

18 CONSCIENCE

18.1 Morality and Conception of Right

¹What is moral and what is immoral? It is impossible to give a rational answer to that question because what is called “morality” is based on illusions and fictions, false values of life and erroneous ideas of reality. This is also clear from the fact that moral values change constantly, and moreover vary from people to people; in other words, there is nothing permanent in them. If we examine the moral rules that are upheld in many parts of the world, we find that they all contradict one another. There is no such thing as general morality; there is no such thing even as could be called Christian morality. All moral systems are more or less subjective and arbitrary, and most of them are created by power elites for purposes of mass manipulation.

²If morality carries little weight, on the contrary understanding of right and wrong is vitally important. In those matters, man must have a certain insight into differences and limits. Moreover he must be sufficiently skeptical about ordinary morality and must have understood that there is nothing general or stable in it. Finally he must understand the necessity of objective right and wrong, namely that there are definite, unchanging standards by which he can discern what is right and what is wrong in each individual case, so that all arbitrary conceptions of right, limited to times and places, make way for absolutely valid norms of right. All of this is about starting from a right attitude, a right conception; what the Buddha called right view and enumerates first among the eight elements making up the noble eight-fold path. Morality passes, but the understanding of right endures.

³An enduring conception of right, conception of good and evil, right and wrong, can arise in a human being only in connection with a constant aim and a constant understanding. In esoteric schools, one of the aims is that disciples shall effect such a constancy in their own essence. This is called creating a centre of gravity, and the instrument for this creation is the work personality. The work personality, which in relation to the allegory of the house in disorder is also called the “deputy steward”, is the sum total of all such forces of the individual which do not merely want to work to develop consciousness but also have some knowledge of the conditions of doing so. The opposite of work personality is false personality, the sum total of all such forces of the individual as neither are able nor desire to develop consciousness and therefore can only hinder work personality in its striving. Work personality and false personality arise in the individual only when he begins to develop his consciousness intentionally and with a certain degree of intensity. In people who do not have this interest or have it only faintly developed, those two opposite forces exist only potentially but do not appear.

⁴By establishing an aim you can establish the principles of good and evil. There can be no clear idea of good and evil or right and wrong without first establishing an aim or direction. When you have an aim, then what brings you closer to your aim is good and right and what takes you further away from your aim is evil and wrong. If this personal aim corresponds to the possibilities of consciousness development, then it contains a common basis of values for many people, namely all those who want to develop. What keeps us from reaching our aim is mechanicalness, sleep; and what helps us achieve our aim is consciousness, being awake. From this it follows that consciousness is good and mechanicalness is evil. Instead of “good” and “evil”, people who want to develop can speak of “conscious” and “mechanical”. This is quite sufficient for all practical purposes. It does not mean that all that is mechanical must be evil, but it means that evil cannot be conscious, must be mechanical; moreover: that good cannot be mechanical but must be conscious. Everyone must ask himself: Can I be evil consciously? Can I consciously do what I have realized to be evil? Must not evil, if I have realized what it is, be something that I do mechanically, in my state of sleep? And the

corresponding as to good: Can I be good in my habitual, mechanical, sleeping state? Must I not be conscious to be good?

18.2 What is Conscience?

¹It is possible for man to exist in four states of consciousness. But such as he is presently, he practically has no experience of the two higher states: self-consciousness and objective consciousness. In this connection, objective consciousness is described as a state where we can know truth. If we reach that state, we shall also know what is right and what is wrong. Consequently, the same way which leads to higher consciousness leads also to the objective understanding of right and wrong. Since we have not got objective consciousness, we consider everything that helps us to develop it as right, and everything that hinders us in this as wrong and bad.

²On our way to full objective consciousness we can in the third state of consciousness, self-consciousness, have a certain limited objective consciousness, namely of ourselves. One important aspect of this objective consciousness is conscience. Here, the word “conscience” does not mean the individual reactions against violations of prohibitions that express themselves mechanically in people and even in pets such as dogs and cats. Such a conscience may be however arbitrary and is totally dependent on the conventional morality from which the prohibitions in question have been formulated. In esoteric teaching, what is meant by conscience is a certain faculty that exists in every normal person, and by normal person is meant one whose consciousness can develop. Man has a potential for true conscience. But in most people that potential is buried and slumbering. In its stead there is a feigned conscience, conventions, hypocrisy, morality.

