

Deliteralizing Christianity: Gurdjieff and Almznoshinoo

Michael Pittman

michael.pittman@acphs.edu

Abstract

This essay addresses some of the references to Christianity presented in G.I. Gurdjieff's magnum opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. Keeping in view the overarching themes of the conscious labor and intentional suffering (being-Partkdolg-duty) and the development of higher-being bodies, the article will present and analyze references to the sacred ceremony "Almznoshinoo," which is first presented in the chapter on Tibetan Buddhism. By next introducing The Last Supper through the lens of the ceremony Almznoshinoo, Gurdjieff's text undermines and unhinges literalizing readings of the sacred texts and practices of Christianity. In the process, Gurdjieff seeks to deliteralize the awareness and consciousness of the reader. The article will also consider the role of feelings in restoring "podobnisirnian," or allegorical thinking, which Beelzebub proposes has been all but lost in contemporary thought. Gurdjieff points out the complete failure of contemporary people to understand and employ allegorical thinking, and its essential role in understanding teachings and stories (legominisms) from the past.

Keywords: G.I. Gurdjieff; esoteric Christianity; legominism; deliteralization; Almznoshinoo; *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*

Introduction: Gurdjieff and his Reception

Beelzebub's Tales is a book that destroys existing values; it compels the serious reader to re-value all values, and, to a sincere person, it is devastating. As Gurdjieff says, it may destroy your relish for your favorite dish—your pet theories, for example or that form of art you happen to follow. It will be like red pepper—disturbing to your mental and emotional associations, your inertia.

— Alfred R. Orage¹

Drawing on references in his recorded talks, and his own writings, the consideration of Gurdjieff's teaching as a form of Christianity has been a generative area of study. In a frequently referenced exchange in P.D. Ouspensky's

1. *Commentaries on G. I. Gurdjieff's All and Everything*, 4.

In Search of the Miraculous, Gurdjieff responds to a question about the origins of his teaching: “I do not know what you know about Christianity but for the benefit of those who know already, I will say that, if you like, this is *esoteric Christianity*.”² This conditional statement points us in a certain direction, and offers the qualification that this description applies to “those who know already.” Taking the point of view that Gurdjieff reflects the zeitgeist of his own period, he seems to have been responding, at least in part, to the war-torn world of the early twentieth century, especially in Europe, and a Christianity that was in a state of decay. No overarching narrative had superseded Christianity at the time, and many people had lost faith in the efficacy and value of the teachings, and in the institutions that supported them.³ And the same evaluation might be still be offered about our present time.

Several works have addressed Gurdjieff’s ideas in Christian terms or attempted to connect his work to Christianity. A brief review of those influenced by Gurdjieff who made explicit connections to Christianity includes Maurice Nicoll (1884–1953), a British psychologist who worked with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (as well as Carl Jung), and wrote an interpretation of Christian ideas in several works, including *The New Man*. Rodney Collin, a student of Ouspensky, also wrote about the work of Gurdjieff in Christian terms. Boris Mouravieff (1890–1966) claimed that Gurdjieff’s work was an incomplete form of esoteric Christianity connected to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. J.G. Bennett (1897–1974), a British mathematician and scientist, taught and wrote extensively about Gurdjieff. After Gurdjieff’s death, Bennett also explored a

2. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 102.

3. Certainly, one can consider Gurdjieff’s own background—in Armenia, and the Caucasus—and especially the influence of Eastern Orthodox Church, through the Greek, Armenian, Russian, and even the Georgian branches. Gurdjieff grew up, first in Alexandropol (now Gyumri), not far from Etchmiadzin, the seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In *Meetings with Remarkable Men* he also refers to Christianity as a part of his culture and background, including Sev Jiam church in Alexandropol, as well as other monasteries in the region, including Sanahin Monastery. Gurdjieff also fondly refers to his time in Kars where he served as choir boy in the church. Undoubtedly, these early influences were certainly foundational and provided an orientation to his life’s work and understanding of the importance of tradition and ritual.

number of traditions, but always returned to Gurdjieff's teachings as foundational for an understanding of spiritual transformation. The anonymous author of talks collected in *A Point in the Work* interprets the Gospels and Christian teachings with references to Gurdjieff's ideas. More recently, a selection of academic works attests to the continuing influence of Gurdjieff's work in terms of esoteric Christianity, including Jacob Needleman's *Lost Christianity* and Richard Smoley's broader work, *Inner Christianity*, which includes Gurdjieff and Mouravieff in the frame of esoteric Christianity. Even more recently, Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopalian priest by training, has interpreted the Trinity through the lens of Gurdjieff's law of three.⁴ Joseph Azize, in *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises* has provided a thoroughgoing discussion of Gurdjieff's practices and inner exercises in the frame of contemplation and contemplative exercises, and connects them to the practices of the Orthodox monastic tradition of Mount Athos in Greece.

The Present Work

While much of the work above addresses the influence of Gurdjieff's ideas and relates his work to aspects of Christianity, the main thrust of the present study will be to explicate the way that Christianity is presented in Gurdjieff's magnum opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*, also published as *All and Everything: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*.⁵ Here I focus on the chapter "Religion," and the means by which Gurdjieff dismantles the effects of a kind of literalism in the presentation and interpretation of Christianity that has been passed down through the centuries. In this chapter, Gurdjieff, through the words of his narrator Beelzebub, introduces Jesus as an authentic messenger "sent from Above," and then provides an extended discussion of a Tibetan ceremony called Almznoshinoo. All of this sets the stage for a critique and

4. Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*.

5. I have discussed other aspects of this text in detail elsewhere. See, for example, Pittman, "Orality and Refractions of Early Literary Textualizations in Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*."

revision of the hierarchizing and literal interpretation of “The Lord’s Supper,” and the role of Judas Iscariot. In these passages, Gurdjieff indicts the loss of “Podobnisirnian,” or allegorical thinking, and the lack of participation by the emotions, or feelings, in the process. According to Gurdjieff, both the constellated and divergent traditions purporting to be “Christian” are viewed as mere shells of the original teachings and examples from Christ. Without an emphasis on a more radical spiritual transformation, or conscious labor and intentional suffering—that, he suggests, is powered by the engagement of the emotional center—Christianity is seen to have devolved into a set of empty rituals, shallow beliefs in externals, such as the teaching on paradise and hell and the whole superstructure of institutions and organizations which operate in the name of Jesus.⁶ In effect, this restricted thinking leads to a narrow and damaging literalism in the interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, such as those found in the Gospels. Consequently, humanity in general, and Christians in particular, are unable to fulfill their appropriate destiny, to live in the image of and be of service to the “Common Father.”

In an early talk from Essentuki in 1918, recorded in *Views from the Real World*, Gurdjieff states, “A soul—this is the aim of all religions, of all schools,” and bluntly adds: “It is only an aim, a possibility; it is not a fact.”⁷ This perhaps uncomfortable idea that humans are not born with a completed soul is at the root of much of Gurdjieff’s critique found in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, including the view of Christianity. As I have proposed elsewhere,⁸ and briefly reiterate here, Gurdjieff sought to create a new type of discourse on the soul, one built on the notion of spiritual transformation and the creation of a soul. In *Beelzebub’s Tales*, this process of spiritual transformation is described as “conscious labor and

6. In Chapter 33, King Konuzion is portrayed as inventing a new “religious doctrine” on the reward of paradise and/or punishment of hell in the afterlife. Throughout the *Tales*, this is repeatedly identified as one of the ideologies that diminish the potency of religions at large.

7. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 214.

