

008

But do you know what, reader?

In case you decide, despite this Warning, to risk continuing to familiarize yourself with my further writings, and you try to absorb them always with an impulse of impartiality and to understand the very essence of the questions I have decided to elucidate, and in view also of the particularity inherent in the human psyche, that there can be no opposition to the perception of good only exclusively when so to say a “contact of mutual frankness and confidence” is established, I now still wish to make a sincere confession to you about the associations arisen within me which as a result have precipitated in the corresponding sphere of my consciousness the data which have prompted the whole of my individuality to select as the chief hero for my writings just such an individual as is presented before your inner eyes by this same Mr. Beelzebub.

This I did, not without cunning. My cunning lies simply in the logical supposition that if I show him this attention he infallibly—as I already cannot doubt any more—has to show himself grateful and help me by all means in his command in my intended writings.

Although Mr. Beelzebub is made, as is said, “of a different grain,” yet, since He also can think, and, what

The Arousing of Thought 42-50

Another particularity of the human psyche

... and you try to absorb them always with an impulse of impartiality and to understand the very essence of the questions I have decided to elucidate, and in view also of the particularity inherent in the human psyche, that there can be no opposition to the perception of good only exclusively when so to say a “contact of mutual frankness and confidence” is established, ...

The reader may read through this paragraph without considering its meaning. Note that it states that the reader will be rewarded if he reads with *an impulse of impartiality*. This will, of course, require effort.

Gurdjieff's cunning

My cunning lies simply in the logical supposition that if I show him this attention he infallibly—as I already cannot doubt any more—has to show himself grateful and help me by all means in his command in my intended writings.

Whether this is cunning or not, is debateable. It is as Gurdjieff says, a logical supposition and thus it may not be true. Beelzebub may have no inclination to help out. No pact has been made.

Of a different grain

This is a wordworking idiom. The “grain” refers to the longitudinal arrangement of wood fibers. Different varieties of wood have different grains and may be worked differently. The transition from a carpentry term to a metaphor for character and behavior happened in the 16th century.

is most important, has—as I long ago learned, thanks to the treatise of the famous Catholic monk, Brother Foolon—a curly tail, then I, being thoroughly convinced from experience that curls are never natural but can be obtained only from various intentional manipulations, conclude, according to the “sane-logic” of hieromancy formed in my consciousness from reading books, that Mr. Beelzebub also must possess a good share of vanity, and will therefore find it extremely inconvenient not to help one who is going to advertise His name.

It is not for nothing that our renowned and incomparable teacher, Mullah Nassr Eddin, frequently says:

“Without greasing the palm not only is it impossible to live anywhere tolerably but even to breathe.”

And another also terrestrial sage, who has become such, thanks to the crass stupidity of people, named Till Eulenspiegel, has expressed the same in the following words:

“If you don’t grease the wheels the cart won’t go.”

Knowing these and many other sayings of popular wisdom formed by centuries in the collective life of people, I have decided to “grease the palm” precisely of Mr. Beelzebub, who, as everyone understands, has possibilities and knowledge enough and to spare for everything.

Enough, old fellow! All joking even philosophical joking aside, you, it seems, thanks to all these deviations, have transgressed one of the chief principles elaborated in you and put in the basis of a system planned previously for introducing your dreams into life by means of such a new profession, which principle consists in this, always to remember and take into account the fact of the weakening of the functioning of the mentation of the contemporary reader and not to fatigue him with the perception of numerous ideas over a short time.

Moreover, when I asked one of the people always around me who are “eager to enter Paradise without fail

Brother Foolon

... what is most important, has—as I long ago learned, thanks to the treatise of the famous Catholic monk, Brother Foolon—a curly tail,

There is no famous Catholic monk with the name Foolon. There were several monks, friars and religious authors that produced treatises on the Devil. The most famous was St. Thomas Aquinas, who describes the devil in his works *Summa Theologiae* and *De Malo*. However in both works he asserts that the Devil does not have a corporeal body, but is pure spirit.

The supposed “curly” or “pointed” tail that the devil possesses is an invention of medieval art, combined with European folklore. Most likely such a representation of the devil’s tail derives from the Greek god Pan or the Satyr, both of which were half man/half goat.

The name Foolon is probably a Gurdjieffian invention. The Greek suffix *on* can mean “that which,” so Foolon could mean someone who is a fool.

The “sane logic” of hieromancy

... then I, being thoroughly convinced from experience that curls are never natural but can be obtained only from various intentional manipulations, conclude, according to the “sane-logic” of hieromancy formed in my consciousness from reading books, ...

Curls are indeed natural, whether in respect of curly hair, where the shape of the hair follicle determines whether the hair curls, or in the case of animal tales where, dogs, pigs and cats can all have curly tails.

Hieromancy is a form of divination performed by studying sacred objects or the various items used in a religious sacrifice. The term covers a category of divination practices that involve the physical remnants of a ritual which are “read” to reveal the future or “the will of the gods.”

Etymologically, the word is from the Ancient Greek roots: *Hieros*, meaning “sacred” or “holy” and *Manteia* meaning “prophecy” or “divination.” Historically, the practice was common in Ancient Greece, Rome, and Mesopotamia. The common forms were:

- The study of the entrails of sacrificed animals.
- The study of the liver of sacrificed animals.
- Observing how sacrificial fire consumed an offering.
- Interpreting the movement and shape of the smoke rising from the altar.

He writes *formed in my consciousness from reading books*, which knowledge is, of course, not reliable knowledge at all.

Beelzebub's vanity

Mr. Beelzebub also must possess a good share of vanity, and will therefore find it extremely inconvenient not to help one who is going to advertise His name.

Beelzebub, as generally depicted in religious literature, certainly does possess “vanity” but if so he is only likely to help Gurdjieff if Gurdjieff paints a picture of him that he enjoys and finds subjectively flattering. This could indeed be the case, but we have no way of knowing whether it is.

