

DISSEMINATION OF THE WORK DURING GURDJIEFF'S LIFETIME

Throughout the course of his teaching Gurdjieff employed deputies or “helper-instructors” to assist with disseminating his ideas. During the Russian phase of the teaching, P.D. Ouspensky and other senior students would often give introductory lectures to newcomers as preparation for Gurdjieff’s presentation of more advanced material. A.R. Orage was responsible for introducing Work ideas to Gurdjieff’s New York groups in the 1920s. Under Gurdjieff’s direction Jeanne de Salzmann organized and led French groups during the 1930s and was largely responsible for teaching Gurdjieff’s sacred dances.

Gurdjieff realized that if his teaching was to take root in the West he needed to train and teach students with a Western background who could assist him in making the teaching culturally appropriate. Gurdjieff’s efforts to train his assistants may also have come from a desire to develop them into independent teachers in their own right.

During a period of physical incapacity following his serious automobile accident in July 1924, Gurdjieff’s Institute at the Prieuré in Fontainebleau virtually ground to a halt. It was then that Gurdjieff realized that none of his students possessed the degree of inner development or the leadership capacity to carry his work forward in his absence:

He had to acknowledge what for him was a devastating realization: that the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man had failed insofar as not a single pupil, nor even all of his students collectively, possessed the inner resources required even temporarily to sustain the momentum of life he had set into motion. This school, even in the temporary absence of its teacher, was no longer a school in the living sense of the word; apart from the consciousness of the master, it was reduced to an estate that housed so many separate entities engaged in solitary and unrelated tasks. What then was the point, if the purpose of existence there depended completely on the consciousness of one person? (1)

Gurdjieff’s accident marked a turning point in the way in which he presented his teachings to the world. At that time, he began to limit his interactions with individual students and groups so that he could concentrate his energy on his writing. It was not until the 1930s that he resumed intensive group work in Paris, although he travelled frequently to America to raise money and supervise groups established there before his accident.

In 1924, Gurdjieff authorized A.R. Orage to formally teach his ideas to New York groups. Orage later gave permission to some of his own students like Jean Toomer, Daly King and Jane Heap to establish their own groups. In France, Jeanne de Salzmann was encouraged to form her own groups during the 1930s. (2) Olgivanna Wright, in conjunction with her husband, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, established a Fourth Way community in Wisconsin in 1932. In England, Ouspensky broke off relations with

Gurdjieff in 1924 and began teaching independently. He later gave his student Dr. Maurice Nicoll permission to establish his own groups in England. At the same time, student John Bennett, without Ouspensky's permission, began teaching on his own.

With the establishment of these disparate teaching initiatives, the Work began to fractionalize from its original source and take on a variety of colours. Figure 1 diagrams the many groups that were established in France, England and America during Gurdjieff's lifetime.

