



THE SHERBORNE THEME TALKS SERIES - # 1

THE FIRST LIBERATION; FREEDOM FROM LIKE AND DISLIKE

By John G. Bennett - 1972 to 1974

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INTRODUCTION

THE SHERBORNE THEME TALKS SERIES

Themes are more than ideas to be thought about. They are aspects of practical wisdom: how to live. This wisdom can be awakened by making an active contact with our own experience. Observation is not enough and thinking is totally inadequate. The aim we have is to work towards a new practical understanding of life so that we can begin to live differently. The relation of our inner life to the external world, our bodies, other people and nature needs to change. The new life cannot be reduced to a set of rules or commandments which can only dictate behavior. It has to be discovered in action, in the hazards of life; and usually through many small moments when something is revealed to us that we cannot doubt.

John G. Bennett was a master at conducting theme meetings and could draw out the most profound lessons from the most faltering of contributions. He helped people to see for themselves the practical core of the spiritual path and avoid the twin evils of doubt and philosophizing.

The Sherborne Theme Talks Series #1 – The First Liberation; Freedom from Like and Dislike

The Sherborne Theme Talks Series are taken from tape recordings of meetings at Sherborne House between 1972 and 1974. We are able to publish only a small selection from the hundreds of tapes.

JOHN G. BENNETT

Distinguished scientist, mathematician and Linguist I, John Godolphin Bennett was head of Military Intelligence in Turkey in 1920, and his early contact with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky led to intensive work with both men over a long period.

His studies of Asiatic languages and his extensive travelling in Islamic countries brought him into communication with many of the world's spiritual leaders

Building on the ideas he had assimilated he gave up his purely scientific work and became Director of the Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences, and set up the five-year experiment in the International Academy for Continuous Education at Sherborne in Gloucestershire, where adults from all parts of the world gathered to learn and live the techniques for the Transformation of Man.

Mr. Bennett died in 1974 and Sherborne House has been sold. But his work lives on in the first of the psychokinetic communities in which he saw man's future, at Claymont Court, Charles Town, West Virginia, USA; in the many communities set up by groups of ex pupils of Sherborne: in the hearts and work of those who knew him: and in the living ideas outlined in his books.

THE THEMATIC TECHNIQUE

When Mr. Bennett began working with themes at Sherborne House he gave the introduction reproduced below. Reading the presentation and discussion of themes, without having worked on them oneself, can create the illusion of understanding. It is important that the reader should try to grasp and take seriously what Mr. Bennett says about the thematic technique.

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“The technique of theme consists in this: in persistently and with great determination occupying one's mind with a specific clear notion so that one can penetrate into it in depth. There are various techniques that involve this persistent directing of the mental attention towards one object. There are various kinds of meditation. There is the Zen Koan exercise where the attention is persistently directed towards something incongruous or impossible and because the incongruity and impossibility of the Koan is clear, the mind can be occupied with it with less risk of wandering off into imaginary solutions to the problem. Another kind of persistent occupation of the mind is described in the talks I had with the Shivapuri Baba in Long Pilgrimage. He said; "Think of God alone; put every other thought from your mind. Think only of God and then eventually you will come to the realization of the meaning of life".

The way we shall work with this particular technique, which is one of very great value and which, when combined with the other things that we shall be doing can be very fruitful indeed, is that every Monday morning I will put before you one theme with which you should, as far as possible, occupy your attention during the week, when your attention is not required for the external activities in which you are engaged.

There are subsidiary benefits of this thematic technique. For one thing, you have something positive to put in the place of the idle associations that ordinarily occupy our minds. You have something to which you can turn your attention when you find you are disturbed, irritated. But these are, as I say, subsidiary benefits. The main purpose is to go through the verbal and conceptual level of understanding to a direct perception of the real world to which it belongs. I use the words "real world" because we can look at it in this way: there is a gradient between states of subjective illusion where one is connected with no reality except the immediate transient experience, passing through various states of awakening to contact or full realization of the meaning of life and one's own real being. These gradations do correspond to different worlds. Ordinarily people speak about 'this world' and the 'other world'. But in reality there are more than two worlds, each one so different one from another that all we can know about one world does not prepare us for the experience of the next world.

The next world is not like the popular idea of somewhere we shall enter into after death. It is the next world here and now. It is only closed to us because we have become almost totally conditioned to living in the world of these sense perceptions and the thinking, as we call it that is derived from our sense perceptions. Although this is, in the full sense of the word, an illusory, that is, not even an existing world, nevertheless while we are in these bodies we have to come to terms with it, not merely because it would be awkward for us to disregard the requirements of our bodies, but because we have an obligation to do so. We are not here in these bodies for nothing, simply to escape from them, but to use them for a definite purpose for which this existence was given to us. We cannot learn this purpose nor

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can we fulfill it so long as we are wholly imprisoned in this world; wholly conditioned to it. Some degree of liberation is needed in order to see, first of all, what it is like to orientate oneself in the physical world. The ordinary state of man is like flatland that is, having only flat dimensions. He has no real experience of height and depth, only an illusory experience coming from his emotions and the interaction between his different functions. A real awareness of height and depth is in the sense of a transition from one world to another. This seldom happens to people and when it does happen, they misinterpret it. But we have to set ourselves to be able to add a dimension to our experience, to be able to be aware of the height and depth of experience and not merely of its successiveness and its spread around us.