All joking aside

All joking even philosophical joking aside, you, it seems, thanks to all these deviations, have transgressed one of the chief principles elaborated in you and put in the basis of a system planned previously for introducing your dreams into life by means of such a new profession, which principle consists in this, always to remember and take into account the fact of the weakening of the functioning of the mentation of the contemporary reader and not to fatigue him with the perception of numerous ideas over a short time.

Gurdjieff is admonishing himself here, confessing that his previous narrative about pleasing the devil is merely in jest

and violates one of the chief principles put into his writing activities—to allow for the weakness of the psyche of the reader and not introduce too many ideas in a short space of time.

To enter paradise without fail

... eager to enter Paradise without fail with their boots on
...

This is a criticism of some of his pupils. It is impossible to “enter paradise with one’s boots on.” In Christian symbolism footwear symbolizes personality (the point of contact with life). Boots or galoshes signify a strong personality that needs to be struggled with and tamed.

with their boots on,” to read aloud straight through all that I have written in this introductory chapter, what is called my “I”—of course, with the participation of all the definite data formed in my original psyche during my past years, which data gave me among other things understanding of the psyche of creatures of different type but similar to me—constated and cognized with certainty that in the entirety of every reader without exception there must inevitably, thanks to this first chapter alone, arise a “something” automatically engendering definite unfriendliness towards me personally.

To tell the truth, it is not this which is now chiefly worrying me, but the fact that at the end of this reading I also constated that in the sum total of everything expounded in this chapter, the whole of my entirety in which the aforesaid “I” plays a very small part, manifested itself quite contrary to one of the fundamental commandments of that All-Common Teacher whom I particularly esteem, Mullah Nassr Eddin, and which he formulated in the words: “Never poke your stick into a hornets’ nest.”

The agitation which pervaded the whole system affecting my feelings, and which resulted from cognizing that in the reader there must necessarily arise an unfriendly feeling towards me, at once quieted down as soon as I remembered the ancient Russian proverb which states: “There is no offense which with time will not blow over.”

But the agitation which arose in my system from realizing my negligence in obeying the commandment of Mullah Nassr Eddin, not only now seriously troubles me, but a very strange process, which began in both of my recently discovered “souls” and which assumed the form of an unusual itching immediately I understood this, began progressively to increase until it now evokes and produces an almost intolerable pain in the region a little below the

Engendering definite unfriendliness

... constated and cognized with certainty that in the entirety of every reader without exception there must inevitably, thanks to this first chapter alone, arise a “something” automatically engendering definite unfriendliness towards me personally.

Typically, the first-time reader of *The Tales* finds the writing style difficult to grapple with and frequently, the meaning of the text difficult to discern. At first blush it is off-putting and, naturally, the reader is very likely to be critical of the author for this. The level of reading effort the book demands is far greater than expected—even for the enthusiastic reader.

The whole of my entirety

... I also constated that in the sum total of everything expounded in this chapter, the whole of my entirety in which the aforesaid “I” plays a very small part, manifested itself quite contrary to one of the fundamental commandments of that All-Common Teacher ...

Gurdjieff confesses that his behavior is contrary to Mullah Nassr Eddin’s advice: “Never poke your stick into a hornets’ nest.” However he realizes that the offense he has caused the reader will eventually blow over with time—as indeed it will in the experience of most readers.

An almost intolerable pain

Gurdjieff notes that his realization that he ignored Mullah Nassr Eddin’s advice gave rise to an increasing “itching” producing an almost intolerable pain to the right and below his solar plexus (possibly in the liver or small intestine). But this ceases when he remembers another fragment of life wisdom concerning Karapet of Tiflis.

right half of my already, without this, overexercised “solar plexus.”

Wait! Wait! ... This process, it seems, is also ceasing, and in all the depths of my consciousness, and let us meanwhile say “even beneath my subconsciousness,” there already begins to arise everything requisite for the complete assurance that it will entirely cease, because I have remembered another fragment of life wisdom, the thought of which led my mentation to the reflection that if I indeed acted against the advice of the highly esteemed Mullah Nassr Ed-din, I nevertheless acted without premeditation according to the principle of that extremely sympathetic—not so well known everywhere on earth, but never forgotten by all who have once met him—that precious jewel, Karapet of Tiflis.

It can't be helped Now that this introductory chapter of mine has turned out to be so long, it will not matter if I lengthen it a little more to tell you also about this extremely sympathetic Karapet of Tiflis.

First of all I must state that twenty or twenty-five years ago, the Tiflis railway station had a “steam whistle.”

It was blown every morning to wake the railway workers and station hands, and as the Tiflis station stood on a hill, this whistle was heard almost all over the town and woke up not only the railway workers, but the inhabitants of the town of Tiflis itself.

The Tiflis local government, as I recall it, even entered into a correspondence with the railway authorities about the disturbance of the morning sleep of the peaceful citizens.

To release the steam into the whistle every morning was the job of this same Karapet who was employed in the station.

So when he would come in the morning to the rope with which he released the steam for the whistle, he

That precious jewel, Karapet of Tiflis

To refer to Karapet as a “precious jewel” is a considerable compliment. In the light of the story Gurdjieff relates it seems excessive. But it may not be.

The etymological roots of the “Karapet,” are not startling. *Kara* can mean “black” but also “joy” and *pet* can mean “heart” (as in *parapet*, a defensive construction on a fort or castle at the height of the heart (chest). So this name might mean “black heart” or “joy of the heart.” Neither meaning seems likely.

However, a little direct research into the name Karapet reveals the existence of the Saint Karapet Monastery, one of the oldest monasteries in “Greater Armenia,” currently located in the Kurdish village of Chengeli in eastern Turkey. In Armenian, the monastery is named the Monastery of St. John Karapet, which is taken to mean the Monastery of St. John The Baptist. This possible meaning throws a different light on the tale of Karapet - and John The Baptist was indeed a precious jewel.