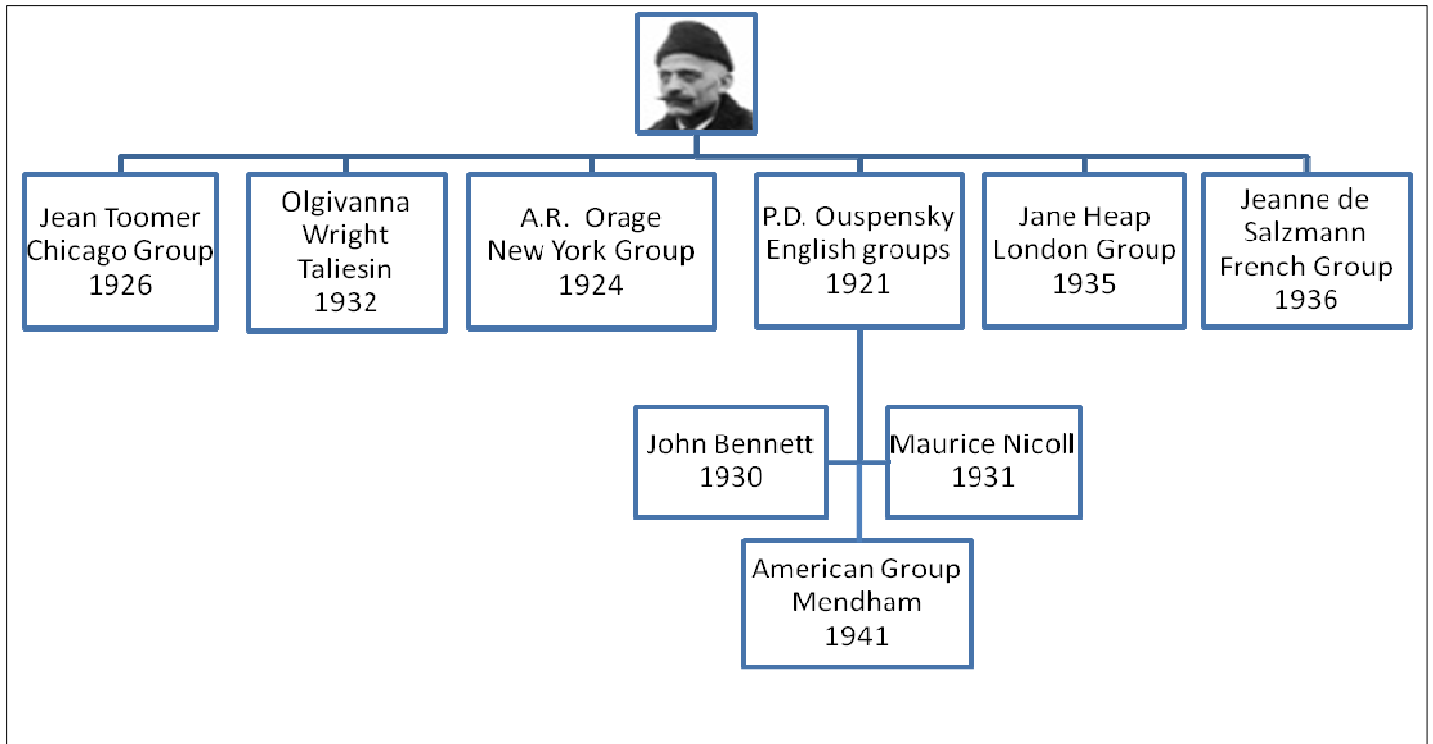


Figure 1: Gurdjieff's Teaching Lines During His Lifetime

By the end of the Second World War many of Gurdjieff's former students were at odds, each teaching their own version of the Work in isolation from Gurdjieff's inspiration and direction. Biographer James Moore colourfully describes the divisiveness that developed between the many proponents of the Work:

The Oragean old guard holds New York tenaciously against Ouspensky's repeated sallies from Mendham, New Jersey. At Lyne Place, Virginia Water, the dignitaries of the Historico-Psychological Society (Kenneth Walker, R.J.G. Mayor, and Dr. Francis Roles) protect the 'System' within a grim stockade of rules and regulations -- one of which forbids the very utterance of Gurdjieff's name. Behind their respective ramparts at Great Amwell house, Ware, and Coombe Springs, Kingston-on-Thames, Dr. Henry Maurice Dunlop Nicoll and John Godolphin Bennett nurse a satisfying mutual disapproval; Jane Heap is mewed up in spiritual quarantine;

and Ouspensky has actually retained a solicitor to communicate with his protégé Bennett. (3)

When Gurdjieff heard of Ouspensky's death in 1947 he sent a telegram to Ouspensky's American students with the summons, "You are sheep without a shepherd. Come to me." (4) Gradually over the next year, students from around the globe returned to the Master's fold, including pupils taught by Ouspensky, Orage and Bennett. In many cases Gurdjieff had to repair the damage caused by well-intentioned but unauthorized teachers of his ideas. In the years before his death in 1949, Gurdjieff attempted to re-establish a balance between intellectual, emotional and physical work and correct the distortions to the Work that had occurred at the hands of his students. Many observers consider this period to be the most significant and fertile phase of Gurdjieff's long teaching mission in the West.

P.D. Ouspensky in England and America

In 1921, after a lengthy period of study with Gurdjieff in Russia, Constantinople and elsewhere, Ouspensky emigrated to England and quickly established himself as a lecturer, philosopher and writer. He initiated a series of public lectures on Gurdjieff's ideas that attracted large audiences and widespread attention. Important members of the British cultural and academic elite were attracted to Ouspensky and many became his students.

