of” is from 1868. Meaning “to bring to a desired condition” is from 1844; psychological sense of “teach or accustom (a person or animal) to certain habits or responses” is from 1909.

Gurdjieff restates the problem surrounding the objective understanding of words.

In other words, if in the entirety of any man who has arisen and been formed in any locality, from the results of the specific local influences and impressions a certain “form” has been composed, and this form evokes in him by association the sensation of a definite “inner content,” and con-

sequently of a definite picturing or notion for the expression of which he employs one or another word which has eventually become habitual, and as I have said, subjective to him, then the hearer of that word, in whose being, owing to different conditions of his arising and growth, there has been formed concerning the given word a form of a different “inner content,” will always perceive and of course infallibly understand that same word in quite another sense.

observation be very clearly established when one is present at an exchange of opinions between persons belonging to two different races or who arose and were formed in different geographical localities.

And so, cheerful and swaggering candidate for a buyer of my wisecrings, having warned you that I am going to write not as “professional writers” usually write but quite otherwise, I advise you, before embarking on the reading of my further expositions, to reflect seriously and only then to undertake it. If not, I am afraid for your hearing and other perceptive and also digestive organs which may be already so thoroughly automatized to the “literary language of the intelligentsia” existing in the present period of time on Earth, that the reading of these writings of mine might affect you very, very cacophonously, and from this you might lose your . . . you know what? . . . your appetite for your favorite dish and for your psychic specificity which particularly titillates your “inside” and which proceeds in you on seeing your neighbor, the brunette.

For such a possibility, ensuing from my language, or rather, strictly speaking, from the form of my mentation, I am, thanks to oft-repeated past experiences, already quite as convinced with my whole being as a “thoroughbred donkey” is convinced of the right and justice of his obstinacy.

Now that I have warned you of what is most important, I am already tranquil about everything further. Even if any misunderstanding should arise on account of my writings, you alone will be entirely to blame, and my conscience will be as clear as for instance . . . the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm's.

In all probability you are now thinking that I am, of course, a young man with an auspicious exterior and, as some express it, a “suspicious interior,” and that, as a

Intelligentsia

Gurdjieff warns us yet again that he will not write as “professional writers” usually write, and advises us to reflect seriously before reading any further.

If not, I am afraid for your hearing and other perceptive and also digestive organs which may be already so thoroughly automatized to the “literary language of the intelligentsia” existing in the present period of time on Earth, ...

Intelligentsia: “the intellectual class collectively,” a loan word from Russian *intelligentsiya*, c 1905, from Latin *intelligentia* “intelligence.”

Naturally it is the intelligentsia, being the section of society from which most authors are drawn, that moulds literary language of the day.

The possible impact of the book

that the reading of these writings of mine might affect you very, very cacophonously, and from this you might lose your . . . you know what? . . . your appetite for your favorite dish and for your psychic specificity which particularly titillates your “inside” and which proceeds in you on seeing your neighbor, the brunette.

Gurdjieff warns us that his writings will have an impact and may possibly have an impact that we perhaps wouldn't welcome, such as losing our physical or sexual appetite.

cacophony: (n.) 1650s, “harsh or unpleasant sound,” probably via French *cacophonie* (16c.), from a Latinized form of Greek *kakophonia*, from *kakophonos* “harsh sounding,” from *kakos* “bad, evil.” Meaning “discordant sounds in music” is from 1789.

He doesn't say that his writing is cacophonous, but that its affect on you might be cacophonous.

The thoroughbred donkey

For such a possibility, ensuing from my language, or rather, strictly speaking, from the form of my mentation, I am, thanks to oft-repeated past experiences, already quite as convinced with my whole being as a "thoroughbred donkey" is convinced of the right and justice of his obstinacy.

"Thoroughbred donkey" is a comical oxymoron, as becomes clear from the etymology.

thoroughbred: The earliest meaning, 1701, applied to persons, "thoroughly accomplished," from thorough + bred, the past tense of breed. In reference to horses, "of pure breed or stock," is from 1796; the noun is first recorded 1842. Thoroughbred refers specifically to the distinct breed of horse developed in England for racing.

donkey: familiar term for an ass, 1785, also *donky*, *donkie*, originally slang or dialectal, of uncertain origin. Perhaps a diminutive from dun "dull gray-brown." Donkeys are notoriously stubborn, so the word began to be applied to stupid, obstinate, or wrong-headed persons by 1840.