Steam whistle

A steam whistle is a device that produces sound using pressurized steam. Such whistles were used extensively on boilers, locomotives and ships. The mechanism is relatively simple and highly effective for long-distance communication. The operator pulls a cord or lever, a valve opens to release high-pressure steam from the boiler which is forced through a narrow, circular opening. There is a resonator (usually a bell or hollow metal cylinder), the sharp edge of which the steam jet hits, causing the steam bell to vibrate rapidly.

Karapet's steam whistle was intended to wake up all the railway workers, but it also woke up most of the other inhabitants of Tiflis.

The Tiflis local government

The Tiflis local government, as I recall it, even entered into a correspondence with the railway authorities ...

In the era to which Gurdjieff refers (twenty or twenty-five years ago - so around 1900), there are historical records from the Tiflis City Duma (the municipal government) and local newspapers of that period (such as Kavkaz or Iveria) which reflect tensions between the city and the Transcaucasian Railway.

The issue of the “daily steam whistle” was, in fact, a common point of urban friction across the Russian Empire. The main problem was, of course, noise pollution, which could in some places be amplified by surrounding hills. But also there was also the “daily” soot from the locomotives polluting the air and damaging the facades of buildings.

The Tiflis Railway Station was towards the center of the city, the city had grown rapidly around it. The Didube and Chugureti districts were heavily populated, and the constant shunting of engines and arrival/departure signals created a literal “noise corridor” through the heart of the city.

The railway whistle was more than just noise; it served as a de facto city clock. However, whistles might be blown at all hours of the night and early morning. To complicate the issue, The Transcaucasian Railway was a state-owned enterprise (under the Ministry of Ways of Communication), while the City Duma represented local interests. The local government frequently petitioned the railway administration to limit whistle-blowing within city limits (perhaps use bells instead) and relocate some of the “noisiest” maintenance shops away from the residential areas.

would, before taking hold of the rope and pulling it, wave his hand in all directions and solemnly, like a Mohammedan mullah from a minaret, loudly cry:

“Your mother is a——, your father is a——, your grandfather is more than a——; may your eyes, ears, nose, spleen, liver, corns ...” and so on; in short, he pronounced in various keys all the curses he knew, and not until he had done so would he pull the rope.

When I heard about this Karapet and of this practice of his, I visited him one evening after the day’s work, with a small boardbook of wine, and after performing this indispensable local solemn “toasting ritual,” I asked him, of course in a suitable form and also according to the local complex of “amenities” established for mutual relationship, why he did this.

Having emptied his glass at a draught and having once sung the famous Georgian song, “Little did we tipple,” inevitably sung when drinking, he leisurely began to answer as follows:

“As you drink wine not as people do today, that is to say, not merely for appearances but in fact honestly, then this already shows me that you do not wish to know about this practice of mine out of curiosity, like our engineers and technicians, but really owing to your desire for knowledge, and therefore I wish, and even consider it my duty, sincerely to confess to you the exact reason of these inner, so to say, ‘scrupulous considerations’ of mine, which led me to this, and which little by little instilled in me such a habit.”

He then related the following:

“Formerly I used to work in this station at night cleaning the steam boilers, but when this steam whistle was brought here, the stationmaster, evidently considering my age and incapacity for the heavy work I was doing, ordered me to occupy myself only with releasing the steam into

Like a Mohammedan mullah

So when he would come in the morning to the rope with which he released the steam for the whistle, he would, before taking hold of the rope and pulling it, wave his hand in all directions and solemnly, like a Mohammedan mullah from a minaret, loudly cry:

That hauntingly beautiful chant you hear echoing from the minarets in Islamic countries is called the Adhan. It is a call to prayer, performed five times a day to notify the community that it is time for one of the obligatory prayers.

The person who recites the Adhan is called a Muezzin. The first muezzin—the first person chosen for this role was Bilal ibn Rabah, a freed Abyssinian slave and close companion of the Prophet Muhammad. He was chosen specifically for his powerful and beautiful voice.

The adhan translates to:

God is the Greatest (Allahu Akbar)

I bear witness that there is no god but God

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God

Hasten to prayer

Hasten to success

God is the Greatest

There is no god but God

During the Fajr (dawn) prayer, the Muezzin adds a special line: “As-salatu khayrum minan-nawm,” which means “Prayer is better than sleep.”

While it is the specific job of the Muezzin to make the call to prayer rather than a Mullah who is generally a scholar or cleric, there is no religious rule forbidding a Mullah or Imam from doing it. In many small village mosques or private prayer rooms, there may not be a dedicated Muezzin. In these cases, the Mullah/Imam will often perform the Adhan himself. Also if the regular Muezzin is late or sick, the Mullah/Imam will step in to ensure the call is made on time.

Boordock

When I heard about this Karapet and of this practice of his, I visited him one evening after the day's work, with a small boordook of wine, and after performing this indispensable local solemn "toasting ritual,"

It seems that the word Gurdjieff is using here is Bardak (Turkish) or Bardaq (Arabic) or Bardaqi (Georgian) or Bardak (Armenian). In each case it refers to a pitcher or drinking vessel (possibly of clay or metal) used for pouring and storing liquids.

Toasting Ritual

In Georgia there are toasting rituals. At a traditional feast called a Supra, it can be a highly structured, philosophical, and poetic ceremony that can last for many hours. This is maybe what Gurdjieff's "Toasting of the Idiots" derives from.

At a Supra the ritual is governed by a strict set of rules and a specific hierarchy. The Tamada is the Toastmaster (or Master of Ceremonies). No one may drink wine or make a toast without his permission. He must be eloquent, witty, and have a high tolerance for alcohol, as he guides the "emotional arc" of the evening. He sets the theme for each round of drinking and while he must drain his glass for every toast, he is disgraced if he actually appears drunk.

