

CHAPTER 4

Selves

When we talk about things we use one word and this sufficiently indicates what we are talking about. We say “chair” or “cushion” and these single words are enough to connect us with all that we associate with the experience of a chair or cushion. With plants and animals and people, it is often much the same; we refer to them by their names and this is enough to connect us with the various associations we have formed about them. This way of going about things serves some purposes, but it is all on the surface and only captures the “thingness” of things: how they are in the world of bodies where everything is outside everything else. We do not come into contact with the deeper characteristics of living beings and people through this approach.

We talk about ourselves as “I” or “me,” also “myself,” but when we try to look at what these words signify, we find that they do not mean the same as each other and what they refer to is not constant either.

“I” is the wholly subjective in us which we believe to be free. It is not the thoughts that are in me, or the feelings that are in me, or the bodily sensations. But to see that, for example, “I am not “my body” is an enormous step.

“My body,” “my mind,” and “my feelings” are a part of “me” and I can be aware of me, that is, aware of what I am. We cannot be aware of “I” because it is always hidden, always behind, no matter how far we reach or dig into ourselves. We have linked “I” to the will, and the will is never an object which can be known or sensed or felt; it is not even before us when we are conscious. Who would there be to see “I”? The common idea that we can find an infinite regress in which one “I” observes another and is observed in its turn and so on is really an incorrect way of describing the relativity of our consciousness. We have seen how one center can observe another and also how we can become aware of our automatic functions and even our sensitivity. None of this is to do with “I.” What it has to do with is that “me” is of different kinds and exists on many levels. It is legitimate to speak of different selves that comprise “me.”

When we use the word “myself” in the same way that we use the name of an object, we make a big mistake. How is it that we can be acting in one way

one minute and a minute later be acting in a totally contradictory way? If we begin to examine our behavior impartially, we can come to see that we are constantly shifting from one plane of existence to another and that for each of these planes there is a “myself” that corresponds to it. The sort of self that is active depends upon the state of the functions that are operating. We must also remember that “myself” is partially subjective and in every self we have to take account of a condition of the will. “I am myself” is always true, but in as many different ways as there are selves.

We must make it clear that each of the selves we are going to talk about is strictly related to the physical body and its instruments. A self is an embodied state of existence and should be considered separately from man’s possibilities of acquiring other kinds of body. The different selves make possible different kinds of experience. They are locations through which we can learn about what we are. They are organizations of function through which we can operate in this bodily world and come into contact with the world of life and the world of minds or people. None of them, not even the highest self, the “true self,” is able to exist without the physical body.

Man has by nature access to the cosmic energy of creativity, and this energy makes it possible for him to act, to come to real understandings, and to begin the work of transformation. This does not mean that he has a creative existence; that his own substance is creative. It simply means that the creative power can enter into the instruments associated with his body, as in sex. This is a most wonderful thing and is the source of man’s potential not only to create outwardly but inwardly—that is, to become free. It is the same with consciousness, which can enter the instruments we have and bring them to a state of harmony and cooperation. This does not make man a conscious being.

With each of the energies, there is the possibility of a different kind of functioning, a different kind of experiencing, and a different kind of “willing.” It is this which produces the different selves. With the accumulation of experience through life, the selves develop, more or less rightly and to a greater or lesser degree. If our “center of gravity” moves toward the higher selves, this is a real advance in our being and different opportunities are opened for us. We can then also talk about the making of a different kind of body, an inner body, which enables us to live in a quite different way. It is only when such a body is formed that we are no longer subject to the laws attached to our physical existence. This is quite different from the temporary experience we may have of higher levels that come through the higher selves.

In the ordinary state, the higher selves are dormant. Even then there may be moments of higher functioning, but we lack the organization of experience by which these moments can be more than dreams. This explains why people can have even very deep experiences but also in another sense not have them. The higher selves give us an organization of experience—a means of transforming energies—by which we can make a step into the higher worlds. They are not themselves the freedom that we seek.