While there are purely bred donkeys, they would never be described as thoroughbred. However Gurdjieff's conviction might well be appropriately described by such an adjective.

Ex-Kaiser Wilhelm

Now that I have warned you of what is most important, I am already tranquil about everything further. Even if any misunderstanding should arise on account of my writings, you alone will be entirely to blame, and my conscience will be as clear as for instance . . . the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm's.

Ex-Kaiser Wilhelm was the last German Emperor (Kaiser) and King of Prussia. He assumed the throne in 1888, launching Germany on a warlike course, eventually resulting in the outbreak of World War I, when he gave German backing to Austria-Hungary against Serbia, following the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. After

Germany's defeat in 1918, Wilhelm lost the support of the German army, abdicated and fled to exile in the Netherlands, where he died in 1941.

Ex-Kaiser Wilhelms conscience was anything but clear.

Auspicious and suspicious

After this passage, Gurdjieff goes on to talk about his motive for writing:

In all probability you are now thinking that I am, of course, a young man with an auspicious exterior and, as some express it, a "suspicious interior," and that, as a novice in writing, I am evidently intentionally being eccentric in the hope of becoming famous and thereby rich.

auspicious: 1590s, "of good omen", from Latin *auspicium* "divination by observing the flight of birds," from *auspex* (genitive *auspiciis*) + *-ous*.

suspicious: (adj.) mid-14c., "deserving of or exciting suspicion," from Old French *sospecious*, from Latin *suspiciosus*, *suspitosus* "exciting suspicion, causing mistrust," also "full of suspicion, ready to suspect," from stem of *suspicere* "look up at." Meaning "full of suspicion, inclined to suspect in English is attested from c. 1400.

novice in writing, I am evidently intentionally being eccentric in the hope of becoming famous and thereby rich. If you indeed think so, then you are very, very mistaken. First of all, I am not young; I have already lived so much that I have been in my life, as it is said, “not only through the mill but through all the grindstones”; and secondly, I am in general not writing so as to make a career for myself, or so as to plant myself, as is said, “firm-footedly,” thanks to this profession, which, I must add, in my opinion provides many openings to become a candidate d-i-r-e-c-t for “Hell”—assuming of course that such people can in general by their Being, perfect themselves even to that extent, for the reason that knowing nothing whatsoever themselves, they write all kinds of “claptrap” and thereby automatically acquiring authority, they become almost one of the chief factors, the totality of which steadily continues year by year, still further to diminish the, without this, already extremely diminished psyche of people.

And as regards my personal career, then thanks to all forces high and low and, if you like, even right and left, I have actualized it long ago, and have already long been standing on “firm feet” and even maybe on very good feet, and I moreover am certain that their strength is sufficient for many more years, in spite of all my past, present, and future enemies.

Yes, I think you might as well be told also about an idea which has only just arisen in my madcap brain, and namely, specially to request the printer, to whom I shall give my first book, to print this first chapter of my writings in such a way that anybody may read it before cutting the pages of the book itself, whereupon, on learning that it is not written in the usual manner, that is to say, for helping to produce in one’s mentation, very smoothly and easily, exciting images and lulling reveries, he may, if he wishes,

I am not young

First of all, I am not young; I have already lived so much that I have been in my life, as it is said, “not only through the mill but through all the grindstones”;

In reality almost everyone who buys this book knows that the author is no longer alive and is probably aware that the book wasn’t published until after his death. The writing here is thus theatrical, a denial that the author is seeking fame and wealth through the adoption of an unusual literary style.

The phrase “not only through the mill but through all the grindstones” may derive from 2nd century Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus, who wrote “The millstones of the gods grind late, but they grind fine.”

D-i-r-e-c-t

and secondly, I am in general not writing so as to make a career for myself, or so as to plant myself, as is said, “firmfootedly,” thanks to this profession, which, I must add, in my opinion provides many openings to become a candidate d-i-r-e-c-t for “Hell”

Gurdjieff’s distinctive use of dashes between every letter of a word is a stylistic choice that can be taken to indicate extreme emphasis. It visually represents someone spelling the word out letter-by-letter as a parent might when teaching a child, trying to be precise.

Acquiring authority

... they write all kinds of “claptrap” and thereby automatically acquiring authority, they become almost one of the chief factors, the totality of which steadily continues year by year, still further to diminish the, without this, already extremely diminished psyche of people.

claptrap: 1730, “a trick to ‘catch’ applause,” a stage term; from clap + trap (n.). Extended sense of “cheap, showy language” is from 1819; hence “nonsense, rubbish.”

