

Bruno Martin

Gurdjieff Practice Book

**Inner exercises and sacred dances
for the unfolding of consciousness**

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Preface

I wrote this book first in 2007 and later on as a new edition in 2014. This now is a first translation into American English after my book on the artful psychology of Gurdjieff: "The Realized Idiot". Years before I published another book about Gurdjieff's theories, called "On a Spaceship with Gurdjieff" which is about his theories, see bibliography (only in German yet).

My work has received much encouragement during this time and many people have told me that they have found this work valuable in their lives and they have also done some of the exercises. I am always asked, "How can I be initiated into the Gurdjieff teachings?" Gurdjieff said to this, "There is no initiation, every initiation is a self-initiation." In fact, we perceive only what we know, and we understand only what we have experienced ourselves. This sentence is of great importance, especially regarding the exercises in this book - but also other techniques of other methods and spiritual directions. The secret lies hidden within ourselves!

I have been working with the "Gurdjieff Method" and the exercises I suggest in this book for over 50 years by now. Some of the exercises I have learned from my teacher and mentor John G. Bennett, who performed them for several decades with his groups and learned many things in the process and, based on his experience, modified or redesigned some of the exercises again and again. Since learning about these exercises, I have also continued to experiment with them, adapting some of them to life circumstances and the understanding of the people who attend my seminars and adapted to the needs of today. A tradition remains only if it is further developed and adapted to the ways of thinking of people in every time and culture!

Nevertheless, there are some "timeless" basics on which these exercises in the book are based: Conscious body awareness, attention, imagination and intention. I discuss these topics in more detail in the book. Without the ability of inner awareness and the developing experience of inner energy work, little progress is perceived. Even when practiced regularly, there is often a feeling that "nothing has happened at all" or that no change has occurred.

Therefore I emphasize again and again that a change into another layer of consciousness brings a changed perception at that moment. When we have returned to the layer of consciousness of the "ordinary" waking state of consciousness, we think and feel that apparently "nothing has changed". In fact, the changed state of consciousness can only be perceived on this "other" level, but not with the "unchanged state". The only thing that can be permanently perceived is the evolving body sensation. The longer we work on it, the stronger this sensation becomes - our own body is felt and perceived more and more often, even if attention is not intentionally directed to it. In the course of time it happens that suddenly a perception of the body sensation is there "by itself" and another clarity, a "heightened" state of waking consciousness is present. Through everyday activities this state can quickly be masked because the attention is directed elsewhere - but still a part of the attention can perceive this sensation, even if another part of the attention is elsewhere. Therefore, working on strengthening the capacity of attention is of utmost importance.

Nothing is lost! This means that the work on the storage and consolidation of the inner energies (see chapter 4) bears fruit without this being noticed or perceived under everyday

circumstances. This phenomenon makes many people doubt at first whether it is of any use at all to do this "inner work". Those who persist in it, notice with time that a change in the whole of their own state of mind and self-perception has set in. This point must be emphasized again and again. Those who are after "quick" results should change their attitude. Craftsmen, dentists, surgeons (m/f) and all other practitioners do not learn their skills overnight either, they only become more and more skilled with long practice! The same is true for the skill to deal with inner "invisible", "intangible" energies. However, there is no clearly tangible result to be seen, which is a problem for many practitioners.

In the field of spiritual unfolding - or as Gurdjieff called it: "The harmonious development of man" - hardware and software" develop together and adapt to each other. Incidentally, this is also a finding of today's neuroscience: The brain is so plastically flexible that it adapts to each new task and restructures itself again and again. Also Athletes or sportsmen work "on themselves". She or he needs not only physical training, but also discipline, perseverance, inner struggle with the weaknesses and so on. The essential difference here - and here the spiritual component comes into play - is the focus of the exercise. The focus of an athlete is the increase of performance in the "outside", i.e. body control, development of strength, the goal of success, etc. But if we put the striving for success in the spiritual in the foreground, we miss the target in this case. Our goal is a "harmonious development" which - we hope - will bring forth an inner quality that will outlast physical life. This is also a goal, but one that does not end on the winner's podium of life, but is completely located in the unknowable. Promises of salvation

are foreign to me, I can only say from my experience - and the inner wisdom gained in the course of time - that this work is worthwhile, even if the idea of an "immortal soul" would ultimately only be a fantasy. Alone the change of my (felt) state of being and the "quality of life" gained with it were and are worth it to take on some efforts in this direction!