Therefore, the really important objective in the thematic technique is that it should give us the power to move in depth. For this we have to accept and be convinced that there is depth, that there is more in simple things than meets the eye, or more than can be described in our conceptual language. It is inherent in this, that everything, however simple, has its own dimension of depth, its own significance. As Blake said: "Everything that lives has meaning and needs neither suckling nor weaning". This means we neither have to put anything into it nor have we to extract it out of its environment; it is where it is. This we have, first of all, to be convinced of and then, afterwards, to learn to perceive. As we ourselves live in a flat world, we also see everything around us as flat.

The theme is to run through all the other activities of the week, as something independent of the other activities. Although activities will impinge on one another, and we will doubtless find material in our other activities for enriching our understanding of the theme, and the theme itself will throw light on the other activities, they must be kept independent of one another. The theme is part of the Work in its own right. One important feature of the way of using the thematic technique as I shall do here is that themes will only be given for a limited period of time, that is for one week. This is quite unlike, let us say, the perpetual meditation on the meaning of life that the Shivapuri Baba recommends, as it is quite unlike what a Zen Master would do for a disciple in showing him a Koan exercise or some meditation theme. But it has a special advantage of its own, and that is that it is circumscribed set within limits. What you can get from it, you must get in one week, after that you have only the distilled results of your own efforts. The next theme will then have to occupy your attention to the exclusion of everything else. This principle of circumscription or limitation is one that enables an activity to be a completing cycle that is to correspond to a completing octave. What is open ended, without an end to which it is directed produces certain other kinds of experiences and possibilities, but it does not give the opportunity to carry through to completion.

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You have to set the theme before yourself in this way that from Monday until Friday night is the time that you have got to penetrate into the theme that I shall give you. Then Saturday and Sunday you can either think about it or not, there is no obligation to put it entirely out of your mind, though there is a certain benefit in doing this, so that you will approach the next theme on the following Monday without the momentum of the previous week. So in the five days from the Monday morning to Friday evening, we try to complete the cycle of penetration into a particular theme. I advise you to picture it to yourself in this way: that what you are looking for is really a world that you are not, in your ordinary state, in contact with: a world which is beyond our ordinary state. In our ordinary state we can see and touch things, we can think about them, we can reason with ourselves about them, we can compare our memories. This is not enough.

If we were fresh, wholly natural people, we should be able to move from that into the depth of things but, as it was said in one of the readings we have had recently, man is unable to perceive, to see, to hear or to think anything new after childhood. By the time he reaches seventeen, eighteen, twenty, twenty-one years of age, he becomes closed and he is only a collection of gramophone records. This is a hard thing to accept, but it is really like that, and therefore you cannot accept it yet, but sometime this will begin to really break into you, showing that all your processes are just automatic results of external influences acting on what has already been formed in you, which it is already too late to change. The only hope of escaping from this situation is to be able to penetrate into another world. The situation in this world is as it is. But as it is said in "From the Author", although it is possible to cross over from the stream that leads to nothing into the stream that leads to the "boundless ocean" it is not so easy. It is not enough "just to wish and you cross", for as Gurdjieff said, a long preparation and a great deal of hard work is required. This is what we have set ourselves to undertake here. It is not at all easy for people to understand that the way of life which is dominant in the world leads to nothing at all. The whole of it is now illusion. This is impossible, not merely difficult, but impossible, for people to grasp until they have had experience of looking at it from another world and seeing it how it is. My hope for you all is that during this time you will have gained this vantage point where you will be able to see for yourself and never again lose this understanding. Really, only that can give us the strength and persistence to endure what is necessary, in order to transfer into and establish ourselves in the stream of real life.

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THEME PRESENTATION

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN, I had a vision that had a very powerful effect on my life. It was shortly before I met Gurdjieff in Constantinople. I saw the world as a four dimensional sphere with space and time together. And I saw how this world was expanding, how everything was living in it. But then I saw that inside this there was a dark place where what was left behind, what had not kept up, was lost. I saw also a bright place surrounding this which was occupied by beings who had got ahead of the world; who were free from the world.

It was later that I heard from Gurdjieff the notion of accelerated transformation and the difference between those who can keep up with the evolution of the world, and eventually reach completion; and those who do not keep up, who get left behind; and also those who can go ahead. Later, while studying Buddhism, I came across the phrase of the Buddha "to achieve liberation in this very life". The words "in this very life" made a strong impression on me. I saw what is called Samsara; sometimes called the wheel of existence; is nothing more than this world where everything is carried along, and it is very difficult to escape from it. It is also difficult to get lost and left behind. One has to do certain

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unforgiveable things in order to get into that dark area behind. But it is also very difficult to get ahead.

You must understand that if we have ventured to seek the path of accelerated transformation we are doing something that is very difficult but possible. Of the many thousands of people that I have met in my life, I have been exceptionally lucky in that I have met four or five men and women who have achieved it. This does not mean that this is all or nothing; that you either achieve complete liberation or you are tied to the wheel of Samsara, but you must understand that the aim we set ourselves is to achieve liberation here in this life. This is possible for those who follow a balanced path. It is not possible by any exaggerated or extreme ways. This is why it is called the middle way. No one method should be used exclusively. No one side of our nature should be worked upon more than another. We have to learn to work in a balanced way. This is what we try to come to here.

There are certain things at the beginning one cannot do because they require perceptions that have to be opened; and it is no use saying that this is what ought to be done, or this is the way to achieve such a result, if you are not able even to see what is required. There are many things that cannot be attempted until a changed perception has come. Otherwise it is only words - empty. On the other hand, there are things that we can do here and now. And we must not neglect these while we are preparing ourselves to do others.