Gurdjieff's phrase "till further to diminish the, without this, already extremely diminished psyche of people" is a kind of refrain that occurs elsewhere in *The Tales*, indicating that although already weak, the psyche of man continues to get weaker because of his behaviour.

Firm-footedly

And as regards my personal career, then thanks to all forces high and low and, if you like, even right and left, I have actualized it long ago, and have already long been standing on "firm feet" and even maybe on very good feet, and I moreover am certain that their strength is sufficient for many more years, in spite of all my past, present, and future enemies.

He uses the term "firm-footedly" earlier and "firm feet" in this paragraph. It could be taken to mean "firm or secure financial position," although the intended meaning may go deeper, because Gurdjieff uses these directions: high, low, left and right. These are reminiscent of the Christian ritual of making the sign of the cross.

So we may also wonder if the use of "firm feet" in this context might relate to Christianity, since the words are wrapped in quotes. If so, then it may relate to a passage from Ephesians 13:16 (particularly verse 15).

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Madcap

Yes, I think you might as well be told also about an idea which has only just arisen in my madcap brain,

madcap: 1580s, noun ("person who acts madly or wildly") and adjective ("wild, harum-scarum"), from mad + cap, used figuratively for "head." The "cap" part is an old (obsolete in any other use) word meaning "head." So a "madcap" was originally a "mad-head," someone who "has bats in their belfry."

Gurdjieff continues to be self-deprecating. In this "preface" in addition to dispensing knowledge, he is partly arrogant, partly insulting to the reader and partly self-critical.

Cutting the pages of the book

The practice of publishing books with unopened (or uncut) pages was common up until the early 20th century. The practice of seeling books in this format dates back to the earliest printed books where pages were printed on large sheets, folded into groups of pages, and then lightly bound. Before the 19th century, books were often sold in temporary bindings expecting the buyer to take the book to a professional binder to have a permanent, custom binding created.

The practice remained common even as publishers began supplying books in "publisher's cloth" bindings (starting around the 1820s). Books from the 18th and 19th centuries are very frequently found with unopened pages, as the reader was still expected to use a paper knife (or letter opener) to slice open the folds as they read. It was a mark of a new, unread book.

With the rise of mass-market edition binding and the introduction of mechanical trimming methods like the guillotine cutter it became cheaper and faster for publishers to trim all the edges of the book block smooth and flush before binding. This gradually ended the common practice for most commercial books.

So the practice largely disappeared for mainstream publications by around 1900 to the 1930s in the US and UK. Nevertheless, it persisted longer for fine/limited editions and for books in some European countries, notably France.

... specially to request the printer, to whom I shall give my first book, to print this first chapter of my writings in such a way that anybody may read it before cutting the pages of the book itself ...

Again, this is theater rather than a feasible idea, as it involves a unique publishing process– trimming some of the pages of a book, but not others. And, of course, no volumes of *The Tales* were published in this way. It would additionally have required booksellers to co-operate and most likely they would not have done so.

Lulling Reveries

exciting images and lulling reveries, ...

lull: (v.) early 14c., *lullen* “to calm or hush to sleep,” probably imitative of lu-lu sound used to lull a child to sleep (compare Swedish *lulla* “to hum a lullaby,” German *lullen* “to rock,” Middle Dutch *lollen* “to mutter”). Figurative use from 1570s; specifically “to quiet (suspicion) so as to delude into a sense of security” is from c. 1600.

reverie: (n.) mid-14c., *reuerye*, “wild conduct, frolic,” from Old French *reverie*, *resverie* “revelry, raving, delirium” (Modern French *rêverie*), from *resver* “to dream, wander, rave” (12c., Modern French *rêver*), of uncertain origin. Meaning “daydream” is first attested 1650s, a reborrowing from French. As a type of musical composition, it is attested from 1880.

He emphasizes again that the book “is not written in the usual manner, for helping to produce in one’s mentation, very smoothly and easily, exciting images and lulling reveries.”

without wasting words with the bookseller, return it and get his money back, money perhaps earned by the sweat of his own brow.

I shall do this without fail, moreover, because I just now again remember the story of what happened to a Transcaucasian Kurd, which story I heard in my quite early youth and which in subsequent years, whenever I recalled it in corresponding cases, engendered in me an enduring and inextinguishable impulse of tenderness. I think it will be very useful for me, and also for you, if I relate this story to you somewhat in detail.

