Chakras and the Enneagram: Centers of Gravity and the Conscious Shocks

One of the unanswered questions about the Enneagram diagram which Gurdjieff brought to the West in the early 20th century was the reason the second conscious shock, which ought to be located between 8 and 9, or “si” and “do,” is instead found between 5 and 7.

At the time he introduced the diagram and discussed the shocks, Gurdjieff explained that the incorrect location was an indicator of the type of work that was needed to provide the shock.

In order to explain this in more detail, we will need to take a look at the diagram in several new contexts.

When divided by a line down the middle, the two sides of the Enneagram symmetrically represent the upper and lower stories of man’s chakras, or energy centers. (See diagram.) The right side of the diagram represents the lower story, and the left side of the diagram represents the upper story. They are two triads, or separate systems, joined together into one harmonious whole within the context of the entire diagram. There is a fundamental difference between the two, because the upper story represents a different level of working than the lower story. One could approximate a rather crude summary by saying that the right side relates to the corporeal centers, and the right to the astral centers.

It’s worth noting that the Star of David, an incomplete version of the Enneagram, clearly conveys the existence of the triads, although in an almost uselessly simplified version. It does however preserve some of the understanding by inverting one of the two triangles, indicating its involutionary nature (see below.)

In addition, the position of Christ on the right hand of God the Father assigns His Presence to the LEFT side of the Enneagram--if we understand the view to be from the perspective of the diagram itself, not our own--for reasons which may eventually become clear.

Centers of gravity

Jeanne De Salzmann and others have often referred to the “center of gravity” in man as though there were only a single center of gravity. This isn’t exactly the case, however.
The dominant center of gravity for the lower story is found in position 4, which represents the lower portion of the central nervous system plexus, located in the center of lower part of the torso. Physically speaking, this lower portion of the plexus is located in the abdomen, below the navel.

The center of gravity for the upper story is found in position 5, and is commonly referred to as the solar plexus. This location corresponds to the center of the spine, and occupies the heart position in the Chakra system.

Esoteric systems from the East including Zen, Tai Chi, Qigong, and some yoga practices all strongly emphasize the center of gravity for the body and all the other centers as the lower portion of the nervous system complexes, located in the abdomen.

What is not elaborated by these practices is that although this is a location that does confer great power if developed fully, it only represents half of the question. Because of its specific nature it's no surprise we see its long-time association with both martial arts and magical or healing powers, especially in Taosim, Tai Chi and Qigong. We might surmise that Dogen’s outright contempt for such homegrown practices—many of which now appear to be slowly assimilating into mainstream Buddhism and other esoteric practices—stemmed solely from his superior understanding of their exact nature.

I’ll probably upset the aficionados by saying this, but in reality, work to develop and contain the energy in the lower portion of the torso, that is, the abdomen, remains at best an incomplete understanding of the entire energy system.

The Enneagram specifically reveals this simply through its visual impression: we can easily see how both 4 (abdomen) and 5 (heart) anchor the triads 1, 4, 2 and 8, 5, 7 on either side of the diagram. As is always the case, the information implicit in the Enneagram is unmistakable, once one sees it.

Work on the lower story is accomplished through what Gurdjieff referred to as the first conscious shock. This shock, coming at position 3, is represented by what is called “conscious labor.” Because this is a physical work as much as anything, and because it involves the acquisition of power (which, readers will recall, Gurdjieff told Ouspensky was in fact the aim of the Fakir), it is a discipline that relates more or less directly to the practice of Hatha Yoga. Logically enough, this physical yoga—including its influence on both the triad it belongs to and the diagram in its entirety—is the first stage of work for man.

Work on the higher story—that is, the left side of the diagram—, as Gurdjieff taught it, is accomplished through the second conscious shock, associated with what he called intentional suffering.
Earlier work on this material has verified that the opening of the emotional center is ultimately essential to inner effort. The reason that the second conscious shock is placed next to the heart is specifically to indicate that what is necessary for the second stage of work is the opening of the heart.

Paradoxically, this must take place long before the energy that is required for the passage from 8 to 9, or “si” to “do,” arrives. The opening of the heart establishes the center of gravity for the work of intentional suffering and the completion of the left side of the diagram. We see here a visual illustration of the mysterious parable, “To he who has shall much be given,” embedded within the enneagram’s geometry itself.