Ouspensky maintained cordial relations with Gurdjieff and invited him to London in the winter of 1922 to give public talks. Following a second visit to London later that spring, Gurdjieff called his eminent pupil to task. Gurdjieff believed that while Ouspensky had an intellectual appreciation of the essential theory, he lacked the human qualities and the experience to effectively transmit the teachings:

To transmit Gurdjieff's teaching in all its complementary modalities he was neither mandated nor qualified; he had enjoyed in total only three years of direct contact; he knew nothing of the music; he had had only a perfunctory fling at the Sacred Dances; and, not least, he lacked the essential human warmth to insulate his pupils from the bleak ideological climate of the 'System.' In addition there arose the separate matter of his own development. (5)

Gurdjieff's message to Ouspensky was unequivocal: Ouspensky was not qualified to transmit the teachings without permission and further study. Ouspensky refused to heed Gurdjieff's demand that he discontinue teaching. And, when invited by Gurdjieff to live and study at the Prieuré, Ouspensky declined. (6) As a result, the relationship between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky deteriorated over the next few years until, in 1924, Ouspensky announced that he was ending formal relations with Gurdjieff. Further, he forbade his students from having any contact with Gurdjieff.

Over the course of the next few decades, the number and size of Ouspensky's groups increased dramatically. He authorized Maurice Nicoll, who had worked with Gurdjieff at the Prieuré and studied with Ouspensky for many years, to start his own study groups in London in 1931. In 1934 Ouspensky began expanding his work activities by writing a set of introductory lectures for new students (later published as *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*), and a year later he acquired a country estate at Lyne Place near London where practical work activities were introduced.

In 1941, Ouspensky moved to the United States and established a community at Franklin Farms near Mendham, New Jersey. He attracted a large American audience including many members of Gurdjieff's New York group. He also lectured in New York at the private residences of pupils.

Ouspensky taught his version of the System in complete isolation from Gurdjieff, even prohibiting students from mentioning Gurdjieff's name in his presence. Accounts of Ouspensky's pupils during this period reveal a highly structured, deadly serious presentation of Gurdjieff's ideas. Meetings were humourless affairs with a rigid question-and-answer format. The emphasis was on an intellectual understanding of the System, supplemented with practical work in a retreat setting.

Ouspensky's school was dominated by rules. Some rules derived from the Work itself, such as the proscription against students talking to others about their esoteric studies. Other rules reflected Ouspensky's character and Russian upbringing. For instance, students were not allowed to address each other by their Christian names. In some cases, the rules were taken to extremes: "if a member of a group decided to leave, he should be ostracized by the remaining members . . . in the later stages of Ouspensky's own work and under his successors, this rule was applied so that the offenders found themselves cut dead by numbers of people whom they regarded as their friends." (7)

Students of Ouspensky like C.S. Nott felt that something crucial was lacking in Ouspensky's presentation of the teachings: "The work was too theoretical, too one-centered, intellectual-centered, and often I would leave with a feeling of emptiness and emotional hunger . . . I get more from inner work with one lunch with Mr. Gurdjieff than from a year of Mr. Ouspensky's groups." (8)

As time went on, Ouspensky's elucidation of the System became more and more mechanical. Visitors to his New Jersey country house observed that his students were joyless, fearful and closed. The atmosphere lacked the sense of warmth, humour and compassion that was characteristic of Gurdjieff circles. After two decades of teaching, Ouspensky had become well aware of his school's shortcomings and his own. In a conversation with his secretary and pupil Marie Seton just before he died, he frankly admitted his limitations as a teacher and leader:

I took over the leadership to save the System. But I took it over before I had gained enough control over myself. I was not ready. I have lost

control over myself. It is a long time since I could control my state of mind . . . The System has become a profession with me. (9)

Seton recognized that Ouspensky was a teacher with many good qualities but had succumbed to the special conditions of the time and the particular challenges of leadership: “If a man of the undeniable qualities of Ouspensky can go off the track and become absorbed in egotism and dependent on easy living, and become callous as to the effects on himself and on others, what of the gurus who were less basically honest?” (10)

Following Ouspensky’s death in 1947, his English and American students fractured into separate groups led by some of his senior pupils. Many of his students journeyed to Paris to meet with Gurdjieff. John Bennett recalls that Gurdjieff spoke of Ouspensky in scathing terms, asserting that Ouspensky had exploited his ideas and damaged his pupils with his overly intellectual approach. However, when Gurdjieff was read the manuscript of Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*, he praised Ouspensky for the accuracy of his reporting: “Before I hate Ouspensky: now I love him. This very exact, he tell what I say.” (11) Gurdjieff eventually gave permission to publish the book and today it is considered a masterpiece of spiritual literature. This publication may well be considered Ouspensky’s greatest legacy to the Work.