It will be useful chiefly because I have decided already to make the "salt," or as contemporary pureblooded Jewish businessmen would say, the "Tzimus" of this story, one of the basic principles of that new literary form which I intend to employ for the attainment of the aim I am now pursuing by means of this new profession of mine.

This Transcaucasian Kurd once set out from his village on some business or other to town, and there in the market he saw in a fruiterer's shop a handsomely arranged display of all kinds of fruit.

In this display, he noticed one "fruit," very beautiful in both color and form, and its appearance so took his fancy and he so longed to try it, that in spite of his having scarcely any money, he decided to buy without fail at least one of these gifts of Great Nature, and taste it.

Then, with intense eagerness, and with a courage not customary to him, he entered the shop and pointing with his horny finger to the "fruit" which had taken his fancy he asked the shopkeeper its price. The shopkeeper replied that a pound of the "fruit" would cost two cents.

Finding that the price was not at all high for what in his opinion was such a beautiful fruit, our Kurd decided to buy a whole pound.

Transcaucasia

Transcaucasia lies to south of the Caucasus Mountains, spanning the countries of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. To the north is Russia, to the east the Caspian Sea, and to the south Iran and Turkey. Kurdistan, the homeland of the Kurds, encircles Lake Van and the region south of Lake Urmia. Thus it spans a sizeable mountainous area south of Transcaucasia, which is primarily part of Turkey, but also northern Iraq and western Iran.

The word Transcaucasia is a Latin rendering of the Russian-language word *Zakavkazie*, meaning (from the Russian perspective) "the area beyond the Caucasus Mountains." Historically, some Kurds have made their home in Transcaucasia. According to the 2011 Armenian Census, 37,470 Kurds were living in Armenia.

However, nowadays, the word "Caucasian" is frequently used to denote people who are 'white, or of European origin,' especially in America. The word literally means "from or related to the Caucasus Mountains."

The confusion of meaning that this word creates has a historical origin. The term was popularized in the context of racial classification by German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in the late 18th century (in his 1795 treatise *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*).

Blumenbach proposed a five-race taxonomy of humanity, placing the Caucasian group as the "highest." He chose the term because he believed the Caucasus region (particularly the people of Georgia, whose skulls he studied) was the original cradle of humanity and represented the most beautiful and ideal form of mankind.

Despite its clear racial bias, Blumenbach's taxonomy was highly influential, and consequently the term "Caucasian" became entrenched in various legal, governmental, and pseudo-scientific systems, particularly in the United States, as a synonym for people of European descent or "white people."

Anyway, it is possible that Gurdjieff is using the word Transcaucasian, not to denote inhabitants of the geographical area, but as a metaphor for Europeans and Americans.

Kurd

We may want to consider why Gurdjieff chose the word (or racial description) “Kurd.” The current population of Transcaucasia is roughly 16.9 million (Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis) and only a small fraction of them are kurds (about 53,000 or 3.1 percent)

However, the word derives from the Sumerian word, *karda*, which means “mountain.” This makes sense because the Kurds’ homeland is mountainous. The Kurds were nomadic.

So Gurdjieff may be choosing the word “Kurd” symbolically. The New Testament uses the term mountain (as for example, the sermon on the mount) to indicate a high levels. Mountain dwellers can be thought of as those attracted to the higher, i.e. those who may be attracted to the Work.

So the Transcaucasian Kurd could suggest Europeans and Americans attracted to spiritual pursuits.

This may explain Gurdjieff’s statement about his tale:

...in subsequent years, whenever I recalled it in corresponding cases, engendered in me an enduring and inextinguishable impulse of tenderness.

Tzimus and Salt

I have decided already to make the “salt,” or as contemporary pureblooded Jewish businessmen would say, the “Tzimus” of this story, ...

Most likely, Gurdjieff borrowed “Tzimus” from Russian. Marvin Grossman, in an article in the *Gurdjieff International Review*, dealt with it at length, concluding that it is Russian slang, means pith or essence, and is a word favored by Russian Jews.

This word has created a little confusion, because it sound

and looks suspiciously like the word *tsimmes* or *tzimmes*, which is a Yiddish word for an Ashkenazi (German /East European Jewish) stewed dish made variously of carrots, prunes and sometimes meat.

However, Gurdjieff seems to indicate that the words “Tzimus” and “salt” have very similar meanings, as do “pith” and “salt.”

According to Brian Simmons in *The Passion Translation New Testament (2nd Edition)*: “Rabbinical literature equates salt with wisdom.” Salt is a preservative and in alchemy, it symbolizes ‘that which survives the fire.’