Readers might find it interesting to ponder the essential nature of the first shock, which is egoistic and involutionary, and the second, which is compassionate and evolutionary. These two characters neatly incorporate other understandings in the Gurdjieff system which are beyond the scope of this essay.
Centers of gravity
and the associated prayers

Crown- 7th Chakra
Divine Conscience

1 Root (base of spine)

2 Sex

3 “I am” conscious labor

4 Abdomen

5 Heart

6 “Lord have mercy” intentional suffering

7 Throat (top of spine)

8 Third eye

Do

Upper (solar) plexus: center of gravity for left side 8, 5, 7 (upper story)

Lower plexus: center of gravity for right side 1, 4, 2 (lower story)
Djana and Bhakti Yoga

It is arguably self-evident that Gurdjieff began his work with a strong intellectual influence: the influence of the Yogi, or, as it is generally known, Djana Yoga. He himself explained to his protégés that a man who completed this work would know what was necessary to complete the work of both Bhakti and Hatha Yoga, that is, the Way of the Monk and the Way of the Fakir. Esotericists can reasonably assume that by the time he encountered Ouspensky, Gurdjieff had already fully completed the Way of the Yogi. In addition to the formidable and even daunting potpourri of theoretical information he imparted, he certainly began teaching his students many Hatha Yoga techniques, although largely in secret.

Nonetheless, as his work progressed, it became increasingly compassionate and emotional, while aggressively de-emphasizing some of the other practical work (especially intellectual theory) and it is quite clear (to this author, at least) that he ultimately understood that, in the end, no matter how much intelligence you have, it is fundamentally impossible to complete the work depicted in the Enneagram without the full participation of the emotional center.

In other words, the final step on Gurdjieff’s path was the path of Love.

We can thus say, with some degree of certainty, that the man did indeed embody a fully realized incarnation that blended all three paths, as he said was necessary. The culmination of his path was, however, firmly grounded in Love. Hence the unusually strong affinity between the Gurdjieff Work, Christianity, and Sufism.

Harmonious Development

The Enneagram does not represent a static system offering a linear progression of development up through a series of numbers from 1 to 9. In this system, all of the notes already exist: that is to say, as is physically true within man, all of the energy centers are already there, and in constant motion. What is left to man is to connect them, or form right relationships with them.

Thus, the idea that one should concentrate on any one part of the diagram at the exclusion of others is a mistaken one. This is where works such as Hatha Yoga, Zen, Qingong and Tai Chi, may stumble, if stumble they do, because they all presume the concentration of power in the abdomen as the aim of work.

The Enneagram clearly shows why there is much more to the question of development. All the notes need to be worked on at once. This is a subtle practice that does not admit to aggressive manipulation or specific techniques that concentrate on one or another point. It is a gentle, long-term process. All of the other techniques can produce remarkable results, but all of them will inevitably tend to be lopsided.
Only Gurdjieff understood the inner energy system in enough detail to present a work that was fully balanced; only the Enneagram provides a simple tool for understanding the relationships properly.

**The two prayers**

There are only two principal prayers found in the Gurdjieff work. This may seem odd in what is so clearly a religious practice, despite any protestations to the contrary. We needn't feel this is so unusual, however; the early Hesychasts and the writers of the Philokalia managed to reduce their practice to a single prayer, the “Lord have Mercy” prayer alone, which was deemed fully sufficient to achieve salvation.

One could argue that point; however, what is certain is that Gurdjieff reduced the essential prayers in his system to the only two he considered as absolutely necessary, according to the science of the Enneagram.

This is because each prayer is specifically related to one side of the Enneagram.

**I am–I wish to be**

This prayer is the Abrahamic prayer, that is, the Old Testament prayer for being that founded the work leading to Christianity. It derives from the statement that the Lord made to Moses when he encountered the Lord in the form of a burning bush: “I am that I am.”

This prayer is specifically related to the first conscious shock, conscious labor, which is a work of essential affirmation and conscious labor. This particular work relates to the energy on the right side of the body (in yoga, the “right channel,” or “golden thread,” running down from the right temple through the bottom of the foot) –an energy which, esoterically speaking, is directly related to the work of the individual and their own personal effort. This work might be contextualized as an effort to show oneself as worthy through preparation, although there are many other dimensions to it.

**Lord have Mercy**

This prayer is the Christian prayer, i.e., the New Testament prayer that represents the “new covenant” of Love brought by Christ. It is furthermore–unmistakably– the Prayer of the Heart as practiced by the Early Church Fathers of the Philokalia. It belongs to the second conscious shock, and the left side of the Enneagram. This work relates to the energy on the left side (yoga: “left channel”) of the body, which is sent from above (the Right Hand of God the Father) as help. The prayer itself represents a call for help, and is in fact the core of the practice of both Christianity and Islam—that is, submission.
Both prayers are necessary in order to foster harmonious development, and stand in complete technical accord with the principles expounded in the science of octaves.