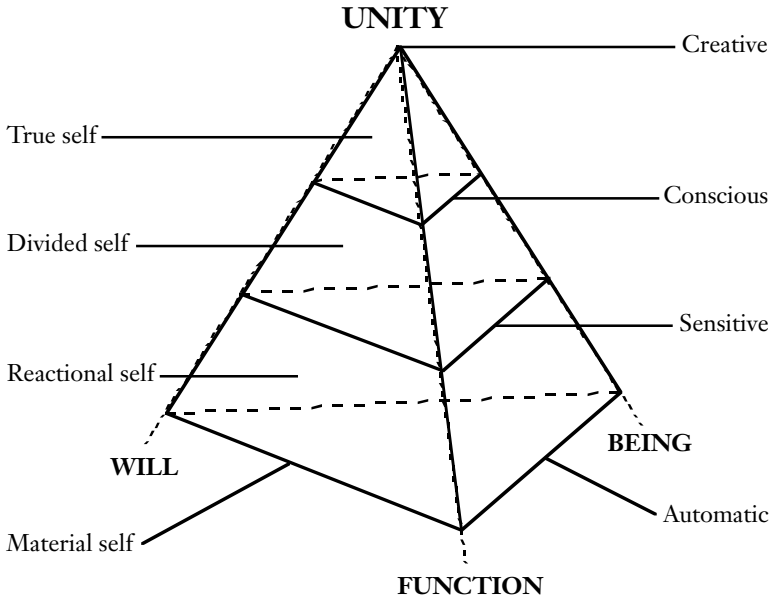


Diagram of Selves And Energies

Figure 4. 1

Every self is a combination of function, being, and will which is organized in such a way as to make certain kinds of experiences possible. This means that a self has got its own set of functions. These are really the same instruments, but working more or less efficiently, more or less sensitively, with more or less consciousness. What the instruments of man can do is quite different on the different levels of organization. This leads us to the being aspect of the selves, which can be seen in terms of energies. Each self is characterized by a certain quality of energy, and when the corresponding quality of energy is not available, that self is latent, as if it were “not there.” Using the terminology of our scheme of energies, we can say that there is a material self that works automatically; a reactional self that works sensitively; a divided self that works consciously; and a true self that works creatively. We can picture the four selves as four “planes of experience” in the diagram of function, being, will, and unity. Each of the selves “has a will of its own,” and this introduces a hazard into our existence that is a very important feature of our human situation. Each of the four selves has some power to affirm itself as an independent entity or to open itself to the action of a higher will. In this way, each of the four selves can make a contribution to the embodiment of the real “I,” which is, so to say, “hidden” in the upper point of the pyramid, at the point of unity. But they can also form

a barrier to this embodiment. This leads to the question that is often asked in Gurdjieff's second series of writings, *Meetings with Remarkable Men**, "How is it possible to come under the influence of higher laws?" This means, "How can we be liberated from the prisons of our selves?" To understand what is required, we shall need an understanding of the laws under which man exists, which we shall try to develop in Part 2.

All our selves are needed if we are to come to completion, and, far from destroying our lower selves, we must understand and regularize their workings to come into the higher ones. The lower selves are accessible to us in our own experience and in observation of other people. When they are in control, we are in the state of slavery and have no initiative apart from the interplay of our conditioning and external stimuli. Nevertheless, they do have a characteristic type of experiencing which we must learn how to recognize. We will begin with a study of the material self, that is, the man-machine.

The Material Self

It is through this self that man has power over all the other objects of the earth. It is supreme in the world of bodies: but it remains within that world and is subject to the laws of that world. The energy it works with is the automatic, very highly organized. The material self has all the functions of thinking, feeling, moving, instinct, and so on, but they operate without awareness. Gurdjieff called it the "man-machine," but it is still a self and also has subjective properties. The material self can be a very useful instrument in dealing with the material world, but there is a danger that it will usurp our true human nature and act as if it were the whole man. Our conceptions of the world are largely formed through this self, and the experience it has is based on our bodily nature. Our conceptions of space and time are conditioned almost entirely by the fact that our bodies are solid material objects. This explains why our thinking is, for the most part, only useful in the world of bodies, the *alam-i ajسام*, and cannot make sense of experience in other worlds. The apparatus of language belongs to the material self, and it develops almost entirely through contact with material bodies. A child begins to speak by naming material objects, coming later on to words for actions and even later to expressions of life and consciousness. It is because of this that we can very easily make the mistake of assuming that the laws which govern material objects are the laws which govern everything. Material laws include the impossibility of two things occupying the same place, and because of this we tend to believe that we cannot be both happy and sad at the same time, believing that happiness and sadness have the same discrete material natures as a table or a chair.

* G. Gurdjieff. *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, New York: Dutton, 1963; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.

Our language, which is a very fine tool for dealing with material things, is actually an obstacle when it comes to trying to understand inner states and realities. The material self has no discrimination. It is able to think and speak, but it is insensitive to quality. It is able to talk about everything, but it reduces it all to the same thing. It is able to know about other worlds, but it always believes that the material world is the only reality. There are people who are dominated by the material self and, while they can be very powerful or successful in a worldly way, they have no feelings, no sensitivity. They will treat other people as if they were things and are therefore capable of great ruthlessness. This does not mean the man of the material self does not have urges, desires, pleasures, and pains. He has all of these, but they are all either derived mechanically from social conventions or they arise from the working of his animal instinct. He can desire power and domination over others, but it is all artificial; he is nothing but a machine. He can have very strong sexual impulses, indulge himself in food and drink, but it is all a sham; he is never able to enjoy life and his experience does not go beyond simple states of pleasure and pain.

It is inherent in the nature of the automatic energy, which is the quality of energy of the material self, that the man of that self does not notice what he is doing and never realizes what he is missing. He does not see that he is never really alive. His life is a charade but he does not have the energy with which to see through the pretense. But although he cannot be aware of what is wrong, he can be driven to seek for some feeling of existence. He has to adorn himself with success and with possessions to feel that he exists at all. The only kind of existence that he is aware of is material existence, and he depends on things. The man of the material self is not only interested in material possessions and money, though these are often important, but he has a material outlook on everything. We can speak of physical materialism, emotional materialism, sexual materialism, and intellectual materialism; in all of the functions, the only reality is material.

A "body person," or a Man Number 1 of the material self, lives entirely for the satisfaction of his bodily impulses. His only means of experiencing life is to have his bodily impulses stimulated. If he is a Man Number 2, centered in the emotional brain, then he is either a very negative and critical person who sees something wrong in every situation he comes into contact with or he is a person with a great desire for power. Such a person is only satisfied in his relationships by the sense of possessiveness. He is unable to make compromises because he is unable to see more than one point of view in a situation. Nothing really enters into him, certainly not the reality of other people, their feelings, and their experience.