New literary form

... one of the basic principles of that new literary form which I intend to employ for the attainment of the aim I am now pursuing by means of this new profession of mine

Gurdjieff does not say what this basic principle so we can only guess what he means. One of the principles may be to use allegory (as the story of the Transcaucasian Kurd is obviously allegorical. Alternatively he may be referring to The New Testament symbolism which he employs in this story.

Town and village, town and country

This Transcaucasian Kurd once set out from his village on some business or other to town, and there in the market he saw in a fruiterer’s shop a handsomely arranged display of all kinds of fruit.

There is a definite contrast in the text between village and a town. Historically and etymologically, the word village (late 14c.) meant “inhabited place larger than a hamlet, but smaller than a town.” By contrast, the word “town” indicates a large settlement, possibly fortified. Towns usually have markets whereas villages do not.

We can think of the village as indicative more of essence and the town, with its market and industry, as indicative of personality.

market: early 12c., “a meeting at a fixed time for buying and selling livestock and provisions, an occasion on which goods are publicly exposed for sale and buyers assemble to purchase,” from Old North French *market* “marketplace, trade, commerce” (Old French *marchiet*, Modern French *marché*), from Latin *mercatus* “trading, buying and selling.”

Gurdjieff uses the symbols of “town” and “market” on the one hand and “town” and “country(side)” on the other to represent personality and essence, both here and elsewhere in *The Tales*.

The town represents life in the Fourth Way sense of the place to apply the Work. The Kurd, who is primarily of essence (the countryside), goes into town and into the market and sees a fruit that he would only encounter in a market and is attracted to it.

Fruit

In this display, he noticed one “fruit,” very beautiful in both color and form, and its appearance so took his fancy and he so longed to try it, that in spite of his having scarcely any money, he decided to buy without fail at least one of these gifts of Great Nature, and taste it.

We note that “fruit” is wrapped in quotes.

fruit: late 12c., “any vegetable product useful to humans or animals,” from Old French *fruit* “fruit, fruit eaten as dessert; harvest; virtuous action” (12c.), from Latin *fructus* “an enjoyment, delight, satisfaction; proceeds, produce, fruit, crops,” from *frug-*, stem of *frui* “to use, enjoy,” from suffixed form of PIE root *bhrug-* “to enjoy,” with derivatives referring to agricultural products. Meaning “offspring, progeny, child” is from mid-13c.; that of “any consequence, outcome, or result” is from late 14c. Meaning “odd person, eccentric” is from 1910; that of “male homosexual” is from 1935, underworld slang. Fruit salad recorded from 1861; fruit-cocktail from 1900; fruit-bat by 1869.

Symbolically, fruit is the produce of man (New Testament: “by their fruit ye shall know them”). So possibly this is the produce of real man. And in the context of *The Tales* we would be inclined to believe that.

Fancy

fancy: mid-15c., *fantasy* “inclination, liking,” contraction of *fantasy*. It took the older and longer word's sense of “inclination, whim, desire.” Meaning “the productive imagination” is from 1580s. That of “a fanciful image or conception” is from 1660s. Meaning “fans of an amusement or sport, collectively” is attested by 1735, especially (though not originally) of the prize ring. The adjective is recorded from 1751 in the sense “fine, elegant, ornamental” (opposed to plain); later as “involving fancy, of a fanciful nature” (1800). *Fancy man* attested by 1811.

The word “fancy” is used repeatedly later in *The Tales* when Beelzebub speaks to Hassein. He refers many times to the three-brained being's who have taken Hassein's fancy.

Scarcely any money

in spite of his having scarcely any money

Money is used to symbolize energy at several points throughout *The Tales*. Additionally those in the Work can be regarded as poor in the New Testament sense of the word.

Taste

taste: c. 1300, “to touch, to handle,” from Old French *taster* “to taste, sample by mouth; enjoy” (13c.), earlier “to feel, touch, pat, stroke” (12c., Modern French *tâter*), from Vulgar Latin *tastare*, apparently an alteration (perhaps by influence of *gustare*) of *taxtare*, a frequentative form of Latin *taxare* “evaluate, handle.” Meaning “to take a little food or drink” is from c. 1300; that of “to perceive by sense of taste” is recorded from mid-14c.

In order to experience the “fruit” it must inevitably be tasted.