8. Cf. Pittman, *Classical Spirituality in Contemporary America*.

intentional suffering.” This phrase is used to denote the authentic and effective means by which human consciousness is transformed and, importantly, the soul is created, no matter the tradition or religion. At the risk of oversimplifying such a complex work, the notion of esotericism that Gurdjieff adhered to might be described as a specialized teaching on conscious labor and intentional suffering, and how to acquire a soul.⁹ Gurdjieff assails the current state of religions around the globe, chiefly because the means and methods meant to support “conscious labor and intentional suffering” are absent. What unfolds in Gurdjieff’s revised view of Christianity in *Beelzebub’s Tales* is a renewed focus on spiritual transformation, including the reinstatement of the role of feelings, or the emotional center, and the means by which Christianity might be understood anew.

The Introduction of Christianity in Beelzebub’s Tales

From Beelzebub’s “objectively impartial” and millennial-level view, the religions of earth are unable, in practice, to support the originally lofty aims and aspirations for human existence. The chapter “Religion,” which appears nearly two-thirds of the way through Gurdjieff’s 1200+ page tome, addresses the overwhelmingly destructive role of religion in human life in general. Here, in addition to Buddhism, the discussion is extended to give more specific references to Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Beelzebub, in his tales to his grandson Hassein, portrays religion as a set of institutional practices and histories that are now hollow, ineffective, and even damaging. He begins the prosecutorial task in the introduction of “Religion” at the beginning of the chapter by describing religion as an “obstruction,” and “one of the

9. In a talk from 1922, Gurdjieff provided a brief explanation of esotericism: “The theory of esotericism is that mankind consists of two circles: a large, outer circle, embracing all human beings, and a small circle of instructed and understanding people at the center. Real instruction, which alone can change us, can only come from this center, and the aim of this teaching is to help us to prepare ourselves to receive such instruction.” And, he adds, “In every sacred book knowledge is there, but people do not wish to know it.” See Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 78.

chief causes for the gradual dilution of the psyche” of the beings of earth.¹⁰ Religions, as Beelzebub relates, are comprised of a variety of fictionalized tales which, consequently, dilute the force of the human mind and heart. These stories highlight the overwhelming tendency of people to focus on external and, thus, secondary or tertiary realities, and, as a result, their feeling of religiousness has become diluted. At the same time, Gurdjieff leaves a space for more positive qualities concerning religion to be retained. While much of the chapter deals with a critique of the distortion of religions over time, there are many important instances wherein Gurdjieff revises and renews the concept of religion in the process. Along the way, he gives further clues and instructions for the process of developing and actualizing the soul. In this way Gurdjieff attempts to reinvigorate the understanding of these traditions with—in Mikhail Bakhtin’s language—a view “of a world permeated with an internal and authentic necessity.”¹¹ One of the major themes of the chapter is the critique of the distortion and manipulation of the teachings of authentic teachers, and the often-fanciful form that the teachings have taken in the present day. In this regard, the potency, or “internal and authentic necessity” has been drained from these once potent teachings.

Following the section on Saint Moses, Beelzebub introduces the figure of Jesus, who laid the foundations of Christianity. Beelzebub identifies Jesus as following in the tradition of Saint Moses (or Judaism), and as chosen “by command from Above,” signifying his importance and position as an authentic teacher. He continues to explain how this third religion—among the five introduced—spread, and how almost one-third of the beings on Earth became followers.¹² As with the other religions found on earth, he notes how the humans began to distort Jesus’s teaching based on “resplendent Love,” and

10. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 694.

11. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 169. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), in his incisive analysis of the late Renaissance author Rabelais (d. 1553), employs a language that is remarkably applicable to the work of Gurdjieff.

12. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 701.

that they have become turned into mere fairy tales.¹³ Thus, they are without their former potency as a genuine teaching able to assist humans in breaking down the effects of the organ Kundabuffer.¹⁴ He adds that this religion in particular has separated into many different sects, “on account of some unimportant details.”¹⁵ Rhyming with an earlier critique of the tendency for humans to “peck-like-crows-at-a-jackal’s-carcass” at authentic teachings, Gurdjieff highlights the ways that Christianity has become neutralized, by dividing into a variety of sects that no longer have anything to do with one another nor the original teachings.¹⁶

Mirroring the critique of religion in the book in general, Beelzebub adds some critical remarks about how the teachings of Jesus were distorted:

They mixed into it [Jesus’s teachings] a great deal from the teaching of Saint Moses, which by that time had been thoroughly distorted, and much later, during the period that contemporary beings there call the “Middle Ages,” the so-called “Fathers of the Church” inserted into this Christian religion nearly the whole of that fantastic doctrine invented long ago in the city of Babylon by those learned beings belonging to the school of the dualists, about which I have already told you.

The “elders of the church” in the Middle Ages probably inserted this last doctrine for the convenience of their own “shops” and for the “shops” of their assistants, because of the famous “paradise” and “hell” contained in it.¹⁷

The eventual authorities of Christianity, Beelzebub remarks, have mixed in parts from other religions, which had nothing to do with what Jesus taught, and often even contradicted his teachings. The first culprits are those that included elements of the teachings that had been previously added to Judaism.

13. *Ibid.*, 702.

14. The story of the introduction of the organ Kundabuffer, and its subsequent removal, plays a central role in *Beelzebub’s Tales* as an explanation of one of the chief obstacles to humans manifesting their ultimate destiny. The properties of Kundabuffer consist of unbecoming inclinations as cunning, contempt, hate, slavishness, suggestibility, lying, self-deceit, self-love, and others.

15. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 702.

16. *Ibid.*, 698.

17. *Ibid.*, 702–3.

The mention of the “dualists” of the Middle Ages, or the “Fathers of the Church,” is a reference to the teaching of paradise and hell and its maleficent influence.¹⁸ Similar to the way King Konuzion subjugated his communities through the teaching of paradise and hell, the elders of the Middle Ages were, it is surmised, able to control those in their “shops” or congregations to adhere obediently to their doctrines and beliefs.

In these passages, while emphasizing the dissolution of the teaching, he also affirms some of the central teachings of Jesus:

And therefore at the present time, in place of the teaching of the Divine Teacher Jesus Christ, in which among other things was revealed the power of the All-lovingness and All-forgivingness of our CREATOR, suffering for beings—it is now already taught there that our CREATOR mocks the souls of those who follow this teaching.¹⁹

The indications here are noteworthy for the significant critique of the state of Christian theology, and even the view of Christianity that the Creator holds. The teaching of Jesus, it is noted, affirmed that the Creator is all-loving and all-forgiving, and even all-suffering, in relation to the beings he has created. Even “CREATOR” is written in all capitalized letters, suggesting the importance given to a divine figure, or God. However, the insertion of the story of paradise and hell is a kind of mockery of the Creator, who would not have created these beings to suffer. The theological emphasis of the suffering that Jesus went through, and which human beings must undergo, is undermined. And, a shift of focus is made to the significance of the suffering that the Creator experiences as a result of the creation of the expanding universe. While buried in the dense prose and details of the elucidation, these points contribute to the view Gurdjieff provides of some of the errors associated with Christianity, as well as the potentials that remain.

Gurdjieff briskly concludes the section by making a brief reference to the Essenes, the Jewish ascetic group living in the region of Palestine, and to the fact

18. Cf. Bart Ehrman’s work, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife*.

19. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 703.

that they maintained the teaching of Jesus unchanged. Though he tells Hasein that he will return to the topic, it is not mentioned again in *Beelzebub's Tales*, apart from a mention of the practice of fasting by the Essenes in “America.” Whether by design or not, this follows Gurdjieff’s general tactic wherein he makes allusions and suggestions that, rather than providing definitive answers, force the reader to search for the clues for themselves. After a brief discussion of Islam, Gurdjieff turns in the next section to address Tibetan Buddhism, and the sacred ceremony Almznoshinoo.

