

Gurdjieff on Movements

Gurdjieff wrote sparingly about movements. The following excerpts taken from *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* and *Views from the Real World* are reprinted by the kind permission of Triangle Editions, Inc.

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You ask about the aim of the movements. To each position of the body corresponds a certain inner state and, on the other hand, to each inner state corresponds a certain posture. A man, in his life, has a certain number of habitual postures and he passes from one to another without stopping at those between.

Taking new, unaccustomed postures enables you to observe yourself inside differently from the way you usually do in ordinary conditions. This becomes especially clear when on the command "Stop!" you have to freeze at once. At this command you have to freeze not only externally but also to stop all your inner movements. Muscles that were tense must remain in the same state of tension, and the muscles that were relaxed must remain relaxed. You must make the effort to keep thoughts and feelings as they were, and at the same time to observe yourself.

For instance, you wish to become an actress. Your habitual postures are suited to acting a certain part—for instance, a maid—yet you have to act the part of a countess. A countess has quite different postures. In a good dramatic school you would be taught, say, two hundred postures. For a countess the characteristic postures are, say, postures number 14, 68, 101 and 142. If you know this, when you are on the stage you have simply to pass from one posture to another, and then however badly you may act you will be a countess all the time. But if you don't know these postures, then even a person who has quite an untrained eye will feel that you are not a countess but a maid.

It is necessary to observe yourself differently than you do in ordinary life. It is necessary to have a different attitude, not the attitude you had till now. You know where your habitual attitudes have led you till now. There is no sense in going on as before, either for you or for me, for I have no desire to work with you if you remain as you are. You want knowledge, but what you have had until today was not knowledge. It was only mechanical collecting of information. It is knowledge not in you but outside you. It has no value. What concern is it of yours that what you know was created at one time by somebody else? You have not created it, therefore it is of small value. You say, for instance, that you know how to set type for newspapers, and you value this in yourself. But now a machine can do that. Combining is not creating.

Everyone has a limited repertoire of habitual postures, and of inner states. She is a painter and you will say, perhaps, that she has her own style. But it is not style, it is limitation. Whatever her pictures may represent, they will always be the same,

whether she paints a picture of European life or of the East. I will at once recognize that she, and nobody else, has painted it. An actor who is the same in all his roles—just himself—what kind of an actor is he? Only by accident can he have a role that entirely corresponds to what he is in life.

In general, until today all knowledge has been mechanical as everything else has been mechanical. For example, I look at her with kindness; she at once becomes kindly. If I look at her angrily, she is at once displeased—and not only with me but with her neighbor, and this neighbor with someone else, and so it goes on. She is angry because I have looked at her crossly. She is angry mechanically. But to become angry of her own free will, she cannot. She is a slave to the attitudes of others. And it would not be so bad if all these others were always living beings, but she is also a slave to all things. Any object is stronger than she. It is continuous slavery. Your functions are not yours, but you yourself are the function of what goes on in you.

To new things one must learn to have new attitudes. You see, now everybody is listening in his own way, but a way corresponding to his inner posture. For example, “Starosta” listens with his mind, and you with your feeling; and if all of you were asked to repeat, everyone would repeat in his own way in accordance with his inner state of the moment. One hour passes, someone tells something unpleasant to “Starosta,” while you are given a mathematical problem to solve. “Starosta” will repeat what he heard here colored by his feeling, and you will do it in a logical form.

And all this is because only one center is working—for instance, either mind or feeling. Yet you must learn to listen in a new way. The knowledge you have had up to today is the knowledge of one center—knowledge without understanding. Are there many things you know and at the same time understand? For instance, you know what electricity is, but do you understand it as clearly as you understand that twice two makes four? The latter you understand so clearly that no one can prove to you the contrary; but with electricity it is different. Today it is explained to you in one way—you believe it. Tomorrow you will be given a different explanation—you will also believe that. But understanding is perception not by one but by not less than two centers. There exists a more complete perception, but for the moment it is enough if you make one center control the other. If one center perceives and the other approves the perception, agrees with it or rejects it, this is understanding. If an argument between centers fails to produce a definite result, it will be half-understanding. Half-understanding is also no good. It is necessary that everything you listen to here, everything you talk about among yourselves elsewhere, should be said or listened to not with one center but with two. Otherwise there will be no right result either for me or for you. For you it will be as before, a mere accumulation of new information.

[Views from the Real World](#), pp. 167–170

**As It is with Everything,
So It is with Movements**

Prieuré, February 9, 1923

As it is with everything, so it is with movements. Movements are performed without the participation of other parts of the organism. Such movements are harmful for the organism. It is useful for its consequences. I emphasize for its consequences. But, for the particular scale to which the organism is accustomed, every movement which exceeds this scale is harmful at first, for a short time. Movements become useful in the future if they are accompanied by proper calculations.