My work is based on the training I experienced with John G. Bennett, but it has received an independent shaping from me through my own work and experience over the years. In addition, I have always had experiences with other spiritual ways, which with their spiritual impulses have also flowed into my work.

Form of the book: It is more manageable for many readers if the mental considerations are separated from the basic exercise program. That is, in this book all chapters can be read consecutively. However, in the respective chapter there are references to the connection of an exercise with the text, such as: "Exercise 1 goes with this". The basic exercise program is collected in the second part of the book. But there are exercises that are more intended for own experiments in connection with the text and do not belong to the permanent exercise program, so these you find in the text.

May the book be able to give new impulses for your harmonious development!

Bruno Martin

1. Learning by Doing

"The highest thing a person can achieve is the ability to do."

G. I. Gurdjieff, Aphorisms

What does Gurdjieff mean by the ability to "do"? We do all kinds of things all the time: we work, we drive, we cook, we eat, we watch TV, we have sex, we think, we surf the Internet, we exercise, we practice yoga, we meditate.... But if we look closely, most of the activities happen to us without our conscious awareness. Most of our time we live "automatically", driven by unconscious desires and ideas about life. The conscious "I" is hardly involved in these activities. But how can one convey to a sleeping person that he is asleep? One can only shake him awake or frighten him like an oyster - and this is the core of Gurdjieff's teaching. His significant insight is that a person can "do" only when his "real I" has become the central pivot of his life, and this requires conscious work. Above all, a person must realize that most of what he thinks is conscious action is more or less automatic.

Those who study Buddhism are familiar with the concept of "not-me," that is, being empty of "I." "Not-me" is only the other side of a coin and does not contradict the "I-concept" in Gurdjieff's system. For in order to become open to the spiritual force that the "I" symbolizes, we must first become empty of all normal ego- or rather personality-related habits of thought and life. When we normally say "I," we actually mean our "personality" and our body. We say, "I am in pain," "I feel good," "I think," "I drive a car." But this personality, which is "I" is not the "real I". The materialistic thought as formulated by René Descartes in the 17th century, "I think, therefore I am", leads to a self-deception.

This usual "I" has been formed in the course of childhood through the parental home, education and many other societal influences. In bright moments, some behavior that suddenly seems strange to us makes us wonder, "Is this really me?" or "I don't know myself like that yet." Depending on the circumstance, my behavior may even be completely frightening: "I don't usually get abusive, not so violent. I'm usually a patient person!"

But this is not the "real me". Most of the feelings, thoughts, physical sensations and perceptions are personality patterns that are shaped from the outside, they do not originate from the true being. This assertion would be simplified, of course, if it were all that constituted "me." For there is still a layer within me that I can actually call "my essence." This being consists of certain traits, characteristics, abilities and behaviors, not all of which are determined by the outside world. They are my "own being".

This is where the difficulty begins: How can I distinguish between what is self-determined and what is determined by others? And who am "I" really? "Am I" at all really? If you don't have the desire to figure this out, you probably won't begin an exercise program that will could lead you to an answer. If you have the feeling that you are not "yourself", you only react almost like a robot to the impulses that come into you from inside and outside, and you want to live more according to the core of your being, the real you, then a targeted exercise program can bring you closer to this goal. But you must seriously decide for it!

If the assertion is true that most people have to acquire "the ability to do", i. e., the ability to act consciously, how can you then carry out an exercise program on your own? Isn't that

asking too much? I think it is possible because practice gradually brings you into contact with your being. Even if the decision to exercise may not be made by your real self, it can be decided by the "representative" of that self, your intellectual center. It may also arise from a feeling or need to do something, to make "more" of your life. In this sense, this program already puts you in contact with the decision, with the "ability to do". A self-deception would be if you think that just because you have practiced for a while, you are already able to act from the core of your being. No matter how, without starting with it, nothing can develop.

All those who have experience with inner exercises know that it is somewhat more difficult to do a series of exercises all by yourself, rather than in conjunction with an exercise group. In an exercise group, there is generally a stronger "energy field" built up, so that each exercise has deeper effects. In this respect, of course, a combination of group and private exercise would be optimal. If you have the possibility to do the exercises together with a partner or friends, not only the exercise is strengthened, but also the motivation to stay with it.