Tibetan Buddhism and Almznoshinoo

For a careful reader, one of the revelations and challenges of *Beelzebub's Tales* is the introduction of many motifs, references, and words that appear and are then echoed or connected at different points throughout the book. Some of these are such that even a committed reader may notice only after multiple readings. Consequently, the reader is left to make sense of the connections and their significance on their own. While some of these are positioned far apart, making it harder to connect, others are close together, even in the same chapter, such as the term Almznoshinoo. One set of critical connections to Christianity is first set up in the chapter on religion through a detailed description of the sacred ceremony Almznoshinoo in the context of the Buddhism of Tibet, or, as it is described, “Lamaism.”²⁰ Beelzebub—who claims to have been present at the time of the events—relates a long story about Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism, and an attempt that was made to preserve their teaching through a sacred process called “Almznoshinoo.” Though I will mainly focus on the resonances found in this section that connect to the subsequent section on Christianity, it is worth noting the similarities found in the Tibetan Buddhist teaching on the *bardos*, or intermediate states which come after death and before reincarnation, found in

20. Jose Tirado observes that “Saint Lama” is based on the legendary eighth century CE adept Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, credited with introducing Vajrayana Buddhism to Tibet. See: Tirado, “Beelzebub’s Buddhas.”

particular in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Likewise, the teaching on the “Three Bodies” of the Buddha also has resonance, principally in the presentation of the “Dharmakaya,” the second, or “teaching body” of the Buddha, which exists after his death. At the minimum, the gist of Gurdjieff’s references point to the existence of more than one genuine legominism addressing the nature of life after death.²¹ Nonetheless, much of this story is arguably a preparation for the discussion of Christianity and the reinterpretation of the meaning and significance of The Lord’s Supper that follows. With this frame in mind, it is worth presenting in some of the key passages of this section in detail.

Living in Tibet at the time of the British invasion (the Younghusband Expedition, 1903–1904), Beelzebub recounts, was a group of seven figures responsible for guarding “the most secret instructions and last counsels of Saint Lama.”²² Upon hearing about the impending invasion, they agreed to send their chief to join the other chiefs of the country in order to persuade the “uninvited visitors,” the British, to return to where they had come from. While some proposed they retaliate, the chief of the group proposed that they do nothing that causes any harm. He effectively made the argument that bringing harm to them would also bring sorrow to their “Common Creator God.”²³ However, before he was able to pass on to his disciples the essential, inner teachings which he had been given to preserve, the chief of seven was shot and killed. Thus, the remaining six were compelled to find a way to receive the remaining teachings from their former guide and teacher. The sole way left to them to receive the

21. Legominism is described as “one of the means existing there of transmitting from generation to generation information about certain events of long-past ages, through just those three-brained beings who are thought worthy to be and who are called initiates,” Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 349. For more on legominism see Pittman, “Gurdjieff, Art, and the Legominism of Ashiata Shiemash.”

22. In *Beelzebub’s Tales*, Saint Lama was originally sent to the beings of Tibet to help them free themselves of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer. Saint Lama’s teachings were based on the teachings of Saint Buddha whose teachings, in turn, had been refinements of the teaching of Saint Krishnatkharna. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 715.

23. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 723. It is also worth noting the reference to the “Common Creator God,” which would be out of sync with Tibetan teachings.

instructions was through the sacred Almznoshinoo, “for the existence of which they not only knew the possibilities, but they also had in themselves all the data required for such an actualization.”²⁴

In an extended segment, Beelzebub next presents the details of the ceremony of “Almznoshinoo” to Hassein. In short, this sacred ceremony involves a group of attained beings—who are in possession of a second body, or Kesdjan body—and the means by which they may communicate with someone who has died.²⁵ In the description, Beelzebub introduces some initial specifics about the second, or “Kesdjan” body:

That process is called the sacred Almznoshinoo by means of which three-centered beings who have themselves already had time to coat and to bring their own body Kesdjan up to completed functioning and to a definite degree of Reason, intentionally produce the coating or, as it is otherwise said, the “materialization” of the body Kesdjan of any being already entirely destroyed, to such a density that this body acquires again for a certain time the possibility of manifesting in certain of its functions proper to its former planetary body.

This sacred process can be produced upon the body Kesdjan of that being who also during his existence had brought his higher being-body up to the completed functioning, and in whom, in addition, the Reason of this body had been brought up to the degree called the sacred “being-Mirozinoo.”²⁶

As presented here, the beings performing this ceremony, through contact with the Kesdjan, or second body, are able to bring about, though for a limited time, some of the functions of the first, or planetary body, of the person who has deceased.²⁷ One requirement is that the individual upon whom the ceremony

24. *Ibid.*, 726.

25. In an earlier story, Beelzebub connects the Kesdjan body with the astral body: “...they themselves later began to name this being-part of theirs—of which, by the way, contemporary beings known only by hearsay—the ‘Astral-body.’” *Ibid.*, 131.

26. *Ibid.*, 726.

27. Gurdjieff employs the term “Kesdjan” to refer to the first of the two higher being-bodies in humans. Kesdjan is a compound word likely borrowed from Persian: *كاس* is a cup, goblet, or vessel and *جان* refers in different instances to soul, vital spirit, mind, or self. Hence, Gurdjieff’s usage of Kesdjan, the second body, as the “vessel of the soul” and the carrier or seat of Reason.

is performed must first have a “higher-being body,” and likewise brought their reason up to a high degree called “being-Mirozinoo.” Though the term is not explained further, the formulation accords with Gurdjieff’s general sense that there are levels or gradations in the development of reason.

The process is described in even more complex terms, reflecting some of the mechanics of soul-making, an overarching leitmotif of *Beelzebub’s Tales*. In addition to the possibility for Almznoshinoo, there is a related process wherein the coating or materialization of the highest being-body, or soul, can be made:

In our Great Universe, besides the process of the intentional coating of the being-body Kesdjan of an already destroyed being, another process exists called the most sacred “Djerymetly.”

And this most sacred process consists in this, that when there is intentionally first produced the coating of the highest being-body, namely, the “body of the soul,” only afterwards, as in the first case, is the sacred Almznoshinoo produced.

It is possible of course to produce both these processes only in that case, if such higher being-bodies are still in those spheres contactable by the sphere of that planet on which these “sacred sacraments” are produced.²⁸

After attaining a second-being body, the aim of the process is described as the coating of the highest being-body, or soul. In the process, the participants may maintain a connection by “consciously feeding the body Kesdjan” of the person who has died “with their own sacred ‘Aiesakhaldan.’”²⁹ The passage provides an outline of the process, and a picture of the tripartite structure of the soul: the body, Kesdjan body (higher being-body), and soul (highest-being body).³⁰ Gurdjieff employs two more neologisms, “Djerymetly” and “Aiesakhaldan,” as key terms, though neither appear again in *Beelzebub’s Tales*. In Gurdjieff’s text, the density of the language, and the unusual neologisms, contribute to the process of distinguishing and “disuniting,” in the language of Bakhtin, the process of soul creation from the entanglements of ordinary language.

28. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 726–27.

29. *Ibid.*, *All and Everything*, 727.

30. In the traditional Christian frame, this tripartite structure is identified as body, soul, and spirit.

Beelzebub continues to relate that, in order to accurately understand this process, some understanding of two properties of the “being-Hanbledzoin,” or the “‘blood’ of the being-body Kesdjan” is required:

The first of these properties of the being-Hanbledzoin consists in this, that, if any part of it be separated and removed, then wherever and however far it may be taken, a “threadlike connection” is formed between this part and the fundamental concentration of all this cosmic substance, in such a way that this connection is formed of this same substance, and its density and thickness increase and diminish proportionally with the distance between the fundamental concentration of this substance and its separated part.