³Conscience is what brings together all our different, mutually irreconcilable feelings about some certain thing, so that we can know them all together, all at once. Conscience is the higher, positive emotional understanding of our own actions, an understanding that is free from lies and self-justifications. Conscience is a sudden, instantaneous state in which one cannot hide anything from oneself, cannot lie to oneself, where one is at once aware of all the feelings one has felt in relation to something or somebody, all those feelings with all their mutual contradictions and inconsistencies. It is a shocking realization of how asleep and mechanical one is in one’s feelings, how much lie and falsehood, how many absurd contradictions there are in the feelings one imagines are noble, unselfish, and loving. We cannot say that we do not have a conscience, so it is not about developing something that does not yet exist within us. Conscience exists within us, but in our lives it is beyond what is apparent. Conscience is buried very deep within us and it is asleep. Therefore, it is very well protected from false ideas and false emotions.

⁴It can wake up for a short moment in everyday life, and when it does, this usually brings about suffering, at least in the beginning, for it is very unpleasant to see the truth about oneself.

⁵Conscience is another manifestation of consciousness, of being awake. You might say that consciousness works more on the intellectual side and conscience more on the emotional side. Conscience is the same in relation to feelings, as consciousness in relation to ideas. More intellectual consciousness and more emotional conscience only appear separate; actually they are two aspects of the same state, and the one cannot develop without the other awakening. Conscience is a tool of discrimination that helps us see what is good and bad or right and wrong in our own conduct. Moments of conscience are absolutely necessary steps on the path to waking up, and a man without conscience cannot develop. Using a different formulation we say that there must be two paths on which man approaches the higher, as yet superhuman states of consciousness: the path of higher intellect and the path of higher emotion. Pursuing only one of the two paths will not do. The work is so great and so difficult that all good forces must be used.

⁶Conscience can be defined as the emotional perception of truth in a certain matter. Conscience is the same as self-consciousness, it only appears different to us. We are subjective, so we view things subjectively. When we think about what is meant by self-consciousness, we think of a certain force, a certain energy, or a certain state in connection with an intellectual appreciation. The same energy, the same state can appear through emotions, and this can happen to quite ordinary people in quite ordinary conditions. Sometimes it may happen that people have an emotional perception of truth – some of them more, others less. This is conscience. Lack of self-consciousness, absence of self-remembrance, and many other factors, such as identification and imagination, shut us off from moments of conscience which otherwise would be more possible. Seeing contradictions and feeling conscience are connected, but are not one and the same. You may see contradictions and yet you may not feel conscience, so if you take these two as one and the same, you will not arrive at the right understanding.

⁷Conscience is not very far for a normal human being, and, generally, it is easier to have moments of conscience than moments of self-consciousness. At first, when conscience manifests itself in us, it turns against us, so that we begin to see all our inner contradictions. Usually we cannot see them, because we are always in one or another small apparent self that does not know of the other apparent selves, but conscience can see from top and shows us that here we felt one thing, there another thing, and here again quite another thing, all on the same subject, or person. For instance, we love somebody one moment, and wish him or her dead the next. We become aware of such contradictions in moments of conscience, and this is what makes them so unpleasant. All our life, all our habitual ways of thinking, have only one aim – to avoid shocks, unpleasant feelings, unpleasant realizations about ourselves. And this is the chief thing that keeps us asleep. But if we want to wake up, we must welcome moments of conscience, without fear, with gratitude. Waking conscience is waking the courage to see the truth about ourselves.

⁸Such people as are called “crooks without a conscience” regrettably are too often successful with people who have a somewhat awakened conscience. If the latter lack discrimination and a wide experience of life, they usually have difficulty in understanding that other people do not have an awakened conscience. Such good people all too easily believe that others are as good as they are. There is, as Confucius remarked, a real need of people in the world who have both an awakened conscience and an immediately active discrimination.