I do not use the term "energy field" superficially without theoretical background. Because the undifferentiated use of "field" and "energy" in so-called esoteric contexts has always bothered me, I developed and explained my own "field theory" in detail in my book *Der Wunderland Effekt (The Wonderland Effect)* in 2011 (only in German yet). There, for the first time ever, a model of physical and spiritual fields is described that goes beyond both the physical field theory and Rupert Sheldrake's approach with the "morphogenetic field". Furthermore, there is a clear, comprehensible structure in it, which is very useful as a concept for one's own perception.

About the different forms of energy I write in this present book also in chapter 4.

If you are one of the many people who have practice experience, be it with yoga, meditation or other spiritual techniques, you will have no difficulty in tuning into an exercise on your own and making it as intense as possible through your previous experience. You can easily remember the sequence of most exercises because the individual steps have certain points of reference in the body, for example, "traveling" with the inner attention from the upper arm to the hand.

If you have no or little experience with exercises, then I advise you to first read the theory on which Gurdjieff's teaching is based and which I explain in this book in an easily understandable way. If you think these exercises are interesting, they could bring me further and I want to get involved with that, then make a willful decision to do the suggested exercises regularly for a certain period of time. It is, however, the case that some of the ideas I elaborate can only really be understood through practice with the exercises.

When you decide to begin the exercise program, sit down, become still inside and make your decision. Inwardly affirm it with the following affirmation or even say it out loud: "I want to start the exercise program and stick with it." Set a goal to do the initial exercises for four weeks and then decide again for the next few weeks. This decision strengthens your intention and will. You shouldn't have any expectations attached to it, just "do it."

Each day, write down all observations, sensations, insights and feelings that arise before, during and after the exercise. Also write down when you have the exercise "left out." Be

honest with yourself: did you just find an excuse or could you simply not because of another requirement? Also, look closely at your excuses, you may see a pattern in them. You are only doing it for yourself, no one is controlling you. After a while, a sitting exercise you do in the morning also works into your day. If you review the notes a month later, you can better assess your practice progress.

I will explain in this book the theoretical context that helps to better understand a certain exercise, so that you know or at least can guess what it is for. It is inevitable that you will have to "believe" at the beginning that the exercise does something, you probably don't know it. But since the theory behind it is explained, at least you have a clue. Sometimes an understanding can come to your mind in a flash, which gives you a confirmation that the theoretical background has a certain foundation.

When you tune into the "field of consciousness" of a certain lineage, you are in resonance with the corresponding energy vibration of the people who have strengthened this field of consciousness with their exercises. Thereby you also get a help or strengthening for your exercises. If you already have experience with spiritual exercises of a different way, you might notice the special vibration you come in contact with. The already accumulated energy is an extraordinary help for the exercise to have a stronger effect. It is also helpful, whether you already have practice experience or not, to create your own outer form. In the practice path I suggest in this book, it is not necessary to light incense or create a particular traditional atmosphere or ritual setting. But, depending on your disposition and background, it can be an enriching and reinforcing impulse to create a specific place in your practice room where

you place images or figures that are important to you. Incense with sage or other incense is useful to keep away unwanted disturbing energies. Certain smoky herbs or resins can also awaken "helpful" forces. In any case, it is good to prepare your outer "room" in such a way to prepare that you can inwardly tune into the exercise undisturbed.

Above all, you should perform each of the suggested exercises with conscious intention. In fact, each exercise is in itself a ritual. Ritual means order, i. e. it follows a certain order, which in turn reflects the cosmic order. It forms a bridge to reality, to the world of consciousness. It is also a ritual in the sense that you perform it regularly in the same way and bring yourself into connection with the vibrational field of the quality of consciousness from which these exercises originate. This creates a resonance that also gives you a certain security.