And the second particular property of this Hanbledzoin consist in this, that, when it is introduced into the fundamental concentration of this substance and has mixed with this primordial concentration, it is distributed in it everywhere in uniform densities and in uniform quantities, wherever the given concentration may be and in whatever quantity this same Hanbledzoin may accidentally or intentionally be introduced.³¹

In this thick language a formula for the ceremony Almznoshinoo is introduced, as well as an image of an intermediate world. First, Handbledzoin, if separated, remains connected to the part from which it originated through a “threadlike connection.”³² And, second, wherever the Handbledzoin is introduced into a substance, and mixed within it, it is distributed equally throughout the substance with which it is mixed. In these passages, we are provided with the basics of second and third-body formation. From Beelzebub’s universally-oriented perspective, the physical body is given with birth, but the second and third bodies must be developed. In a passage that appears later in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, Handbledzoin is described more straightforwardly as the “substance which arises in the common presence of a man from all intentionally made being-efforts.”³³ Following the above description, we can connect the process of conscious labor and intentional suffering and the creation of Handbledzoin

31. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 726-27.

32. *Ibid.*, 727.

33. *Ibid.*, 1200.

to the food or nourishment for the second body. The second or Kesdjan body is the intermediate component of the tripartite construction of the body/soul combination. Once the second body is formed, it can serve as the seat or carrier of the “highest-being body,” or soul. Thus, the description is presented as an almost technical guide on how to begin to create a soul. In portraying and identifying the elements or substances of this intermediate, but accessible world, one can begin to picture how they operate.³⁴

Beelzebub offers that one of the requirements for the sacred Almznoshinoo is a “preliminary preparation.” Before the being dies—or their planetary body dies—some particle of their Handbledzoin is taken and either kept in some type of “surplanetary formation” or it is ingested by specially prepared people. Here, according to the qualities of Handbledzoin, it is blended with the Handbledzoin of their own developed Kesdjan body:

In this way, when the three-brained perfected being foredesigned for this sacrament Almznoshinoo ceases his planetary existence, and his body Kesdjan is separated from his planetary body, then thanks to the first particular property of this being-Hanbledzoin that connection begins to be established about which I have just told you, between the given body Kesdjan and that place where the particle of his Hanbledzoin was preserved beforehand or those beings who intentionally coated this particle in their own bodies Kesdjan.³⁵

The preparation is critical and this is the component that is essential if one is to perform the post-death ceremony correctly, as will be explored further in the discussion of The Last Supper to come. One of the prerequisites, as noted—even for the preparatory part—is that the Kesdjan, or “second body,” must have been formed by the chief, as well as those who participate in the ceremony. Consequently, the reason and being of each individual involved must previously have been developed to a very high level.

34. This may also be connected fruitfully to the discussion of the “barzakh” in Islamic and Sufi discussions. Ibn al-Arabi and others describe *barzakh* as an intermediate world, or passage, between the physical and spiritual worlds. This can also be connected to the world of Imagination (khayal), or “the imaginal.” Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*.

35. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 728.

Beelzebub provides a relatively complex description of this process, made even more difficult by using certain neologisms. Nonetheless, noting some of the highlights sets the stage for making some of the deeper connections to the story of Jesus to come. The core of this sacred process is the establishment of a connection and the passing of a substance from the second body of the person who has died to the second body of those remaining alive on the planet. The formation or materialization of the Kesdjan body can persist only as long as the beings who produce these formations, make this sacred process, and “consciously feed the body Kesdjan with their own sacred ‘Aiesakhaldan’.”³⁶ The preliminary preparations consist of taking a particle of the Handbledzoin of the person to be communicated with and kept in a corresponding planetary formation, or blended in the beings who intend to perform the ritual. Upon the demise of the body, the Kesdjan body separates, but according to the first property, a connection can be made at the place where the Handbledzoin was initially preserved. However, due to the limits of the “trogoautoegocratic process” and the laws of the planet, including gravity, the link made through the Handbledzoin can last only for a limited period of time, that is for the duration of one revolution around the planet’s sun.³⁷

At the conclusion of this section, Beelzebub adds that the ceremony, which enables specially prepared people to establish relations with the Reason of an already formed “independent cosmic unit,” had been produced before and in different periods.³⁸ And, he adds—perhaps in an allusion to the legominism from Christianity—that there existed several legominisms, or authentic teachings, about this process. Though there are resonances with certain teachings found in

36. *Ibid.*, 727.

37. There is much more to say about Gurdjieff’s text presentation of “the common-cosmic Trogoautoegocratic-process,” especially in relation to the “laws of world creation and world maintenance.” For the present, it will have to suffice to note that the “Trogoautoegocratic Process,” is the principle by which, as Bennett sums up, “the permanent harmony of the Universe is assured by the reciprocal feeding of everything that exists.” See Bennett, “Gurdjieff’s *All and Everything*.”

38. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 730.

Buddhism concerning the bardos, as well as the “three bodies” of the Buddha, the discussion and summary of *Almznoshinoo* becomes a potent precursor to the discussion of *Almznoshinoo* in Christianity. In these passages, Gurdjieff begins the disruption and subversion of the reading of the Last Supper to follow. In the mode of the formalists, the extended discussion defamiliarizes *The Last Supper* by describing the process in a different context, and in completely unfamiliar terms, that is, unencumbered by the terms that would be overfamiliar to even a nominally Christian reader.³⁹ Simultaneously, even on the level of what might be described as the literal, the description of *Almznoshinoo* presents a rationale for a communication and exchange that can take place after death, and provides some details concerning the creation of the soul. Gurdjieff aims to purge and then restore, in Bakhtin’s words, “an authentic world and an authentic man,” one that is based on a wider vision of “conscious labor and intentional suffering,” and spiritual transformation. The effort, then, in Bakhtin’s words, can be described as the attempt to disunite the delimiting interpretations of Jesus’s actions and deeds from all that had previously divided and distorted them.

Christianity and *Almznoshinoo*

After the long story about the cause of the corruption and demise of Lamaism, Beelzebub introduces an extended discussion of Christianity which concludes the chapter. In these passages, Gurdjieff overhauls the view of religion by giving alternate explanations about the life of Jesus that go against the doctrinal and institutionalized beliefs as held in the matrix of Christian institutions and thought. He intentionally provokes the reader through the critique of doctrinal views and, at the same time, affirms the authenticity of the original teachings and the possibility of the development of the soul. In these final pages, Beelzebub discusses the teaching of Jesus, the relationship with his disciples, as well as

39. In the work of the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), defamiliarization means to “make strange.” Defamiliarization in literature refers to the ability of poetic language to “make strange” what is typically familiar, or overfamiliar to a reader. See Shklovsky, “Art as Technique.”

the meaning of his crucifixion and resurrection. In this treatment, he—again using Bakhtin’s phrasing—infiltrates the matrix of habitual thought about the doctrinal tradition of, in particular, the Last Supper and the significance of the role of Judas Iscariot. In Beelzebub’s recounting of the life of Jesus and story of the Last Supper, we readily see Gurdjieff’s characteristic method in which he simultaneously decimates a worldview while retaining and reinvigorating the most important particulars of that worldview.

Beelzebub next offers that it may be edifying for Hasein to hear how this sacrament Almznoshinoo was performed with another of the sacred individuals sent “from Above,” Jesus Christ. Beelzebub begins by stating that Jesus Christ, in the last gathering with his disciples, was attempting to transmit “certain cosmic Truths” by means of the sacred Almznoshinoo.⁴⁰ Here all the foregoing discussion of Almznoshinoo impinges upon this explanation, its interpretation, and its reevaluation. Beelzebub begins,

The point is, that when this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ was actualized in the planetary body of a terrestrial three-brained being, and when afterwards he had to be separated from his exterior planetary coating, then just this same sacred process “Almznoshinoo” was also produced on his body Kesdjan by certain terrestrial three-brained beings in order to have the possibility – in view of the violent interruption of his planetary existence – of continuing to communicate with his Divine Reason and of obtaining in this way the information about certain cosmic Truths and certain instructions for the future which he did not finish giving them.

The information concerning this great event was accurately noted by certain participants in the performance of this sacred process and was intentionally related, for a definite purpose, to the ordinary beings around them.⁴¹

Here the significance and meaning of the Almznoshinoo is transferred to the understanding of the Last Supper. However, unlike the Tibetan lamas, this group of twelve disciples had sufficient time before the death of their teacher to

40. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 735.