18.3 Buffers

¹In railway-carriages the function of buffers is to dampen the force that arises when carriages collide. Man has mechanical appliances that have a similar function and therefore are called buffers as well. Their effect is that they reduce the collision of two conflicting aspects of him, so that he does not notice them together. This prevents him from seeing his self-contradictions, so that lying to himself will be much easier.

²Buffers are machines that feed you excuses, subterfuges, and self-justifications. Each buffer is the result of years of wrong and stupid life, of sleep, ignorance, indulgence in, excuses for, every kind of weakness, unwillingness to make efforts from within your being, laxity, apathetic loitering, shutting your eyes to your own errors, escape from uncomfortable truths, constant lying to yourself, blaming and accusing other people, etc.

³Morality is made up of buffers. Buffers make the life of ordinary man easier, more pleasant. It would be very hard for him to live without them, since he does not understand the necessity of conscience. Buffers prevent him from feeling true conscience. Instead of true conscience he has feigned conscience and buffers, moral conventions, hypocrisy, and vanity.

⁴Buffers prevent him from developing consciousness as well. Even if man earnestly desires to awaken, be transformed, lead his life on a higher level, yet these buffers will hinder him

pretty efficiently, since they reduce shocks, and only shocks, jolts, blows can shake a man out of the state of sleep in which he lives, wake him up.

⁵Buffers are formed slowly and gradually. Many buffers are formed artificially by “education”, other buffers by the suggestive influence of the surrounding society. Consensus, having the same opinions as all the others, as convention tells you, because you are afraid of “what people say”, expresses itself as some kind of hypnosis or trance, that is, an apathetic state where the individual can be induced to believe in the most absurd things and act against what in a moment of conscience he would realize to be right. Ethnographers describe allegedly primitive human societies in Asia, Africa, and South America, thus outside Europe, as being dominated by irrational taboos that manifest themselves as acquired anxieties for sensual contact with certain objects or beings. Many people in modern European societies, however, educated, learned, and intellectual people in particular, evince a no less irrational anxiety about contact with tabooed subjects of conversation.

⁶When a man discovers something within himself, he experiences a shock, but if his buffers are strong enough they make this occasional clarity soon evaporate, so that he can go back to sleep. The more a man observes himself, the more likely it will be for him to begin to see these buffers. This is so because the more you observe yourself, the more you will catch glimpses of yourself as a whole (note this: as a whole, not as a unity!). And when you see this whole, you will also see conflicting traits, precisely such conflicts as buffers are supposed to hide. Finally you will be able to see your buffers, see them as the unnatural formations that they are.

⁷Buffers lull man to sleep, give him the pleasant feeling that everything is well as it is, that there are no conflicts and that he can go on sleeping in peace and quiet. Buffers are mechanisms that make man believe that he is always right and always does the right thing.

⁸It is often very easy to see the buffers of other people. It is very difficult to see your own buffers and you will eagerly deny them. A man was told by his teacher that his chief feature was that he contradicted. He reacted at once and hotly by saying: “But I never contradict!” Then the other pupils could not help laughing.

18.4 Waking Conscience

¹When people who are being trained in esoterics are told about conscience for the first time, they usually comprehend it too shallowly and, therefore, take it too lightly. As if they and all other people had conscience. It is with this as with self-consciousness. It is very easy to believe, when you hear about it, that you have it. But we do not have an awakened conscience, no more than we have self-consciousness. Thus conscience has to be awakened. In fact, this is one of the most important aims of your work on yourself. And there are many obstacles to this.

²The awakening of conscience is a process that runs in many steps, like the development of self-consciousness. Therefore, we may speak of an “awakened conscience” as on many different levels. A fully awakened conscience is far away for most people, but a faintly awakened, a temporarily awakened, and an awakening conscience exists in pretty many people.