A Man Number 3 on the material level can be very intellectual, very logical, but his idea of knowledge will be analytical and atomistic. He sees things in compartments and is unable to see things as a whole. It is not within the power of the automatic energy to bring about a unity of knowledge, so that

while such a person may have a great fund of knowledge he has no desire or impulse to seek a deeper view of things and is even suspicious of those who are drawn toward a view of wholeness. One of Gurdjieff's most important psychological conceptions was that of the formatory apparatus, which corresponds to the thinking center of the man of the material self. The formatory apparatus, powered by the automatic energy, is constantly associating, and this has become, in almost everyone nowadays, the primary tool of thought and action. It uses words as if they were material objects and is unable to discriminate between ideas; it has a fantastic ability to remember and associate words and ideas, and it is this "formatting" that we usually refer to as "thinking." It is so successful in dealing with the material world that it is sometimes assumed that it is a sign of true human intelligence. But intelligence is something that actually belongs to a deeper part of us.

A person dominated by the material self is in a truly pathetic condition. He can be outwardly successful but his life is, objectively speaking, wretched. He has no real experience of his own, and when the higher energies work in him they work apart from the self he habitually lives in and he can only regard their action as a dream. He is constantly reaching outside himself for anything which can give him a feeling of existing at all. He is nothing but an empty shell, and, because the material self is unable to exist independently of the body, when he dies he is completely destroyed forever.

Whenever I speak about this, I remember something which happened many years ago and made a deep impression on me. I had a very good friend who was a distinguished lawyer and a good man. One of his brothers was a very successful man—Chancellor of the Exchequer. All of his family were proud of his intelligence and helped him toward success, his brothers even going to work for a time to make money in order to help him with his career. But although everyone looked up to him, he had no feelings, no sensitivity; and, somehow or other, all the feelings, all the sensitivity in his family had gone to his other brothers. When he died I went to his funeral because I was a friend of his brother. It was an unforgettable experience. When the coffin was brought into the chapel, where it was to be cremated, I had such a strong feeling of there just being an empty shell, a nut with no kernel. Everything had dwindled and dried up inside him, and I saw once and for all how terrible a thing it is when one allows oneself to be a prisoner of the material world. One may have everything externally but have nothing inside.

Yet we all have this material self, this automatic functioning of our centers, and it is necessary that it should be so. We could not become what we are to be without it. Our task is not to destroy it but to see that it plays its proper role. The material self should be the instrument for interacting with the material world. Everything that we do, such as breathing, eating, moving, thinking, and so on, is partially in the world of bodies. We have a role to play in that world. But if we are nothing but these mechanisms and the corresponding energy transformations that keep them going, we miss the point of

our existence. We have to learn how to separate ourselves from the mechanism. "I" am not these associations, these reactions, these sensations that are going on in me; in much the same way as "I" am not the brake, the accelerator, or the clutch pedal of the car which "I" am involved in driving. We have to find ways in which this separation can be established in us; but when we use the word "separation" we do not mean that these things have to be cut away from us as some sort of cancerous growth. The constant stimulation which arises through our sensations and our associations is necessary for us. It is the working of the automatic energy which maintains the "tone" of our nervous system and the vitality of our entire organism.

By itself, the material self is nothing more than a machine "running wild," out of control and serving no useful purpose. It is one of our tasks to discover the purpose of this self and train it to fulfill this purpose. The material self was often depicted in medieval paintings as a dragon. There is nothing to fear from dragons as long as we keep an eye on them. If we are off-guard, they can catch us out.

Although the material self is the instrument through which we can master the world, this does not mean that the material self by itself can be aware of the material world. It is simply part of that world, and when we are dominated by it we lose all sense of being in relationship with the external world; that is, we lose all sense of having obligations toward the things that we use. In his rightful place, man is a god in relation to material objects; but a sign of the man dominated by the material self is that he has no regard for the tools that he uses but is more likely to be concerned with owning them. To treat the belongings of other people just as carefully as our own can have the most extraordinary results, results that will be quite unexpected. We suddenly find ourselves coming into contact with the world around us, with what we are doing, and with the tools that we are using. All this is quite impossible for the material self, which cannot see tools but only own them. When such an experience comes, we can see the material self for what it is: a machine.

In its rightful place, the material self has the all-important role of taking care of all our automatic functioning, all the habitual behavior we need for the balanced ordering of our lives. Even the perfect man has a material self; but it is subordinate to what is higher in him. We do not expect a chisel to decide for us what it will cut; yet there is a danger that we will let our material selves direct the way in which we live our lives. When this self is in its rightful place, the higher parts of our selfhood are left free to perform their functions, which are concerned with the higher energies of sensitivity and consciousness. These higher energies should not be wasted on tasks which can be done automatically. When we are concerned with material objects, the center of gravity of our actions can be the material self. But, as Gurdjieff expressed it, "You can make as much money as you like, as long as it is only with your left foot." The rest of us must not be swallowed up in materiality.