Gifts of Great Nature

Gurdjieff introduces the idea that fruits are a gift of nature. The reader may have thought of fruit as the means that various plants and trees continue their species rather than as a gift for nature. He also introduces the concept of Graet Nature here, for the first time.

Courage

Then, with intense eagerness, and with a courage not customary to him, he entered the shop ...

courage: c. 1300, *corage*, “heart (as the seat of emotions),” hence “spirit, temperament, state or frame of mind,” from Old French *corage* “heart, innermost feelings; temper” (12c., Modern French *courage*), from Vulgar Latin *coraticum*, from Latin *cor* “heart.” Meaning “valor, quality of mind which enables one to meet danger and trouble without fear” is from late 14c. In this sense Old English had *ellen*, which also meant “zeal, strength.” Words for “heart” are also common metaphors for inner strength. In Middle English, the word was used broadly for “what is in one's mind or thoughts,” hence “bravery,” but also “wrath, pride, confidence, lustiness,” or any sort of inclination, and it was used in various phrases, such as *bold corage* “brave heart,” *careful corage* “sad heart,” *fre corage* “free will,” *wikked corage* “evil heart.”

Unless the Kurd had a morbid fear of shops its unlikely that it would take courage to enter a shop and buy something. The courage must thus refer to his intention to do something new and unfamiliar. A similar kind of courage is found in those who dare to engage with The Work.

Horny finger

and pointing with his horny finger to the “fruit” which had taken his fancy he asked the shopkeeper its price.

Fingers are not usually described as horny. If you look up the etymology of horny, it originally refers to horns on the head.

horny: late 14c., “made of horn,” from horn (n.) + -y. From 1690s as “callous, resembling horn.” The colloquial meaning “lustful, sexually aroused,” was in use by 1889, and is now the usual meaning of the word. Horn as a noun was once also was a popular name for a domestic cow.

callous: c. 1400, “hardened,” in the physical sense, from Latin *callosus* “thick-skinned,” from *callus*, *callum* “hard skin”. The figurative sense of “unfeeling, hardened in the mind” was in English by 1670s.

Horns are used much later in *The Tales* to symbolize degrees of reason (the higher degrees being indicated by more tines); Beelzebub's reason at the end of *The Tales* is measured by the way that his horns grow.

So the “horny finger” may imply ‘a wise finger’.

Cents and pound

The shopkeeper replied that a pound of the “fruit” would cost two cents.

Finding that the price was not at all high for what in his opinion was such a beautiful fruit, our Kurd decided to buy a whole pound.

Note that here we depart from what would be the local currency in Transcaucasia (cents are not used in any of the countries of Transcaucasia) and from local units of weight (pounds are not used in any of the countries). The story adopts American currency and units of weight.

Having finished his business in town, he set off again on foot for home the same day.

Walking at sunset over the hills and dales, and willy-nilly perceiving the exterior visibility of those enchanting parts of the bosom of Great Nature, the Common Mother, and involuntarily inhaling a pure air uncontaminated by the usual exhalations of industrial towns, our Kurd quite naturally suddenly felt a wish to gratify himself with some ordinary food also; so sitting down by the side of the road, he took from his provision bag some bread and the “fruit” he had bought which had looked so good to him, and leisurely began to eat.

But . . . horror of horrors! . . . very soon everything inside him began to burn. But in spite of this he kept on eating.

And this hapless biped creature of our planet kept on eating, thanks only to that particular human inherency which I mentioned at first, the principle of which I intended, when I decided to use it as the foundation of the new literary form I have created, to make, as it were, a “guiding beacon” leading me to one of my aims in view, and the sense and meaning of which moreover you will, I am sure, soon grasp—of course according to the degree of your comprehension—during the reading of any subsequent chapter of my writings, if, of course, you take the risk and read further, or, it may perhaps be that even at the end of this first chapter you will already “smell” something.

And so, just at the moment when our Kurd was overwhelmed by all the unusual sensations proceeding within him from this strange repast on the bosom of Nature, there came along the same road a fellow villager of his, one reputed by those who knew him to be very clever and experienced; and, seeing that the whole face of the Kurd was aflame, that his eyes were streaming with tears, and

At Sunset

Walking at sunset over the hills and dales, ...

At sunset: When, in *The Tales*, Gurdjieff refers to night and day, he's not usually referring to literal night and day, but metaphorically to waking sleep (night) and to consciousness (day). So sunset is the borderland between the two.

