

## Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson

**T**hrough whatever strange alchemy of my American businessmanhood, my intense interest in all that is esoteric, my love of Gurdjieffianism, and my life-long fondness for reading, I have come to be totally fascinated by Gurdjieff's strange, science fiction-like allegory *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. I even, beginning in 1995, instituted with a group of friends an annual conference ("All and Everything") devoted to the study of this great if bizarre one thousand-plus-page *magnum opus*. In this chapter, I would like to explain to the reader why I find *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* so utterly compelling.

At first sight (this was my first reaction, more than twenty years ago), *Beelzebub's Tales* seems like a colossal leg-pull. In Chapter One—"The Arousing of Thought"—Gurdjieff expends seventeen thousand words and a complex vocabulary to tell us only that his personality stems from two principles: "In life never do as others do" and "if you go on a spree then go the whole hog, including the postage." It seemed to me that he must be making fun of all the academicians, literary artists, and philosophers who had ever lived.

But this weird, over-complicated style—which Gurdjieff deliberately cultivated, believing that the harder you worked at something, the more likely you were to get something out of it—concealed a strange and

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startling story. Its contents resembled what the old-time science fiction pulp magazines used to call a “space opera,” but with this major difference for starters, that the hero of *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* is Beelzebub, thought by some religionists to be the name of the Devil, by others to be the name of the chief among the fallen angels, second only to Satan—either way, not usually the hero of a book. The more deeply I got into this 1,238-page work by G, which he had begun in 1924, which he completed just before his death in 1949, and which had first been published in English in 1950 (except for the private issuance in 1931 of an early draft that he later extensively revised), the more I felt that I was present at far, far more than a cosmic leg-pull—though the leg-pulling elements may never have been far away.

*Beelzebub’s Tales* is a vast allegory unfolding through the description of visits to and observations of the planet Earth over several thousand years, as recounted by Beelzebub, who is here depicted as an old and wise space traveler. In the story, Beelzebub, exploring the universe in the spaceship *Karnak* for perhaps the last time, is accompanied by his attendants and kinsmen, including his beloved young grandson, Hassein (often regarded as the allegorical pupil sitting at Gurdjieff’s feet). During the lengthy unfolding of this cosmic journey, there is much time for conversation, and Hassein, who has become especially interested in the strange “three-brained beings” (human beings) who inhabit the planet Earth, has many questions for his grandfather about these creatures.

It happened previously that for a very long period of time Beelzebub had been exiled from the center of the universe to our remote solar system, where he took up residence on the planet Mars. From there he made six forays to the planet Earth covering various epochs, the first beginning in the days of Atlantis and the last ending in the early twentieth century. In between these visits, with the aid of a telescope, Beelzebub continually monitored activities on Earth from his base on Mars. To answer Hassein’s many questions, Beelzebub reports his experiences during these six visits along with the results of his telescopic observations. It is these accounts to his grandson that comprise the content of the *Tales*.

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I was eventually to realize that, if this cosmic tale has a peculiarly Gurdjieffian complexity, it nevertheless fit into a clearly recognizable literary tradition—and a distinguished one at that.

(A cautionary note: in the introduction to his *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, Ouspensky warns that, although comparisons of literature are perfectly legitimate in the academic sense, they can sometimes be an impediment to learning. He writes: "I found that the chief difficulty for most people was to realize that they had really heard new things. . . . when we hear new things, we take them for old, or think that they can be explained or interpreted by the old."<sup>1</sup> But because Ouspensky's statement, while being true, can also be used as an excuse for not making certain formal literary judgments, I think it's important to make those comparisons here.)

I am no literary scholar, and for much of what follows I am indebted to literary friends, one of whom studied William Blake (whom Ashish admired) under the world's leading Blake scholar, now deceased, Northrop Frye. It seems that, in a very real sense, G with his *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* belongs to the same literary tradition as the great English romantic poet and engraver, William Blake (1757–1827). Blake is remembered primarily for his short lyrical poems such as "The Tyger" (beginning with the famous lines: "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night, / What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame they fearful symmetry?"<sup>2</sup>). But the London-born Blake was a visionary as well as a romantic poet and apparently so immersed in the spirit world that as a child he saw God peering at him through the window, Ezekiel sitting on the front lawn, and angels hanging out of every tree. Hardly ever free of this divine company, the poet/engraver spent the greater part of his life writing long, convoluted, seemingly obscure epic poems, the principle theme of which was (as for John Milton in *Paradise Lost*) mankind's fall from God's grace—the "fall of man."