41. *Ibid.*

prepare for the ceremony Almznoshinoo. Since Jesus had not finished providing his teaching, the aim was to continue to communicate with his “Divine Reason” and obtain critical information from him after the death of his physical body. In this sense, the story about the sacred process of Almznoshinoo was accurately related to others and for a definite purpose: to transmit certain cosmic realities about the possibility of human transformation to future generations.

In a destructive mode, Gurdjieff critiques the common version of the story of Judas and the general folly of the inheritors of the traditions concerning Jesus. Beelzebub continues with a derisive summation of the “absurdities” told about the figure of Jesus. He also mocks the “fairy tales” spread by the learned beings of new format and adds that they were motivated by a particular ailment called “Ekbarzerbazia,” and the inherent need “to-lead-into-error-beings-around-them-similar-to-themselves.” Beelzebub then describes how the story of Jesus which circulated among the three-brained beings of the unfortunate planet by “learned beings” was distorted:

then they “inserted” for transmission to subsequent generations, in most of the notes and expressions of those stories of the witnesses about this sacred process, such “absurdities” that in addition to this indubitable information, that Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross, and that after the crucifixion he was buried, they also proved just as convincingly that after His crucifixion and burial, Jesus Christ was resurrected and continued to exist among them and to teach this and that, and only afterwards did He raise Himself with His planetary body to Heaven.⁴²

Here, Gurdjieff presents one of the first of several challenges to the received view of Christ. Beelzebub first condemns the insertion of fairy tales by so-called learned beings into the records of the witnesses about this process of Almznoshinoo. He then affirms that Jesus was crucified on a cross and was buried. Where he diverges with the conventional story about Jesus is on the resurrection of the physical body. Beelzebub notes that “the learned beings”

42. *Ibid.*, *All and Everything*, 735–36.

also proved, “just as convincingly,” and added to these stories, that Jesus was resurrected among them, taught, and later returned with his physical body to Heaven. Here he characterizes the familiar summation of the life of Jesus—at least with regard to the physical resurrection—as the result of the type of creative fantasy or “criminal wisecracking” typical to humans under the influence of Kundabuffer.

One of the results of the wisecracking about the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ by later interpreters is that the impulse of doubt was engendered in the subsequent generations of those who heard these teachings:

The result of this kind of, in the objective sense, “criminal wisecracking” of theirs, was that in the beings of subsequent generations, genuine faith in all this Divine and uniquely accomplished teaching of salvation of the All-Loving Jesus Christ was totally destroyed.

These absurdities which were written down, began gradually to engender in the presences of certain of the beings of subsequent generations the impulse of doubt, not only concerning what I have just said, but also doubt relating in general to all the real information and accurate instructions and explanations of this Sacred Individual intentionally actualized among them from Above.⁴³

In this passage, Beelzebub offers a dual-edged critique. On the one hand, he condemns the “wisecracking” of those who received and distorted these once-beneficent teachings. On the other, he affirms the “Divine” and unique nature of the teaching of Christ and affirms the “all-loving” character of Jesus as a sacred individual.

Beelzebub next reminds Hassein that the doubt engendered in subsequent generations was “crystallized” and became an “inalienable part of their common presences,” resulting in the loss of faith. However, he adds that they nonetheless retained, though muted, an “instinctive sensing of cosmic truths”:

they gradually acquired from this automatic crystallizing, data for a more or less correct instinctive sensing of certain cosmic truths, as for instance, concerning the indubitable truth, that if the process of the sacred Rascoorno occurs to any being, or as they say “if someone dies” and is moreover buried, then this being will never exist again, nor furthermore will he ever speak or teach again.

43. *Ibid.*, 736.

And so, those of these unfortunates, in whom in short there still continued to proceed, very slightly, the functioning of being-mentation according to the law of sane logic, and who had not at all accepted such illogical and unusual incoherencies, ultimately lost all faith in any Truth whatsoever, really given and explained by this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

Here Beelzebub reasserts his critique of the theological assertion that the physical body is resurrected from another angle. Beelzebub remarks that through “sane logical mentation,” the following generations began to doubt that after the “sacred Rascooarno,” or physical death, a person would be able to speak or teach again. Nonetheless, Gurdjieff also affirms that it is perfectly rational to believe that, once someone has died, it is impossible to speak or teach again. Gurdjieff, while affirming the existence of Christ, simultaneously criticizes the most basic formulation of the life of Christ that is still generally accepted: the death and resurrection of Christ in his physical, bodily form. Interestingly, this so-called “indubitable truth” about speaking or teaching is at odds with the thread of the discussion about Handbledzoin and the Almznoshinoo ceremony. Here it is interesting to reflect on the significance in Buddhism of the view of the *dharmakaya*, the second of Buddha’s three bodies. This second body, which lives after death, is specifically called the “teaching body.”⁴⁵ Despite the indication that one cannot teach or speak after death, Beelzebub, generally affirms that one of the purposes of Almznoshinoo is that communication can take place after death, though that communication does not, or need not, take place through the physical body. Rather, the focus shifts to the communication that takes place through the second, or Kesdjan-bodies of the individuals involved. In order to explain this further, Beelzebub continues the discussion of Almznoshinoo in relation to the story of the “death and resurrection of Christ.”

44. Ibid.

45. “The Dharma body is the Buddha that is everlasting. Mahayana Buddhists later began to call the Dharmakaya *Vairochana*, the ontological Buddha, the soul of the Buddha, the spirit of the Buddha, the true Buddha, the ground of all being, the ground of enlightenment. Finally, Dharmakaya became equivalent to suchness, nirvana, and Tathagatagarbha (‘the womb of the tathagata’).” Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, 158.

Literal and Allegorical Modes of Interpretation

Next, Beelzebub attempts to explain to Hassein the real meaning of the “Lord’s Supper.” He explains that, though there have been many distortions of the story of the life of Jesus, a record of his words and actions remain. The purpose of this sacred event, mirroring much of what was said regarding Almznoshinoo in Tibet, was for the disciples of Jesus to prepare to communicate with the Kesdjan, or higher being-body, of Jesus after his physical death. As Beelzebub notes, because of his impending death, Jesus was unable to complete the teaching for his twelve specially trained disciples. As a result, Jesus resolved to perform the special sacred ceremony of Almznoshinoo in order to communicate the remainder of his teaching after his death. As we learned in the description of Almznoshinoo, those who perform the ceremony must have developed their own Kesdjan bodies. After this necessary preparation, they would then be able to communicate with their teacher through the blood, or Handbledzoin, of his Kesdjan body.

As is repeatedly made clear in Beelzebub’s explanations, the critique is directed toward a literal understanding and interpretation of “The Last Supper.” Gurdjieff here does not seem to be concerned with traditional Christian exegesis, though he may have been familiar with it.⁴⁶ Rather, his focus seems to be the more conventional habit of mind that interprets simplistically, and passively, the meaning and significance of genuine legominisms. Beelzebub remarks that humans, “accept blindly, literally, and word for word, entirely without any being-logical mentation, all these ‘fantastic absurdities’ which reached them.”⁴⁷ Especially damaging is the propensity to take only at face value the sacred teachings and stories originally written in a special way meant to preserve their

46. Origen of Alexandria (c. 184–c. 253) proposed three modes of interpretation: literal, moral, and allegorical—with the allegorical, or spiritual, regarded as the highest. Interestingly, some of his writings were believed to have been compiled by Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen in Origen’s *Philokalia*. The continuing Christian hermeneutic tradition expanded this to four modes, including the mystical (or anagogical).

47. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 737.

potency and meaning. Even though the basic story about the Almnoshinoo ceremony has been retained, it has been interpreted without reference to the context, or the way that words or ideas were understood and used at that specific time, and in that circumstance. As a result, no significance is given to the possibility of any inner or metaphorical meaning of the story. Consequently, the unfortunate humans retain “a kind of special peculiar ‘faith’,” out of alignment from the original teaching or its intent.⁴⁸

Distortions notwithstanding, Beelzebub adds that the Gospels retain some accurate statements and indications:

It is interesting to notice that even in this totality noted “from-bits-here-and-there,” which your favorites call the Holy Writ, there are many precise words and even whole phrases, uttered at that “Lord’s Supper” by the Saint Jesus Christ Himself, as well as by those directly initiated by Him who in this same Holy Script are called “disciples” or “apostles,” and which words and phrases your favorites, particularly the contemporary ones, also understand, as always and everything, only “literally,” without any awareness of the inner meaning put into them.⁴⁹

It is striking that though the “Holy Writ,” or Gospels, include teachings drawn from different sources, they are said to retain an accurate transcription of some of the words and phrases uttered by Jesus and his apostles.⁵⁰ Yet what remains is understood in an external, or literal form, without an awareness of their “inner meaning.” Beelzebub next provides a reason for the promulgation of the literal understanding of The Last Supper:

And such a nonsensical “literal” understanding proceeds in them, of course, always owing to the fact that they have entirely ceased to produce in their common presences Partkdolg-duty, which should be crystallized by being-efforts, which in their turn, alone crystallize in the three-brained beings data for the capacity of genuine being-pondering.⁵¹

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. In a talk on the “astral body,” Gurdjieff also remarks that the second body is, in relation to the physical body, what is called the soul. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 215.

51. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 738.

Beelzebub here adds an important point to the discussion of being-Partkdolg-duty:⁵² the ability to ponder *with being* is the result of conscious labor and intentional suffering. If a three-brained being is engaged and able to manifest genuine being-pondering, then, according to Beelzebub, they would have the capability to understand the story of Jesus and the process of Almznoshinoo correctly.

In the next paragraphs, Beelzebub elaborates further upon the reason and results of automatic and literal thinking, and the special mode of the transmission of sacred texts:

That is why, my boy, in the given case also they could not ponder at least only about the fact that, when this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ was actualized among them and when this same existing Holy Writ of theirs was compiled, so many definite words were not used by beings similar to these compilers as are used at the present time.

They do not consider that at that period “being-mentation” among the beings of this planet was still nearer to that normal mentation, which in general is proper to be present among three-brained beings, and that at that time the transmission of ideas and thoughts was in consequence still what is called “Podobnisirnian,” or, as it is still otherwise said “allegorical.”⁵³

Here we are given a view that there were many specially defined words used by the compilers of these sacred texts concerning the life of Jesus that are no longer used. Moreover, the “being-mentation,” which might be understood as thought functioning in conjunction with feeling, or being, of the people of that time was very different from the current time. And, finally, a special mode of transmission of ideas and thoughts was used that is called Podobnisirnian, or allegorical.⁵⁴

In the preceding passages, Gurdjieff provides a critique along two trajectories: the first is a critique of those who followed in the centuries after Jesus’s death and interpreted the scriptures literally, and according to their own views, or added to

52. “Being-Partkdolg-duty” can be literally translated as “being-duty-duty-duty”: *Partk* means duty in Armenian; *Dolg* means duty in Russian. The repetition serves to reinforce the sense of duty, or obligation, in relation to being.

53. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 738.

54. *Podobni*, in Russian [подобный] means “like/similar.”

them teachings from other sources. The other, is a critique of the formalized, doctrinal view of Jesus that became instituted as a form of ideology, and which reinforces a particular view of Jesus, his life, death, and teachings. These early interpretations became dominant in official discourse, as articulated by the early Church councils, and were transmitted and further diluted in the popularized view of Jesus.⁵⁵

The remedy for this situation, at least preliminarily, is offered in the critique. Gurdjieff's text first works to disunite and destroy the things falsely brought into proximity, chiefly through theological and legal forms and formulations.⁵⁶ He then attempts, in a reconstructive mode, to rejoin ideas and things to their authentic origin and intent. One of the remedies in this process is the renewal of conscious labor and intentional suffering. In this chapter, and in other instances, we see that conscious labor and intentional suffering is a prerequisite to "being-logical confrontation," and the capacity for "being-pondering."⁵⁷ We can also add to this series the capacity for contemplation, which, in another passage in the book, is described as "the state in which alone the truths indicated in the detailedly genuine religious teachings can be understood."⁵⁸ The ability to consider and interpret events and teachings correctly is dependent upon one's state. Without conscious labor and intentional suffering, human mentation operates automatically and interprets stories or events only through their external, or surface, meaning. When there is a balance and communication among the three centers—body, thought, and feeling—proper being-mentation⁵⁹ is possible, as is the understanding of stories and events transmitted in an

55. This is perhaps most notably found in the Nicene Creed, established in 325 CE, which is shared and repeated in most Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican), and provides the doctrinal statements of belief about the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

56. This method reflects the aim of the "First Series," of Gurdjieff's writings: "To destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world." Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, v.

57. *Ibid.*, 737, 738.

58. *Ibid.*, 1010.

59. In a later passage, Beelzebub suggests that "active mentation" is: "actualized exclusively only with the equal-degree functionings of all his three localizations of the results spiritualized in his presence, called 'thinking-center,' 'feeling-center,' and 'moving-motor-center.'" *Ibid.*, 1172.

allegorical mode (Podobnisirnian). In Beelzebub's universal frame, the ability to understand the meaning of stories and events transmitted in an allegorical mode should be proper to all three-centered beings, no matter where they arise.

Deliteralizing Consciousness and the Role of the Emotions

Following the destructive aim in *Beelzebub's Tales*, Gurdjieff critiques the excessive literalism imposed by centripetal, homogenizing, and hierarchical modes of speaking and reading. In the process, Gurdjieff provides a renewed view of the soul and soul-making. Psychoanalyst James Hillman, in writing about myth and story, provides a perspective on this process in psychological terms, arguing that "Soul-making goes hand in hand with deliteralizing consciousness and restoring its connection to mythic and metaphorical thought patterns."⁶⁰ Hillman calls literalism a sickness, adding that "whenever we are caught in a literal view, a literal belief, a literal statement, we have lost the imaginative metaphorical perspective to ourselves and our world."⁶¹ Reflecting this view, *Beelzebub's Tales* offers the critique that the sickness of our contemporary age is literalism. In a psychological mode, Hillman offers that the proper aim of individuation should be the deliteralization of consciousness. *Beelzebub's Tales*, with its emphasis on the creation of the soul, aims first—again using Bakhtin's language—to destroy the ideational stratum that supports the literal understanding of religious teachings. *Beelzebub's Tales* works—through its challenging prose, neologisms, and the whole range of retelling and reframing of the legominisms from the past—to deliteralize consciousness and to restore a connection with the "imaginative metaphorical perspective." In relation to Christianity in particular, Gurdjieff attempts to restore and reinstate a view of the imaginative, allegorical perspective that is offered in the discussion of The Last Supper. From this perspective, we are stuck in a literal orientation, where words and ideas lack the depth and dimension that are otherwise

60. Hillman, "A Note on Story," 45.

61. *Ibid.*

made accessible through conscious labor and intentional suffering (and the acquisition of handbledzoin in the process). In the next passages of *Beelzebub's Tales*, Beelzebub describes further the results of automatic, literal thinking. In the analysis, Gurdjieff provides a brief, but meaningful comment on the role of feelings in the process of genuine “being-pondering.”

In the next segment of the story of Christianity, there is an explanation of automatic thinking and its results, one of the critical explanations regarding the literalism of Christianity. First, allegorical thinking is contrasted with the disunified process of mentation that every human being now possesses:

In other words, in order to explain to themselves, or to any others, some act or other, the three-brained beings of the planet Earth then referred to the understanding of similar acts which had already formerly occurred among them.