A.R. Orage in America

Alfred Richard Orage was a distinguished English editor and literary critic when he first met P.D. Ouspensky in 1921. After a year of study with Ouspensky, Orage was introduced to Gurdjieff. Orage became Gurdjieff’s pupil and worked intensively with him at the Château du Prieuré beginning in October 1922. Gurdjieff recognized Orage’s great potential and challenged him physically, emotionally and intellectually:

No other pupil . . . served Gurdjieff with a more implicit spiritual obedience than Orage. In general, it seems that the severity of an apprenticeship under Gurdjieff was proportional to the maturity and development of a pupil’s personality . . . The rigors Orage endured included the kind of psychological bullying undergone by a monk in certain monastic disciplines, or by the chela of an Indian guru. (12)

Orage held his teacher in great esteem and the harsh treatment he received at Gurdjieff’s hands inspired both growth and gratitude. At one point, after receiving scurrilous criticism from someone, he remarked: “That sort of thing could not upset me now. But then, I have been insulted by an expert.” (13)

In early 1924, Orage accompanied Gurdjieff to New York City where his followers performed public demonstrations of Gurdjieff’s sacred dances and movements. There, with Gurdjieff’s permission, Orage began to give public lectures and private classes in which he introduced Gurdjieff’s ideas to a wider audience. For the next six years Orage lived and taught in New York, returning each year to the Prieuré for a few weeks to work

with Gurdjieff. During this period he also assisted with the English translation of Gurdjieff's first book, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*.

Orage also authorized a number of his most capable students to establish their own study groups in New York. Jane Heap, who was co-editor with Margaret Anderson of the avant-garde literary magazine *The Little Review*, met Gurdjieff in 1924 and later studied with Orage. In 1926, with Orage's permission, she began leading groups of her own. On a visit to the Prieuré in 1928, Heap was directed by Gurdjieff to give weekly talks of his ideas in Paris and in 1935 Heap was sent to London by Gurdjieff to teach. Her low-key London group worked independently of the much larger English groups associated with Ouspensky, Nicoll and Bennett. Orage also encouraged Jean Toomer and Daly King (14) to lead study groups in New York, although only Toomer was recognized by Gurdjieff as a legitimate teacher of his ideas.

In his public and private talks Orage stressed the importance of 'self-observation without identification.' This idea became a cornerstone of his approach to spiritual development:

Self-Observation implies the separation of the sense of "I" from the physical body. The observing "I" must not "identify" -- in Gurdjieff's phrase -- with the thing observed. Neither must there be any inclination for the observer to criticize what it sees, to alter what it dislikes, or to analyze what it finds. Self-Observation must take place in all conditions at all times; for this is the Method of the man in the world, the Fourth Way. Orage enumerated the various aspects of human activity to which Self-Observation might be applied. The recommended categories were posture, gesture, movement, facial expression, and tone of voice. The exercise was also to be conducted with all possible senses. (15)

In 1927, Orage introduced to his teaching a series of complicated psychological exercises, largely of his own devising. (16) When Gurdjieff heard of this innovation he was furious and accused Orage of altering the dynamics and direction of his Work. He felt that Orage was overly intellectual and did not place sufficient emphasis on physical, emotional and practical activities.

In November 1930, Gurdjieff met with Orage's groups in New York. He quickly observed that the students, almost without exception, had misinterpreted much of his teachings and had become fixated with the practice of self-observation. He placed the blame for this and other misunderstandings directly on Orage. Jeanne de Salzman, writing many years later, reflected on the incident:

Orage worked at his task with ardor . . . But no movement continues for long in the same direction -- this is an inevitable law. The skillful use of ideas which have become familiar, and the sense of security they bring, weaken the quality of perception little by little -- and then the words spoken no longer have the same action, even though one doesn't see it oneself. (17)

Gurdjieff recognized Orage's intellectual and organizational gifts but realized that Orage had become stuck and needed a shock to make him aware of a state of affairs that he was unable to perceive. While Orage was away in England, Gurdjieff summoned leading members of the New York groups to a secret meeting. He told them that the current groups must be reorganized and certain students would have to leave. In a masterful piece of theatre, Gurdjieff required members of the new group to sign an agreement prohibiting them from having anything more to do with Orage. The New York groups were in shock. Word of this activity reached Orage, who quickly returned to New York. When he arrived and saw what had taken place, he renounced his role as leader of the group and, surprisingly, joined the others in signing the agreement.