Because each one is specifically associated with a conscious shock, we see that worship, in both the old and New Testament form, is actually an essential--perhaps the most essential--component of the Gurdjieff system. It is just worship in what one might call an unfamiliar context.

This makes perfect sense, because if we wish to discover a truly effective worship, certainly, it won't be one we're familiar with.

**More on the prayers**

Each of the 2 conscious shocks–in the form of prayer–takes on a dual role of both holy affirming and holy denying. This relationship is complex, but important to try and understand.

*I am- I wish to be*

The first shock, conscious labor, is accompanied by a prayer of affirmation of the self.

This is entirely appropriate, because it takes place on the right side of the enneagram, which is the corporeal, or incarnated, side of the diagram. It corresponds exactly to Gurdjieff’s comment that a man must become a conscious egoist in order to work. Embodied in this flesh, a human being’s first task is to affirm themselves consciously. This means to take responsibility for one’s Being.

This is actually a holy denying action, since one must paradoxically deny the Lord in order to affirm oneself. It’s notable that Gurdjieff’s mythological protagonist Beelzebub fell from grace in heaven specifically because he affirmed himself and his own ideas, instead of His Endlessness. We see a direct connection here between Beelzebub’s actions and the first conscious shock, as well as an explanation of why he is banished—that is, incarnated–in the solar system.

There is, in other words, a little Beelzebub in all of us.

The energy of the first conscious shock is involutionary. It is a folding inward of the higher towards the self, a gathering of energies. This shock is affirming from the perspective of the self, but denying from the perspective of the Lord. Nonetheless, it is absolutely necessary as part of the process. One might say that one has to leave the Lord in order to come back. The parable of the prodigal son comes to mind.

The understanding also casts a light on the ideas of original sin in Christianity; man

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2 See Beelzebub’s Tales To His Grandson," pg. 1040-1046
begins from a point where holy denying (affirmation of the self, which may be perceived as sinful) is a requirement for his existence and development, not an option. This is consistent with some of Meister Eckhart’s views on the nature of sin, as well as brother Lawrence’s observation that he put his sins between himself and God, to advise God that he was not worthy, and that God studiously ignored him, and continued to send blessings anyway.

The path is fraught with danger because the path must be fraught with danger. (Job 5:7: Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.) No one is exempt from negotiating this territory. The difference between the conscious egoist and the unconscious egoist is that the conscious egoist is aware of the danger; the unconscious egoist blithely ignores it.

*Lord have mercy.*

The second conscious shock, intentional suffering, requires a movement into the emotional and spiritual side of the enneagram.

The shock that is required here is the exact opposite of the first shock—this is a holy affirming action—that is, it is a surrender to His Endlessness. In other words, it is the surrender of the ego which was painstakingly and actively affirmed in the first stage of work, and an affirmation of the Lord. The shock is, of course, a holy denying action in relation to the ego.

Ultimately, we are required to surrender everything we have gained in order to complete the process. The evolutionary process of the second shock is a returning outward of everything that was folded inward in the first stage. And, in the same way that organic molecules must without fail be correctly folded in order to do their jobs, what was folded inward in the first stage must be rightly folded, lest what is emitted in the second stage during the unfolding be corrupted.

Why does it work this way? Well, Gurdjieff gave us an oblique answer to that in his conversations with Ouspensky. He pointed out that men already think that they have will, and so make no effort to acquire it.

In the same spirit, it is impossible to surrender your ego to God if you don't have one.

As Gurdjieff explained it, what we think is ego, or "I," is actually just false personality—a construction of the intellectual mind. ^3^ Hence the work to acquire a real ego, in order to have something to give up or offer, makes perfect sense.

The shocks are not one-dimensional. Each shock actually embodies both a yes and a no— the two shocks manifest an internal friction that maintains a dynamic action.

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^3^ See G.I. Gurdjieff’s *Views From The Real World*, “Essence and Personality,” P. 143; also, P.D. Ouspensky’s *In Search Of The Miraculous*, Pgs. 226-227
The beauty of understanding the system from this perspective is that the reconciling factor always remains "do," regardless of which role the shocks play, and which perspective they are viewed from.

The action of the Lord is always necessary in order to reconcile our contradictions.
Realms and centers

on the Enneagram

Crown- 7th Chakra
Higher intellectual

1 Instinctive
(base of spine)

2 Sex
(sex organs)

3 First conscious
shock

4 Moving (abdomen)

5 Emotional (heart)

6 Second conscious
shock

7 Intellectual
(throat)

8 Higher emotional
(third eye)

Spiritual realm:
the higher centers
Evolutionary
movement

Physical realm: the
lower centers
Involutionary
movement

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Desires & non-desires in relation to involution and evolution

One of the well-known remarks that Gurdjieff’s saintly protagonist Ashieta Shiemash made to his followers was as follows:

"And so, only he who consciously assists the process of this inner struggle, and consciously assists the "nondesires" to prevail over the "desires," behaves in accordance with the Being of our Common Father Creator Himself; whereas he who consciously assists the contrary only increases His sorrow."\(^4\)

This of course reminds us of Gurdjieff’s premise of non-identification, or, if we are Buddhists, the cultivation of detachment; and Christian asceticism is not far off this mark either. Nonetheless, followers of the Gurdjieff method continue to question each other and themselves about exactly what was meant by this.