Movements, taken as work, can be divided into the following categories:

1. When one takes the peculiarities of a man's constitution into consideration, both those present now and those which may be likely in the future.
2. When breathing participates in movement.
3. When thought participates in movement.
4. When a man's old, constant, unchangingly characteristic movement takes part.

Only if movements are connected with the things which I have enumerated can they be useful for ordinary, everyday life.

I separate the idea of everyday life from the idea of life connected with work for self-perfection and inner development. By everyday life, I mean a normal, healthy life.

For our work, apart from the four categories I have enumerated, we have to join our normal feelings and sensations with movement, as well as the special feeling and special sensation which we are aiming to acquire. This other sensation should be acquired without destroying the sensations already present.

So there are four conditions.

Thus you see that to make a movement truly useful we must gradually join with it all the above-mentioned other movements of a different category. You must realize that only then can a movement be useful. No result can be expected if even one of the conditions mentioned is lacking.

The easiest of our movements is that crude organic movement which we are able to do (which we have studied already). The movements we have been doing so far are those that all people do, and everyone can do them. And although the movements we shall be doing may look complicated at the first glance, they can easily be done by everyone if they are sufficiently practiced.

However, if we begin to add to these movements one of the conditions I mentioned, it will prove much more difficult and will no longer be possible for everyone. And if we gradually add to it several conditions, such a movement will become possible for only a very limited number of people.

In the end, in order to make a beginning in achieving the aim for the sake of which we began to study movements, it is necessary gradually to join to the movement which proceeds in us the conditions I spoke about.

Now, to begin with, it is essential to pick out the more or less appropriate types. Together with this we shall gradually study and practice the second condition—that is, breathing.

At first we shall be divided into groups; later we shall divide groups themselves, and in this way shall come to individuals.

Views from the Real World, pp. 174–175

Cosmic Laws and Sacred Dance

Imagine that in studying the laws of movement of the celestial bodies, let us say the planets of the solar system, you have constructed a special mechanism for the representation and recording of these laws. In this mechanism every planet is represented by a sphere of appropriate size and is placed at a strictly determined distance from the central sphere, which stands for the sun. You set the mechanism in motion, and all the spheres begin to turn and move in definite paths, reproducing in a lifelike way the laws which govern their movements. This mechanism reminds you of your knowledge.

In the same way, in the rhythm of certain dances, in the precise movements and combinations of the dancers, certain laws are vividly recalled. Such dances are called sacred. During my journeys in the East, I often saw dances of this kind executed during the performance of sacred rites in some of the ancient temples. These ceremonies are inaccessible, and unknown to Europeans.

*Views from the Real World, p. 31
Glimpses of Truth*

Questions and Answers on Art

Question: What place do art and creative work occupy in your teaching?

Answer: Present-day art is not necessarily creative. But for us art is not an aim but a means.

Ancient art has a certain inner content. In the past, art served the same purpose as is served today by books—the purpose of preserving and transmitting certain knowledge. In ancient times they did not write books but expressed knowledge in

works of art. We shall find many ideas in the ancient art which has reached us, if we know how to read it. Every art was like that then, including music. And people of ancient times looked on art in this way.

You saw our movements and dances. But all you saw was the outer form—beauty, technique. But I do not like the external side you see. For me, art is a means for harmonious development. In everything we do the underlying idea is to do what cannot be done automatically and without thought.

Ordinary gymnastics and dances are mechanical. If our aim is a harmonious development of man, then for us, dances and movements are a means of combining the mind and the feeling with movements of the body and manifesting them together. In all things, we have the aim to develop something which cannot be developed directly or mechanically—which interprets the whole man: mind, body and feeling.

The second purpose of dances is study. Certain movements carry a proof in them, a definite knowledge, or religious and philosophical ideas. In some of them one can even read a recipe for cooking some dish. In many parts of the East the inner content of one or another dance is now almost forgotten, yet people continue to dance it simply from habit.

Thus movements have two aims: study and development.

Views from the Real World, pp. 182–183

In the Sarmoung Monastery

While living in Bukhara with his friend Soloviev, Gurdjieff learns about the Sarmoung monastery, somewhere in the heart of Asia and to which he is invited to travel. After a lengthy and perilous journey through the mountains on horseback, during which they are usually blindfolded, he and Soloviev arrive at the monastery and to Gurdjieff's great surprise, he meets his old friend Prince Lubovedsky, whom he finds bedridden and recovering from a serious illness.

As long as Prince Lubovedsky had to keep to his bed, we went to see him in the second court, but when he was better and could leave his cell, he used to come to us, and we talked every day for two or three hours.

So it continued for about two weeks, until one day we were called into the third court, to the sheikh of the monastery, who spoke to us through an interpreter. He appointed as our guide one of the oldest monks, an aged man who looked like an icon and was said by the other brethren to be two hundred and seventy-five years old.