Although Orage continued to work with Gurdjieff in this diminished capacity, the relationship between the two deteriorated. In May 1931, Orage broke with Gurdjieff and returned to England. Although Gurdjieff attempted to communicate with him, Orage maintained a clear distance from his former teacher. When Gurdjieff wrote him in 1932 requesting a meeting, Orage replied: "There was a time when I would have crossed oceans at your bidding. Now I would not even cross the Channel." (18)

A.R. Orage died on November 5, 1934. Upon hearing the news Gurdjieff was grief-stricken and stopped writing for two months. He later remarked that he had considered Orage to be like a brother.

Jean Toomer in New York and Chicago

American writer Jean Toomer, who wrote the critically acclaimed novel *Cane*, attended Orage's groups in New York beginning in 1924. He later travelled to the Prieuré on a number of occasions where he studied with Gurdjieff between 1924 and 1929.

When Toomer returned to New York from his first visit to the Prieuré, Orage authorized Toomer to conduct a group in Harlem in 1925. (19) Orage felt that with his literary background and speaking skills, Toomer would be well equipped to disseminate Gurdjieff's ideas in America. However, it quickly became apparent that Toomer lacked the qualities of an effective leader: "Toomer assumed a disarming emotional detachment from his pupils in his meetings, and displayed what seemed to others an unnatural control of his emotions even in the most tragic circumstances." (20) Toomer's first groups were deemed a failure. However, Toomer did have success in raising money for Gurdjieff and for much of the next decade he provided a steady source of funds for the continuation of Gurdjieff's work.

In 1926, Toomer established a study group in Chicago. Gorham Munson, a student of Orage, visited Toomer's groups. His impression was decidedly negative. Rather than developing his own speaking style, Toomer imitated Gurdjieff's mannerisms and behaviour and even mimicked Gurdjieff's broken speech. Munson accused Toomer of playacting the role of spiritual teacher: "He assumed the development and psychology beyond the

point that he had ever reached; he ascribed to himself powers and knowledge which he had not really attained.” (21) Undaunted by his critics, Toomer continued to lead his Chicago group well into the 1930s.

In 1931, Fritz Peters, a student of Gurdjieff from the Prieuré, visited Chicago and attended one of Toomer’s group meetings. Peters was unimpressed, having observed the negative effects of attempting to transmit Gurdjieff’s ideas without proper supervision. Moreover, he found Toomer’s groups lacked the characteristic humour and openness of Gurdjieff’s groups, their meetings “charged with an atmosphere of grim, humourless, devotion -- and a consequent lack of perspective . . . The very posturing and attitudinizing of the group members was evidence of a certain misplaced seriousness.” (22)

In the summer of 1931, Toomer attempted to conduct an “experiment in living” in a small Wisconsin town. Toomer introduced his own ideas and practices to supplement Gurdjieff’s teachings, but the behaviour of his students generated controversy and scandal in the small conservative community. Toomer was accused of advocating “free love” and quickly attracted notoriety which the local press fuelled in a series of damning articles.

Toomer continued to lead groups in Chicago and raise money for Gurdjieff until the mid-1930s. However, he was growing increasingly disillusioned with Gurdjieff’s outrageous behaviour and incessant money demands. Finally, in 1936, he broke with Gurdjieff and ceased teaching groups altogether. After more than a decade of contact with Gurdjieff, he wrote: “I do not know G. I have never known G. I never will.” (23)

The Taliesin Fellowship of Wisconsin

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife Olgivanna directed a community in Spring Green, Wisconsin along lines inspired by Gurdjieff, beginning in 1932. Olgivanna was a former student of Gurdjieff at the Prieuré and an accomplished dancer. She had accompanied Gurdjieff to New York in 1924 for demonstrations of the sacred dances, and later that year met Wright in Chicago. They married in 1928, and in 1932 the couple opened a school of architecture called the Taliesin Fellowship. Olgivanna introduced her husband to Gurdjieff’s ideas and provided many of the practical activities and disciplines at Taliesin, patterned after her experiences at the Prieuré.

