

Albigen-Papers-6-First-Steps

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SIXTH PAPER

The First Steps

Of course, in order to begin a work we must have an objective. And the objective need not be immediately negated by declaring that we do not know that which we expect to find, when we announce our objective to be The Truth. Such a stated objective actually means that we aim to come to a point of no-ignorance and being. Our objective is to find our definition, whatever the finding entails. Our objective is to find our origin and destiny, if we can do so, but these are secondary to self-definition or the finding out of who is doing the seeking.

There is only one time to start and that is now. And we can expect to battle the urge to procrastinate from now on. The place is right where we are now, not in Tibet or some nebulous, material land of magic. The manner of searching is to use the tools at hand until better methods are discovered.

Now all of this above advice engenders no great arcane secrets, no magical formulae. It could be used in any research laboratory, or by any man building a shelter. The sad part is -- just that which the simple analogy implies -- that man can begin on any level, with any tools, yet he always hangs back, waiting for the electrifying Messiah or the more propitious setting.

The greatest of journeys are stated with a single step. It is that simple. Of course, the Search does not remain simple. While the feet are making a pilgrimage, the mind is reminded and brought back to the problem at hand. Thus, physical exercises of the hatha yoga type may do little more than promote health, but if they are done in conjunction with meditation, or the repetition of the spiritual objective, then the mind is reminded and it in turn will evolve more useful exercises and more sensible spiritual objectives.

For those who think only in terms of their own inadequacy and consequent despair, let us outline the simple steps of beginning that lead to more and more organized systems of climbing and seeking.

To begin with, we have at least our bodies and minds. We also have available, written works or references on the subject. We have, if we wish to seek them out, co-workers.

And so we can sit alone with the body and meditate or do exercises. Or we can pick up the body and go down to the library and read everything we can find on subjects related to transcendental prospecting. Or we can pick up the body and take it to places where we might meet men who have spent their lives searching for the Truth.

We can look at a successful businessman and look at his competitor who failed. While an occasional failure may be attributed to adverse luck, wherein it was impossible by any sort of planning to prepare for the disasters that wiped out the man who failed, we find generally that the losers applied less energy and less consistent attention to their project. And we are reminded of the simple adage, "If you throw enough mud at the ceiling, some of it will stick."

The same thing applies to a man who may have no competition, a man who might be building a shed in which to live. If his mind wanders, or if he procrastinates, he may begin the foundation but never complete any more of the structure. As the years go by he will observe his unfinished work, and each year come to believe that the task is more impossible or beset by some curse. In the meantime, his neighbor, or many of his neighbors, may have completed the task in a few weeks.

What we are coming to here is that man must develop a system of work, and work with persevering dynamism. And the results are manifest everywhere -- he will succeed. So, he must observe the proper manner of working, and the best manner of seeking. And this involves the knowledge that man must become a vector, and must employ the laws that expedite success.

Even as we study the man who was unable to finish a shed, we may discover that some of his frustration may have resulted from his having too many irons in the fire. And the same factors are involved in the Search.

By this we interpret that man needs to be dynamic, if he wishes proportional results. Piddling at a major task will bring less than minor results. If the search for our identity is not the major task, then it is eventually going to be rationalized more and more to the rear of the attention, until it is finally forgotten.

All men are seekers. However, the degree of energy applied is the difference among them -- and we might add that the amount of honest, intelligent study of ways and means also marks the difference. The final page of the last paper lists the general obstacles that a person encounters, once the person tries to wake up and tries to search for the sake of Truth itself.

If we examine our lives and the spiritual lives of people around us, we will begin to see how they were blocked by these obstacles at different stages or levels of work. We may be able to see the other fellow's blocks before see our own, and if this is so, then it is good to ask ourselves, regardless of the level that we might imagine ourselves to be -- whether or not we too might be incomplete -- might be resting on a step that is still far from the top and one that is itself still a creation of many desires and rationalizations.