If you want to tune into the practice path of this book, I suggest that you sit down to the exercise you want to do and become aware or say: "I now tune into the field of consciousness of the *Work*. I am doing this exercise to work on my inner transformation, and I ask all forces well-disposed toward me to help me in this work. I also ask all forces who wish to hinder me to remain outside for the time of this exercise." Those who have not previously had contact with a group of the lineage of the "Work" can willingly attune themselves to the vibration of the Work with such or similar invocation or affirmation. The term "Work," as used in the Gurdjieff lineage, has two meanings. In German it is sometimes translated simply as "labor," but this word does not capture the full meaning. The term is a reference to the alchemist "Great Work" of transforming matter into spirit. In

this sense it means not only "work," it is also the field of consciousness power that this "Work" carries. I also like "Werk" because in German it has to do with wirken (acting) and Wirklichkeit (reality). John G. Bennett says: "The Work is not everything and there may be something beyond it. What matters is that we can find something real for us in the Work. What opens up from it has no limits."

If you are in another lineage, you can, of course, "invoke" a different force or field of vibration in your exercises. The exercises suggested here in the book are very neutral and can be done even if you are in the field of another teaching. However, in my opinion, it makes a difference if you use the exercises of the book to resonate with the "Work" offset or with "Buddhism" for example, because each line has, in my experience, a different "frequency". You just have to try out what works for you.

For the exercise to work, resonance with the field the exercise connects to, along with the intention of the practitioner, is an important prerequisite. The commitment to work on yourself you make only with yourself. However, it is helpful to tune into such a vibrational field because you can get an additional energy. Because many people have done such exercises over a longer period of time, so that their work has left a power in the consciousness field of the working line, which you can connect to.

With this attunement, inner exercises can take on real *meaning* for you and support you in your own development. You should take your self-set intention seriously: In order for the exercise to develop its quality, you must consciously decide to do the exercise. When you process the experience within you and consciously make it your own, you bring forth

something new. This process is comparable to food transformation. Just as food is transformed by the organism for the maintenance of the body and taken over into the cells, your intention transforms the experience into the development of the inner being.

This is exactly what Gurdjieff and Bennett did with the methods and teachings they experienced during their search. Both did not simply copy them, but explored them and cast them into a new form through their own experience with the exercises. Gurdjieff specialized more in movement exercises rather than sitting exercises, while my mentor John G. Bennett considered both important. I will elaborate on this later.

It was equally important to Gurdjieff to create a new spiritual line of transmitting that did not directly connect to any of the known lines of tradition. He was looking for something that had a universal quality and could work in our time and for the future, without associations with centuries-old beliefs and rituals, some of which were entrenched. As I understood it through John G. Bennett, it is about intelligent and creative content work and not about preserving old forms.

After Bennett moved into the world of his further transformation, it became a personal issue, and I was interested in finding out about these new forms in his example, but also in getting to know other ways and methods. In this way I was able to find out their value and effect, also to integrate some things that fit into the framework of this method, in order to convey what I had learned in such a lively way that it did not become a "belief" for me, but rather was formed again and again from my own long experience. It doesn't matter if you already have experience with exercises. Each exercise works differently and always anew, and in the context of the exercise

program of this book it is necessary to engage in this process completely or not at all. In Monopoly, one card is called "Back to Go." The same is true for inner work. In Gurdjieff's "Science of Idiocy" (see my book "The Realized Idiot") he explicitly emphasizes that it is important for one's own development to become an "ordinary idiot" again, i. e. the "beginner's mind" in yourself and start all over again to break down ingrained routines and patterns of behavior.

It is not easy to "learn how to learn". Those responsible for our school system are now slowly realizing that teaching learning strategies rather than just general knowledge is becoming more and more fundamental today. Every person has a different strategy. Some memorize phone numbers in threes, others in twos, still others with pictures. The important thing is that the exercises you do come from a "living" field and can come alive in you through your work.

A good condition for the effectiveness of exercises is also the desire to learn something new. If I get to know an exercise and think, "I already know this" or "I've done this exercise before" or "I do know the best way to relax," then I close the door on a new experience. That's why Bennett kept emphasizing, "Try to learn to see everything as if it's completely new and as if it has no connection with anything you've heard of before." In fact, everything is always new and different, we just rarely perceive it that way.

Even nature has ensured that we look at things again and again with a fresh gaze. Every time our eyelids automatically close over our eyes, we wipe away the familiar in order to be able to look and discover anew. But who does this consciously? A wake "seeing", "hearing", "tasting", "feeling" - the whole spectrum of human senses - is the door to the world

of life. Furthermore, the door of the senses also opens the world beyond the senses, which connect the visible and non-visible, incomprehensible world.