The Reactional Self

We can look at a picture and see it as a machine might or we can be aware of it as well. What this difference is is quite obvious in our experience. In the second case, we have an experience of what it means to be alive. The automatic energy is capable of producing a description of the picture and, if it is a painting, of classifying it according to style and period and reproducing what other people have said about it; but in all of that, there is no one who is actually looking at the picture. The added awareness, which can put us in touch with the world around us, with other people, and with what is going on in ourselves, comes from the sensitive energy. It gives us the feeling of being alive.

The sensitive energy is essentially polarized in its workings, and all life is sensitive, governed by the poles of attraction and aversion. Sensitivity does not produce a neutral kind of contact with the world but a kind of experience with force and direction. It is for this reason that the self associated with the working of this energy is called "reactional"; but it must be distinguished from the state of conditioned reflex that belongs to the material level. The reactional self exists in our experience whereas the material self is all "outside." In ordinary language, people talk about "feeling" to point to the difference; but each of the centers has its own sensitive reactional nature. There are instinctive pleasure-pain reactions, emotional likes and dislikes, sexual attraction and repulsion, mental yeses and nos, moving center "want-tos" and "don't-want-tos." People living from the reactional self differ from those centered in the material self in that they can make contact with things; but they always do it in this either/or kind of way.

As we grow up, all our experiences work in us to organize the flow of sensitive energy. Without the action of a higher self, this leads to the acquisition of various habitual reactions with which we are identified. We said that each of the levels of energy really merges into the others, and there is in the sensitive level of energy a range of greater or lesser freedom from automatism. The power of response that the sensitivity has can be conditioned. When children are encouraged to follow their likes and dislikes, they are being "educated" for slavery. Gurdjieff said about people who encouraged children in this way, "Right to kill. Stick knife in back." The proper role of the sensitive energy is to put us in touch with life and provide us with substances for our transformation; it should not be the dictator of our behavior. It is a terrible thing to see to what extent what we do is determined by the conditioning of our sensitivity, all the time going toward what we like and avoiding what we do not like so that we live in a very narrow way. This is the life of what Gurdjieff called the "false personality," which copes with all the real problems of life by avoiding them. It can even lead us into doing things that damage our health and well-being because the true sensitive power of discrimination between the healthy and the harmful, such as all animals have, is overlaid with all sorts of artificial reactions.

For the man of the reactional self, his likes and his dislikes are the “truth”: what I like must be good and what I do not like must be bad and everybody else must avoid it, too. This kind of absurdity is a very powerful force in the lives of many people. If the reactional man is centered on his body, he will not do anything that does not “feel good” to his body. This can bear no relation to what his body really needs. Because of the enormous capacity of the sensitive energy for being organized and structured, the reactional self can have all kinds of sexual predilections outside of the basic attraction between man and woman. None of these manifestations of polarity need to be stable and consistent. Reactional people can like a thing one moment and dislike it the next; but they will not be aware that this is happening. In any given moment what they are liking is “good” and what they are disliking is “bad.” They are intolerant of other people who do not have the same likes and dislikes and will find it hard to believe that their own reactions have ever changed.

The force that is in the reactional self is very seductive. This self will feel that the reactions it has are its very hold on reality. What has to be understood is that the reactions that take place in us do have a very important role in our lives, but they are only “raw material” for our own being and not ends in themselves. What has to be learned is how to “bear the clash of opposites” in ourselves, for it is then that the reactional nature becomes as it should be.

The avoidance of this clash or tension is characteristic of the man who is dominated by his reactional self. It prevents him ever from coming into contact with how things really are. Strength of feeling in him is really a barrier to understanding himself or others. Instead of having an insight into anyone, all he will ever know is how he feels about them. If he is mentally active, he will see everything as either right or wrong, true or false. He cannot understand ideas; he can only accept them or reject them. What he believes in is absolute for him and he cannot enter into any other point of view, though he probably believes that he is completely impartial and objective.

Recently, I was reading a book written about the history of Bukhara by a great savant. Although he has done more to widen our understanding of the languages of Central Asia than anyone for hundreds of years, he was nevertheless a very striking example of this sort of violent intellectual prejudice; all the more so because of his obvious intelligence. As he saw it, certain dynasties and people could do no wrong while others could do no right; and if I had not read many books about this and come to know it from many sides, I could easily have been taken in. I was astonished to see how his prejudice colored everything that he wrote and that despite the fact that he was very intelligent he could not be impartial.

To begin to master the working of the sensitive energy in us we must study how it works in our lives. This is made difficult by the fact that we tend to identify with any state that happens to be present in us, and what we have to learn is how to direct our attention outside of “ourselves”—that is, our states—to what is around us. If, for example, we find ourselves rejecting some idea,

we have to get ourselves to see that “Here is this rejection in me; there is that idea which is being rejected.” We can train ourselves in this way, but it is at the beginning not so easy as it sounds. We have to enlarge our awareness beyond its narrow confines. This in its turn releases energy in us, and if we are not careful, this new energy will be taken up by our reactional nature. The energy that is produced by our efforts to see can be lost in enthusiasm, excitement, or misery and self-blame. It is in this way that nearly all the opportunities released in the course of life, when by chance some larger awareness is produced in us, are wasted. The reactional self “steals” the energy: we like or dislike what we see of ourselves and we get into some state that is as blind as what we had before the moment of seeing. To see ourselves without reaction is one of the first tastes of freedom.