³Conscience, when awakened, is the same in all people, which is a fact that must be stressed. In our self-observation certain realizations may reach us: “I am not this person whom I am observing. I am not these behaviours, views, statements, certainties, self-justifications, excuses. I am not the one I imagined. I am not these public distinctions and recognitions, positions, and virtues. I am not these appearances. I am something different, deep below, hidden.” Such realizations may form an intellectual basis for the possibility of waking conscience.

⁴All work on waking conscience must, just like all intentional work, start from the intellect,

the thinking centre. It must begin with knowledge, understanding, insight, right attitude, right effort, reflexion, self-observation. Thereupon this qualitative intellectual factor can activate higher emotions, where conscience is the most active after it has awakened. These higher emotions must be or become active, alive, in man, because without their participation there will be no moments of conscience. Purely intellectual man, who either does not have much of these emotions or does not care to activate them, must remain a man whose conscience is asleep. Hopefully he will finally realize, if his intellect is strong enough and deep enough in understanding, that he must (re)acquire the mystic's intensity, devotion, and love of this higher, whatever he calls it – God, the higher self, soul, or spirit –, for this higher is the origin of conscience. Like self-consciousness conscience comes down from above and leads us upwards, if we are able to receive it. And to be able to receive it we must love it. The love of God is flowing toward us without reserve, the mystics are right in saying this. But what does “toward us” mean? It means that we must meet it halfway.

⁵If you remember yourself in one mood, then remember yourself in another mood, and try to unite them, you may begin to see how contradictory your emotional states are.

⁶As long as a man views himself as one and single, he will never leave the condition in which he exists. To awaken his conscience he must start to see contradictions in himself. But if he tries to see contradictions believing at the same time that he is one and single, nothing will come out of it. Then it will just be as if he put his one foot upon the other and wondered why he does not move from the spot.

⁷Man prevents, delays, or even destroys the awakening of conscience above all by lying to himself and about himself. Self-lying is what keeps false personality alive, but conscience is what will ultimately kill it. Every time a man refrains from lying to himself or about himself thanks to the wakefulness of his conscience, he weakens or thins false personality somewhat. It must die eventually for the true man to be born.

18.5 Preparing for Moments of Conscience

¹At one moment you entertain a certain kind of feelings towards some definite thing, event, or person, at another moment you have feelings of quite the opposite kind, and this without realizing it. Then, suddenly, conscience arrives, the condition where these mutually opposite feelings exist simultaneously. The shock of seeing these irreconcilable, illogical feelings makes it impossible for you to identify yourself with them. You then observe them in a state free of identification. This is a self-conscious state of a higher emotional kind. But it is impossible to make up one's mind, exert oneself to create such a state. It is possible to create a state of self-remembrance after receiving training in methods and applying them with understanding. It is impossible to do something corresponding to intentionally creating a moment of conscience; nothing but imagination will come out of it. You must wait for conscience until it arrives. On the other hand it is possible to prepare a room in yourself for its arrival, cultivate such an attitude that you will be able to welcome it when it arrives. You do so by trying to see yourself as you are, not as you want to be, by being sincere to yourself, by lying to yourself as little as possible. This preparation has a preparation in its turn, namely right attitude, right understanding of what is false in yourself, what cannot or what should not be developed in yourself. Also efforts at creating moments of self-remembrance may favour moments of conscience later.

²It is possible to prepare for conscience by working, in our present condition already, at its better moments, on liberating ourselves gradually from our habitual feelings. This we cannot do directly, only indirectly. And we do it by dis-identifying from them. This dis-identification, too, we do best and the most efficiently indirectly, by observing unnecessary emotions as the objects, separate from ourselves, they are. Then they are no longer inner states that we talk about by saying “I” and “me”, but they have become more like external things, objects of our

reflection and observation. From this fact comes the term “objective consciousness”. When we can observe them as objects outside the self, we can also clearly see their mutual inconsistency, that we hate the person or the thing we say we love, and love those we say we hate. Then we can even more intentionally withdraw inwards to the centre of ourselves and, using understanding, make those emotions belong to what is external to us, our inner external world, so to speak. All this work is preparation for future moments of conscience. Even this preparation must contain many things, above all an inner rejection, separation from oneself, of all expressions of lying, hatred, suspicion, and pride, and an intentional cultivation of the opposite qualities, especially in one’s attitude to beings and realities of higher kinds.