C.S. Nott, a long-time student of Gurdjieff, visited Taliesin in the 1930s and was impressed with the atmosphere and the dedication of the students:

The aim was to produce an organic architecture in an organic life; the idea being, that to bring about an organic state of society, men and women must begin by living a three-fold life, a life simultaneously of the instincts, the feelings and the mind. Their feet must be firmly planted on the earth and they must be able to use the hands; they must be able to appreciate the things of the feelings -- music, poetry, paint-

ing, and so on; and they must be able to be interested in ideas, be able to think. This three-fold activity gave the place an extraordinary vitality. (24)

Gurdjieff visited Taliesin in 1934 and his formidable presence made a great impression on the pupils there. During his visit he cooked, played his own music and held readings from *Beelzebub's Tales*. By all accounts, Gurdjieff and Wright held each other in high regard, but there is no doubt who held seniority in matters metaphysical. Although Wright was a brilliant architect, he overestimated his knowledge in fields beyond architecture. Following dinner one evening a memorable exchange took place between Gurdjieff and Wright:

Gurdjieff was talking to the pupils who were listening with attention. Wright said, 'Well, Mr. Gurdjieff, this is very interesting. I think I'll send some of my young pupils to you in Paris. Then they can come back to me and I'll finish them off.'

'You finish! You are idiot,' said Gurdjieff angrily. 'You finish! No. You begin. I finish.' (25)

Olgivanna Wright was the mainspring behind the introduction of Gurdjieff's ideas to the Taliesin community. Her husband limited his role to architectural matters but clearly encouraged Olgivanna to introduce Gurdjieff's teachings to his students. Although Gurdjieff did not directly authorize Olgivanna to teach his ideas through the framework of the Taliesin Fellowship, he clearly approved of the enterprise. Olgivanna had adopted many of the practices she had learned at the Prieuré, even dressing the architectural students in costumes similar to those Gurdjieff's pupils wore for demonstrations of the sacred dances and movements. However, in the North American context, the adoption by Olgivanna of Gurdjieff's autocratic teaching style was not well received: "Draftsmen, apprentices and their wives were supposed to sit at Olgivanna's feet whilst she gave them instructions and mercilessly criticized their failings." (26)

Taliesin continued functioning as a Gurdjieff-inspired community even after the death of Frank Lloyd Wright in 1959. But gradually, over the years, the original spirit animating the community disappeared and Taliesin ceased to function as a quasi-esoteric school (27). Although the influence of Taliesin on Fourth Way studies in America was slight, it serves as an example of an interesting experiment in the cross-fertilization of Gurdjieff's ideas with a practical discipline like architecture.

John G. Bennett in England

John Godolphin Bennett first met Gurdjieff in Constantinople in 1920 while Bennett was serving as an officer for British Intelligence. Three years later, Bennett decided to study with Gurdjieff at the Prieuré, having been impressed with Gurdjieff's powerful personality and deep knowledge of esoteric matters. After only a month, Bennett decided to leave Gurdjieff and study with Ouspensky in London, whom he had met earlier in Constantinople.

During their early association, Bennett assisted Ouspensky by reading introductory lectures to new pupils. In 1930, he formed his own study group in London without permission from Ouspensky. He rationalized his decision by promising to send full reports of each meeting to Ouspensky.

Bennett disagreed with Ouspensky's belief that a systematic presentation of Gurdjieff's teaching was impossible and he began summarizing the System in written form. When Ouspensky was told of Bennett's writing he instructed his solicitor to request Bennett return all of Ouspensky's materials and directed his English pupils to break off all relations with Bennett. This marked the end of Bennett's formal relationship with Ouspensky and the two men never spoke again.

Following the end of the Second World War, Bennett continued with his groups which were expanding rapidly. He believed that a new approach to spiritual study was needed which incorporated more dynamism and creativity. Bennett began to employ methods he had studied but not fully understood and assimilated during his brief stay at the Prieuré in 1923: "I was consumed with zeal to encourage effort and more effort -- mental, physical and emotional." (28) Students at his Coombe Springs community would rise early and face a day of strenuous physical labour, complicated mental exercises, periodic fasts and hours of Gurdjieff's rhythmic exercises. However, in the name of spiritual development, Bennett created conditions that inspired fear and intimidation in his followers by openly exposing their weaknesses: "The most outrageous attacks were accepted as necessary means for self-study, and no one complained. Indeed, as I learned later, the members of the community . . . felt themselves to be so inadequate that their one fear was of being sent away." (29) Bennett subsequently realized that he had been prescribing spiritual exercises without adequate understanding and foresight: "I am doubtful whether I did any good to myself or to others by devising various spiritual exercises. Though their purpose is to provide a fulcrum through which our desires for perfection can exert its pressure, they can easily become ends in themselves." (30)

Bennett recognized his own limitations as a teacher, calling himself "weak" and "riddled with inconsistencies" in his role as a spiritual director of others:

When I found myself in the position of a spiritual teacher, and saw that my most ill-conceived suggestions were taken as inspired utterances, I became aware of the necessity for anyone who has the task of guiding others in spiritual matters to abstain from hiding his own defects and

mistakes, and to make sure that no one shall look upon him as an ‘authority’ in his own right. (31)

In 1948, Bennett returned to Gurdjieff in Paris and brought with him many of his pupils. Gurdjieff was frank about Bennett’s limitations, telling his students that Bennett was “immature, ignorant and useless to them as a teacher.” Following Gurdjieff’s death in 1949, Bennett assumed a significant though controversial role in transmitting Gurdjieff’s teachings to a new generation of seekers.