I spoke about liberation. This is one way of expressing it. When you look and are able to see this world as it is, you will see that liberation is what we must aim at. This world is not intended for our home. It is the region beyond this world - the region of light. This world that I am talking about is surrounded by an atmosphere, as every concentration is, and in that atmosphere various intermediate states are possible. But the true home of man is in the light world - the lightness that is beyond. You have to remind yourself that you are here with a very great aim that is to set your feet firmly on this path of accelerated transformation. Once your feet are firmly on it you will continue, whatever the difficulties.

I want you to take as a theme of study this week the First Liberation, which is the liberation from like and dislike. Every week we will work at a theme which one is able to look at from many points of view. One is able to think about it and one is able to bring it into relation with our everyday life. So none of these things is theoretical in the sense of an abstraction, which is only to be thought about. Freedom from like and dislike is necessary. It

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is true to say that no other freedom is possible until one has gained this freedom. So long as we are slaves to our likes and dislikes we cannot get any further.

We have in us a very necessary mechanism which is established partly for the purpose of the transformation of energies and partly to overcome the natural inertia that there is in animals. In the animals only the instinctive urges for the most part; food, sex, and curiosity; produce responses. When man is just governed by these mechanisms, he has no freedom of his own. We are so complicated in our construction and there are so many possible outcomes to our responses to different things, that we get the illusion that we have freedom, and that we are somehow directing the course of the activity of our behavior. One of the first and most necessary things in self study is to free oneself from this illusion. The mechanism about which I speak is that of polarity. It exists in all our centers. In our moving centre we have the polarity of active and passive states of the body, activity and repose, the di-urnal cycle, and the cycles in all our actions of tension and relaxation. We have in our instinctive centre the reaction of pleasure and pain, pleasant and unpleasant sensations, and because the moving and instinctive centers are so closely linked to one another, there is an alternation of activity and re-pose in the instinctive centre that is hardly distinguishable from the other. We have in our feeling centre the polarity of like and dislike: attraction and repulsion. We have in our intellectual processes assent and dissent, affirmation and denial. This is the crudest mechanism introduced by nature in order to produce fields of force. It is the primary distinction that is introduced into the existing world.

We, like everything else that exists, are subject to this action of polar forces. We have, as I said before, in us a certain mechanism that is, by its nature, polar. That is what we call the reactional self; reacting simply by desire and aversion, by attraction and repulsion in all the different parts of us. This forms a kind of self in us that enters into action as soon as we are stimulated in some way. As long as we are not stimulated, we simply remain on a mechanical automatic level of existence, just governed by our own habits and by the immediate environmental actions, this is what we call sleep, or mechanical state of existence, automatism, in which we pass a greater part of our lives than we realize. There is no harm in this. Without automatism we could not exist. It is impossible to live. It would be totally uneconomic. In fact, literally it can be said to be impossible, because it would not be possible to concentrate enough energy to do everything consciously. This is not necessary because the greater part of our lives can be lived automatically equally well.

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But the transition to this polar state occurs when something attacks our attention, stimulates us, or we dislike something, or we have a feeling of pain or pleasure, or our curiosity or intellectual activity is stimulated. This mechanism is really provided for the purpose of generating force. It is by keeping the poles of our polar nature apart that we maintain in ourselves a force. When these poles meet this force is dissipated.

The first thing to realize and understand about the study of like and dislike is that it does represent a way of life and an attitude towards life that is virtually absent from the modern world. At times this has been taught as a normal thing for man; let us say by the Buddha, by the stoic philosophers. It is taught in the Bhagavad Gita that a normal man must not be a slave to his likes and dislikes. On the contrary, he must know how to make use of the energies of likes and dislikes, and not allow them to make use of him.

First look at this to see if it is possible to come to a conclusion about it, whether we wish to be free in relation to likes and dislikes. If we wish to be free, there are ways and means for liberation, although it is no use to show you the ways and means if consciously, or more probably unconsciously, you do not wish to be free. One has to ask oneself the question how can we not wish to be free from it? And there is a big, very significant answer to this when one discovers and sees what it is.

Subjection to likes and dislikes really makes people's lives miserable. And some people it makes very miserable. With others it narrows down and constricts their possible responses to the world. In spite of that, there is something in us that clings to these things and which identifies ourselves. When you hear people saying, as if it were a merit, that they do the things that they like and do not do the things that they dislike, or that they know which people they can get along with and which they cannot and how they are able to keep away from people they cannot get along with and consort with the people they can, as if this were a mark of wisdom; what does it mean? It means one's shutting oneself off to a whole lot of possible experiences. In the ordinary mechanical way of life, we say we will go along with the things we approve of and avoid the things we disapprove of. Like and dislike is a kind of guardian, a kind of warden that keeps us in prison. As long as we are daunted by this, we remain in the prison of our own imagination. When we are bold enough to walk through, we see that the warden has no power to stop us and we can go free.

We have to bring this back to ourselves and you will have to look at it and see that you cannot be free from the tendency to take what you can until you can be free from like

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and dislike. This does not mean that like and dislike ceases. Freedom is not the abolition of desires, but the presence in oneself of something which can choose; which is not drawn towards what it likes, or repelled by what it dislikes, but is able to choose impartially when to take, when to refrain from taking. Only it must be very clear to us that this is not something that one does because one is told, or because there is a moral obligation to do it, but because we can see for ourselves the working of the law.

We can study likes and dislikes in terms of attention. Attention in man in a mechanical state simply follows the line of force of his likes and dislikes, his own interests. Just like filings around a magnet, they arrange themselves in the field of force of the magnet. They have no independent position orientation of their own. We have something in us that corresponds to silver, that is not affected by the magnetic field of like and dislike. We have to look and find something in ourselves. That everyone has in him, that is free from like and dislike. It is covered up and crusted over by our habitual reactions, and this in turn has a whole mechanism of justification and explanation. We even lose this power of questioning in ourselves. So automatically it does seem right for us to follow the direction of our likes and dislikes, and we have an inner orientation corresponding to this, instead of having full inward freedom.