But Blake, partly because he was influenced by certain earlier esoteric writers such as Emmanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme, took a radically different approach from Milton. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when Eve eats the apple and she and Adam are expelled from the Garden of Eden, man is radically cut off from God. For Blake, God and man are one, so that

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when man falls, so does God. It is this dual-natured fall that creates the physical universe, whereas in Milton the creation of the physical universe (e.g., the Garden of Eden) precedes the fall of man. In Blake, as he touches upon in his shorter poems and makes explicit in the longer “prophecies” such as *Vala: The Four Zoas*, man/God falls through seven stages or Eyes. This latter concept is derived from Jacob Boehme (it also finds expression in many of the sources cited by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*), but Blake adds a further twist, asserting that as man/God fell, or “contracted,” from divine perfection to the stony rock bottom of earth his organs of perception contracted as well. Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

This implies that, as we successively fell through the seven Eyes (stages) with our man/God–body/Soul contracting, including our organs of perception, we necessarily perceived ourselves/the universe in a successively more constricted manner. Less and less were we able, in the words of Blake, to see “eternity in a grain of sand, infinity in a wildflower,” until finally we came to a halt at the present fallen state of man (what Blake calls the “Limit of Contraction”)—and are now lucky if we can see some sand and the occasional flower.

This may seem like a digression from Gurdjieff and *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*. But Blake’s insight implies that when, for example, I observe an ancient artifact dating from a period of mankind’s life when we were, so to speak, “less contracted” than we are now, I will be prevented from taking in the full being of that artifact by the fact that my organs of perception have shrunk below the level of perception of the organs of perception of those who created the artifact in the first place. Were we able for a moment to “put on” our ancient being—a more expanded one—we might be able to “read” this monument. But it would seem to be extremely difficult for us, locked in our present constricted state, to “put on” a chunk of that primordial expanded vision, at least not without going crazy after a brief moment of illumination.

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Gurdjieff seems to be talking about attaining just such a moment of visionary perception, of “putting on our primordial selves,” when, as recorded by Ouspensky in *In Search of the Miraculous*, he tells the following story:

In the course of our travels in Central Asia we found, in the desert at the foot of the Hindu Kush, a strange figure which we thought at first was some ancient god or devil. At first it produced upon us simply the impression of being a curiosity. But after a while we began to feel that this figure contained many things, a big, complete, and complex system of cosmology. And slowly, step by step, we began to decipher this system. It was in the body of the figure, in its legs, in its arms, in its head, in its eyes, in its ears; everywhere. In the whole statue there was nothing accidental, nothing without meaning. And gradually we understood the aim of the people who built the statue. We began to feel their thoughts, their feelings. Some of us thought that we saw their faces, heard their voices. At all events, we grasped the meaning of what they wanted to convey to us across thousands of years, and not only the meaning, but all the feelings and emotions concerned with it as well. That indeed was art!<sup>3</sup>

Ouspensky asks Gurdjieff: “Why, if ancient knowledge has been preserved, is it so carefully concealed, why is it not made common property?” and Gurdjieff answers that there are two reasons, the first being that “this knowledge is not concealed.”<sup>4</sup> He is perhaps referring to the vestiges of ancient knowledge that are all around us but imperceptible to us because our organs of perception have shrunk below the level where we might have been able to perceive them. (Gurdjieff’s second reason, that this knowledge “cannot, from its very nature, become common property” because it is material, finite and quantifiable, is a little more problematical.)

As every student of Gurdjieff knows, in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* the author roundly attacks modern literature, declaring that “a European’s understanding of an object observed by him is formed exclusively by means of an all-around, so to say, ‘mathematical informedness’ about it.” G is implying that this is an extremely limited, so to speak “contracted”

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way of looking at the world. By contrast “. . . the people of Asia grasp the essence of the object observed by them sometimes with their feelings alone and even by instinct. . . . hundreds of illiterate people will gather round one literate man to hear a reading of the sacred writings or of the tales known as the *Thousand and One Nights* [because such tales are] . . . works of literature in the full sense of the word.”<sup>5</sup>

These attacks, which Gurdjieff also launches in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, referring sneeringly to the “bon ton literary language” of our day, boil down in the language of Blakean vision to the assertion that works like the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the powers of perception of the Asian, are less “contracted” than those of the contemporary European; Gurdjieff seems to be declaring that his fellow countrymen have retained their power of, so to speak, putting on the expanded vision of the Sixth Eye, or the Fifth (assuming that we represent the Seventh; Blake in his cosmology calls the totally unfallen state of God/man itself “Atlantis” and doesn't relate any of the successively descending stages to particular civilizations on our planet—as opposed to Blavatsky, who does do this when she equates the “third root race” to Lemuria and the “fourth root race” to Atlantis).