To come to see, it is not enough to “try to become more aware.” This in itself does not lead to very much. We have to struggle actively against likes and dislikes in us: do what we dislike doing and not do what we like doing; set ourselves to appreciate a point of view contradictory to what we believe to be our own; be active when we feel inertial and inactive when we feel energetic. Injunctions such as these are liable to be terribly misunderstood. They are taken to be an advocacy of a masochistic life. But the fruit of their practice is rarely suffering, it is an enhanced sense of life. We become a little more free from the mutual exclusion of opposites and, instead of being at one pole or other, either being attracted or repelled, we experience the force between them in ourselves. This is the force of life that lifts us out of the mechanical life, and it is for this that the reactional self exists.

Only when the opposites can be experienced together in us can we begin to be aware of our own human nature. This nature that we have is something with enormous depth, and if we are caught by our reactions we are condemned to live only a surface existence; but if we can use the force of our reactions, we have a way of penetrating to what lies within us. The rightful place of the reactional self is that of a generator of energies, and the combination of opposites is that condition of transformation in which higher grades of energy can be produced. Just as with electricity it is impossible to generate a current unless we have learned how to separate the positive and negative poles, so it is only when we have learned how to separate the positive and negative forces of our reactional self that we can gain from our activities a source of energy for our inner work. A vivid life is one in which there is “yes” and “no” at the same time; affirmation and denial.

When it is like that, the reactional self is the seat of an organ of perception of vast power which can help us to live our lives fully and to share in the lives of others. Far from leading to additional suffering, this way of life releases us from a great amount of unnecessary suffering. This is what Gurdjieff meant when he said “sacrifice your suffering.” We have to come to realize that what comes out of the sensitive interaction we have with the conditions of life is not what we *are* but the energy that we can use to *be*.

It is only when we have become awakened to the reality of the higher selves that it can make sense to us that the material self is a machine for dealing with the world of bodies and the reactional self is a generator of energies that can enable us to experience the reality of life. They are not complete in themselves but only instruments. We must explain something further about the training of the reactional self. This can only be done properly from within. It is of no value—in fact, it is detrimental—for people to be forced into contradictory situations against their wish. Conditions can be created in which it is relatively easy for people to recognize opportunities for struggle, and they can be encouraged and guided to do so, but force only serves to stimulate the lower part of the selfhood. When the struggle begins to be established in this right way—that is, not for the approval or disapproval of others or for external reward but from within—then this is the way to an opening up of the next higher self, the divided self. Educating people in this path is a very high responsibility.

The Divided Self

The difficulty of awakening the divided self is illustrated in an Eastern story as it was recounted by Gurdjieff. In the story, mankind is compared to a flock of sheep, and it is said that there is a magician who owns them. When he wants their wool he shears them and when he wants their meat he kills them. Because he is too stingy to put fences around his pastures, he has to find some other means of being sure that the sheep do not run away. Being a magician, he hypnotizes the sheep and suggests to them that they are immortal and that, far from its harming them, they will find losing their skins to be beneficial. Secondly, he suggests to them that he is a kind magician who has only their best interests at heart. Further, he suggests that, even if anything were going to happen to them, it would not happen this very day so that there is no need on their part to worry just now. And, if all this were not enough, he suggests to some that they are lions and that nobody would dare to trouble them; to others that they are eagles and that they can therefore fly away when they need to; to others that they are men who can control their own destiny; and to others that they are magicians who can control the destiny of others. They are so contented by all of this that he is able to kill them and shear them without any problems whenever he wishes to.

There comes a nice little piece at the end of the story: the way that the magician keeps the sheep hypnotized is to beat them a little every day. These “beatings” refer to the continual state of stimulation of the reactional self we are in, which inhibits the awakening of consciousness; the separation of consciousness from sensitivity. So long as we sleep in this way, we are prevented from seeing our real situation. So long as we are hypnotized by our own reactions, our likes and dislikes, our prejudices, our beliefs and habits of thought

and all the rest of it, we are protected from seeing what Gurdjieff called, in the telling of the *legominism* of Ashiata Shiemash in *Beelzebub's Tales*, "The Terror of the Situation."

What we mean by the "separation of consciousness from sensitivity" is being set free from the hypnotism of the reactional self. Then we can begin to see what it means to be dominated by the lower selves. A real struggle can begin, a struggle between the conflicting pulls of our higher and lower natures. The real property of the divided self is that it is drawn to live in two different worlds. This is due to the conscious energy which can make connections beyond the limits of the sensitivity. On the one side, we are drawn out into the world, and this reaching out is the foundation of what we ordinarily call "desire." On the other, we are drawn within ourselves toward our higher invisible nature, and we can call this, as Gurdjieff did, "nondesire." The very seat of desire and nondesire is the divided self. That is why it is said that in every man there is a devil and an angel.

It is important to realize that the energy of the divided self is not in itself wise or good. It is the power behind the deepest urges that we have—consciousness. Consciousness is the first level at which the genuine normal urges that belong to the centers can take effect; but they are mixed with what comes to us from outside. Here are the drives to understand, to share, to live, to action, and so on, but they are usually adulterated by desire.

If we begin to work on ourselves in earnest, as time goes on we are bound to find that there is "something" in us that wants no part of it. This "something" wants to have its own way and does not want to recognize any master either within or without. Or else it is apathetic and only wants to be left alone. This self-assertion, however, is not the whole story. It is from the very same place in us that there comes the wish to be free of slavery and to fit into the whole, to serve and to understand what needs to be done. All of this belongs to the divided self and is the reason for its name.