One can never emphasize too strongly that nothing is gained by avoidance. Only by exposing oneself can one arrive at anything. If I dislike some situation and I avoid exposing myself to it, I am no longer free and I even throw away the chance of freedom. Let me take one example. We had a musical evening last week put on by one of the groups to sing together something like the songs of a revival meeting. For us in England it seems quite natural. It would never occur to us that this had any sort of derogatory tones overtones or undertones about it whatsoever, but some of you are more acutely aware of this in America. You found this unpleasant and disapproved of it. You absented yourselves thinking "I don't want to take part in this". This is what I call inner slavery. Not only do you not expose yourselves to something you dislike, but you even feel justified and proud that you do not expose yourself to it. You know, there are some people who say, "Ah, I don't like so and so and I keep out of his way". This is the height of folly. If I do not like so and so, that person is the most valuable. If I really do not like him, if I really cannot stand the sight of him, what more valuable person is there for me to expose myself to in order to gain my freedom? If I do not like some sort of activity, what is this approval besides slavery? You must understand, it is not that one must suppress or lose one's critical function. It is exactly the opposite. But

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this must not turn into inner slavery, so that I withdraw myself from what I do not approve of. If I wish to have inner freedom, I must be able to do anything, not only the things that interest me and attract me. I must be able to do anything that I choose to do. The way to be, to real objective living, goes through this door; the door at which we leave behind the likes, the dislikes, and the rest. What do I mean by leaving them behind? I mean by this that there begins to grow in us something which is quite free and untouched. That is the beginning of reality for us.

This is the key to freedom; to learn to set ourselves to disregard one's likes and dislikes, to go through with it. Not looking to the right, when I dislike it, or to the left, when something else attracts me away from it. That you can do from the start. Is something that we owe to our children. Those of you who are parents owe this; that your children should not grow up with this slavery to like and dislike. Remember what I am saying. If you do not from the earliest childhood instill in your children that being subject to like and dislike is slavery, you are depriving them of something that is going to be of much value. I know that I could not have come to what I have come to in myself if my mother had not done this for me. Every mother who does that for her children is really a blessing: a blessed woman.

Every mother or father who gives way to the children's likes or dislikes is a curse to his or her children. That I can tell you with complete confidence from all my own life experiences and what I have seen in others. But it is never too late. This can always be done. You can set yourself to choose not to be a slave to likes and dislikes.

I have always been thankful to my mother for having insisted absolutely and pitilessly on eating everything that was put on the table, whether we liked it or not. We were never allowed to have an attitude of like and dislike towards food. It was equally unpardonable to like food as to dislike it. We simply had to eat what was put in front of us. If some of you have not been brought up with this freedom in relation to like and dislike in front of food, it provides now an opportunity to work. This is a necessary thing and an easy way to work. If I see in front of me something which I dislike, and there are some kinds of food that I find hard to swallow, I say to myself, "This is not freedom. You must eat this". My body tries to reject it. I say, "No, you must swallow it". Even now sometimes I have to reason with my own body and tell it that it has got to swallow something it revolts against. Why? Because nothing is so precious to us as our own freedom. It was for this that we were created. It was to become free beings that we are made such as we are. This is our greatest privilege. This is

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what makes us deserve the name of man. Everything else about us deserves the name of animal.

I have seen people work for years and years and acquire a great deal of strength. Yet they did not gain this inner freedom in relation to their likes and dislikes and were completely caught by this. It is a real tragedy to see that happens. As I look back on my life and all the people I have known in the last fifty years or more since I became interested in this Work, I see that the ones who appreciated it and knew that inner freedom was the most important thing, now have something, so that they can really deserve the name of man. Those who aimed at becoming clever, strong, or able to have domination over other people did not find their inner freedom.

They are in a very sad condition, and it is not easy to come back from this. We must look at it. If I am a slave to anything at all I am not free. This is a barrier to progress or opens us to the possibility of having a terrible distortion. Somebody who works on himself and acquires powers or even control over energies and has not liberated himself from likes and dislikes will be in a really monstrous condition. Everything will be exaggerated for him, and this will not only be an obstacle to progress, but may even cause serious damage. But it is far more likely that through the waste of energy that goes into our likes and dislikes that no progress will be made at all.

People are accustomed to this, and it has become the vein of the world that people are even taught that they should avoid what they dislike and go for what they like; that this is right for man. It is called the right to be happy. But this is not happiness. It is quite true to say we have the right; everyone has the right to reject what they dislike and grasp at what he likes. But if one lives in this way, one is tied to this world. If we push like and dislike too far, we begin to harm others. If I take what I like and in doing so I deprive others, or if I do something I want to do and cause others an excessive amount of trouble by doing that, then I begin to be drawn towards the dark world. Those who have force and power to do what they like and disregard the consequences for other people are what Gurdjieff called Hasnamus. The Hasnamus is precisely the being who finishes up in the dark world.

You may think that what I am talking about now is a matter of faith, that I am asking you to believe something. That is not much good. You cannot get very far believing what other people tell you, and I do not ask you to believe what I tell you. You must learn to see for yourself. Every one of us has got the power of vision to see things as they really are, but

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this power of vision is obscured by all kinds of bad habits of thought. It should be possible for any person who is not a potential Hasnamus to see for himself or herself that if I take more than my share, somebody else has to have less than his share. I must also be able to see that this taking in the end is going to recoil upon me. It is possible for any reasonable person to see that the greater part of the troubles that beset mankind at this time are due to that; that those who have the power to take, take, and they disregard the consequences to those who are not able to. All of us probably feel that this is a wrong thing.