Returning once again to the character and nature of the two conscious shocks, and the prayers associated with them, we can perhaps begin to develop a deeper perspective on this thorny question.

In the preceding passage, Ashieta Shiemash lays out what could be considered an encapsulation of the forces in action on the opposite sides of the enneagram:

"'And we must be suffering, because this being-impulse can come to its full manifestation in us only through the constant struggle between two quite opposite complexes of functioning issuing from two sources of quite opposite origin, that is to say, through the constant struggle between the processes of the functioning of our planetary body and the parallel processes of the functionings arising progressively in accordance with the coating and perfecting of our higher being-bodies within this planetary body of ours, which processes in their totality actualize every kind of reason in three-centered beings.

"'Consequently, like all three-centered beings of our Great Universe, we men existing on the Earth, owing to the presence in us also of the factors for engendering the divine impulse of Objective Conscience, must always inevitably struggle with the two quite opposite functionings arising and proceeding in our common presence, the results of which are always sensed by us either as "desires" or as "non desires."\(^5\)

( Italics are mine.)

If we understand the "two opposite complexes of functioning" as referring to the two opposite sides of the enneagram, we can see that the desires belong to the right side of the diagram, which represents both the physical incarnation ("the functioning of our planetary body") and the involutionary forces of self-affirmation.

\(^4\) See G. I. Gurdjieff’s *Beelzebub’s Tales To His Grandson*, pg. 340
\(^5\) *Ibid*
The non-desires, on the other hand, clearly represent the evolutionary forces of surrender (intentional suffering) represented on the left side of the diagram, which represent the higher centers.

In other words, the struggle between desires and non-desires is a representation of the struggle between the self and Godhead, in which the self must be utterly surrendered in order to complete Gurdjieff's second conscious shock. The action, in fact, has little to do with man's involvement with the external world, but is rather an inner interaction that has been progressively misunderstood and literalized until the exoteric interpretation focuses on our outward behavior, emotional tastes, and moral compasses. Hence Beelzebub's utter contempt for man's ideas about good and evil.6

The question of the struggle between desire and non-desire must ultimately draw a man much more deeply into the nature of his personal manifestation relative to a higher authority. Once again, we encounter a taste of Meister Eckhart's direction here. Or, to put it in Christ's words, once a man gains the whole world (his ego, his self, and his relationship to the external) he runs the risk of losing his soul in the process.

If we were to extrapolate any further, we might surmise that the impulse of divine conscience, also mentioned in this particular passage, represents the reconciling force or "do" that mediates all of the interplay between these opposing forces. It is, after all, a specifically designated divine force active in all of the three brained beings of the universe, qualifying it for that role. Hence its position in the diagram that opens the essay.

What we see in the Enneagram is a map of the vast cosmological engine in which energy, on its involutionary path, is separated from its parent source—the Father—undergoes a painful process of individuation—and then discovers that this must be surrendered if it is to return to the source. The entire process is a divine process—not belonging to man, and mediated entirely through the assistance of the divine, who must intervene (by way of the conscious shocks) on both sides of the process in order to help it along.

Thus, in a peculiar yet instructive paradigm, God intentionally causes man to fall away from him, and helps in the process, but then assists in his return. Echoes of certain sophisticated Christian theologies abound here. Sin—the involutionary force—is necessary. Without it, there is no polarity, and without polarity, the movement of energy is impossible.

Here we furthermore encounter a powerful and comprehensive image of one of the basic Gurdjieffian practices: we forget ourselves, and we must return to ourselves.

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6 See Beelzebub’s Tales To His Grandson, Pgs. 1040-1046
The Enneagram has this basic principle of inner work built directly into its visual language, inserting the principle into the workings of the cosmos itself. We may feel alone and desperate in our perpetual forgetting of ourselves, forgetting of our Divine nature, forgetting of the principles of inner work.

Yet, seen from the point of view of the Enneagram, the cosmos is manufactured with this challenge built into the very fabric of its own existence.

Even God, apparently, cannot remember himself sufficiently—perhaps, in the end, the price that He paid to create the cosmos, and one of the sources of His endless sorrow.