Let us take the whole of humanity and take a sort of Gallup pole. We will find that the majority of the people are more interested in somatic functions than anything else. Between these body-functions they have moments of curiosity, and some of them may spend an hour in church on Sunday. This group of people occupies the lower stratum of the pyramid-form that is representative of all human action. Gurdjieff speaks of this category or stratum as being composed of "man Number one," or instinctively motivated man.

The second layer (man number two) may be our habitat for a few years or for a lifetime, but most of us have experienced it. We weary of the outgoing forces of emotion that identify the emotional approach to religion, and graduate from the second level. We eventually come around to doubting the autosuggestion that brought us quiescence. We realize that our mind over-intuited, and this came about by our listening to an emotional zealot who, being self-hypnotized in turn, transferred to us his rapture, and the emotional sublimation of physical appetites. We also realize that our intuition was not infallibly guided by some soul-faculty or guardian angel.

As Ouspensky so well states it, these first two levels are very deeply asleep. And people on those two levels would not even open this book or one similar to it. So we go on to the third level of the pyramid, or man number three. (These layers do not represent clear-cut division of advancement, as there are many layers within each category-number. Nor do I maintain that this is the only method of categorizing the evolution of man from ignorance. However, Gurdjieff is one of the few philosophers who was in any way meaningful in his outline of the upward struggle. He does not use the pyramid corollary, but the reference to the pyramid should be easy to understand.)

The third level is that of the intellectual man, the man who employs logic and common sense along with his intuitional approach. This man is showing more signs of wakening, but if he is predominately intellectual, he will remain trapped. His trap will consist of excessive attachment to the tool which he proudly labels "reason",

and with which he thinks he can solve all problems. This man winds up chasing his own tail ... or an endless tangent.

We have been operating on the third leveling in the first five sections of this book, in the hope of stimulating the intuition for those approaching the problem with only logic, and in the hope of applying common-sense analysis to movements that have only an intuitional appeal. It may be said that I have been saying things that would be either told to a sleeping person who had some chance of being awakened by the shock of the words, or else I have been talking to people who have already gone through these three stages -- were somewhat awake -- and would be stimulated to more effort by knowing that they were not alone in this type of thinking.

Those who are getting ready to graduate from the first three levels are not above conceit, and conceit can be a block in itself. We are now able to look back and see the mote in some other people's eyes, but may still have some big blinders on our own vision. So if any of us think that we can gloat over the discovery of a new cult or ism, which we are sure of for salvation-purposes, let us be reminded of the salvationist on the emotional level. The fact that we have erred before means that we may be capable of erring again.

The time is not for resting or gloating at any stage of the game. The history of the most eminent sages is one of men who never stopped working, if for no other reason than to amplify their Vector by helping others.

It is only when you are at least partially awake that you are able to do anything ... except as a robot. And so we ask, how will a person know when he is partially awake? He will begin to realize that he has been a sort of robot, and still is a robot largely, and he will have the advantage of presently being aware of his robot condition.

It may seem like I have further complicated things by first advising the reader to begin in any manner available, and followed this advice by stating that man is largely incapable of doing nothing. This is naturally paradoxical, but both are true. Any waking must be gradual at first. It is understandable to reckon that a man is partially awake, or largely in a robot condition, would not be aroused to suddenly do great things or undertake disciplines of a complex nature. Nor would he immediately grasp a concept that was not worded with all the gestalts of his robot nature.

We presume now that we have reached the stage where we are eager to do something about defining ourselves. To feel that we are robots is not to know of our total potential to operate as an aware person, or of our essence. It may be better to use the word "sleep walker" instead of the word "robot", because the latter implies an object without any essence beyond that which is visible. A sleepwalker may awaken some day.

The first questions are, "How do I start" and "How will I know to trust any advice on the subject?" This means that we are looking for yardsticks and human guides. And, of course, we may realize that we must find some means of checking our own thinking to see if it is impersonal, and not the automatic reactions of a conditioned mind.

And knowing all of these things, together with an awareness of all of the obstacles -- all of this will not get us started. We must, if we are not inspired to a singular method, look to our fellowman for his record of experience on this path.