If the Tamada wants someone else to elaborate on his toast, he says "Alaverdi" to them. That person then continues the theme with their own speech before the rest of the table drinks. While the Tamada can improvise, a formal Supra usually follows a specific thematic sequence. The first few toasts are almost always:

- To God: Acknowledging the creator
- To the Motherland (Georgia): Specifically the phrase "Sakartvelos Gaumarjos!" (Victory to Georgia).
- To the Reason for Gathering: Whether it's a wedding, birthday, or a guest's visit.

- To the Deceased: A solemn moment to remember those no longer at the table.
- To New Life/Children: Following the toast to the dead to symbolize the cycle of life.
- Other common toasts include peace, parents, women, and friendship.

There are specific rules of etiquette that need to be observed.

- Wine Only: Traditionally, toasts are made with wine or Chacha (strong grape brandy). Toasting with beer is considered an insult—historically, Georgians only toasted their enemies with beer, essentially wishing them bad luck.
- Listen in Silence: You must never talk or eat while the Tamada is speaking. It is a sign of deep respect.
- The "Bottoms Up" Rule: For some toasts, the Tamada will expect everyone to empty their glass. For others, a sip is fine, but you should always wait for him to finish speaking before raising your glass.
- Full Glasses: You should never toast with a half-empty glass. The designated wine-pourer will ensure your glass is constantly refilled.

The Supra is often described as a "secular prayer" because the toasts are meant to be sincere, emotional, and reflective.

Clearly Gurdjieff's meeting with Karapet did not have the status of a Supra, but Georgians rarely drink casually without some form of ceremony. If you are sitting down with just one other person for a few glasses of wine, there is no need for a Tamada, but the encounter will still follow a simplified, more intimate ritual.

In Georgia, drinking is almost never "automatic." Even between two friends, the act of drinking is always framed by a Sadghegrdzelo. Even with only two people, one person usually takes the lead as the host or the "designated" Tamada for that sitting. In such situations, Georgians often stick to a

“holy trinity” of toasts that are considered the bare minimum for any meeting:

- To Our Meeting: Acknowledging the fact that you are together.
- To the Family: Specifically the parents or well-being of the other person's household.
- To Peace In Georgia, “Peace” is a deep-seated cultural wish, often used as the closing toast for a quick drink.

Amenities

This is an unusual choice of word. The local complex of “amenities” suggests that in this specific location, there is a complicated set of unwritten rules of social interaction. The “amenities” of conversation are things like small talk, offering a compliment, sharing a cup of tea, or apologizing for the intrusion before asking a difficult question. Such behaviors are established to ensure that neither person loses face or feels insulted.

Little did we tipple

The song title “Little did we tipple” is almost certainly incorrect. That is probably Orage's whimsical English translation of a song title that expressed the same sentiment, such as “We drank but a little.” However, we have not been able to identify such a song.

In Georgian culture, drinking songs are a central part of the supra. These songs are often polyphonic and complex. While there are many songs about wine and friendship. The sentiment—that the party has just begun and more wine is needed—is a very common theme in Georgian folk music.

Drinking honestly

“As you drink wine not as people do today, that is to say, not merely for appearances but in fact honestly, then this already shows me that you do not wish to know about this practice of mine out of curiosity, ...”

These words from Karapet indicate to Gurdjieff that he has indeed achieved his aim of discovering the origin of Karapet's morning ritual.

the whistle, for which I had to arrive punctually every morning and evening.

“The first week of this new service, I once noticed that after performing this duty of mine, I felt for an hour or two vaguely ill at ease. But when this strange feeling, increasing day by day, ultimately became a definite instinctive uneasiness from which even my appetite for ‘Makhokh’ disappeared, I began from then on always to think and think in order to find out the cause of this. I thought about it all particularly intensely for some reason or other while going to and coming from my work, but however hard I tried I could make nothing whatsoever, even approximately, clear to myself.

“It thus continued for almost two years and, finally, when the calluses on my palms had become quite hard from the rope of the steam whistle, I quite accidentally and suddenly understood why I experienced this uneasiness.

“The shock for my correct understanding, as a result of which there was formed in me concerning this an unshakable conviction, was a certain exclamation I accidentally heard under the following, rather peculiar, circumstances.

“One morning when I had not had enough sleep, having spent the first half of the night at the christening of my neighbor’s ninth daughter and the other half in reading a very interesting and rare book I had by chance obtained and which was entitled Dreams and Witchcraft, as I was hurrying on my way to release the steam, I suddenly saw at the corner a barber-surgeon I knew, belonging to the local government service, who beckoned me to stop.

“The duty of this barber-surgeon friend of mine consisted in going at a certain time through the town accompanied by an assistant with a specially constructed carriage and seizing all the stray dogs whose collars were without

An instinctive uneasiness

“The first week of this new service, I once noticed that after performing this duty of mine, I felt for an hour or two vaguely ill at ease. But when this strange feeling, increasing day by day, ultimately became a definite instinctive uneasiness ...

Karapet clearly senses the towns people’s resentment of the steam whistle. Whether there is a direct cause and effect is speculative. But there is likely to be an indirect effect. If you are aware that people are thinking negatively of you, it can have a tangible effect on your well-being.

It can trigger the body’s “fight or flight” response, leading to increased cortisol levels. In other words, negative imagination has its impact.

Additionally, people who have negative thoughts about you may unconsciously show it through body language, tone of voice, or lack of eye contact. You might “sense” a bad vibe without knowing why. Also, some cultures and belief systems suggest that “the evil eye” or “negative energy” can affect a person directly. This may or may not be so.

