

What Is The Work?

Gurdjieff brought a teaching of the Fourth Way that calls for conscious work rather than obedience. A fundamental idea is that in our ordinary state everything takes place in sleep. And in sleep we can see nothing. We cannot direct our lives by our own will. We are entirely dependent on influences from outside and enslaved by the automatic reactions of our functioning. It is complete slavery. There is no higher principle, no conscious principle.

Man has the possibility to awaken from this sleep, to awaken to the higher, to be. The means is the attention. In sleep the attention is taken. It must be freed and turned in another direction. This is the separation of “I” and “me.” It is the active force opposed to the passive, the struggle between the yes and the no. This mobilization of the attention is the first step toward the possibility of self-remembering. Without a different attention, we are obliged to be automatic. With an attention that is voluntarily directed, we go toward consciousness.

Dividing the attention makes it possible to begin the observation of oneself. Self-observation must always be related to the idea of centers and of their automatic functioning, in particular, the lack of a common direction. Our three centers—mind, body and feeling—work with different energies, and their disposition determines the influences that reach us. We can receive more subtle, higher influences only if our centers are disposed in a certain way. When we are wholly under the power of lower influences, the higher cannot reach us. Everything depends on the quality of the influences that we obey, higher or lower. As we are, each influence produces a kind of reaction that corresponds to it. Negative emotions are a negation on a very low level. If our reactions are on a low level, what we receive is on a low level. We need to learn to obey the law governing higher forces, consciously to submit our will to the higher. The moment of consciousness is a moment of will.

de Salzmann, Jeanne (2011-07-19). *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff* (pp. 22-23). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.