Commentary

During his lifetime Gurdjieff authorized a number of his senior pupils to introduce his ideas to new students as preparation for more advanced studies. He intended that these “helper-instructors” would transmit his basic teachings in their original form without modification or personal interpretation. But those entrusted with introducing Gurdjieff’s teachings to a wider audience failed in many respects to properly carry out this task.

It may seem surprising that students who studied directly under Gurdjieff were unable to transmit the essence of his teachings without distortion. Well-intentioned students with undeniable intellectual gifts -- such as Ouspensky, Orage, Bennett and Toomer -- made serious mistakes in their presentation of Gurdjieff’s ideas, and inevitably passed on their own subjective biases and interpretations. Ouspensky’s lectures were too intellectual while Orage overemphasized the practice of self-observation. Bennett added ideas and exercises based on his own independent spiritual studies. Jean Toomer, by imitating Gurdjieff’s mannerisms and behaviour, confused the transmission of Gurdjieff’s ideas by emphasizing the messenger rather than the message.

In retrospect, Gurdjieff must assume some degree of responsibility for the distortion of his teachings for not having properly supervised his designated instructors. It was not until 1930, when Gurdjieff realized that Orage was incorrectly presenting his teachings to his New York groups, that he acknowledged his own role. Gurdjieff attributed his neglect to his decision to shift his time and energy to writing rather than individual or group work following his automobile accident in 1924.

To impart a teaching as subtle and sophisticated as Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way requires constant monitoring and feedback by a specialist to prevent an unbalanced or overly literal understanding by the pupil. The teacher must also have the flexibility and sensitivity to present the teaching according to the requirements of ‘time, place and people.’ What works for one person at a certain time and in a specific situation does not necessarily work for others or across different conditions. Gurdjieff knew how to work with each student according to his or her individual needs and capacities in a way that his successors were unable to replicate:

Another remarkable feature of his teaching was that it addressed each according to his particular capacities, weaknesses, and needs . . . In the

midst of general conditions, identical for all, for each person there was the opportunity for a “personalized” work and relationship. There seemed to be no limits to the possibility of transforming daily life into meaningful conditions for inner work. Furthermore, seeing around him a representation of humanity “in toto” provided the student a powerful antidote for an overly personal and rigid view of things. Some of his students did not follow this example and later, imitating Ouspensky, created groups of a more elitist character. (32)

However flawed in their execution, the attempts by students like Ouspensky, Orage and Bennett to transmit Gurdjieff’s teachings were no doubt sincerely motivated. Each seriously endeavoured to transmit what he had learned from Gurdjieff and each was limited by his own capacity and stage of development. All were attempting to follow one of the key tenets of the Fourth Way: the responsibility of each individual to raise others to one’s own level of understanding. (33)

The Fourth Way, as conceptualized and realized by Gurdjieff, was clearly not meant to exist as a solitary path pursued in isolation from fellow seekers or the outside world. Its teachings recognize the interdependent relationship of the teacher, the students and the broader community. In light of each student’s obligation to help others in their spiritual studies to the extent of their knowledge and capacity, it was appropriate for Gurdjieff to encourage key pupils to carry on responsibility for transmitting his teachings.

Some have argued that Gurdjieff’s greatest failure was his inability to elevate any of his students to his own level of spiritual development. But perhaps this criticism is misguided. Many of Gurdjieff’s successors like Ouspensky, Orage and Bennett taught their students much of value. Whatever each individual mentor’s alleged shortcomings or imperfections, collectively they transmitted a basic grounding in Gurdjieff’s ideas to thousands of students in several countries. The ultimate result is that Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way teachings remain alive today over 50 years after his death.

