

**Gurdjieff on Aim, as recounted to P.D. Ouspensky in “*In Search of the Miraculous*,” taken from the edition published by Paul H. Crompton Ltd 2004, Pages 99-100.**

**For a more complete examination of the subject, refer to Chapter 6.**

ONE of the next lectures began with a question asked by one of those present: *What was the aim of his teaching?*

“I certainly have an aim of my own,” said G. “But you must permit me to keep silent about it. At the present moment my aim cannot have any meaning for you, because it is important that you should define your own aim. *The teaching by itself cannot pursue any definite aim.* It can only show the best way for men to attain whatever aims they may have. The question of aim is a very important question. Until a man has defined his own aim for himself he will not be able even to begin ‘to do’ anything. How is it possible ‘to do’ anything without having an aim? Before anything else ‘doing’ presupposes an aim.”

“But the question of the aim of existence is one of the most difficult of philosophical questions,” said one of those present. “You want us to begin by solving this question. But perhaps we have come here because we are seeking an answer to this question. You expect us to have known it beforehand. If a man knows this, he really knows everything.”

“You misunderstood me,” said G. “I was not speaking of the philosophical significance of the aim of existence. Man does not know it and he cannot know it as long as he remains what he is, first of all, because there is not one but many aims of existence. On the contrary, attempts to answer this question using ordinary methods are utterly hopeless and useless. I was asking about an entirely different thing, I was asking about your *personal* aim, about what you want to attain, and not about the reason for your existence. Everyone must have his own aim: one man wants riches, another health, a third wants the kingdom of heaven, the fourth wants to be a general, and so on. It is about aims of this sort that I am asking. If you tell me what your aim is, I shall be able to tell you whether we are going along the same road or not.

“Think of how you formulated your own aim to yourselves before you came here.”

“I formulated my own aim quite clearly seven years ago,” I said. “I said to myself then that I want *to know the future*. Through a theoretical study of the question I came to the conclusion that the future *can* be known, and several times I was even successful in experiments in knowing the exact future. I concluded from this that we ought, and that we have a right, to know the future, and that until we do know it we shall not be able to organize our lives. A great deal was connected for me with this question. I considered, for instance, that a man can know, and has a right to know, exactly how much time is left to

him, how much time he has at his disposal, or, in other words, he can and has a right to know the day and hour of his death. I always thought it humiliating for a man to live without knowing this and I decided at one time not to begin doing anything in any sense whatever until I did know it. For what is the good of beginning any kind of work when one doesn't know whether one will have any time to finish it or not?"

"Very well," said G., "to know the future is the first aim. Who else can formulate his aim?"

"I should like to be convinced that I shall go on existing after the death of the physical body, or, if this depends upon me, I should like to work in order to exist after death," said one of the company.

"I don't care whether I know the future or not, or whether I am certain or not certain of life after death," said another, "if I remain what I am now. What I feel most strongly is that I am not master of myself, and if I were to formulate my aim, I should say that I want to be *master of myself*."

"I should like to understand the teaching of Christ, and to be a Christian in the true sense of the term," said the next.

"I should like to be able to *help people*," said another.

"I should like to know how to stop wars," said another.

"Well, that's enough," said G., "we have now sufficient material to go on with. The best formulation of those that have been put forward is the wish to be one's own master. Without this nothing else is possible and without this nothing else will have any value. But let us begin with the first question, or the first aim.