‘Makhokh’

ultimately became a definite instinctive uneasiness from which even my appetite for ‘Makhokh’ disappeared,

Makhokh (or Makhokhapur) is a traditional Armenian dish. It is a traditional soup associated with Lent. Its name comes from the Armenian word for “malt” or fermented grain. It is a sour soup made from fermented wheat (or barley), legumes (like chickpeas or beans), and dried fruits (like prunes or cornelian cherries).

It is a hearty, vegan-friendly dish designed to sustain people during fasting periods. In regions like Karin and Sassoun, there is a traditional “Dance of Makhokhapur” performed on the first day of Lent.

My neighbor's ninth daughter

“One morning when I had not had enough sleep, having spent the first half of the night at the christening of my neighbor's ninth daughter.

The most notable nine sisters are the children of Zeus and Mnemosyne (the goddess of memory and remembrance). Their daughters were the nine muses (in order by age): Calliope, Clio, Melpomene, Euterpe, Erato, Terpsichore, Urania, Thalia and Polyhymnia.

So perhaps Karapet was attending the birth of Polyhymnia (the one of many hymns) who is the patron of sacred poetry and hymns, as well as oratory, pantomime, geometry and meditation.

Dreams and Witchcraft

... and the other half in reading a very interesting and rare book I had by chance obtained and which was entitled *Dreams and Witchcraft*...

We can find no record of a book entitled *Dreams and Witchcraft*. Nevertheless, these are the two possibilities that that Karapet needs to investigate: whether his feeling of unease is caused by his own imagination (dreams) or whether by the psychic force of curses directed at him (witchcraft).

The barber-surgeon

... as I was hurrying on my way to release the steam, I suddenly saw at the corner a barber-surgeon I knew, belonging to the local government service, who beckoned me to stop.

In Tiflis, as elsewhere, the job of “dog-catcher” had a far lower status than the profession of “barber-surgeon”. It was a menial “police adjacent” job.

At the turn of the 20th century, Tiflis—then part of the Russian Empire—faced significant issues with stray dogs and the constant threat of rabies. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many cities in the Russian Empire, including

Tiflis, implemented a municipal tax on dog ownership to control the stray population and fund sanitation efforts. The tax tried to ensure that only “responsible” citizens kept dogs, theoretically reducing the number of animals on the street.

When an owner paid the annual tax, they received a small metal tag (often called a “dog token” or *zheton*). This tag had to be attached to the dog's collar and served as a dog “passport.” If a dog was found on the street without a visible tag, it was legally considered a stray.

Dog-catchers were often referred to as *zhivodyory* (which means “skimmers”) because they skinned the stray dogs for their hides. The “skimmers” were usually paid per head, and made extra money from selling the hides. Dog pelts were used to make cheap furs, linings for winter boots, and caps. The dog-catchers also sold fat from the dogs to soap-boilers.

Wealthy residents could easily afford the tax and their dogs sported polished brass tags. For the poor, however, the tax was a burden. If a poor family's dog was caught without a tag, they usually couldn't afford the fine to “ransom” the dog back from the city pound, so the dog would inevitably be killed and processed by the skimmers. The word *zhivoder* eventually became a general Russian insult for a cruel or bloodthirsty person, a meaning it still carries.

By the 1890s, the “barber-surgeon” as a singular hybrid profession was obsolete in Tiflis. The Russian Empire, which governed Georgia at the time, had a formalized medical system. Surgical tasks were performed by doctors or feldshers (trained medical assistants). Barbers were simply barbers.

So Gurdjieff's barber-surgeon is metaphorical. He would not have been a dog-catcher or a surgeon. Gurdjieff uses this metaphor several times throughout *The Tales* possibly to indicate a part of the psyche concerned with psychological health.

the metal plates distributed by the local authorities on payment of the tax and taking these dogs to the municipal slaughterhouse where they were kept for two weeks at municipal expense, feeding on the slaughterhouse offal; if, on the expiration of this period, the owners of the dogs had not claimed them and paid the established tax, then these dogs were, with a certain solemnity, driven down a certain passageway which led directly to a specially built oven.

“After a short time, from the other end of this famous salutary oven, there flowed, with a delightful gurgling sound, a definite quantity of pellucid and ideally clean fat to the profit of the fathers of our town for the manufacture of soap and also perhaps of something else, and, with a purling sound, no less delightful to the ear, there poured out also a fair quantity of very useful substance for fertilizing.

“This barber-surgeon friend of mine proceeded in the following simple and admirably skillful manner to catch the dogs.

“He somewhere obtained a large, old, and ordinary fishing net, which, during these peculiar excursions of his for the general human welfare through the slums of our town, he carried, arranged in a suitable manner on his strong shoulders, and when a dog without its ‘passport’ came within the sphere of his all-seeing and, for all the canine species, terrible eye, he without haste and with the softness of a panther, would steal up closely to it and seizing a favorable moment when the dog was interested and attracted by something it noticed, cast his net on it and quickly entangled it, and later, rolling up the carriage, he disentangled the dog in such a way that it found itself in the cage attached to the carriage.

“Just when my friend the barber-surgeon beckoned me to stop, he was aiming to throw his net, at the opportune

The municipal slaughterhouse

taking these dogs to the municipal slaughterhouse where they were kept for two weeks at municipal expense

In Tiflis stray dogs were indeed taken to the municipal slaughterhouse. The slaughterhouse was the only facility equipped to handle the mass killing and industrial processing of animals. When the dog-catchers finished their rounds, the “dog-cart” was typically driven to the outskirts of the city where the municipal slaughterhouse was located. The Tiflis slaughterhouse had a dedicated section for “worthless” or “dangerous” animals.

Because it had drainage, hooks, and tools for skinning and boiling, it was the obvious place to process dog carcasses for their fat, bones and hides. The carcasses were boiled down to extract fat, (for soap-makers). Bones were ground down for fertilizer. Pelts were sold to tanners.