When we really come near this question of freedom something in us revolts entirely against it. I remember very well when I had been doing work which did bring me to the point where I knew and saw that I had the power. I saw that I knew exactly how to do it, so that I could feel exactly what I chose to feel. If I could do that, then I would be responsible for my life, I could no longer blame anything outside myself, because what was outside me could not touch me. Therefore, I had to be the answer. If I was in a bad state, I was able to change it, and if I did not change it, I could not blame anyone else. But I wanted to be able to blame people. I wanted to say that it was not possible that it could have been different. So I think that anyone who comes to have a real taste of what it is like to be free then also understands how strongly something else in us does not wish for it. Someone who says he is quite sure he wants to be free is still very superficial. That person has not yet experienced what is really involved. It is not only that to be free requires a price that one has to pay, but when one is free then one has a new trouble, and that is that a free man is a responsible man. Beneath it all, we do not want to be responsible.

One partial purpose of this exercise is to bring objective meaning into words, not imagination. Another is that we need to know more about like and dislike if we are to make use of this as material for our work. There is a paradox that we should always set ourselves to do what is within our power. One side of the work is to establish confidence in ourselves that we are able to do what we decide to do. For that we have to be cautious and modest and set ourselves things that there is no doubt we do, even if they seem trivial. The great thing is to bring oneself to the point where there is no possible doubt that one can do it. For other purposes this is not the way to work. For other parts of us to develop we have to set ourselves quite boldly and trustfully: to attempt things which are quite beyond our power that we cannot even understand perhaps. In another side of the Work it has to be quite different. We have to learn how not to make any kind of effort and just simply allow things to happen to us. We simple learn not to resist some process which is possible not forcing it,

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not demanding, not pushing ourselves, not making any sacrifices or anything, just allowing things to happen like the seed grows in the ground. These three ways are not the only ways. Because of this, the Work has to be well understood and balanced. One has to know when to do things that are well within our power that we have no excuse about, when it is right to stretch ourselves to do things we know we cannot do, when it is right not to do either of these things, but to be wholly responsive and passive, and allow something to work in us from some other level or some different source. In general, this theme of like and dislike can provide you with very good material for straightforward work and if you want to acquire the kernel of your own "I", you must do this. Gurdjieff said the Buddha taught that the best way of freeing oneself from one's own egoism, from the consequences of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer, is to set oneself to bear the manifestations of others unpleasing to oneself. The other side of the same thing is not always to give oneself to situations that are pleasing to us. There is a certain science in this. It is not a question of forcing oneself all the time to do things one dislikes or depriving oneself of the things one likes. That sets up a wrong kind of force in us, not the way to freedom. With experience and practice after a certain time, you can come to recognize a situation where it is right to act in a certain way in order to be free. You see that you are going to be caught in some situation and you realize that here is an opportunity for acting as a free man. Remember that all kinds of emotional reactions are the same. They are reactions. There is no good or bad in slavery. Slavery is slavery. You have to see for yourself that none of us is better than other people. Exactly the same forces work in everyone. All of us have the same egoism, the same self love. It is hidden in many different ways. One person's self love is hidden by aggressiveness. Another person's self love is hidden by timidity. One person wants to do a great deal. Another wants to avoid trouble. But it is always from the same root. In the end, this is the ultimate freedom: to be finally and totally free from oneself, but that is not the starting point. That is the goal.

THEME OBSERVATIONS

Student: I have a certain dislike about manifestations of people at the breakfast table. I get very annoyed at people who seem to me to take more than they should be taking of bread or jam. It goes further than that, because half the time I found myself disliking myself for being so trivial. Usually there is enough, but I find I am really concerned for most of the

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time I am at breakfast. It is very strange also, because I never really thought that I would be that way about something like that.

J.G.B. Do you remember I spoke about temptation? No one is tempted unless he is working. One who does not set himself a standard higher than his present one is not worth tempting. If he stays as he is, there is no harm to those who are concerned with stopping our development. But when you begin to work on yourself it is different. Then you are tempted, and temptation is necessary. There are always people who just take what they can take. This is your ordinary situation in life, and you did not even notice it. But you become a little more sensitive, because you are setting yourself some standard. Then a quite new opportunity comes. The reward for making an effort, a really good effort, is to be tempted to do something wrong with it. This second opportunity is a very important one. What you have just said is a very good illustration. If you made no effort to be awake and aware, you would not notice these things, or you would be involved in doing the same thing as everyone else. You become more attentive. You notice more and what happens? You fall into a kind of negativity that you would not have expected from yourself; this kind of inner fault finding with people, and you are immediately given the opportunity for seeing something about like and dislike which you would not have seen otherwise.

This is how it works. Every step that we make exposes us to the temptation to spoil it in some way. This is necessary. It has to be like that.

Yes, it is right what you say. The two observations are right. You see yourself criticizing others and you are angry with yourself for this triviality. This anger with yourself is more serious, because it comes from your own egoism; from your automatic thinking that you ought to be better than other people. It seems good to be angry with oneself, but if you look deeper, you see that anger with ourselves is really disappointment that we are not as wonderful as we would like to be.

S: I had an experience where something changed inside me. I put my name on the bulletin board to go to the concert on Wednesday. When I saw which people were signing up for Thursday, I wanted to change my name to that list, so that I could go with them, the people with whom I felt more comfortable. I immediately ran up to my room to get a pen to change the date by my name. On the way up I stopped a moment just to consider whether what I was doing was really what I wanted to do. At that point it seemed that it was unnecessary suffering to put myself in the position of going with people, some of whom I

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did not know at all and some of whom I had a distinct aversion to, should I actually go ahead and go that night. There was another self that really thought it was mechanical suffering to go on a night with people I did not like. At that point I decided that I really wanted to go on the night when I would be most uncomfortable.