But, meanwhile, this also now proceeds in them according to the principle called “Chainonizironness.”⁶²

The beings of earlier times created texts in a way that allowed others to understand actions according to other, similar acts. In contrast, currently a deficient form of thinking operates according to the principle of “Chainonizironness.” This root of this neologism can be related to automatic thinking through “chain,” or *chainon* in French, meaning “link.” Like links in a chain, words and ideas are automatically associated together in the unending flow of thoughts. Rather than containing any substantive inner meaning, or reference to inner experience, they are linked only by their immediate, external significance.

In a striking, but brief, passage, Beelzebub mentions one of the reasons for this dissipation in human mentation:

And this first proceeded there because, thanks as always to the same abnormally established conditions of ordinary existence, their being-mentation began to proceed without any participation of the functioning of their what are called “localizations of feeling,” or according to their terminology “feeling center,” chiefly in consequence of which this mentation of theirs finally became automatized.

62. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 738.

The unusual conditions of life have generated a being-mentation which proceeds without the participation of the feelings. The participation of “the feeling center” is, as noted in other passages, essential for the fulfillment of being-duty.

The importance and potential role of feeling becomes, here, central to the critique of culture and institutions, including Christianity. In the first part, they are a necessary element in a being-mentation capable of understanding the implications and indications of the allegorically coded texts that have come down to us in the form of legominisms. In an early talk on “energy accumulators,” Ouspensky records Gurdjieff remarking upon the importance of the emotional center in the apprehension of new knowledge:

The emotional center is an apparatus much more subtle than the intellectual center, particularly if we take into consideration the fact that in the whole of the intellectual center the only part that works is the formatory apparatus and that many things are quite inaccessible to the intellectual center. If anyone desires to know and to understand more than he actually knows and understands, he must remember that this new knowledge and this new understanding will come through the emotional center and not through the intellectual center.⁶³

This inversion and prioritization of emotion, or feeling, before intellect is noteworthy, since knowledge is typically thought of as the purview of the intellect. The “formatory apparatus” is the aspect of associative thinking that occurs mechanically in the mind, and is viewed as a necessary, but lower-level function. In general, people often take the associative thinking that occurs in them as the intellect. And, while the higher intellectual center is essential, it is the emotional center that provides the force and intensity required to understand new knowledge and attain a new understanding. Hence, the restoration of the feelings and their importance is critical to Gurdjieff’s revised understanding of genuine legominisms such as those found in the teaching of Jesus, and also the whole enterprise of soul-making that is addressed throughout *Beelzebub’s Tales*.

Of significant import here is the role of emotions in understanding ideas and information allegorically. From this perspective, “the feeling center,” balanced

63. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 235–6.

and fully integrated with the other centers, is what enables the appropriate apprehension of higher truths, and for humans to understand their place and position of things in the world, including themselves. J.G. Bennett emphasizes the importance of feelings in spiritual transformation: “It is feeling that can be transformed into being. Our feelings are capable of going beyond anything that knowledge can give us. Feelings reach the world of being.”⁶⁴ Bennett emphasizes the importance of feelings as a means of perception, and as a way to apprehend qualities or attributes, as well as the world not visible to us. In relation to The Lord’s Supper, we are given the view that it is with and through the feeling center—the source of the third force—that we can apprehend the sense and significance of the ceremony.⁶⁵ This view is also indicated and reinforced by the notion that communication is made possible in the ceremony between one Kesdjan body and another. The images that Gurdjieff evokes in the explanation and emphasis on Kesdjan direct the reader toward a view of the world of being as tangible and real.

Beelzebub goes on to describe how thought is reduced to an automaticity that produces a peculiar form of mentation:

And hence, during all this time, in order to have the possibility of even approximately making clear to themselves or explaining anything to anyone, they were themselves automatically compelled and continue to be compelled to invent very many almost nonsignificant names for things and also words for ideas, great and small; and therefore the process of their mentation began little by little to proceed, as I have already said, according to the principle “Chainonizironness.”

And it is just with this mentation of theirs that your contemporary favorites try to decipher and to understand a text written still in the “Similnisirnian” manner for the mentation of beings, contemporary with the Divine Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

64. Bennett, *Deeper Man*, 19.

65. In Chapter 17, “The Arch-Absurd,” regarding, “the place of concentration and source for the further manifestation of the third holy force of the sacred Triamazikamno, namely, the Holy-Reconciling,” Beelzebub remarks: “It is interesting to notice that most of the separate parts of this being-brain are localized in them, just in that place of their planetary body where such a normal being-brain should be, namely, in the region of their breast, and the totality of these nerve-nodes in their breast, they call the ‘Solar Plexus.’” Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 147.

66. *Ibid.*, 738–39.

Without the participation of feeling, automatic thinking predominates. Automatic thinking does not have the depth or dynamism to decipher the story of Jesus as it was written, nor its inner significance. In this passage he employs the word “Similnisirnian” to describe this special rendering of a text to encapsulate and convey the higher meanings contained within. The reference to Similnisirnian, in the root, may refer to the notion of a similitude—something that can compare to something else. This is also linked to the notion of Podobnisirnian, or allegorical thinking that is required for the interpretation of texts written in this special way.⁶⁷ In a discussion of symbols and symbolic language, J.G. Bennett offers that “symbols can convey an unlimited range of meanings, and differ thereby from signs that can have only one meaning. Signs belong to the realms of science and philosophy whereas symbols belong to the realm of consciousness and being.”⁶⁸ Here we can connect Bennett’s presentation of the symbolic with texts written in the Similnisirnian manner. By definition, then, these texts are multivalent, dialogical, and are thereby opened and accessed through an allegorical interpretative mode.

While the meaning of the events is not fully explicated in these passages, the reader is provided with some important indications. In making the distinction between the preparation for the ceremony and the ceremony itself, the significance and interpretation of the events of Jesus’s life are cleaved apart. If we are to properly understand the inner meanings, then we must go beyond both the inherited tradition and our own automatic thinking to engage with the text—and the liturgy—in a different way. The first indications are given when making connections to the sacred Almnoshinoo that was presented in the discussion of Tibet. In this frame, the Lord’s Supper is in fact the preparation

67. The 1992 edition of *Beelzebub’s Tales* changes “Podobnisirnian manner” to “imagonisirnian manner,” which suggests another possible indication of “image” or, even, imaginal. This connection to image, allegory, and art can be connected back to Gurdjieff’s earlier discussions of legominisms and art in Chapter 30.

68. Bennett, *Concerning Subud*, 154.

for the more important exchange or communication that becomes possible after the death of Jesus. The implied critique is that the preparatory portion of the ceremony has been misunderstood and even conflated with what comes after death. What has traditionally been theologically emphasized and prioritized is the resurrection of Jesus's physical body. The interpretations and ceremonies built up around this view are reinforced in the authoritative texts or "Holy Writ" that comprise much of Christian teachings. This is where the most significant break with the original interpretation on the physical resurrection occurs, and where Gurdjieff pushes the reader to reappraise their own thinking about the meaning and significance of Jesus, his teachings, and their own relationship to the Eucharist—or the reenactment of the Last Supper.

Though only partially explained, we can identify two potential purposes of *Almznoshinoo*. The first is the communication or exchange between the one who has passed and those who remain alive. The second is the aid that those remaining may provide to the one who has passed in continuing the process of completing or coating the soul, or highest-being body. And, importantly, all who participate in the process must already have the second being-body. While this restricts the overdetermined interpretations of the Last Supper, it makes other interpretations and emphases possible. This may include, for example, a more dynamic and participatory mode of engaging with the texts of Christianity, and the Eucharist. Even if one only conditionally considers—or even rejects—Gurdjieff's pronouncements concerning the possibility of a physical resurrection, the critique of the literalization of both the ceremony and our consciousness remains potent. In part, the force lies in the reorientation from an outward-looking or externalized view of the meaning and significance of The Last Supper—and the entrapments that come with it—and towards spiritual transformation. In the image of the intermediate and accessible realm of Kesdjan creation, he attempts to reinstate a more immediate and urgent view of the transformative potential of the Eucharist on the level of being in the present.