The fishing net

“He somewhere obtained a large, old, and ordinary fishing net, which, during these peculiar excursions of his for the general human welfare through the slums of our town, he carried,

Tiflis dog-catchers usually patrolled the streets using heavy iron tongs or lassos to catch dogs and then throw them into their dog-cart. Gurdjieff’s dog-catcher was unusual or even innovative in using a fishing net. The fishing net is also reminiscent of Christianity, and “fisher’s of men.”

moment, at his next victim, which at that moment was standing wagging his tail and looking at a bitch. My friend was just about to throw his net, when suddenly the bells of a neighboring church rang out, calling the people to early morning prayers. At such an unexpected ringing in the morning quiet, the dog took fright and springing aside flew off like a shot down the empty street at his full canine velocity.

“Then the barber-surgeon so infuriated by this that his hair, even beneath his armpits, stood on end, flung his net on the pavement and spitting over his left shoulder, loudly exclaimed:

“Oh, Hell! What a time to ring!”

“As soon as the exclamation of the barber-surgeon reached my reflecting apparatus, there began to swarm in it various thoughts which ultimately led, in my view, to the correct understanding of just why there proceeded in me the aforesaid instinctive uneasiness.

“The first moment after I had understood this there even arose a feeling of being offended at myself that such a simple and clear thought had not entered my head before.

“I sensed with the whole of my being that my effect on the general life could produce no other result than that process which had all along proceeded in me.

“And indeed, everyone awakened by the noise I make with the steam whistle, which disturbs his sweet morning slumbers, must without doubt curse me ‘by everything under the sun,’ just me, the cause of this hellish row, and thanks to this, there must of course certainly flow towards my person from all directions, vibrations of all kinds of malice.

“On that significant morning, when, after performing my duties, I, in my customary mood of depression, was sitting in a neighboring ‘Dukhan’ and eating ‘Hachi’ with garlic,

The church bells

“Just when my friend the barber-surgeon beckoned me to stop, he was aiming to throw his net, at the opportune moment, at his next victim, which at that moment was standing wagging his tail and looking at a bitch. My friend was just about to throw his net, when suddenly the bells of a neighboring church rang out, calling the people to early morning prayers.

Clearly the church bell acts in a similar n anomalous manner to the steam whistle, distracting the dog from its preoccupation with a bitch, while calling people to early morning prayers.

Gurdjieff and dogs

We have provided enough background information to suggest that the story about Karapet and the dog catcher is clearly an allegory. This becomes clearer if we understand what the word “dog” symbolized to Gurdjieff. There is a wealth of material in the record of Gurdjieff’s Paris meetings that explain this. Here are some extracts:

A: I am not able to be good to others.

GURDJIEFF: Perhaps you are not yet free?

A: I want to take advantage of everything, selfishly, for myself.

GURDJIEFF: You must work. Kill some ‘dogs’ in you. You only play your role in theory. At first you play it well, but very soon you forget and return to your ordinary state, to your nothingness. Your task will be to stay longer.

...

...

H B: At present, our dogs force us to use others to satisfy our desires.

GURDJIEFF: This is fertile ground for the development of being. Today you are an ordinary man; through working, try to be a real man. Later you will perhaps be a complete man, a real man. When you are aware of your dogs, struggle

with them; this struggle is necessary in order for you to become a real man. This is fertile ground for work. And there are still more dogs in you that are invisible.¹

And

GURDJIEFF: Everyone has a 'dog' inside him that plays the role of the devil. The secret for you is that whenever you do something, you expect a result, and you must not expect one. Perhaps you have an idea that has been crystallized in you. What you do now for the future is a guarantee for you. You should be pleased; the presence of this dog is a guarantee that you will have to work.

HT: I've tried to do these exercises sincerely as a service, but what arises in me when I persuade myself that I should not expect any result is this resignation I told you about, and which is another dog. I resign myself to doing the exercise without expecting results, but this is a bad attitude.

GURDJIEFF: Does this mean that you don't want anything, that you are not interested in anything? So, you have no aim? You haven't understood anything? If you've begun like this, you'll never get anywhere. You came here by accident. See Mme de Salzmann - she will explain things to you.²

And ...

MR. H.: Mr. Gurdjieff, sometimes self-remembering causes me boredom. I look forward to the end of my time for the exercise. There is something monstrous there, but I can't help it. Sometimes I feel wonderful fullness, but other times absolutely nothing. I can't help it, and when I have this condition, I don't know what it is.

MR. GURDJIEFF: This proves that in you the automatism is very strong, that there are in you many weaknesses, many dogs, many results to "desalt" We must kill them. How is it possible to be bored at a divine thing?

MR. H.: There's something missing in my self-remembering.

¹PARIS MEETINGS 1943, G.I.Gurdjieff, p43

²PARIS MEETINGS 1943, G.I.Gurdjieff, p72

MR. GURDJIEFF: This is the symptom that there are a lot of dirty things inside you. You must clean all of that to become worthy of doing this exercise. Pay ten times more attention to cleaning your interior so that it becomes dignified. You are not.

There are too many dogs. Do you understand what I call dogs? The different things crystallized in you by life, by education. All of these results play the role of factors to create associations that always arise and drive you. These factors are numerous. We can't kill them completely. But we must make them functions. Today sometimes one, sometimes the other of these factors becomes your ego and directs you. The place of "Me"—as long as a true "Me" has not arrived—it is the head which must hold it, and play the role of the "Me"

MLLE. D.: Mr. Gurdjieff, when I remember myself, I never get a complete sense of satisfaction. The more I concentrate, the more I feel like I'm almost getting there. But something separates me. Afterwards I have rather an impulse of embarrassment and disgust.

MR. GURDJIEFF: Disgust with what?

MLLE. D.: Disgust with me, disgust..

(A silence)

MR. GURDJIEFF: Can you stay a while after the meeting? I'll tell you what bothers you.