J.G.B: What happened when it came to going? Was it as bad as you expected?

S: No, it was not bad at all. By the time I went out that night, I still did not feel particularly comfortable, I still wanted to go the other night, but while I was making the decision I did feel a very strong polarity.

J.G.B: There are two things in this. One is that this freedom is something that has to be bought. It just will not come by us wanting it, by saying "Yes, I want this freedom". You have to make this kind of sacrifice. And when it is a genuine thing, as you have described here, it does not make the like or dislike, or the working of the two opposites disappear at all. For the kind of situation that you describe, where you have a quite strongly established pattern of behavior to put yourself into congenial surroundings and to avoid others, this is a real sacrifice. But yet when it came to it, as you say, it was not so bad. There is something here which is very encouraging, because it is the beginning of something else in you - something which was able to be free in this case.

If you could see how valuable it is, you would begin to want to have this in you, even if it means that amount of suffering. But the interesting thing about the example that you gave was the beginning part, where one part of us argues that this is a stupid thing to do, because it is only mechanical suffering. This is not conscious suffering. This is very characteristic of what Gurdjieff calls the evil inner God of self calming. Usually this God works so cleverly that we never even notice how we are avoiding situations which really have got some work to them, so quickly do we find some reason why we should not do something. This kind of thing that you describe is the way in which one forms in oneself something which is able to be free. This is something which we must understand. What can be free is that which can occupy a position between like and dislike, so that instead of there being two states of like and dislike, there are three states; like, dislike, and freedom. These form a triangle, or a triad. When you really understand what it is that I am now talking about you understand a great deal that can be achieved with this Work. This is why it is not a question of suppressing like and dislike, because if this twofold action - pleasure, pain, or enjoyment and suffering - is strong enough, but the third one - the one which is able to be

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free - can also be strong. In general people who make progress in this Work, and have the possibility of going far in it, have strong feelings, strong likes and dislikes, strong urges, strong enjoyment and acute suffering.

They know the difference between really making demands on their bodies and indulging their bodies. When they have these kinds of strong forces working on them, the third force, the force of their own 'I' where they can be free, also can be strong. It is very far from being a question of suppressing these things. They have to play in us. They have to produce this tension in us. We have to do this particular trick which is described in the chapter on the organization of man's existence by Ashiata Shiemash, that you have to consciously strengthen the force of non-desires. * This is the way to become free. Otherwise one is entirely a slave to one's desires. It never says that desires must be eliminated or suppressed, but that the strength of non desires must be increased, so that non desires can be stronger than desires. Then there can be freedom.

*(*All and Everything: Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson, G.I. Gurdjieff, pub. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1950),*

S: I dislike all the time we spend at hard physical work, which seems to take time from lectures, which I enjoy. But I get so tired when I do practical work that I sleep during meditations and lectures. This annoys me and I wake up and say, "Did I miss an awful lot?" It comes from being so tired, and I am sure that I annoy people because I slack at practical work and I snore through lectures and things. I quite like gardening. I think to say more would upset people too much.

J.G.B. Yes, this is good. I am glad somebody has spoken about this, because this does bring us in of front of the place of like and dislike in our work. When I spoke about this at the beginning, I said freedom from like and dislike is a real freedom and it is important to have a taste of it. You say you dislike practical work, but you like lectures, and that is that.

This attitude towards like and dislike overlooks what we are after here. You are a good example because you do give way to your likes and dislikes. You do not do your share of the practical work. This may be very beneficial for other people, because you create all kinds of situations of like and dislike for them. There is one aphorism from Gurdjieff's study house which I chose to put in my book on Gurdjieff; "Remember you came here to struggle with yourself, only with yourself, and therefore thank everyone who affords such

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opportunities". So many people have to be thankful to you, and you have to be thankful to many people.

Our likes and dislikes are the most elementary means that we have for that part of the Work which consists of struggle with oneself. I said to one group today that there are different kinds of work. There is work requiring an effort of attention where the difficulty is to have enough energy to maintain a state of attention, to maintain a quality of work or to maintain something that one wants to be doing well in order to be able to make just that effort or super effort. That is one clear way in which we can produce an action in ourselves, and it is the way most people ordinarily understand it. When they say "the Work", they think of it primarily as an effort one makes because one wants to achieve an end. If a student wants to pass an exam, he has to make an effort. He has to sacrifice time. He has to give his time. He has to give his attention in order to become proficient in the particular skills or tricks required to be successful. There is quite a different kind of work involved in meditation. It has nothing at all in common with that. No effort is required, but it is something that is no less difficult, because it is not against anything. It just consists in letting go and trusting oneself to the force that will draw us towards a deeper state of consciousness.

This thing about like and dislike is not the same as effort. Some of you have seen this. It is much closer to decision. There is the saying, "Grasp the nettle and it won't sting you". This grasping the nettle cannot be called effort and it cannot be called surrendering oneself to a higher power, but it is a very real thing.

You say "I will do this which I am perfectly capable of doing, which doesn't involve effort, but it is simply that I am sure I dislike it". You have invented this theory for yourself that it exhausts you. You are a strong healthy young woman. There is no reason why you should not do it. We do of course invent reasons why we should not do what we dislike. But leaving this aside, the real nature of this work is when we struggle with ourselves. We must understand that this is a different sort of thing from effort. It is not really an effort to do what one dislikes unless there is something difficult. Then it is the same whether one likes it or dislikes it. The effort is not dependent upon that. Sometimes there is less effort required, because our attention is more easily on something we dislike. There is a saying in Gurdjieff's "*Meetings with Remarkable Men*"* which he ascribes to his father. It goes, "It's only heavy until you get it on your shoulder".