If we are going to build a shed, it is usually advisable to spend a few hours getting some advice from a carpenter. And so, automatically we gravitate toward men who have a reputation for being seeker after Truth. The blueprints left behind by Christ and Buddha were both threefold directives. "The Way, the Truth, and the Life", (John 14:6), is given as the means of coming to the Father. We find other directives that fit into and explain the threefold message of Christ. We are told to "seek and ye shall find," and "The truth shall make you free." The way is the particular path of seeking. The Truth is the objective. The truth is also the practice of honesty. There are naturally many opinions as to the exact meaning of these words, but the "Life" refers to the type of life that is led by a seeker, and to the collective spiritual life of a church or brotherhood of souls. It was in his final order, given to his intimate apostles, in which he repeated, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep."

Let us compare the directives of Christ with those of Buddha. The three ways of Buddha were, the Buddha (the Way of Discernment), the Dharma, (the life of Truth and duty), and the Sangha, or brotherhood.

Next we go to the teachings of Gurdjieff, and we find that he recommended the Way of Self-observation, and the School. The latter may be synonymous with Sangha. It may be said that Gurdjieff was involved in a work that was aimed at truth or greater understanding, by virtue of his strenuous efforts to produce reasonable concepts and techniques.

Now this does not by any means say that we have uncovered the only Way to start identifying ourselves. And the three systems just mentioned are working hypothesis ... until enough results are obtained to bring us to the point of witnessing such systems as worthy. Again, until we know all things, we remain on the unsure ground of relative knowledge. So that, in order not to remain forever inert, we must begin with some working hypothesis and work with it until it is no longer endurable, or until it is transcended and replaced by a better working hypothesis.

It is not difficult to accept the truth as an objective, unless we prefer blind dogmas and fairy tales. It is not hard for us to understand the advantages of a brotherhood, Sanghat, or school (or the Contractor's Law which will be explained in another section), because man has come to realize that nothing much is accomplished by a solitary individual. However, the other directive, which has reference to Path, brings with it some controversy, since different Paths are recommended.

And it is this fact of divergence that makes more literature on the subject necessary. Christ admonished his followers to "seek", but he spent many more words and verses in admonishing them to "believe in" Him. Blind belief is somehow contrary to "seeking and finding." And again we must return in confusion unless we interpret his teachings to have an esoteric and an exoteric meaning, and conclude that the esoteric teachings were not printed, since he was killed for the exoteric teachings. My interpretation of his words allocates the admonition for blind belief to the laity, and is thus an exoteric instruction. Other admonitions, such as "Seek and ye shall find, knock, etc.", were meant for those in a position to do so.

So that many a fundamentalist will contradict my interpretation of that which I claim to be Christ's esoteric intention, but I claim this because nearly all men who have received a glimpse of enlightenment, whether it came from worshipping Krishna, Zen contemplation, or a Gurdjieffian system, -- all wind up with a sense of harmony with the other systems and recognize in Christ's system a roadmap which most Christians fail to see.

In any event, I recommend (for those not otherwise addicted) that they embark upon a threefold path, without the fear of being accused of being a follower of any particular religion. I would explain the mechanism as a sort of troika, the vehicle being the individual, and the three powers that are pulling the vehicle with proportional pace as being the Truth, the Law of the Contractor (brotherhood), and Life of Search. And this system involves and includes all of the levels, and the evolvement of one working-hypothesis to another.

THE SELF

It is expected of us, if we wish for results, that we will not leave a stone unturned. And this means reading and researching until we come to a movement that we wish to join, or to a teacher that we need. And in order to properly evaluate these different systems, we must have some type of yardstick. We must find a method to measure movements before we dive into them too deeply.

And in attempting to be objective, we should not begin the search with presuppositions, or refuse to listen to a concept because it promises nothing to us, or promises something not to our liking. Vanity is the worst enemy of the seeker. As we have seen in previous pages, man seems unable to contemplate a God that does not have human form, human concepts of justice, plus a human appreciation for our corporeal love. We spend so much

time gloating over our superiority over animals that we neglect to see our meaninglessness. Yet, we never stop to think that a genuine comparison to ourselves to the Beings that rule our lives may prove to us that there is a more remote relationship to those Beings than there is to the animals that we use.

