

# *Life is Real Only Then, When I AM*

## **G.I. GURDJIEFF | Summary | Inner World of Man**

G.I. Gurdjieff's writings are primarily focused on the concept of the "inner world of man". Gurdjieff argues that humans are comprised of three separate worlds: the outer world, the inner world, and a "world of man" that is independent of both. He asserts that the inner world is a product of automatic, mechanical processes, while the "world of man" is a result of conscious effort and a developed "I". Gurdjieff's writings detail his personal experiences and struggles to understand and attain this "world of man" and includes exercises he believes can help others achieve it. He also discusses the importance of conscious suffering and the need to combat the negative impulses that arise from the inner world in order to cultivate the "world of man".

### **Main Themes**

1. **The Imperative of Self-Remembering:** Gurdjieff emphasizes the crucial importance of "self-remembering" as the path to true being and escape from the mechanical, sleep-like state of ordinary life. This idea permeates the entire text, acting as a central principle for inner transformation.
2. *"But what is this!!! Can it be really so?!!! A new thought!!! Why hitherto could there not have come to my head such a simple thought? Did I have to suffer and despair so much in order only now to think of such a possibility? . . . Why could I not, in this instance also, look to a 'universal analogy'? And here also is God!!! Again God! . . . \* Only He is everywhere and with Him everything is connected."\**
3. **The Tripartite Nature of Man:** Gurdjieff describes the human psyche as being composed of three independent worlds: the outer world, the inner world, and the world of man. He argues that only through conscious work can an individual develop and integrate these three worlds, achieving true individuality and transcending the limitations of an "ordinary man."
4. *"And thus, every man, if he is just an ordinary man, that is, one who has never consciously 'worked on himself,' has two worlds; and if he has worked on himself, and has become a so to say 'candidate for another life,' he has even three worlds."*
5. **The Importance of Suffering and Wilful Effort:** Gurdjieff stresses the necessity of conscious suffering and deliberate effort in the process of self-development.

He posits that by consciously challenging our weaknesses and engaging in "will-tasks," we can access hidden energies within ourselves and transmute our being.

6. *"But in me is not yet atrophied the possibility of actualizing conscious labour and intentional suffering! . . . According to all past events I must still be. I wish! . . . and will be!!"*\*
7. **The Role of a Teacher and Group Work:** Gurdjieff highlights the significance of a teacher and group work in facilitating self-development. He details his experiences with establishing the Institute and his interactions with students, showcasing the challenges and potential benefits of working within a group guided by a teacher.
8. *"No one of you separately is capable of doing anything real at all; therefore, even for the sake of only an egoistic aim, help one another in this newly formed group which might also be called a brotherhood. The more sincere you are with one another, the more useful you will be to one another."*

## Important Ideas and Facts

**Gurdjieff's personal health struggles:** The excerpts reveal Gurdjieff's challenging health conditions throughout his life, including injuries and a "Great Illness." This personal context informs his urgent pursuit of inner transformation.

*"Concerning this, that is, that I have soon to die, any one of hundreds of physician-specialists knowing me can now confirm."*

**Gurdjieff's extraordinary abilities:** He describes having developed specific powers, such as telepathy and hypnotism, through conscious effort. He later renounced using these powers for personal gain, seeing them as obstacles to true self-development.

*"For instance, the development of the power of my thoughts had been brought to such a level that by only a few hours of self-preparation I could from a distance of tens of miles kill a yak; or, in twenty-four hours, could accumulate life forces of such compactness that I could in five minutes put to sleep an elephant."*

**The Three Impulses:** Gurdjieff identifies three essential impulses that must be present in a real man: "I am," "I can," and "I wish." He provides exercises and techniques aimed at fostering the development of these impulses.

*"If 'I am,' only then 'I can'; if 'I can,' only then do I deserve and have the objective right to wish. Without the ability to 'can' there is no possibility of having anything; no, nor the right to it."*

**The Role of Attention:** Gurdjieff underscores the critical role of attention in self-awareness and overcoming mechanicality. He describes various exercises involving the conscious direction of attention to specific bodily sensations and processes.

*"First of all, concentrate the greater part of your attention on the words themselves, 'I am,' and the lesser part concentrate on the solar plexus, and the reverberation should gradually proceed of itself."*

**The Distinction between Sensing and Feeling:** Gurdjieff differentiates between "sensing" and "feeling," associating "sensing" with the motor centre and "feeling" with the solar plexus. This distinction highlights the importance of understanding the various sources and qualities of human experience.

*"A man 'feels' – when what are called the 'initiative factors' issue from one of the dispersed localizations of his common presence which in contemporary science are called the 'sympathetic nerve nodes' [...] and he 'senses' – when the basis of his 'initiative factors' is the totality of what are called 'the motor nerve nodes' [...]"*

**The Concept of Vibrations and Radiations:** Gurdjieff discusses the concept of vibrations and radiations emanating from different cosmic concentrations, including humans. He suggests that the quality and intensity of these radiations are influenced by an individual's level of being.

*"First of all, you must know that throughout the entire Universe every concentration, to whatever species it belongs, has the property of giving off radiations."*

## Overall Impression

These excerpts from "Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'" offer a glimpse into Gurdjieff's complex and often challenging teachings. He presents a vision of human potential that transcends the limitations of ordinary life, advocating for a path of conscious effort, self-remembering, and integration of the three worlds within us. While demanding and unconventional, his ideas offer a provocative framework for understanding the human condition and pursuing a life of greater meaning and purpose.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Being:** In Gurdjieff's system, "Being" refers to a state of heightened consciousness and inner unity, representing a more authentic and integrated way of existing.

**Conscious Labor:** Deliberate effort undertaken with awareness and intention, aimed at self-transformation and the overcoming of automatic, unconscious behaviour.

**Hanbledzoin:** A term Gurdjieff uses to encompass the powers of telepathy and hypnotism, which he believes can be developed but also lead to corruption.

**"I":** The core of individual consciousness, a unified and self-aware entity that can direct action and perception with genuine intention and will.

**Self-Remembering:** The practice of maintaining conscious awareness in every moment, breaking free from habitual patterns of thought and behaviour.

**Solar Plexus:** A network of nerves located in the abdomen, regarded by Gurdjieff as a key centre for feeling and emotional experience.

**Suffering:** In Gurdjieff's system, suffering is not inherently negative; it can serve as a catalyst for self-awareness and growth, prompting individuals to seek a deeper understanding of themselves and the world.

**Three Worlds of Man:** The outer world of physical reality, the inner world of personal thoughts and emotions, and the world of man, representing the potential for a unified and conscious "I."

**Will-Tasks:** Deliberately chosen actions designed to challenge habitual patterns, cultivate self-awareness, and promote the development of specific qualities or abilities.