MR. H. Mr. Gurdjieff, how to recognize these dogs, how to know which are the worst? And then, should we attack them? And how? Or do I just have to continue the general process?

MR. GURDJIEFF: In general, in everyone, these dogs are used to living around centers. This is their place. The factors are crystallized according to the preponderant centers. We have four centers, four localizations, four villages where these dogs live. In one village there are many, in another there are fewer, in yet another there are very few. Depending on the person, there are more or less dogs in each village.

These villages are Thought, Feeling, Sensation, and Sex—Sex which is even a very important village.

One person has more dogs in one village, another in another. It depends on which village is the most populated. My advice, in general, to kill these dogs, so that they no longer disturb you and so that they no longer have the strength to take the "I" in their hands, here it is - this advice is valid for everyone - we must first of all liquidate the dogs in the sex village. After, the others. We must first liquidate this intimate animal.

Afterwards, you will turn your attention to other villages. Knowing this rule, you will find out which village to continue through. But how to bind them? First you make it your task to never give these dogs the opportunity to function as before. Immediately, a blow to the head! Once you recognize your enemy, your first task is to struggle against him. Perhaps he is your real enemy. One after another you take all these dogs. And then you move on to another village. This is how you can gradually overcome your enemies.

I repeat, this is not about killing them. What is crystallized is forever. It can even become an asset if it is used as material, as a function. But dogs should never gain the upper hand, never should they have the possibility of fixing and taking the "I". This will be your task. And that goes for everyone here.

DR. H.: Mr. Gurdjieff, this sexual function, it is a function, it is not something that we must reduce and squash as much as possible?

MR. GURDJIEFF: We are not talking about functions, which are parts of us, but rather dogs, that is, weaknesses around our functions. The functions are the villages. We cannot change them. They are villages. But dogs, yes, we must change their breed.

DR. H.: What is the criterion for changing the breed? It varies with all...

MME. DE SALZMANN: Mr. Gurdjieff said it: it depends on the village. The functions are constituted differently in some and in the others.

P.L.: I think there are more dogs when the village is weak. Is this true?

MR. GURDJIEFF: The village is perhaps becoming weak because there are a lot of dogs to weaken it. Every dog has a name in these villages. I know all of their names.

(Mr. Gurdjieff jokes about the names of the dogs.)¹

You may also wish to read or reread the story of Gurdjieff and Pogossian suddenly being surrounded by a pack of 15 Kurd sheepdogs and being unable to escape their attention.² As a counterpoint, there is also the story of Gurdjieff's loyal and exceedingly helpful dog Philos, who was also a Kurd sheepdog.³

The following are notes from a lecture given by Gurdjieff.

Lecture Thursday 10 November 1921

Dog. The Animal learns nothing. It participates, poses, argues, acts with—but with it is no progress.

Emotionality. The Animal is the emotionality.

It sits within and speaks and acts most of the day. You do not speak yourself.

It cries out, sobs, is terrified.

It leaps up, is overjoyed, wastes itself in enthusiasm.

It blinds the eyes. It never sees anything as it is.

It does not learn.

It does the same thing every day.

It remains the same in all situations.

It governs nearly all the behavior.

It is very difficult to see it. It conceals itself.

It seems to be in what we most value in ourselves, it is turned to the world entirely.

¹PARIS MEETINGS 1944, G.I.Gurdjieff, p144-145

²Meetings With Remarkable Men, G.I.Gurdjieff, p94

³Meetings With Remarkable Men, G.I.Gurdjieff, p135-136

It only understands in terms of the world.

It wishes to possess, to be praised. It uses everything for its own purpose. It does nothing except for self.

It is never free from fear.

Anything unusual is alarming to it. It seeks reassurance, It is behind much virtue.

Almost all virtue is emotional. The animal is emotionality. Emotionality is unconsciousness.

A knife is needed to cut through it: the knife of making conscious.

Otherwise there is no virtue. What is diffuse and unconscious contains no essence.

Virtue lies in essence. With the clear feelings is essence.¹

So Gurdjieff's story of the dog-catcher can be taken as an allegory for the inner struggle necessary in working on oneself. The dogs are habitual mechanisms that live around our centers. Some—those that have a license—can be tamed to become useful functions, while others have to be destroyed. The destruction of these worthless dogs will be beneficial as their substance can be used productively for ourselves.

In respect of this Work, part of us that corresponds to a barber-surgeon (a healer of a kind) needs to undertake the task of managing these dogs. We note also the sexual dog (the one who was attracted by a bitch) dashes off when the church bell rings as a call to prayer.

My reflecting apparatus

“As soon as the exclamation of the barber-surgeon reached my reflecting apparatus, there began to swarm in it various thoughts which ultimately led, in my view, to the correct understanding of just why there proceeded in me the aforesaid instinctive uneasiness.

“The first moment after I had understood this there even arose a feeling of being offended at myself that such a simple and clear thought had not entered my head before.

“I sensed with the whole of my being that my effect on the general life could produce no other result than that process which had all along proceeded in me.

Because of this incident, Karapet realizes that his blowing of the steam whistle inevitably gave rise to negative vibrations being directed at him. He therefore began to consider how to neutralize their influence on him. His solution was to preemptively curse those who cursed him as described on p47 of *The Tales*.

“Your mother is a— , your father is a— , your grandfather is more than a— ; may your eyes, ears, nose, spleen, liver, corns...” and so on; in short, he pronounced in various keys all the curses he knew, and not until he had done so would he pull the rope.

Although Gurdjieff doesn't say so, it seems likely that he sees himself (and *The Tales*) as Karapet, wakening us from our pleasant sleep, saving us from the barber-surgeon, and being cursed by us in return. A subtlety in the tale is that Gurdjieff mentions twice that

Dukhan

In the caucasus (and also in Crimea) a dukhan (derived from the Persian/Arabic *dukkān*) refers to a small traditional tavern, shop, or restaurant.