The conviction -- that all animals were placed here by a humanly sympathetic Creator, so that we could kill for sport, make trinkets of horns and other body parts, making clothing from others, and use some for food -- is no more valid than to entertain the conviction that we are merely planetary food (Gurdjieffian suggestion), or that our protoplasm or ectoplasm is our chief value, and not any undefined soul.

From the very beginning of our search we should realize our insignificance, as regards our present, unproven state. We should take not of the diffusion of our attention among our many "I's" or personalities. And when we add to this the knowledge that we are almost hopelessly buried under a heavy pile of conditioning that may go back many generations in regard to genetic influence, we can realize that we have a task, and the task is not to be taken lightly.

But by the same token, the task also becomes easier if we keep these things in mind. Because now we will not make the mistakes we would make if we were unaware of our limitations.

We can now dispense with movements that would not have been recognized before for what they were, but which were followed because they encouraged our harem or blessed our marriage, or helped out business. We will dispense with those movements that bring us peace of mind, but not wisdom. We can dispense with movements that appeal to our weaknesses, excuse our laziness, or soothe our weariness.

We begin to see that certain "religions of wisdom" were nothing more than theological systems of politics. Under the vanity of our "wisdom", we accepted the religion that seemed to answer all our questions, or to be more precise, we accepted the religion that promised everything but proved nothing.

Of course, the Ego intrudes in many still more subtle forms. And we find ourselves clinging to the hope that we are going to take our personality with us beyond the shadow of the grave. Another turn that we take is to try to give our weight to a concept that will require more time than we can afford. In other words, we know in advance that some movements require endless practice and rubrics that are primarily designed to keep us busy rather than develop us.

We must be on the alert for impediments that are physical as well as mental. We must begin by setting our house in order, and this means the dwelling in which we live, as well as the physical body. This business of putting the domestic situation in order need not be an enormous undertaking, nor a drive for wealth. It simply means that a person cannot think, study, or carry on work with a group or school, if he is beset by domestic irritations and interruptions. And even after the household has been placed in order, as long as we live we must still work to keep it in order, or run the risk of traumatic interruptions.

So that in this work, as in a business or any complex type of work, the degree of our success in the big things depends on how many little things we can manage simultaneously.

The process of setting the body in order may be very complex, and it too will demand consistent attention. Sometimes yoga exercises help, but the practitioner must watch for signs of sleepiness and the type of peacefulness that drowns out any desire for exertion.

PROGRESSION

In this section I would like to deal with the need for cooperation in things spiritual, regardless of the path chosen. There are many paths, and we must be patient with honest men, even if we honestly believe that they are on the wrong path. Words and their interpretations form a high barricade between seekers, but even more

formidable is the barricade or Babel that results from different intuitional interpretations of concepts dealing with abstract matters and subjective thinking.

And this brings us to that which this book proposes. We can enter the brotherhood of the ignorant and climb and study together. If this makes for us a wide field in which to work, we can find friendship and comfort at least in the large number of people found there, and we can still find the select few among them that can work more dynamically with us by virtue of their nearness to our level.

Not all of those who read this will be instantaneously satisfied with this system, but all should see the need for helping one another in the ultimate friendship. And so, there is much to be done. There are books to be read. There are experiments which many would like to try. There are scientific compilations, cataloguing and syntheses that some of us might feel compelled to build. There are eminent wise men whom we shall certainly desire to meet, even if they are on the other side of the globe. We must amass knowledge, and then whittle it down and simplify it.

Can the mystic relax his ego a fraction and take as lesson from the man with the hoe? Too many of us, having heard that we are a part of God, decide that we alone are possessed of divine intuition, and consequently we sever valuable contacts ... a valuable contact possibly meaning some kindly soul capable of tapping our inflated ego-balloon if nothing more. Some of us who have been freed from tobacco or alcohol think that we have crashed through the perimeter of outer space.