NOTES

- (1) Anna Challenger *Philosophy and Art in Gurdjieff’s Beelzebub* (London: Rodopi, 2002), p. 4.
- (2) In 1929, Gurdjieff sent Alexander and Jeanne de Salzmänn away from his Institute at the Prieuré in France to “fend for themselves.” Alexander de Salzmänn established a group in the early 1930s that included the poet-novelist René Daumal and a number of other prominent writers, artists and intellectuals. Following her husband’s death, Jeanne de Salzmänn took charge of the group and received prospective pupils sent to her by Gurdjieff. Later in the 1940s, many of these pupils were amalgamated into groups directed by Gurdjieff himself.

- (3) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Bedfont, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 287.
- (4) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 461.
- (5) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Bedfont, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 163.
- (6) Many years later, Ouspensky explained that he did not accept Gurdjieff's invitation to live at the Priuré because he did not understand the direction of the work and felt that there were elements of instability in the way the Institute was organized.
- (7) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 387.
- (8) C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), p. 110.
- (9) William Patterson *Struggle of the Magicians* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1996), p. 176.
- (10) William Patterson *Struggle of the Magicians* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1996), p. 176.
- (11) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 252.
- (12) Philip Mairet *A.R. Orage: A Memoir by Philip Mairet* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966), p. xxviii.
- (13) Philip Mairet *A.R. Orage: A Memoir by Philip Mairet* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966), p. xxix.
- (14) C. Daly King studied psychology at Columbia University and attended Orage's meetings in 1924. A year later, Orage authorized King to lead a group in New York. King, who was never a direct student of Gurdjieff and did not meet him until 1929, was never acknowledged by Gurdjieff as a teacher of the Work. King continued to teach groups in New York and later in New Jersey until Orage's death in 1934. King did not hide his antipathy towards Gurdjieff and even believed that Gurdjieff suffered a frontal lobe injury from his 1924 accident that reduced his capacities and irrevocably changed him. King took detailed notes of Orage's lectures during the 1920s and eventually systematized Orage's transmission of Gurdjieff's teaching in an unpublished manuscript *The Oragean Version* which continues to be circulated in Work circles today.

- (15) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 307.
- (16) These psychological exercises were subsequently published as *Psychological Exercises and Essays* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974). They consist of over 200 exercises in the “conscious and deliberate manipulation of one’s mental resources” and are designed to increase the flexibility and scope of the mind. They call upon logic, mathematics, language and spatial perception. Examples include reading by sight a passage in which all spaces between words have been removed and reciting numbers backwards in a constantly changing sequence.
- (17) Foreword to G.I. Gurdjieff *Life is Real Only Then, When ‘I Am’* (New York: Triangle Editions, 1975), p. xii.
- (18) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 371.
- (19) There are contradictory views regarding the circumstances of Toomer’s establishment of his Harlem group. Some reports claim that Orage was dismayed by Toomer’s decision. But research by Paul Beekman Taylor in *Gurdjieff’s America* (Lighthouse Editions, 2004, p. 96) suggests that Orage approved of the group: “As soon as he started his Harlem group, Orage made it a point to attend his meetings and discuss them with Toomer afterwards.”
- (20) Paul Beekman Taylor *Gurdjieff’s America* (Lighthouse Editions, 2004), p. 127.
- (21) William Patterson *Struggle of the Magicians* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1996), p. 118.
- (22) Fritz Peters *Gurdjieff Remembered* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1971), p. 21.
- (23) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 20.
- (24) C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), p. 144.
- (25) C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), p. 152.
- (26) Anthony Storr *Feet of Clay* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 40.
- (27) For a fascinating account of the Taliesin community or Fellowship see Roger Friedland and Harold Zellman *The Fellowship* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).

- (28) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 211.
- (29) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 212.
- (30) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), pp. 212-213.
- (31) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 160.
- (32) Michel de Salzman "Footnote to the Gurdjieff Literature" in Walter Driscoll, ed. *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. xxiii-xxiv.
- (33) Gurdjieff himself alluded to this principle of a 'stairway' in a conversation with Ouspensky recorded in *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949, pp. 203-204):

On the fourth way there is not *one* teacher. Whoever is the elder, he is the teacher. And as the teacher is indispensable to the pupil, so also is the pupil indispensable to the teacher. The pupil cannot go on without the teacher, and the teacher cannot go on without the pupil or pupils. And this is not a general consideration but an indispensable and quite concrete rule on which is based the law of man's ascending. As has been said before, *no one can ascend onto a higher step until he places another man in his own place*. What a man has received he must immediately give back; only then can he receive more. Otherwise from him will be taken even what he has already been given.