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*(*Meetings with Remarkable Men, G.I. Gurdjieff, pub. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1963).*

S. But it is not merely that it exhausts me. It is so time consuming and I know how it makes my attitude towards my children when I get overtired. I came here to hear you talk about the Work, not to go out and freeze.

J.G.B. No. It will keep you in a state of imagination. No one ever got an inch nearer heaven through sermons. No one ever got an inch nearer wisdom through listening to lectures. It is not that. One only gets somewhere by what one does. You know what Gurdjieff calls the whole secret; the means devised by our Creator and given to us to attain higher bodies, to reach freedom from the consequences of the organ Kundabuffer, to arrive ultimately at union with the source of our being; is conscious labour and intentional suffering. I do not say that for some people listening to lectures is not intentional suffering. In that case it may be different.

You have made a courageous decision to come here. I warned you that it would not be a very easy thing, and if you stick it out you will come to see what I mean. Meanwhile you will cause a fair amount of opportunity for yourself and other people. I do not think anyone will be against you for that.

S. The one thing that struck me yesterday was that you were not here, and we were assigned to go out to the field to do practical work. I was not as speedy as I could have been getting out in the back field. Then when it was time for tea, everyone left the field fifteen minutes early, so they could be on time for tea. It just struck me how, if we go along with our likes and dislikes, we are really predictable in the things we do.

J.G.B. It is so. There is an extreme condition of like and dislike where it is wholly fantasy; where maybe one is convinced that one cannot bear something and one will just not expose oneself to it, or one is sure that one cannot do without something and one will move anything and give anybody any amount of trouble because one has got to have that. That belongs to what I call World 96. It is really a negative state of existence. In that state we get nowhere. Everything we do is self destructive. Thank God we are not in that state very much. Some people are so caught into it that everyone looking at them feels sorry for them, seeing how helplessly they are caught into this conviction that certain things are unbearable and must not happen to them.

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Ordinarily we are between these things. There is some substance in it; something in our personality that really has got a habitual attitude. And then, as you say, this is very predictable when we allow ourselves to live this way. A great deal of important self knowledge comes from knowing about this, what we would call our mechanical likes and dislikes, as distinct from our fantastical ones. These fantastical ones really are imagination. We allow ourselves without any genuine experience to support it, to imagine we cannot bear something, or that we must have something else, which are factors of World 96; likes and dislikes.

If you were really a slave to World 96, it would be very unlikely that you would be here. Because people who are caught into that are really caught, and it is very difficult for them to escape. They end up very miserably if they go into old age with this. It is very pitiable when you see old people who have really become slaves to their illusions, their fantasies of what they cannot bear and must have, and who impose all this on the world around them, because they have this negative power.

Then there are the likes and dislikes of World 48, or likes and dislikes of personality. They are really there. They are in us, but they are not in our essence. They are the ordinary things. They lead to the sort of thing you described having observed. It is the same sort of thing with people who walk around the house and see something they want and take it because their personalities have got into this way of just taking what they want and avoiding what they do not want. It is different from the first, and one must really learn to distinguish. All of us have the totally fantastic illusion about "Can't bear this, must have that".

Then it is very true that this is so mechanical it is predictable. It is quite true to say that 30 or 40 people, where their attention has somehow been distracted from the purpose of being here, were suddenly caught unawares by my not being here for a class, and not knowing what rearrangements are going to be made, they find themselves in the situation of going off to do practical work. Then the personality is caught unawares and all its ordinary behavior comes out. One wastes time. One does not settle down to the job. One gets away from it as quickly as one can. One's real interest has disappeared, and one finds oneself thinking "How soon will this finish?"

There are also some things that belong to essence. They are much more serious. They are not really properly called likes and dislikes because they really enter into our character. They require a quite different study, and what has to be done when they are an

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obstacle to our transformation is a different kind of thing from this. In your observation the important thing is to see how if one gets caught unawares, so that one forgets why one is here, this ordinary side, all these habitual behavior patterns of our personality reassert themselves. Some people are terribly disconcerted. People at the end of the last course were really convinced that they had rid themselves of certain bad habits. Then I created a certain situation in which they did not realize what had been done. They were very disturbed when they discovered that these habits were still there. This is not a matter of eradicating these things, but learning how to work with them, knowing how much we can get from learning to go straight ahead with what one is doing, without being pulled this way, tempted by this, and repelled by that. How strangely easy it is to do it.

S. I had several experiences of having a very strong desire for some food; once when I was in the kitchen and once it was some food that I did eventually eat. Rather than repress that desire, I just sat and tried to pay as much attention as I could, but at the same time did not give in to the desire. I was aware in doing that, it created all kinds of feelings of turmoil inside me. It is difficult to describe. It was as if something familiar was being changed; very chaotic.

J.G.B. All right. Now in front of a situation like that, did you remember sensing?

S. Once I did, yes.

J.G.B. You will find that it is possible to deal much more simply without this turmoil if you put your attention on sensing. You can continue to look at what attracts you, but if part of your attention is on your sensation, then the energy that comes from this attraction that you are resisting will be blended. As you learn this, more and more you will see how much it can help you, how much you can use this energy that comes from some attraction that you are resisting, especially in the kind you describe here.