No doubt Gurdjieff thought (without using these words) that if anyone perceived the world in a “less fallen” manner it was himself. In *Meetings with Remarkable Men* he is at pains to tell us his father was a bard—an *ashokh*—the descendent of an unbroken line of bards going back to the epic poem *Gilgamesh* (and this before the decipherment of the Sumerian tablets telling the Noah-like story of Gilgamesh); in so doing, he points to his own vital, unbroken connection to those works of art dating back to primordial times. We are left to infer that it is G's own ability to directly sense the power of these artifacts that drives his own devastating attacks on modern literature.

Gurdjieff's huge epic novel *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* is in fact, like *Paradise Lost* or *Vala: The Four Zoas*, a story of the fall of man—or, rather, of the progressive descent of mankind as seen through the unfallen eyes of Beelzebub observing our race through a telescope from Mars, then observing us at first hand as he makes six successive visits to our planet's surface, the first being to the relatively expanded epoch of “Atlantis.” In this

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way does *Beelzebub's Tales* take its place in the mighty literary tradition of the epic depiction of the fall of man. This is a tradition that goes back a long way—the story of Gilgamesh in a sense belongs in it, telling as it does of a flood followed by a new breed of man—and has persisted up to our day not only in *Beelzebub's Tales*, but also with works such as James Joyce's novel *Finnegan's Wake* (1939). About this latter modern masterpiece, literary critic Edmund Wilson writes that Earwicker, the epic hero, and Anna Livia, the epic heroine, are “the eternal woman and the eternal man, and during the early hours of heaviness and horror of Earwicker's dream, he is an Adam fallen from grace—to be redeemed . . . with the renewal of the morning light.”<sup>6</sup>

There is an odd way in which *Beelzebub's Tales* stands apart from practically every other epic account of the fall of man. Blake's *Vala: The Four Zoas* is incredibly hard to understand—so much so that whole generations of critics thought that Blake must have been demented when he wrote it, or certainly continually intoxicated, relying for this latter state on the English romantic poet's drug of preference, laudanum. The current view is that Blake was entirely sane, and that these later epic prophecies in poetry are hugely obscure because Blake was, after all, attempting to describe levels of perception far beyond his own, for which the concepts themselves, let alone the words, barely exist in the limited, “fallen” thinking of contemporary mankind. Critic Northrop Frye quotes Joyce as saying that *Finnegan's Wake* required “an ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia,” adding, “in other words, the critic.”<sup>7</sup> This isn't an unreasonable statement when you consider that this notoriously hard-to-read book is about what happens when a man falls asleep, sinks during his dreams to the archetypal unconscious of mankind, communes with the entire human race, and then wakes up. Works like the above are hard to understand not because of any deliberate obfuscation on the part of the author, but because their themes are transcendent and ineffable, and it is probably a wonder that the authors are able to express as much as they do. This isn't the case with *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. J. G. Bennett tells the story of how Gurdjieff, in writing *Beelzebub's Tales*, “himself used to listen to chapters read aloud and if he found that the key passages were taken too easily—and therefore

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almost inevitably too superficially—he would rewrite them in order, as he put it, to ‘bury the dog deeper.’”<sup>8</sup>

Even when I first read *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, this policy of deliberate obfuscation struck me as making sense. It seemed consonant with G's overall strategy as expressed in his words, “I wished to create around myself conditions in which a man would be continuously reminded of the sense and aim of his existence by an unavoidable friction between his conscience and the automatic manifestations of his nature.” The very difficulty of *Beelzebub*, consciously created by Gurdjieff, was intended to create this friction.

Still, this whole matter of Gurdjieff's “burying the dog” did puzzle me a little, and in a letter to Ashish I asked him about it.