It is not easy to see what the divided self is about. It is far deeper than the level of reaction. For the greater part of our lives, the divided self may be no more than a pattern that accompanies us from birth and limits the kinds of relationship that we can form. We can only get at it indirectly, by finding out, for example, what we "cannot do" in situations, such as take the initiative or keep to a plan and so on, which gives us a clue as to our type. The observation of our typical behaviors can lead us to understand that there is "something" in us which is imposing a pattern of what is possible and impossible for us to do, that is not due to external conditioning or the state of our mechanism. This does not mean that we cannot live and experience outside our pattern or type; but to do this, a creative action is needed. Even as we are, the pattern is a pattern in depth, not like a blueprint, and it has a "permissive" side as well as a "prohibitory" one. Type is rather like a style of life that has almost infinite possibilities of variation. But we must remember that we are rather like actors who have a very limited repertoire of roles. It is almost impossible

to make ourselves act in a way that is not typical.

Type is sometimes also referred to as “character,” but here the meaning is more directed toward the desires, aims, appetites, and ideals which are the foundation of our behavior, the content rather than the form. It is the needs for connectedness, for relatedness, that move us from inside ourselves, so that we are looking for something, reaching out to something, striving for something. All this gives our life and experience a certain “shape” which can be recognized; but its recognition requires consciousness. Nearly everyone can have some feeling of what it means to associate different people with different “animals.” There does seem to be a real affinity between man and the various species of animal. But whenever we try to pin it down, it goes out of sight. It cannot be reduced to the sensitive level.

[The Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav] Jung showed something important with his notion of “archetypes.” We can say that the “animals” or “archetypes” which form our character are taken from a source in which we all share, so that here we go beyond the limits of our private self. If we can really come to the core of this, we discover our unity with other people, and we see that we are dealing with the patterning of human nature. For someone who has penetrated into the archetypal world—or the world of what Jung called the “collective unconscious”—life is made harder. He becomes aware of the destructive forces in his own nature. He sees how much rejection of the total human reality there is in him. We have to be able to accept what we find in this world because it is rejection that binds us to the limited pattern of our own nature.

The limitation of our pattern is also what is called “fate,” the way of life and experience that is fixed in us at birth. It is “we ourselves” who bind ourselves to fate; but how this comes about in us is not easy to see. It is seldom so simple as laziness or violence or the desire for domination. Something gets “twisted round” in us so that we remain closed. Traits are “positive” or “negative” according to their source, though they may appear the very same thing. True pride, for example, is based upon contact with the inner richness of what we can be as human beings and in its working is no different from humility whereas false pride is ascribing to ourselves, just as we are, the qualities that only in reality belong to whole men and women. One pride leads us to God while the other seeks to inflate us in the world.

Unless we are free from the domination of the two lower selves, work belonging to this third level is ill-advised. The lower selves confuse the issue to such an extent that any effort to deal with the divided self is bound to be worse than useless, even harmful. We need to clear away the rubbish of the lower selves before we can begin to be aware of the hidden pattern of our nature. When this emerges, it can be very hard to bear. We begin to see how it is that we destroy our possibilities, reject, refuse to make sacrifices, all in the belief that we are holding on to our true reality.

As the reactional self is the door through which we must pass if we are to come into the world of energies, so the divided self is the door through which

we must pass in order to come to the world of will.* So what is on the “other side” of our own nature, our divided self, looks to us like nothing, absence, lack, whereas in reality it is there we have to go to find true reality. One of the few things that can enable us to pass through the door of the divided self is to see that we are helpless, to see that we cannot “do,” cannot in reality create anything from ourselves. Through the key of the pattern we have in our consciousness we can unlock many doors and achieve many things, but none of this is “doing.” In every real step, we have to be stimulated by the creative energy within that we do not see. Will and energy are still apart. Our centers can begin to work together, and we are able to make all sorts of connections. We can be quite free of our reactions, but none of this gives us effective freedom because we still cannot change what we are.

The admission of helplessness is very subtle. It does not mean that we cannot achieve external results. It means that we see that we cannot change ourselves and that everything will remain essentially the same. It also means that we accept that there is within us a power which can “do,” but this power is totally beyond our awareness and we cannot come to it by any means at our disposal. This must penetrate our understanding because understanding is the power of the divided self. Remembering Gurdjieff’s dictum, “Understanding with one brain is hallucination; understanding with two brains is semi-hallucination; only understanding with all three brains is real understanding,” we can see that real understanding is possible for the divided self. But there is the understanding that binds everything to itself and the understanding that binds itself to the reality of things. It is in this second sense that Gurdjieff, in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, makes Father Giovanni say, “Faith comes from real understanding.”**

We can say that a man is, in a real way, his understanding. It is useless for him to say, “Of course, there are things that I do not understand; of course, there are limits to my understanding.” He can even say, “Yes, I can appreciate that there are hidden realities,” but it is all just words. The opening of the understanding to the truly unknowable worlds is a very great thing. It has to be thoroughly disillusioned about “doing,” able to bear the realization that we are not the source of our own acts. We can have all sorts of experience, such as through meditation, when we become aware of something working in us that is not the result of our own initiative. But still we believe that this is something happening “to us” and “in us” and we remain at the center. What is higher remains at the level of an image for us; it is not a reality.