Like the pioneer, we are pioneers, possibly, eternally so. Like the pioneer, we must work collectively, yet with a guarantee of our individuality ... at least as long as we desire to cling to our individuality. The solitary mystic still needs an ashram. Yet, unless his solitude is respected, he and we shall lose. And being sparsely represented, we must, like the pioneer, invent and employ commerce between fellow-seekers.

We come now to the concept of an Ashram. To differentiate somewhat between "Ashram" and "Monastery", the word Ashram is used to define a system that would overcome the inadequacy of monastic life, and the insufficiency of having just random contacts in our field, whether that field be philosophy or religion.

The monastery has a closed door, the Ashram, an open one. The monastery suppresses individuality and doubt, the Ashram must not. While the monastery keeps wisdom in, it also keeps much more wisdom from getting in.

We need a spot on earth upon which to meet. A homing ground, but not an intellectual prison. A library and a clubhouse of philosophers. A place with quiet rooms where a person can be alone if he desires. A clearinghouse of contacts, or a place where a card-file might be kept with names of those who wish to be contacted. In philosophical research, access to personal contacts is more valuable than any card index of an esoteric library.

Many people of philosophic drive feel no compulsion to mingle with anyone except their colleagues. But these people must be unaware of future growth-possibilities for themselves, and they must be unaware that they must help others in order to grow themselves. This is the Law of the Ladder, which will be discussed later. The Ashram brings the different levels together that are needed for the growth of each member.

It is understandable that if an Ashram were formed by people without teachers or leadership, --if that Ashram were managed in a spirit of tolerance and brotherhood, --it would either form the matrix that would attract worthwhile teachers, --or it would generate and develop such from the membership.

This atmosphere of brotherhood does not mean one of quiet patience alone, but of consideration for the members who might require degrees of anonymity, if they are to function with the Ashram and still carry on professional lives not connected with the Ashram. Some of this protection may be automatic, if the members concentrate their work with people on or near their own level. Procedure for insuring protection can be found and made the custom of the Ashram, and then it should be accepted by all members.

We get into quite a question when we ask for a solution to the problem of protecting members from the human traits of other members. To begin with, we must have a trustworthy person in charge of the gate, in charge of screening those who are admitted to the physical premises. All newcomers should be endorsed by some active member who will vouch for them.

If there are various groups meeting apart from the general gathering, these groups must be protected in the same manner from those admitted to the premises.

There must be this focal point. But there must also be a focus of time for meeting. Not all participants need to be at the point which is the Ashram. The Ashram, where intensity of effort breathes life into the focal point, cannot survive by itself. There must be a much wider association that includes those who are unable to stay in one place, and for those who have not yet decided to enter the work with fuller participation. However, many organizational problems will take care of themselves, if the initial nucleus of founders take sensible precautions in their early planning.

I feel that a sincere seeker, who possessed the determination to find the Truth at any cost, suffering, or expenditure of energy, would most certainly find the Truth, if he followed the threefold path with an open mind. The part of that path which is hardest to realize is that dealing with the brotherhood or school. We can begin work upon ourselves with a spiritual discipline, and we can follow the truth in all our words and deeds, but it is quite another thing to be part of a brotherhood. This latter requires compatibility with a group of people, and requires that we find a group that is doing something worthwhile.

But, given that group, we begin to experience results according to a process, which I will call Progression. This means that evidence of a little of something may automatically imply that more may evolve from the little. If we find some men's minds capable of great knowledge, there must be some capable of greater knowledge. The concept of Progression is related to the Law of the Pyramid. Each layer of capacity in the Pyramid automatically presupposes the existence of another higher layer or level.

The suppression of Galileo, if successful, might have retarded the present explorations of space, but that suppression would never have removed the potentiality of man for spatial exploration. His suppressors presumed even to read the mind of God and imagined that God as well as nature, planned for man to remain helpless and ignorant. Progression is opposed by fanaticism and futility.