S. I think I felt very strongly about satisfying likes and dislikes one runs into in the course of the day. Let us say I am lying in bed in the morning and I feel very warm and secure. Then I think of the cold water of ablutions. Something inside me resists the simple idea of getting up and doing ablutions. There are times when I simply give into that and stay in bed a little longer, and I feel at times like that that I have satisfied my desires. But afterwards I feel unsatisfied. It is the same way with likes. Let us say there is extra bread on the table, and I have already had my share. But there is more staring me in the face. I say to myself, "Well, you know, you are not really getting enough to eat", and I feel I should take

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care of my body. I use that rationalization, and afterwards I have none of the satisfaction that I expected, that I was somehow looking for. Then I had just a faint glimmer of a higher form of satisfaction when those things are worked against. There is a kind of thing inside me that likes to work and likes to utilize attention.

J.G.B. This is a very simple thing that we probably all knew without having to come here to learn it. One has a satisfaction when one resists an impulse of like and dislike, and one has dissatisfaction when one gives way to it. This we forget. As we are looking at it from this side, when it all has not happened yet, it looks different. It takes time to realize that we shall have greater satisfaction by resisting likes and dislikes than by giving way to them. This is how our being grows, how our inner strength grows. It is both strength and awareness of being strong that comes from this. It is a conscious strength. This takes time, because we may know this in theory, but we have not practiced it. We live quite differently and have given way to our likes and dislikes. We have rationalized them and gratified them. Therefore, though we may know it theoretically, it is not a living truth. It is not an experienced, verified truth for us. This comes gradually.

This other thing, the last thing that you have just said about a different kind of satisfaction is what Gurdjieff calls "impartial self satisfaction", not feeling one's own pride and self love, but simply the sense of being something real. The sense of being in a world that is something different. That is a very important thing for all of us to come to, the realization that there is this way into the world. This is one meaning of the word Work, that Work is doing things consciously. That does bring us into another world, and that world is a much more satisfying world than the world of imagination where people usually live and do not even know they are living in a dream.

S. I find very often, Mr. B. when coming up against likes and dislikes, that I am torn between submitting to it or watching myself do it. Could that be a rationalization for some kind of slavery or struggling with it, but not knowing where that struggling is coming from? For instance, I was working in the kitchen grating cheese. I wanted to take some of the cheese and put it in my mouth. On one hand, I wanted to say I was doing that to watch myself doing it and my manifestations in order to learn about it, so that I would not be a slave any more. On the other hand, I thought of struggling with it, but that seems to be coming out of pride. What is the reality in all that?

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J.G.B. I am very glad this has been raised, because people do have the idea that it is enough to watch a mechanical manifestation, and that this watching detaches one and frees one from it. Some people have understood that this is what Krishnamurti is saying and it is a misunderstanding. In order to watch, one must be detached. This is the misunderstanding. In order to be detached, one must first have something which can be detached and that something is made by struggling. This is so important that if any of you have any doubt or difficulty about it, please speak and we can talk about it together. This must be clear. The way that we look at it from Gurdjieff and the Masters of Wisdom is that in order to observe one must struggle. The idea that one can observe without struggling is an illusion. All you have in that case is a state of dreaming. It is true to say that there will be self love, pride, and the rest of it in this. If you struggle you will soon find your pride humbled, because you will see many things that you would not see otherwise.

I would say this about Krishnamurti's teaching; Krishnamurti is an exceptional being. I first met him in 1933 when he was quite a young man. He was exceptionally trained from childhood. I met one of his teachers. As a result of his exceptional qualities and training, he was able quite early to see for himself, and seeing is liberation. Therefore, he taught, "See and you will be free". But he did not take into account that in order to see, one must first be something. I have talked about this with him and I have said to him, "But Krishnaji, you are not like other people, and you are expecting other people who have not got the being that you have got to do what you can do". He insists that anyone can do it, but in experience people discover that they cannot. Gurdjieff said in one of his lectures when somebody spoke to him about self observation, "You not observe. You not observe because you not exist".

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This theme is also called 'The First Liberation'. Overcoming like and dislike is the first practical step out of the dream world. What is there in our nature that is slave to like and dislike? How easy is it to break free from that slavery? What is opened up for us then? No practical treatment of human life can neglect like and dislike. It is the main subject of the Shivapuri Baba's "moral disciplines: and we need to understand it if we are to make any progress in the inner world.

ISBN O 900306 31 9

The Sherborne Theme Talks Series – #2; Noticing

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Unless we notice we cannot be in a position to choose or act from ourselves. It is a transition from one state of existence to another. The significance of this transition -which is not a process in time – is largely negated because we fail to understand its concrete relevance to freedom. Noticing is the opening of possibilities. How can we train ourselves to grasp this kind of opportunity?

ISBN 0 900306 34 3

The Sherborne Theme Talk Series – #3; Material Objects.

We are trying to wake up from a dream world. This had to be done before we can begin to realize our own destiny. There is a spurious kind of inner life that is dreaming and useless imagination. In front of material objects we can assess our true situation. Do we see them? Do we use them responsibly? Do we have any contact with them? Any freedom of attention to direct towards them and their working in our world? If we are asleep, material objects become our masters. If we are to begin to be awake, we must understand how to be worthy masters of the material world.

ISBN 0 9000306 35 1

The Sherborne Theme Talk Series – #4; Food.

Like any living creature man eats to live and draws on the lives of other beings to provide for his own life. But man, unlike the animals, can be conscious of the significance of eating. Man can also abuse food by eating in a wrong way. The right relationship to food is not produced by excessive attention to diet. It comes through the practice of simple disciplines towards whatever it is one happens to be eating. One can come to the point of glimpsing what it really means to eat, not simply on the physical level or even the psychological level, but also in the spiritual sense.

ISBN 0 9000306 45 9