This does not mean that what is beyond our understanding is so remote that it will never have anything to do with us unless we become liberated beings.

* A simpler way of understanding this is that the reactional self is the way to life and the divided self is the way to mind. This does not mean that life is energy or mind is will. That is quite untrue.

** G. Gurdjieff. *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, New York: Dutton, 1963, p.240; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, p 240 .

It does work in us, but in a secret way. What is before us in the work of transformation is the possibility of coming into cooperation with this working and coming to the point of realization of who we are.

The True Self

The true self is whole. It does what it sees. What is done is done from the whole man. It is very difficult for our language to carry anything of what wholeness means. We believe that we know what is meant by saying that the “whole is larger than the sum of its parts,” but the very form of expression betrays that we are looking at wholeness in materialistic terms. At the very root of our difficulty is that here we have something that is beyond the reach of our awareness, even the fullest reach of this awareness in the conscious energy.

With the true self, a whole new realm of experience is opened up that has more to do with the will than with new content of our awareness. We can talk of creative action, but in fact nearly all our experience of creativity is “after the fact” in the realms of sensitivity and consciousness. There is nothing here that we can objectify and look at in terms of something of which we can be aware. Words that we have, such as “balance” and “harmony,” do point to something of the wholeness we are groping after. We can form some conception of what it means to be Man Number 4 in terms of the harmony of centers, but what this means in terms of being and will is still literally incomprehensible. It is only in the line of function that we are able in our thought to follow the ascent to the true self.

We can say that the reactional self can be the means of entering into the world of life, the divided self the means of entering into the world of mind; but the true self is the means of entering into the world quite beyond life, the universal world which cannot be contained in bodies and separate existences. The doorway into the universal world is the real “I,” which is now a possibility. “I” is the most hazardous point in the world. Because the true self is a whole, it can come under the authority of “I”; but here there is great uncertainty. The true self can identify with “I” as a separate reality. This is egoism. It is not the same as the selfishness and self-indulgence of our ordinary state. The man of “I” has real power. If he takes himself to be an end in itself, the center of everything, he has the power to create terrible disorder in the world. Gurdjieff described such a man as *basnamuss*, which in Persian means “soul of shit.” What is opened to the true self is the opportunity to exercise creative power. This can lead beyond existence in the path of service or to an even deeper attachment to existence in the path of egoism.

All the ingredients of a man are derived from the greater whole, but at the point of “I” there is a real risk of disaster. The greater whole is not only a machine in which every part has an automatically arranged position and function. The possibility of real freedom has been arranged for man, but on the

way in which he realizes this freedom very much depends. He has not been given freedom. It is not possible to give freedom. Freedom must be realized, and it is always hazardous and even depends upon hazard for its exercise and realization. The man who is able to go beyond existence and be detached from the powers of his body Gurdjieff called Man Number 5. Man Number 5 is beyond selfhood and he has passed through the barrier of egoism, but even he is not free from what he has carried up with him from the lower worlds. Only when the unitive energy of love enters into him can he finally be released from separation. For this, he has to enter purgatory and undergo the final purification in the agony of clear awareness of his separation from the Source.

All of this must seem very far away until we realize that in our own lives here and now the significance of the cosmic drama of "I" is being enacted. To understand this we have to realize the literal truth of Gurdjieff's definition of conscience as "the very representative of the Creator"* and that it is produced in us by "the localization of the particles of the 'emanations of the sorrow' of our Omni-Loving and Long-Suffering-Endless-Creator." In many places, he describes how it is that because conscience is completely outside the reach of our awareness, it has remained uncontaminated by all the influences that have reduced the other "sacred impulses" of hope, love, and faith to factors of enslavement. Conscience is one of the most creative powers that we have. It has nothing to do with our training in morality. It is able to penetrate into the very reality of every moment, and one of the aims of work on oneself is awakening to the workings of conscience.

In Gurdjieff's picture of purgatory, he has written over its gates the words "Only-he-may-enter-here-who-is-able-to-put-himself-in-the-place-of-the-other-results-of-my-labors." To do this is a very great thing. Gurdjieff himself said that it was "the last thing for a man." But even here and now it is before us. There is nothing so obvious to anyone who studies the workings of human nature as that all of us put ourselves at the very center of the universe and have hardly any sense of the reality of other people. How can we begin to work at this, which is the antithesis of the workings of conscience? Gurdjieff's advice was to "bear the unpleasant manifestations of other people." We have to realize that, as we are, we forgive ourselves everything and others nothing. Gurdjieff's advice directs us toward the experience of reality here and now in this very life. If we can even begin to practice what he advises, we make a contribution toward the overcoming of egoism in ourselves, so that "I" may become a doorway toward God and not toward objective hell, which is a separate reality.

The choice between union and egoism is a reality only for the true self. Because we are not conscious of this self, it does not mean that it is altogether irrelevant to our lives. The work that we do is aimed largely at awakening the powers which bring us to the point of decision between ourselves and God.

* *Beelzebub's Tales*, p. 372.