*Letter of January 14, 1989*

G and his dog: When anything is presented in easily understood terms, there is the danger that people will understand with their minds only. Effort to understand involves the more essential depths of a man's intelligence. Therefore, G “buried the dog” deeply. In Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, the fat boy tells horrible tales because he “likes to make your flesh creep.” G hid his meanings because he “liked to make you think.” As is well known, G made the book deliberately obscure, “burying the dog deeper,” as he was fond of saying, so that mankind would have to work hard at getting his meaning and therefore appreciate that meaning all the more.

My non-Gurdjieffian literary friends continue to raise objections. They tell me that it is essentially because works like Blake's *Four Zoas* and Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* are about expanded realms of reality that they are so hard to read—our feeble, contracted organs of perception can scarcely open out to them, they say. When I remark that Gurdjieff seems to share the faculty of these authors of living in and creating an expanded world, which is why *Beelzebub* is so difficult, they reply that, if this is really the case, why does Gurdjieff have to consciously make the book even more difficult? Isn't the dog buried deeply enough already by virtue of G's having to describe the indescribable? They finish up by telling me that G as a writer is somehow

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blocked and not really able to penetrate to (or tell the truth in words about) those regions with which he may be partially in contact.

The above is, however, a view with which I disagree. As I've said, the more deeply I have gotten into *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* over the years, the more profound and useful a book it has seemed to me, and I can only reply to my literary friends that, firstly, under "Friendly Advice" preceding the Table of Contents, G suggests that his book be read three times, the second time "as if you were reading aloud to another person."<sup>9</sup> It has been speculated that hearing something read aloud, so that it enters the consciousness aurally rather than visually as in ordinary reading, permits the matter to bypass the intellect and affect the emotions directly, thereby having a much more powerful effect. A vital component of this is hearing and/or reading aloud the more than five hundred special words G constructed from a variety of languages, the sounds of which presumably have a special emotional impact on our organism. These words, because they were invented by Gurdjieff (or remembered from the arcane sources of his knowledge), appear exactly the same in all the translations of *Beelzebub's Tales*, and there even exists a glossary that suggests a single, universal pronunciation for these sounds. I know of no studies that verify the impact of these special words and sounds. Still, I suspect there is something occultly true about these speculations. It's also said of *Beelzebub's Tales* that the contents of the subtitle of the book, *An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*, in which G chronicles all the stupidities of human life, have a profound effect on the reader. I know that much of the above must sound like special pleading; but academia has been relenting to some extent in its attitude toward G, and in 1999 a friend of mine received from the University of London the first-ever doctorate issued for a thesis on *Beelzebub's Tales* (the subject was drawing astrological analogies to Beelzebub).

Still, certain parts of *Beelzebub's Tales* often seemed uniquely strange, and I looked frequently to Ashish for guidance. More than once, I simply asked him what *Beelzebub's Tales* was all about, as in, "I regard *Beelzebub's Tales* as a largely autobiographical account by Gurdjieff. Beelzebub's sixth descent onto earth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is clearly autobiographical. Could it be that the five earlier descents, going

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back to the time of Atlantis, recount the appearance in past times of the reincarnating being we know today as Gurdjieff? What is your view?”

*Letter of January 24, 1989*

Of course a lot of Beelzebub is G! But G didn't have a tail tucked into his pants, and he didn't grow horns. Much of the book is sheer romance, but so delightfully mixed with the literary equivalent of “tricks, semi-tricks and magic” that it keeps the reader awake and constantly guessing at whether to laugh, to perceive a profundity, or both.

My questions often had to do with obscure matters: “In *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff writes about ‘being-Hanbledzoin,’ which he characterizes as the blood of the astral or Kesdjan body. He writes about its importance in the ‘animal magnetism’ that some people possess and says that the possessor of adequate Hanbledzoin has strong hypnotic abilities. Is this information of any value in one's inner search?”

*Letter of November 15, 1980*

The circulation of the human blood functioned well for millennium before it was understood, and functioned no better on account of its being understood. When consciousness is held, the occult mechanics of energy transformation which builds potential selfhood into actual selfhood functions of its own accord. However, in this latter case, practical knowledge of method can improve the functioning. But method without holding self-awareness may result only in odd psychic powers.

