

## FIRST INITIATION

*A Talk given by Mr. Gurdjieff to a Paris Group, September 16, 1941*

### **Mr. Gurdjieff:**

You must see that in life, you receive exactly what you give, life is the mirror of what you are; it is in your own likeness. You are passive, blind and demanding. You take everything, you accept everything, without ever feeling any obligation. Your attitude towards the world and towards life is the attitude of one who has the right to demand and to take, who needs neither to pay nor to earn. You believe all things are due to you simply because you are you. You don't notice this. Nevertheless, it is that in you which separates one world from another.

You have no yardstick by which to measure yourself. You live entirely by "It pleases me" or "It does not please me". This means that you appreciate only yourself. You acknowledge something higher than yourself only in theory or with your logic – not in actual fact. This is why you make demands and continue to believe that all things are cheap, that you have enough in your pocket to buy everything you may want. You do not acknowledge anything above, outside or within yourself. It is for this reason, I repeat, that you have no yardstick and live passively according to your whims.

Yes, your "self esteem" blinds you. It is the biggest obstacle to a new life. In order to go further, one must cross this barrier, this threshold. This is the test which separates mankind into two: the "wheat" from the "tares". However intelligent, brilliant or gifted a man may be, if he does not adjust or modify his evaluation of himself, he will be unable to pursue his inner growth and unable to work on self knowledge, to achieve real being. He will remain what he is all his life.

The first demand, the first condition, the first test for one who wishes to work on himself, is to change his evaluation of himself. He must not imagine, believe or think, but see – and really see – things in himself which he never saw before.

His evaluation will never change as long as he sees nothing in himself. And in order to see he must learn to see, this is the first initiation of a man on the path to self knowledge.

In the first place, he must know what to look at. Once he knows this, he must make efforts, keep his attention, and observe constantly, with tenacity. By holding his attention and constantly observing, one day he might see. If he sees once, he can see a second time, and if this goes on, he will no longer be able *not* to see. This is the state to be looked for and the aim of observation; it is from this that true desire, the irresistible desire to become will be born. Having been cold, we shall become warm, vibrant. We shall be affected by our own reality.

At present we have only the illusion that we exist. We have too high an opinion of ourselves. We do not respect ourselves. In order that I should respect myself, I need to recognise in myself a part that is higher than other parts. It is by my attitude towards this part that I demonstrate the respect I have towards it. In this way I shall respect myself and my relationship towards others will be governed by the same respect.

One must understand that all other criteria – talent, knowledge, culture – are variables measurements of detail. The measure of one's own inner vision is the only true, unchanging, objective measurement. From a higher and more real level one can assess another level, also real but inferior. This assessment determines the role of each and will bring you self respect.

But you will find that this is not easy – and it is not cheap. You have to pay dearly. For defaulters, lazy people, parasites – no hope. One must pay dearly, pay at once, pay in advance. Pay from oneself by sincere, conscientious, disinterested efforts.

The more you are prepared to pay without sparing yourself, without cheating or tampering, the more you will receive. And from then on you will get to learn something about your own nature. You will see all the tricks and falsehoods to which you resort in order not to pay on the nail. You need to pay with your plausible theories, your deep-rooted convictions, your prejudices, your conventions, your “I like this” and your “It does not suit me”, without bargaining, without pretending and honestly, by sincerely trying to see, while you are passing your false coinage.

Try to accept for one moment the notion that you are not what you believe yourself to be, that you have too high an opinion of yourself, and that in fact you lie to yourself. You lie to yourself all the time, all day long, during the whole of your life. Lies govern your life to the extent that you cannot control your lying. You are a prey to lying. You lie in everything. Your relationship with others, lies. The education you profer, the conventions, all lies. Your teaching, lies. Your theories, your art, lies. Your social life, your family life, lies. And what you believe yourself to be, equally lies.

But you never stop to see what you are doing or what you are saying because you believe in yourself. One must inwardly stop and observe, observe without taking sides, impartially. Accept for a time this notion of lying. And if you observe in this manner, paying from yourself, without self pity, by giving up all your imaginary riches for one moment of reality, then you may suddenly see what you have never seen before. You will see that you are not what you believe. You will see that there are two of you – the one who *is* not, yet takes the place of and plays the role of the other. And the one who *is* but so weakly, so impermanently that he vanishes almost as soon as he appears. He cannot withstand lying. At the smallest lie, he evaporates. He does not fight or resist, he is lost in advance. Learn to observe until you have seen the difference between your natures – until you have seen the liar in yourself, the impostor. When you have seen your two natures, on that day truth will have been born in you.

*1 This talk, edited by Dr. Michel de Salzman, and translated by Pierre Elliot, was read at the 1983 Annual General Meeting of The American Society for Continuous Education, Claymont Court, Charles Town WV*