Many who have studied Gurdjieff's methods assume that this path of exercise leads people to awakening, to really "doing". But it makes a difference whether one does an "outer" exercise and concludes that it would "automatically" lead to waking up, or whether one learns to do the exercise from "within", that is intentionally, carried by the power of consciousness. The core principle for this is: In order to produce conscious energy, some conscious energy must already be present, even if you must "steal" it somehow when you don't have it yourself. This energy can be provided, for example, by conscious intention or by working together in a group. Everyone has experienced, for example, that training together in a sports group spurs on a higher performance than training alone. Even when I exercise with a partner, I notice that the exercise has a stronger effect.

Exercises are door openers - perhaps they also lead us to realize that there are no doors! It is important to develop the ability within oneself to draw something for oneself from what has been experienced, to transform it into one's own quality of being.

Exercises for self-awareness and development of the "outer" and "inner" senses are "works of art", this is my conviction after many years of experience with these exercises. It is not enough to sit down alone or with a group and do an exercise, i. e. to follow some sequence given by the exercise leader. To really have a real experience, it is important to experience the essence of the exercise. In most cases, of course, it has to do with "energies". In other words, it has to do with vibrational

patterns, sensations, feelings, perceptions that are activated or that the practitioner becomes aware of.

I don't believe that most people who are on a spiritual path and practice accordingly ever thought about the structure and "substance" or "energy" of the experience. But this is an essential part of any exercise. I can only really process the experience when I also reflect on it, when I try to recognize what happened to me during the exercise.

It is in the nature of things that at some point they will be "running dead" - entropy is what physics calls this. Therefore it is advisable to start a new exercise from time to time to gain again a new possibility of experience. But there are also "basic exercises" that can be done for a longer time without entropy, just as we need daily food. There are also exercises that have a very intense and lasting effect, even if you do not notice it immediately. These should only be done for a predetermined time - a week or two - and can be done again later occasionally. I have seen people who have done certain intensive exercises for a long time and also for a very long time, e. g. two hours a day, and at some point they were completely confused, i. e. the whole organism and the brain were out of balance. So: do not overdo it!

The "experiment with ourselves" that we conduct is an experiment, but it is based on many years of experience and on the knowledge of many people; the experimental arrangement is ourselves. Without the methodical knowledge which is the basis of this experiment and which has been passed on over many decades, however, we would not be able to carry out the experiment at all: we would not know in which direction we should research and experiment.

Of course, the "wise old ones" also experimented to find out

the things that were then transmitted. They obviously did a very thorough research. However, if one looks at the transmission of the teachings of the most different spiritual traditions, one gets the impression, this respective line of tradition exists only because of the passing on of fixed exercises and rituals, which have always continued for decades or centuries. Visions, realizations, insights etc. can be passed on, and many progresses of knowledge in all fields of knowledge are also based on the ingenious insights of earlier researchers. But also spiritual insights - and the people of every age - develop, so that we have to check again and again which kind of exercise is appropriate for which people and what they can achieve.

"Experience itself is nothing, but experience gives you the possibility to 'see'. When you see, you don't need anyone to tell you anything. It's not always necessary to have external experience, sometimes it's possible to just see what's happening in your consciousness."

John G. Bennett in: The Way to be Free, New York 1980, p. 97

In order to be able to "do", i. e. to act willingly and consciously, it is necessary to bring the whole body with its functional centers to obey our will. The will is our "real I", the center of the ability to act. However, the will is not a property of the brain or the body. These are only tools of the will. "In the world of bodies there exist only bodies and laws concerning bodies," writes John G. Bennett. "There is no consciousness there. This is both the visible world as our senses perceive it and the world of ordinary thought, which is no more than a reflection of the physical world. It is a terribly

limited mode of existence."¹ The different brains do not act by themselves, except on the basic level, which can be called automatic processes. To be able to do something intentionally, the power of attention has to be awakened. The first step to strengthen the attention and to bring it more and more into life is noticing, which I will talk about in the next chapter.

¹ John G. Bennett, *Deeper Man*. As said on the impress page I cannot give the page numbers of the English books, because there exists different editions.