A Reconsideration of Judas

Building on the prior discussions, the final segment of the chapter presents a revision of the importance of Judas Iscariot in the story of Jesus. Of significance in these passages is the gesture of compassion that Beelzebub provides in the reinterpretation of Judas. Here, I propose, one can connect the reinstatement of “being-feeling” in Beelzebub’s interpretation, made more accessible with a more generative and—in Gurdjieff’s terms—practical understanding of the Last Supper. Beelzebub addresses Hassein with the introductory phrase, “And so, my boy” that characteristically denotes a shift in focus in the text, and proceeds to decry the travesty perpetrated against the disciple Judas. Beelzebub again critiques the accepted wisdom regarding the Gospels that have made their way to the current period noting this time that there is everything in them except “reality and truth.” He describes Judas as the “chief, most reasonable and most devoted of all beings, directly initiated by this Sacred Individual.”⁶⁹ Yet, due to the lack of anything accurate in the “Holy Writ,” one would inevitably draw the conclusion that Judas was “the basest of beings conceivable, and that he was a conscienceless, double-faced, treacherous traitor.”⁷⁰ According to the previous analysis, we can understand that the information found in the Gospels has been interpreted automatically, according to the principle “Chainonizironness,” rather than “Podobnisirnian,” or allegorically, and thus without engaging the feelings.

With a sense of compassion towards Judas, Beelzebub attributes the continuing existence of the teachings of Jesus for the past twenty centuries to the role that Judas played:

But in fact, this Judas was not only the most faithful and devoted of all the near followers of Jesus Christ, but also, only thanks to his Reason and presence of mind all the acts of this Sacred Individual could form that result, which if it did not serve as the basis for the total destruction of the consequences of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer in these unfortunate three-brained beings, yet it was nevertheless, during

69. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 739.

70. *Ibid.*

twenty centuries the source of nourishment and inspiration for the majority of them in their desolate existence and made it at least a little endurable.⁷¹

He goes on to say that it should be well understood by anyone who ponders reasonably that any of the disciples of Jesus would have attained a very high level of Reason. All twelve apostles were beings who were chosen and specially educated by Jesus personally, and Judas Iscariot was one of the more important and advanced of them.

In the frame of *Almznoshinoo*, we understand that Jesus gathered the twelve disciples around him in order to complete the transmission of his teaching. Before Jesus could completely explain certain cosmic truths to his disciples, he was forced by conditions to allow “the cessation of his planetary existence to be accomplished,” and become crucified.⁷² Consequently, he decided along with the twelve specially selected beings, to complete the transmission of the truths after his death by the process known as *Almznoshinoo*. As noted as a requirement in the tale of the Tibetans, each one of the disciples had acquired a second-being or *Kesdjan* body. When the group was surrounded by guards, it looked as though they would not be able to finish the preparatory part of the process of *Almznoshinoo*. It was Judas who then took it upon himself to make the necessary arrangements and thereby delay the capture of Jesus so that they could finalize the necessary preparations for the ceremony:

And it was just here that this Judas, now a Saint and formerly the inseparable and devoted helper of Jesus Christ and who is “hated” and “cursed” owing to the naive nonreasonableness of the peculiar three-brained beings of your planet, manifested himself and rendered his great objective service for which terrestrial three-brained beings of all subsequent generations should be grateful.

This wise, onerous, and disinterestedly devoted manifestation taken upon himself consisted in this, that while in a state of desperation on ascertaining that it was impossible to fulfill the required preliminary procedure for the actualization of the sacred *Almznoshinoo*, this Judas, now a Saint, leaped from his place and hurriedly said:

71. *Ibid.*, 740.

72. *Ibid.*

“I shall go and do everything in such a way that you should have the possibility of fulfilling this sacred preparation without hindrance, and meanwhile set to work at once.”

Having said this, he approached Jesus Christ and having confidentially spoken with Him a little and received His blessing, hurriedly left.⁷³

Gurdjieff here inverts the story of Judas, who has become the supreme scapegoat of the tradition. The reevaluation of Judas’s role is predicated upon the foregoing discussions of Almnoshinoo and understanding of the preparations that were necessary for the ceremony. For it was he who sacrificed himself so that Jesus would have sufficient time to prepare for the ceremony. In this retelling, it is Judas who sacrificed the most for the final transmission of Jesus’ teaching and its continuation in the sacred ceremony. Beelzebub offers that Judas is even now considered a saint for the exceedingly difficult actions that he took upon himself.

Beelzebub reveals his absolute indignation at this widespread blame put upon Judas and asks, since Jesus is such a “Sacred Individual,” how could he have been so naïve to have not known that there would be such an unworthy person in his presence? Beelzebub, in a personal comment, remarks,

I personally even think that if this Judas was presented in their Holy Writ as a type of this kind, then it may have been for this reason, that it was necessary for someone or other, also belonging to the mentioned types, to belittle in this way, for a certain purpose, the significance of Jesus Christ Himself.

And, namely, He appeared to be so naïve, so unable to feel and see beforehand, in a word, so unperfected that in spite of knowing and existing together with this Judas so long, He failed to sense and be aware that this immediate disciple of His was such a perfidious traitor and that he would sell Him for thirty worthless pieces of silver.⁷⁴

From Beelzebub’s view, an insult to Judas is likewise an indictment of Jesus. Jesus, as a being “sent from Above,” would surely recognize the innate qualities of those around him, especially his closest disciples. Judas is seen as exemplary

73. *Ibid.*, 741.

74. *Ibid.*

for he has been prepared and then volunteers for this special duty and sacrifice. In this sense, Judas stands as a paradigm of conscious labor and intentional suffering, rather than as a scapegoat of the tradition. As Beelzebub has offered throughout *Beelzebub's Tales*, a being that functions properly and in accordance with the requirements of being-Partkdolg-duty develops a special type of reason with a high level of mentation and perception. All messengers, prophets and saints are exemplary in this regard. Thus, as Beelzebub offers, it would be inconceivable for someone directly trained and educated by Jesus to take any action without his knowing about it or understanding the motivation behind it. The implication is that one who has also participated in conscious labor and intentional suffering, developing the capacity for “being-pondering,” would also be able to understand these truths. Perhaps, like the choice of Beelzebub for the narrator of *Beelzebub's Tales*, Gurdjieff has a sense of sympathy for those who have been perceived as outcasts. As Beelzebub has been misunderstood, so has Judas. While there is certainly more to explore in this discussion, the frame fits in with Gurdjieff's view that blame and scapegoating do not accord with the view of the “Divine and uniquely accomplished teaching of salvation of the All-Loving Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵

Conclusion

As I have contended, Gurdjieff attempts in *Beelzebub's Tales* to destroy the ideational strata that propagate and reinforce the literal interpretations of religious teachings while simultaneously rebuilding a new, more immediate picture of the world, the self, and its possibilities. In the chapter “Religion,” the initial introduction of the ceremony of Almznoshinoo in the context of Tibetan Buddhism creates a new allegorical sheath—unencumbered by the overdetermined interpretations and ossified associations inherited from the past—through which the story of Jesus can be understood anew. By introducing The Last Supper through the lens of the sacred ceremony Almznoshinoo,

75. *Ibid.*, 736.

and the explanations of the ceremony according to the second body Kesdjan, Gurdjieff's text undermines and unhinges literalizing readings of the sacred texts and practices of Christianity. In the process, Gurdjieff seeks to deliteralize the awareness and consciousness of the reader. In the restorative mode, through the emphasis on conscious labor and intentional suffering, and the awakening and integration of the feeling center, the capacity to understand and interpret texts is renewed. The aim of *Beelzebub's Tales*, then is to realign and reunite consciousness with metaphorical thought patterns that are made possible through the process of spiritual transformation.

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