Willynilly

...and willynilly perceiving the exterior visibility of those enchanting parts of the bosom of Great Nature, the Common Mother, and involuntarily inhaling a pure air uncontaminated by the usual exhalations of industrial towns, our Kurd quite naturally suddenly felt a wish to gratify himself with some ordinary food also;

willynilly: c. 1600, contraction of “will I, nill I,” or “will he, nill he,” or “will ye, nill ye,” literally “with or without the will of the person concerned.”

The Kurd cannot help but perceive the beauty of nature as he walks back to his village. Here, Gurdjieff refers to the bosom of Graet Nature, the Common Mother. Emphasizing the fact nature can directly feed us nourishing beautiful impressions.

Bread

so sitting down by the side of the road,... he took from his provision bag some bread and the “fruit” he had bought which had looked so good to him, and leisurely began to eat.

Bread is another Biblical symbol indicating knowledge (bread of heaven, Christ feeding the crowd with two fish and five loaves of bread, Christ tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread, bread as the flesh of Christ, etc.). He eats bread with the “fruit.” He invokes his spirit.

Provision bag is an odd choice of words. Provision indicates what is prepared for the future. So, metaphorically, *The Tales*

(the fruit) is in our provision bag. He leisurely begins to eat the bread and the fruit.

Horror of Horrors

But . . . horror of horrors! . . .

horror: early 14c., “feeling of disgust,” late 14c., “emotion of horror or dread,” also “thing which excites horror,” from Old French *horror* (12c., Modern French *horreur*) and directly from Latin *horror* “horror, dread, veneration, religious awe,” a figurative use, literally “a shaking, trembling (as with cold or fear), shudder, chill,” from *horrire* “to bristle with fear, shudder.”

He starts to eat the red peppers and “horror of horrors”—religious awe of religious awe (?)

Burning Inside

very soon everything inside him began to burn.

Hot red peppers will certainly burn your mouth, but they will not burn you inside. But reading *The Tales* may well set fire to your inner world.

Hapless

But in spite of this he kept on eating.

And this hapless biped creature of our planet kept on eating, thanks only to that particular human inherency which I mentioned at first, the principle of which I intended, when I decided to use it as the foundation of the new literary form I have created

The choice of the words “hapless” and “biped” is curious. Hapless could simply be taken to mean unlucky, although there is nothing in the story of the Kurd to indicate that his purchase was unlucky. One might in fact form the opposite opinion.

The etymology of “hap” is:

hap: c. 1200, “chance, a person's luck, fortune, fate,” also “unforeseen occurrence,” from Old Norse *happ* “chance, good luck,” from Proto-Germanic *hap-* (source of Old English *gehæp* “convenient, fit”). Meaning “good fortune” in English is from early 13c. Old Norse seems to have had the word only in positive senses.

In this context, someone who is “hapless” might be someone who is not directly under the law of accident—laws of chance—but is instead influenced by the laws of fate.

The word “biped,” meaning two-footed, may refer to the Christian symbol of the foot as the point at which you interact with life. The left foot indicating essence and the right personality. Thus “hapless biped” might, metaphorically, indicate someone who is attracted to the Work.

Gurdjieff makes it clear that he is challenging the reader to dare to read the book. He emphasizes that it will be difficult, and that the difficulty he has created is a “guiding beacon” of his new literary form. Anyone who has struggled with *The Tales* knows full well that it is an entirely new literary form.

Repast

And so, just at the moment when our Kurd was overwhelmed by all the unusual sensations proceeding within him from this strange repast on the bosom of Nature, ...

repast: late 14c., from Old French *repast* (Modern French *repas*) “a meal, food,” from Late Latin *repastus* “meal” (also source of Spanish *repasto*, noun use of past participle of *repascere* “to feed again,” from Latin re- “repeatedly” (see re-) + *pascere* “to graze,” from PIE root *pa-* “to feed.” The verb (intransitive) is from late 15c.

The etymology of “repast” implies “feeding again” on the bosom of Nature.

Aflame and eyes streaming

and, seeing that the whole face of the Kurd was aflame, that his eyes were streaming with tears, and that in spite of this, as if intent upon the fulfillment of his most important duty, he was eating real “red pepper pods,” he said to him:

Again the physical details do not align exactly with the experience of eating hot peppers. The capsaicin in hot peppers binds to pain receptors in the mouth, tricking the nervous system into thinking your body is overheating. Tears and sweating may also occur, but streaming with tears is an exaggeration. However the experience of remorse may provoke tears and fire in the inner world.