Hachi with garlic

This is possibly what is called Khashi in Georgia and Khash in Armenia, it is Khash. It is a heavy, rich soup made by boiling cow or sheep's feet and stomach for many hours until the broth is thick and gelatinous. It is traditionally served unseasoned, but beside the soup bowl, a small dish of crushed garlic mixed with broth or water is provided. You stir in as much garlic as you desire to give the soup its flavor. It is eaten early in the morning (often as a hangover cure) with dried lavash bread and a shot of vodka.

¹ Gurdjieff's Early Talks 1914-1931, G. I. Gurdjieff, p110

I, continuing to ponder, came to the conclusion that if I should curse beforehand all those to whom my service for the benefit of certain among them might seem disturbing, then, according to the explanation of the book I had read the night before, however much all those, as they might be called, ‘who lie in the sphere of idiocy,’ that is, between sleep and drowsiness, might curse me, it would have—as explained in that same book—no effect on me at all.

“And in fact, since I began to do so, I no longer feel the said instinctive uneasiness.”

Well, now, patient reader, I must really conclude this opening chapter. It has now only to be signed.

He who ...

Stop! Misunderstanding formation! With a signature there must be no joking, otherwise the same will be done to you as once before in one of the empires of Central Europe, when you were made to pay ten years’ rent for a house you occupied only for three months, merely because you had set your hand to a paper undertaking to renew the contract for the house each year.

Of course after this and still other instances from life experience, I must in any case in respect of my own signature, be very, very careful.

Very well then.

He who in childhood was called “Tatakh”; in early youth “Darky”; later the “Black Greek”; in middle age, the “Tiger of Turkestan”; and now, not just anybody, but the genuine “Monsieur” or “Mister” Gurdjieff, or the nephew of “Prince Mukransky,” or finally, simply a “Teacher of Dancing.”

The sphere of idiocy

... if I should curse beforehand all those to whom my service for the benefit of certain among them might seem disturbing, then, according to the explanation of the book I had read the night before, however much all those, as they might be called, ‘who lie in the sphere of idiocy,’ that is, between sleep and drowsiness, might curse me, it would have—as explained in that same book—no effect on me at all.

The “sphere of idiocy” label that Gurdjieff uses may well be appropriate since in drowsiness there is rarely any clear thinking. Whether the solution adopted by Karapet has objective merit is difficult to ascertain. If Karapet believes he has shielded himself, that may be sufficient.

One of the Empires of Central Europe

Yes, Gurdjieff spent roughly a year in Germany between August 1921 and late 1922 before eventually establishing his Institute near Paris, making several attempts to find a location for his institute. So he very likely rented a property there. However, he faced significant “obstruction” from the German government regarding residence permits and the official recognition of his Institute. So he chose France instead.

There is no reason to doubt Gurdjieff’s story about signing a deceptive rental contract.

The signature

The Chapter closes with Gurdjieff’s very thorough signature. It has seven aspects:

- *He who in childhood was called “Tatakh”:* *Tat* in Armenian means “grandmother.” So “Tatakh” may mean “notable grandmother.” (Gurdjieff’s grandmother was a well known healer and midwife.)
- *In early youth “Darky”:* This likely reflects Gurdjieff’s swarthy complexion.

- Later the “Black Greek”: In *Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*¹ Gurdjieff mentions some acquaintance calling him “Black Devil.” In *Gurdjieff, A Master in Life*, Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch quotes someone referring to Gurdjieff as “you half-black Greek.”
- In middle age, the “Tiger of Turkestan”: There is no record we can find of anyone referring to Gurdjieff by this nickname.
- And now, not just anybody, but the genuine “Monsieur” or “Mister” Gurdjieff: The name by which he was generally known once he began teaching.
- Or the nephew of “Prince Mukransky”¹: There is no evidence that Gurdjieff was directly related to the Mukransky family. It is possible he was related by marriage in some way, but there is no known evidence.
- or finally, simply a “Teacher of Dancing.”: Indeed.

Gurdjieff brackets this first chapter with an invocation to the Trinity (law of Three) and this statement of his identity (Law of Seven).

Author's Biographical Notes

Robin Bloor was born in 1951 in Liverpool, UK. He obtained a BSc in Mathematics at Nottingham University and took up a career in the computer industry, initially writing software. From 1989 onwards, he became a technology analyst and consultant. He has thus been a writer of a kind ever since. In 2002 he was awarded an honorary Ph.D. in Computer Science by Wolverhampton University in the UK. He currently resides in and works from Austin, Texas in the USA.

In 1988, after drifting through several work groups, Bloor met and became a pupil of Rina Hands. Rina was a one-time associate of J. G. Bennett, a student of Peter Ouspensky's, and later, a pupil of George Gurdjieff. Following Gurdjieff's death, she remained part of J. G. Bennett's group for a while. Subsequently, she formed groups both in London, where she lived, and in Bradford in the North of England—initially in conjunction with Madame Nott. She was both an accomplished movements teacher and an inspirational group leader. She died in 1994 and is buried next to Jane Heap in a cemetery in North London.

Bloor leads a Group in Austin, Texas. Aside from the usual movements and Work activities, the group specializes in the study of Gurdjieff's writings and the study of Objective Science, as articulated by Ouspensky in *In Search of The Miraculous*, and by Gurdjieff in *The Tales*.

He has written a number of books about The Work. Details of some of these books are provided on the following pages.

¹ The House of Mukhrani (often Russified as Mukhransky) is a princely branch of the Bagrationi dynasty, which ruled Georgia for over a millennium. While many family members held the title, Prince Mukhransky there were only two in Gurdjieff's time: Prince Konstantin Bagration-Mukhransky (1889–1915) and Prince Alexander Bagration-Mukhransky (1853–1918). After the Red Army invaded Georgia in 1921, the family fled to Europe, primarily settling in Spain.