If there is a recognized pyramid of knowledge, and of effort, then it is possible to have a larger pyramid. If the mind of man is changing and growing in complexity to meet the complexities of its problem, it is possible that that mind might change and adjust to meet the infinite scope of spiritual problems, today's suppressors were yesterday's oppressed.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE SEARCH

There generally comes a time for all searchers when an individual becomes significant to us, if we believe him to be capable of being a guide or consultant. There are many little gossamer-threads of understanding and decision-points in which a good friend with experience would be of value.

In most instances, and on most levels of spiritual work, the friendship of a guide is not a great importance ... we can listen to words often while not accepting the speaker. However, there are levels in which the personal guide is in a position to do us some damage, if he is not motivated by compassion, at least.

We must be fairly sure of these teachers who would have us dedicate our lives to them. We realize that we must experience a change of being, if we are to experience or feel the Absolute in all things. And as we approach this challenge, near the end of our quest, we are eager to be helped by someone who is able to push us to over the

goal. Our error lies in our haste to leap and embrace any teacher who promises to annihilate our ego. The "ego" that he may annihilate may be the only awareness that we have.

The teacher must show some reason why it is advisable to lose your ego, must try to explain the process, and somehow manifest the loyalty of a friend that would survive any test. We must reject the "Master" who commands us to believe without explanation.

It is true that much of our mind is filled with garbage that clings like barnacles to a stem of make-believe, vanity, or ego. But we need not subsidize a marble palace in Kashmir, just to remove those barnacles. The barnacles will start to fall away with meditation, self-analysis, and the encouragement of analysis and criticism from our friends.

In being alert for various tricks, it is good to know a little of the history of trickery, and of the history of movements that are based on the use of "gimmicks." Rom Landau mentions that some Tibetan priests have a trick by which they can hypnotize at a distance. By using such mechanism they manage to hold the laity. The African sorcerer has a trick by which he can hypnotize the minds of his victims, to bring their bodies to the point of suffering or death. These tricks do not enhance the soul of the victim.

Some of us will say, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." But it is also unwise to put everything upon the single roll of the dice, if there is a less risky manner of bringing about the same result. It has been argued that certain wonderful secrets are available to men who may be trusted. In order to prove that trust, the applicant must be made subservient to a point where he will not be strong enough to betray the master. And we wonder why the master should need to fear betrayal. This demanding pose is often encountered in the persons of those who pretend to be able to initiate us into magical rites and powers.

I have the highest respect for Zen as a system, but I cannot convey that same respect to all who claim to be Zen teachers and masters. I have written evidence that one Zen student was driven to the point of murder. Another student, a lady, slashed her wrists. Another lady admitted that she was driven to the point of insanity, but still never reached Satori. She came to the conclusion that her teacher was a sadist of some peculiar type. She studied under him for over twenty years. The lady who slashed her wrists also became an alcoholic. Is all this necessary for spiritual development and identification of the Self?

The Zen master is a very mysterious character. The mysteriousness is necessary, he tells us. A hypnotist finds that an atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery expedites the hypnotic processes. Hypnotism may have therapeutic values, and in such a case the end might justify the means, if therapy alone resulted. In which case the subject would at least know that therapy was the reason for being hypnotized, and would possibly know the hypnotist long enough to trust him.

We come now to a very important conclusion. There is no religion greater than human friendship. Now this conclusion should not be quoted out of text. It does not mean that people are greater than truth. It does not mean that we should worship humanity or individuals. In fact, I strongly oppose getting the idea of love and friendship mixed in deciding the attitude of the student toward the teacher, especially if the student cannot discriminate between physical love and platonic devotion.

Nor does the above mean that we should reject a particular religion, if it interferes with friendship. That which is meant is quite the opposite, in that a religion should not be found acceptable if it holds that human friendships a principle should be cast aside. Strangely enough, this demand, if made, has to emanate from the mouth of another human, not a divine spirit. It has been a long time since man has received any messages from burning bushes or voices in the sky. So that to our knowledge, our whole spiritual education and help must come from other humans or their books.

We need to trust any man whom we accept as a teacher, because he holds in trust our hopes for salvation or enlightenment, as well as our sanity, which, until we make the final jump, is the only true communication with our essence or absolute being.

[End]

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