

The Herald of Coming Good

G.I. Gurdjieff | Summary | A Journey to Awakening

Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, founder of "The Institute For Man's Harmonious Development", was a mystic and philosopher, who discusses his motivations and methods for teaching self-improvement. Gurdjieff, who believed that humanity is asleep and needs to awaken to its true potential, outlines his journey through various life experiences, including becoming a hypnotist and healer. The book details his experiences, observations, and the process of developing his method of self-development, which he shared through his writings. Gurdjieff goes on to explain his system for teaching his ideas, which involves a three-stage approach: the first series of writings is accessible to all, while the second and third series are only available to those who have proven their commitment and understanding of the earlier material. This approach is meant to ensure that his ideas are properly understood and implemented.

Main Themes

1. **The search for the meaning of life:** Gurdjieff details his lifelong, obsessive search for understanding the meaning of human life on Earth. This pursuit led him to study a variety of esoteric disciplines, travel extensively, and eventually establish the Institute for Man's Harmonious Development.
2. **The limitations of modern man:** Gurdjieff criticizes modern civilization for creating a world where humans are dominated by external influences and lack genuine self-awareness. He argues that modern education fails to develop the full potential of individuals, leaving them fragmented and disconnected from their true nature.
3. **The Institute for Man's Harmonious Development:** Gurdjieff outlines the purpose and structure of his Institute, which aims to cultivate the harmonious development of individuals through a variety of methods, including self-observation, physical exercises, and esoteric teachings. He emphasizes the importance of observing and understanding one's own psychological mechanisms to achieve true self-knowledge.

4. **The importance of self-perfection:** Gurdjieff advocates for the continuous work of self-perfection as a means of overcoming the negative aspects of human nature and achieving a higher state of being. This involves cultivating positive qualities like love, compassion, and understanding, and eradicating negative traits like vanity and self-conceit.
5. **The publication of Gurdjieff's writings:** The "Herald of Coming Good" serves as an introduction to Gurdjieff's larger body of work, which he plans to release in a specific order to ensure readers are properly prepared for the deeper teachings contained in later volumes. He cautions against reading his works out of order, warning of potential psychological harm.

Important Ideas/Facts

"Irrepressible striving": Gurdjieff describes his early life as being dominated by an "irrepressible striving" to understand the meaning of life. This drove him to study various esoteric teachings and eventually develop his own system for human development.

"Mehkeness": Gurdjieff studied the ancient science of "Mehkeness" (taking away responsibility), which he sees as a more complete and profound understanding of the human psyche than contemporary hypnotism.

Three parts of the psyche: Gurdjieff describes the human psyche as consisting of three distinct parts: physical, astral, and mental. He argues that these parts are often poorly integrated in modern man, leading to fragmented perception and erroneous judgments.

"Objective Justice" and the absence of vanity: Gurdjieff emphasizes the importance of "objective justice" in human interactions and critiques the prevalence of vanity in modern society. He argues that eradicating vanity is essential for achieving true happiness and understanding.

The importance of "spiritual instructors": Gurdjieff advocates for the training of "spiritual instructors" who can guide the development of individuals and help them cultivate essential psychological qualities for a harmonious life.

Quotes

- **On the search for truth:** "Although I, too, at that period of my life, resembled them in my outward manifestations... there began to form in my thoughts, gradually and even in a way imperceptibly to my waking consciousness, the 'something', which assumed definition soon after a strong spiritual tribulation caused by the death of an intimate friend, and this newly formed datum of my mind has begun ever since... to engender in my entirety what I have elsewhere termed an 'irrepressible striving'."
- **On the limitations of modern man:** "The system applied in the Institute For Man's Harmonious Development for observing human psychic activities clearly demonstrates that the modern man never acts of his own accord, but only manifests actions stimulated by external irritations."
- **On the three parts of the psyche:** "In a newly-born child these three diverse parts of the general human psyche may be compared to a system of blank gramophone rolls upon which begin to be recorded, from the day of its appearance into the world, the external significance of objects and the subjective understanding of their inner significance..."
- **On the importance of eradicating vanity:** "I categorically affirm that the happiness and self-consciousness, which should be in a real man, as well as in a peaceful communal existence between people... depend in most cases exclusively on the absence in us of the feeling of 'Vanity'."

Conclusions

This book serves as Gurdjieff's first appeal to contemporary humanity, urging individuals to seek the path of real being. It outlines his unique life experiences and insights gleaned from studying ancient knowledge, ultimately leading to the creation of his Institute for Man's Harmonious Development. It's a call to self-awareness, recognizing the limitations of modern education and the societal structures that hinder true human potential.

Glossary of Key Terms

Tzvarnoharno: A term used by King Solomon to describe a negative force resulting from the collective evil actions of people, ultimately leading to destruction.

Mehkeness: An ancient science, largely unknown to contemporary society, that deals with the manipulation of consciousness and removing responsibility. Modern society knows a small portion of this science as hypnotism.

Subconscious Mentation: The realm of the human psyche beyond conscious awareness, believed by Gurdjieff to hold keys to understanding the meaning of life.

Institute for Man's Harmonious Development: Gurdjieff's organization designed to facilitate the comprehensive and balanced development of individuals using his system of knowledge.

Objective Justice: A concept central to Gurdjieff's philosophy, emphasizing the importance of acting in a way that considers the benefit and well-being of others.

"Rights of Initiates": Individuals who have reached a certain level of understanding and development in Gurdjieff's system, entrusted with guiding others.

"Helertoon": An ancient term describing a specific mass psychosis characterized by unusual excitation of minds.

"Scruple of Conscience": A psychic factor, largely absent in modern people according to Gurdjieff, that compels individuals to act honestly and ethically, especially towards those who have shown them trust.

"Podispodny": A state of degeneration where the natural "scruple of conscience" is replaced by a tendency towards deceitful and harmful behaviour.

"Spiritual Instructors": Individuals responsible for guiding the development of children and instilling in them the necessary psychic factors for a morally sound and fulfilling life.

"Gymnasium" or "Study House": A building at the heart of Gurdjieff's Institute, designed to facilitate learning, self-discovery, and the harmonious development of individuals.