Few pieces of esoterica are more bewildering than G's contention that our moon is alive, dynamic, and ever-growing as long as it can feed on certain energies man produces. Quoting G in *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ouspensky writes: “The moon is a huge living being feeding upon all that lives and grows on the earth. The process of the growth and the warming of the moon is connected with life and death on the earth. Everything living sets free at its death a certain amount of the energy that has ‘animated’ it; this energy, or the ‘souls’ of everything living—plants, animals, people—is

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attracted to the moon as though by a huge electromagnet, and brings to it the warmth and the life upon which its growth depends . . .”<sup>10</sup>

In *Beelzebub's Tales*, Gurdjieff takes the subject further than did Ouspensky, telling us in Chapter Nine that the Earth has two satellites, the Moon and “Anulios.” We cannot see Anulios because we can no longer see reality due to our improper overall education and conditioning. Some speculate that Anulios represents G's fourth state of consciousness, what he calls the Real World, and which has analogies with Ashish's state of unitive vision. Gurdjieff's ideas concerning the dynamic feeding nature of our Moon (and Anulios) remain a subject of heated debate among Gurdjieffians. I've described our channeling sessions with Charlaine/Pastor. During the second session, we resorted to asking the following question about G's moon: “What is meant when we say that energy released at death is attracted by and feeds the moon, if it is not crystallized for the creation of the soul?”

Charlaine/Pastor's answer was very long, taking up several pages of transcript, and at best not very clear. I felt prompted to ask Ashish for his opinion on this answer. (I'd sent him the transcript.)

*Letter of July 12, 1989*

I have been trying to make sense of Charlaine's talk on the Nature of the Astral. Your editing certainly makes it easier to read. First, I don't think the question to have been a fair one. Who but Gurdjieff has ever spoken of the earth feeding the moon? The guide, not being a Master, should not be expected to be familiar with the G jargon. It is not surprising that the question is not properly answered, except on six: “The astral plane is the emanation of the physical plane.” It seems clear that the word “moon” in the question sparked the associative connection with “astral,” which is what the occult moon often means. And so you get a long and rather garbled talk on the astral in which the only interesting thing is the idea that the so-called astral body is constructed of energies supplied from the physical in the “astral plane.”

When we were struggling with G's “feeding the moon and Anulios,” G told Gopalda in a dream that he had turned the usual thing upside-down.

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This seemed to fit his image of a mystery-maker. Whether we got his statement right or not, the facts are that, while the subtle worlds are usually depicted as the channel for the ingression of divine principles, e.g., the ingression of self-awareness, it also works the other way round, where things that are not integrated in the human being are released into the intermediate worlds at death by a process akin to the manner in which we project unconscious psychic content in life.

This accounts for the seemingly material heaven worlds which are experienced by true believers—Christian, Moslem, Hindu, and Buddhist. There are individual images and collective images. The astral plane is full of them. With all these believed-in illusions floating around, it does become rather important to show the other side of the coin, namely, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness.

Certain modern “New Age” works, including some on UFOs and alien abductions, express the notion of humankind’s crystallizing an essence that “feeds” other parts of the universe. The books of “astral traveler” Robert A. Monroe—*Journeys out of the Body*, *Far Journeys*, *Ultimate Journey*—tell of his meetings while in astral body with aliens who harvest mankind’s sense of humor and export it throughout the cosmos. (The human sense of humor is apparently a rare and sought-after commodity in our universe.) Monroe meets a second set of aliens (this time discarnate) who tell him of a powerful, non-physical creator-entity—not God, but a creature created by God—whom they call “Someone,” who invented a highly spirituality-enhancing substance called “Loosh.” Seeing that the best-quality Loosh could only be fermented in entities living in physical, space-time reality, Someone created Homo sapiens and Earth as a sort of Loosh farm. Initially, Loosh was harvested at the moment of the human entity’s death. Then Someone figured out that the finest Loosh could be extracted only from humans who were alive and engaged in selfless, egoless acts, such as protecting their children. To distill the most potent possible Loosh, Someone began to put humanity through every sort of vicissitude. The entire history of our species, it would seem, stems from our being manipulated to produce top-quality Loosh!<sup>11</sup>

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This “feeding” theme, unrelated to the moon, can also be found in UFO literature. Certain UFOologists believe the aliens are harvesting the soul matter of mankind. This lies behind the alien abduction experience, they say—and not only are the aliens milking us, but they have been manipulating us throughout our history in order to ferment the highest-quality soul matter. I don't know what these occult reports and strange phenomena mean, but they seem to indicate that, with his notion of a “feeding moon,” Gurdjieff touched upon a very real phenomenon of the astral plane (as suggested by Ashish), one that manifests itself in the universe in other forms as well—though in both cases our contracted organs of perception are probably picking up only a garbled and subjective version of the underlying reality.