In a Paris meeting on December 7, 1941, Gurdjieff said:

One needs fire. Without fire, there will never be anything. This fire is suffering, intentional suffering, without which it is impossible to create anything. One must prepare, must know what will make one suffer and when it is there, make use of it. Only you can prepare, only you know what makes you suffer, makes the fire which cooks, cements, crystallizes, does.

Suffer by your defects, in your pride, in your egoism. Remind yourself of the aim. Without prepared suffering there is nothing, for by as much as one is conscious, there is no more suffering. No further process, nothing. That is why with your conscience you must prepare what is necessary. You owe to nature. The food you eat which nourishes your life. You must pay for these cosmic substances. You have a duty, an obligation, to repay by conscious work.

that in spite of this, as if intent upon the fulfillment of his most important duty, he was eating real “red pepper pods,” he said to him:

“What are you doing, you Jericho jackass? You’ll be burnt alive! Stop eating that extraordinary product, so unaccustomed for your nature.”

But our Kurd replied: “No, for nothing on Earth will I stop. Didn’t I pay my last two cents for them? Even if my soul departs from my body I shall still go on eating.”

Whereupon our resolute Kurd—it must of course be assumed that he was such—did not stop, but continued eating the “red pepper pods.”

After what you have just perceived, I hope there may already be arising in your mentation a corresponding mental association which should, as a result, effectuate in you, as it sometimes happens to contemporary people, that which you call, in general, understanding, and that in the present case you will understand just why I, well knowing and having many a time commiserated with this human inherency, the inevitable manifestation of which is that if anybody pays money for something, he is bound to use it to the end, was animated in the whole of my entirety with the idea, arisen in my mentation, to take every possible measure in order that you, as is said “my brother in appetite and in spirit”—in the event of your proving to be already accustomed to reading books, though of all kinds, yet nevertheless only those written exclusively in the aforesaid “language of the intelligentsia”—having already paid money for my writings and learning only afterwards that they are not written in the usual convenient and easily read language, should not be compelled as a consequence of the said human inherency, to read my writings through to the end at all costs, as our poor Transcaucasian Kurd was compelled to go on with his eating of what he had

The Jericho jackass

he said to him:

“What are you doing, you Jericho jackass? You’ll be burnt alive! Stop eating that extraordinary product, so unaccustomed for your nature.”

The fellow villager is reputed to be clever and experienced—he recognizes what the Kurd is eating, “as if intent upon fulfillment of his most important duty,” yet tells him to stop—perhaps because he is going against his nature.

It is not our nature that requires us to work on ourselves, to develop Will. We satisfy the needs of Nature mechanically by our physical processes. The Kurd, however, chooses to struggle, and perhaps that is our most important duty.

A jackass is a male donkey. Christ came from Jericho to Jerusalem for his trial and crucifixion. Outside Jerusalem, he mounted a male donkey, a jackass. The Jericho Jackass is an alliteration that hints at this. By eating the red peppers, then, you may become the vehicle that carries the Christ within you towards the crucifixion.

Our Kurd

But our Kurd replied:

Here, Gurdjieff refers to the Kurd as “our Kurd” and later on the page as “our poor Transcaucasian Kurd,” suggesting that the Kurd is a part of us.

The Last Two Cents

But our Kurd replied: “No, for nothing on Earth will I stop. Didn’t I pay my last two cents for them? Even if my soul departs from my body I shall still go on eating.”

For nothing on earth would he stop eating - “for nothing on earth,” possibly because there’s “nothing on earth” he cares deeply about. The ‘two cents’ probably refers to the widow’s mites passage in Mark 12:42-44 (a mite was a small coin, sometimes translated as a cent):

BEELZEBUB'S TALES - COMMENTARY

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

It is only at this point that the two cents are referred to as the “last two cents.”

fancied for its appearance alone—that “not to be joked with” noble red pepper.

Not to be joked with

While *The Tales* has its humorous side, its content is deadly serious – “not to be joked with.”

Noble red pepper

Only here throughout the story is the red pepper described as noble.

noble: c. 1200, "illustrious, distinguished, of high rank or birth," from Old French *noble* "of noble bearing or birth," from Latin *nobilis* "well-known, famous, renowned; excellent, superior, splendid; high-born, of superior birth," earlier *gnobilis*, literally "knowable," from *gnoscere* "to come to know"

The prominent Roman families, which were "well known," provided most of the Republic's public officials. High-born, but not necessarily high-born in the sense of power-possessing, possibly high-born in the religious sense.