After this we, so to say, entered into the life of the monastery, were allowed access almost everywhere, and began gradually to find out about everything.

In the centre of the third court was a large building like a temple, where twice a day all those who lived in the second and third courts assembled to watch the sacred dances of the priestesses or to hear the sacred music.

When Prince Lubovedsky completely recovered, he went everywhere with us and explained everything, and was thus, as it were, a second guide for us.

The details of everything in this monastery, what it represented, and what was done there and how, I shall perhaps recount at some time in a special book. But meanwhile I find it necessary to describe in as much detail as possible one peculiar apparatus I saw there, the construction of which, when I had more or less grasped its significance, made a tremendous impression on me.

When Prince Lubovedsky had become our second guide, one day on his own initiative he obtained permission to take us to a fourth court, at one side, called the Women's Court, to the class of pupils directed by the priestess-dancers who, as I have said, daily performed sacred dances in the temple.

The prince, well knowing my great and absorbing interest in the laws of movement of the human body and psyche, advised me to pay special attention, while watching this class, to the apparatuses with the aid of which the young candidates for priestess-dancers were taught their art.

The external appearance of these peculiar apparatuses gave the impression, even at the first glance, that they were of very ancient workmanship. They were made of ebony inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl. When they were not in use and stood grouped together, they reminded one of 'Vesanelnian' trees, with branches all alike. On close examination, we saw that each apparatus consisted of a smooth column, higher than a man, which was fixed on a tripod. From this column, in seven places, there projected specially designed branches, which in their turn were divided into seven parts of different dimensions, each successive part decreasing in length and width in proportion to its distance from the main column.

Each part or segment of a branch was connected to the adjacent segment by means of two hollow ivory balls, one inside the other. The outer ball did not wholly cover the inner, so that one end of any segment of a branch could be fastened to the inner ball, and the end of the adjacent segment to the outer ball. In this way, these junctures were of the same type as the shoulder-joint of a man and allowed the seven segments of each branch to be moved in any desired direction. On the inner balls certain signs were inscribed.

There were three of these apparatuses in the room and beside each of them stood a little cupboard, filled with square plates of some metal, on which were also certain inscriptions. Prince Lubovedsky explained to us that these plates were copies and that the originals, made of pure gold, were kept by the sheikh. Experts had determined that the plates and the apparatuses themselves were at least four thousand five hundred years old. The prince further explained that, by making the signs on the inner balls correspond to those on the plates, these balls and the segments fastened to them could be placed in certain positions.

When all the balls are placed as designated, the form and extent of the given posture are fully defined, and the young pupils stand for hours before the apparatuses, regulated in this way, and learn to sense and remember this posture.

Many years pass before these young future priestesses are allowed to dance in the temple, where only elderly and experienced priestesses may dance.

Everyone in the monastery knows the alphabet of these postures and when, in the evening in the main hall of the temple, the priestesses perform the dances indicated for the ritual of that day, the brethren may read in these dances one or another truth which men have placed there thousands of years before.

These dances correspond precisely to our books. Just as is now done on paper, so, once, certain information about long past events was recorded in dances and transmitted from century to century to people of subsequent generations. And these dances are called sacred.

Those who are to become priestesses are mostly young girls who by the vow of their parents or for some other reason are consecrated from an early age to the service of God, or of this or that saint. They are given to the temple in childhood, where they are taught and prepared for everything necessary, as for example, for the sacred dances.

When several days after I first saw this class I went to see the performance of the genuine priestesses, I was astounded, not by the sense and meaning contained in their dances, which I did not as yet understand, but by the external precision and exactitude with which they performed them. Neither in Europe, nor in any other place where I have lived and have watched with conscious interest this sort of automatized human manifestation, have I seen anything to compare with this purity of execution.

[*Meetings with Remarkable Men*](#)

Chapter 'Prince Yuri Lubovedsky', pp. 160–163

The Art of Sacred and Popular Dance

On Thursdays, namely, the days which the learned beings of this group assigned for 'sacred' and 'popular' dances, there were demonstrated with the necessary explanations every possible form of religious and popular dances, either those already existing which they only modified, or quite new ones which they created.

And in order that you should have a better idea and well understand in which way they indicated what they wished in these dances, you must know that the learned beings of this time had already long been aware that every posture and movement of every being in general, in accordance with the same Law of Sevenfoldness, always consists of seven what are called 'mutually-balanced-tensions' arising in seven independent parts of their whole, and that each of these seven parts in their turn

consists of seven different what are called 'lines-of-movement,' and each line has seven what are called 'points-of-dynamic-concentration'; and all this that I have just described, being repeated in the same way and in the same sequence but always on a diminishing scale, is actualized in the minutest sizes of the total bodies called 'atoms.'

And so, during their dances, in the movements lawful in their accordance with each other, these learned dancers inserted intentional inexactitudes, also lawful, and in a certain way indicated in them the information and knowledge which they wished to transmit.