Connected to the themes of the Moon and Anulios, and equally prominent in *Beelzebub's Tales*, is another strange if seminal Gurdjieffian concept: that of the Kundabuffer. Beelzebub tells Hasein that the moon was created by the collision of the planet Earth with a comet named Kondoor. As a result, organic life had to be created on earth for the purpose of emitting vibrations that could be absorbed by the moon and were essential for maintaining it in orbit.

A “commission” of divine beings, fearful the human race would feel so humiliated it would kill itself if it found out it had only been created to keep the moon aloft, implanted a special organ called the Kundabuffer in our species. This organ caused us to perceive reality “topsy-turvy” and build up a need for sensual enjoyment. Eventually, the commission removed the Kundabuffer, but not before Homo sapiens had become hopelessly addicted to pleasure and pain, with these identifications being passed down to subsequent generations through improper education and bringing about the general confusion and “asleep” state that characterizes mankind today.

I asked Ashish: “Gurdjieff's proposed solution to the problems of humanity as pronounced in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* is his wish that an organ would be implanted into each human being, similar to the organ Kundabuffer, but which would cause him to ‘constantly sense and be cognizant of the inevitability his own death as well as the death of everyone upon whom his eyes or attention rests.’ I see this as allegorical. Is there

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some way we can achieve this, apart from the implantation of such an organ? Can one expect further instruction from Gurdjieff through meditation, prayer, or channeling? How does one pray? How does one blank the mind in meditation, yet pose the question?”

*Letter of September 19, 1995*

In one of the great Indian myths, a “wonderful being” asks a series of Sphinx-like questions. One question is “What is extraordinary?” and the answer is “All men seeing others dying yet thinking that they themselves will not die.” Something like Kundabuffer, I take as a throwaway. Yet it is absolutely true that only when one is convinced in one’s guts that this body will die can one summon the sort of passionate energy that seeks what does not die. Strictly speaking, one needs neither Kundabuffer nor George Gurdjieff nor anyone of his sort to pursue this inquiry. One needs only honesty, courage, and the burning desire to know.

Indeed, one should not expect Gurdjieff to take notice of prayers for help from people who have not done their homework, i.e., people who have not pursued the inquiry as far as their makeup permits. It is when one is blocked, yet still persists in trying anything, that trying to contact Gurdjieff may bring results. Again, one must do this oneself. The objection to mediums or channels is that this method does nothing to develop one’s capacity for assessing the value of what comes through. When one is trying to get answers for oneself, one may at least be aware of the futility of anything which involves cheating, because one could only be cheating oneself.

Thus, whatever one gets, one must take seriously, but also with sufficient lightness so that one learns by experience what sorts of messages with what attached feelings turned out to be true and what false. “How does one pray?” No, Sy, that won’t do. It’s too much like the man on the road who asked the way and, on being told, then asked to be taught how to walk. How can you ask a question of Gurdjieff without thinking of him? You are like the maharajah who was given a medicine which could cure him with one dose, provided he did not think of a camel while taking that dose. He could not but think of a camel, and you could not but think of Gurdjieff. What you must not think of is how famous you might become if you said you got this message from G himself.

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I had other questions for Ashish about *Beelzebub's Tales*. But, in the 1990s, these questions increasingly had more to do with my growing involvement in writing about *Beelzebub's Tales*, and even more so with the controversy engendered by the publication of a new edition of *Beelzebub's Tales* in 1993 that sought to stick closer to the French translation—considered by many to be a better rendition of the original Russian-Armenian manuscript—but, which, according to a number of Russian-speaking Gurdjieffians, was actually further from that original. There was a question whether a third English version should be prepared. Ultimately, the 1993 “revised translation” was withdrawn by the publisher, and a new edition was put out in 1999 that returned to the exact text of the 1950 edition approved by Gurdjieff. (However, several hundred typos and minor errors that had plagued the earlier edition were corrected in this new edition.)

I continue to read *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* with supreme enjoyment and recommend it to one and all.