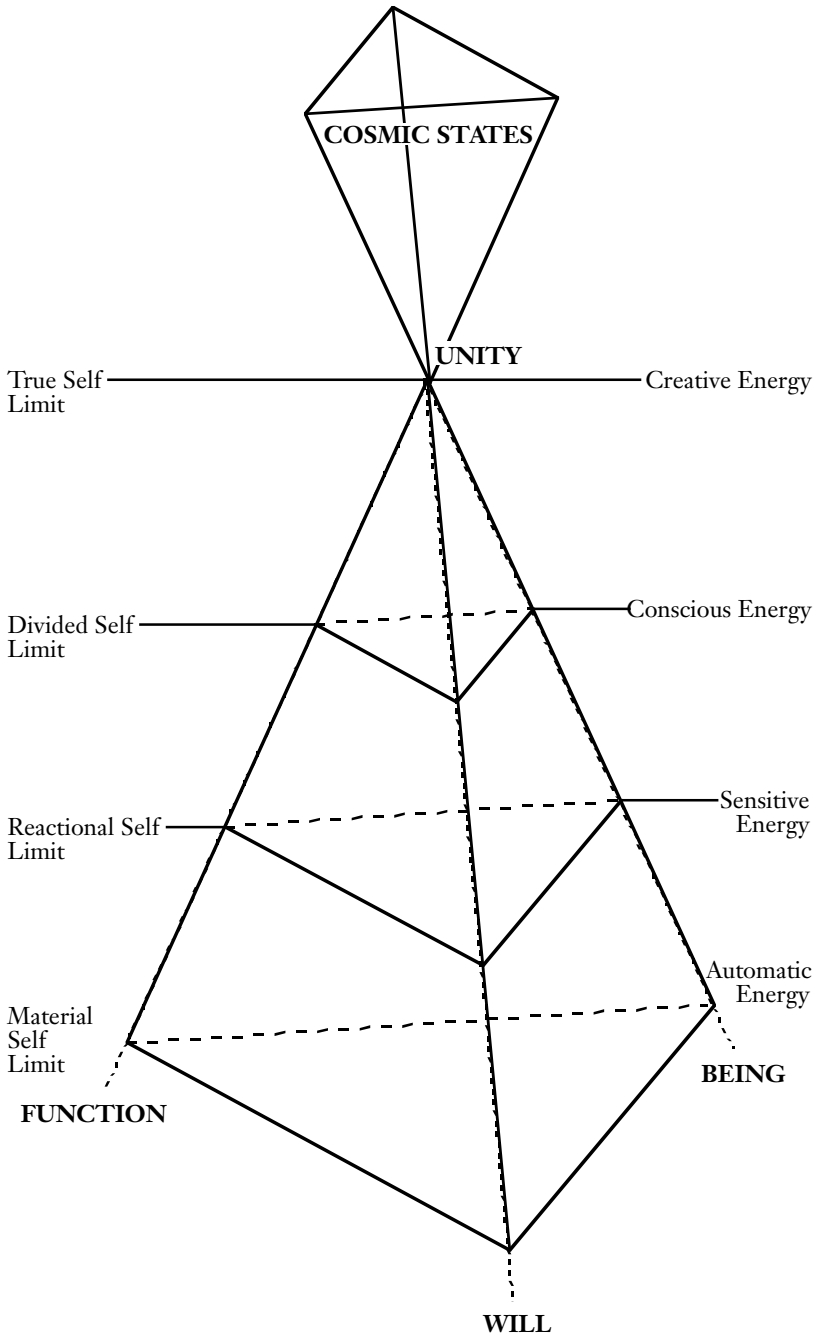


Diagram of Four Selves in Relation to Energies and Unity

Figure 4.2

The true self is the vehicle of “I,” and there are influences that enter our lives from within that originate at the level of this self. In some sense, even if only to a very small degree, our own “I” does communicate with us. The authentic search for our own reality begins with the true self, even if we are totally unaware of the action taking place. But to go from this stage, when our own reality comes to us “like a thief in the night,” to something that can enter our waking life is a big step.

The true self is the proper domain of spiritual work, that is, of work that goes beyond the transformation of energies into the world of will. It is to do with this that Gurdjieff had some of his greatest contributions to make to human understanding. Throughout *Beelzebub's Tales*, he reiterates that we are “all children of our common Father Creator Endlessness.” We men do not really understand that this is so, and this lack of understanding is one of the greatest curses on human life. As children of a common Father, we can enter into the working of the great Whole, which Gurdjieff expressed in terms of the three primal forces of the will: holy affirming, holy denying, and holy reconciling. These three are the three cosmic aspects of will, function, and being. We can extend our diagram of the pyramid beyond the central point and arrive at other levels of reality beyond that of man with real “I.” These correspond to men Numbers 5, 6, and 7 in the terminology of Gurdjieff. They are in worlds beyond existence. They are “men of will” who do not need physical bodies to keep themselves together.

They have “bodies” that we cannot imagine. We may “discover ourselves” within this planetary existence, supported by the apparatuses which have been evolved through living beings and given the help of forces that work for the maintenance of the whole solar system; but to evolve to the condition in which we can be creative workers on such a scale in our own right would seem to be impossible. What we shall have to try and understand is that the whole idea of separate existence has to be abandoned the other side of “I.” For us, this will appear as pure annihilation. We have used the picture of land and sea to talk about the difference between the worlds of bodies and energies or being. Beyond the sea is the air, formless, omnipresent, and invisible. The air can be our symbol of the spiritual reality that touches us everywhere and without which nothing is possible.