18.6 Understanding Conscience

¹It is difficult to describe the experience of a moment of self-remembrance to anyone who has not had this experience, and it is even more difficult to describe the experience of conscience. The less experienced can approach understanding of more intellectual self-remembrance through intellect, but approaching more emotional conscience through intellect is more difficult, and through ordinary emotion it is even more difficult, since its sentimentality, egoism, egocentricity, negativity, and other such personality reactions falsify everything. At moments of conscience, personality is entirely passive and quiet, does not react, and so cannot falsify.

²It is difficult to understand conscience, because personality has grown over it, so that our feelings and our perception of self have shifted to personality. Therefore it is impossible for us to “feel all together”, and even if we could, it would be unendurable to us such as we are now. If a man could feel all together, it would mean that he were one. But personality is not one, but is divided into many small apparent selves. The most important thing to understand about personality is its division. That is why you now feel in one way and now in another way, but separately and not together, and without even memory as a unifying bond – just as it is with your thoughts or body movements: at the one moment in one way, at the next in some other way, and in most cases you do not even notice these constant changes. It is this constant shifting and impermanence that man perceives as a unitary self and so calls it “I” – a mere imaginary unity, suggested to him by his physical unity, his name and his body.

³And also quite apart from the idea of conscience it is important that you discover within yourself that when you feel strong emotions – this has nothing to do with insignificant emotions –, when you feel strongly about some particular thing, you can be practically certain that at another occasion you felt differently about the same thing. If you cannot see this in yourself, then you should try to see it in others and then ask yourself what your reason is for believing you are an exception. When you realize that these mutually contradictory feelings exist, then it will help you understand your mechanicalness and your lack of understanding of yourself – lack of self-knowledge. As long as we have different emotions at different moments, what are we? Now we have confidence, now we are suspicious; now we like something, now we dislike it; now we assert that something is immensely important and blame others for their lack of interest, now we are indifferent ourselves. The aim is to bring all these different emotions together, otherwise we shall never come to know ourselves. If we always feel only one emotion at a time and do not remember other emotions, then we are identified with this one emotion. When we have another emotion, we forget the first one; when we have a third one, we forget the first and the second. Very early in life, through imitation and in various other ways, we learn how to live in a state of imagination to protect us from unpleasant experiences. Thus people develop within themselves this capacity for feeling only one emotion at the time.

⁴With conscience, in conscience, you understand the basic unity of religions. Without conscience, outside conscience, they must all wage war against one another.

⁵Ordinary man, who is not interested in developing consciousness, cannot understand conscience either. To him, conscience, if he were hit by it, would only amount to torment, unnecessary suffering, which he would hasten to forget.

⁶There are people in whom opposing forces, such as false personality, lying, self-justification, conceit, are so strong that they can never have any moment of conscience. Mercifully, the powers of destiny have seen fit to spare such people an instinct for, or an interest in, anything that has to do with the development of consciousness. For it would be inhumane torture to let a man be inflamed with eagerness to strive for something that he could never attain.

⁷Demands for public demonstration of remorse, confession of sins, can only obstruct the manifestation of true conscience. Conscience is the individual's private business, which he is not obliged to report to any other. It is all too easy to falsify conscience. False personality is an expert on such things. Sentimentality, indignation, righteous wrath – no such things have anything to do with conscience. All such is the unrest and noise of personality. Conscience is observation, quiet, and silence. It is a higher state of consciousness. Personality must find a state where it is passive, quiet, withdrawn, if conscience is to appear. If man is too full of himself, his personality, conscience cannot awaken.

⁸False personality is the most decided enemy of conscience. Does this mean that enmity is mutual? That conscience is the enemy of false personality? Not in the sense where enemy means “hater”. At the moment of conscience there is no hatred, so conscience hates nobody and nothing. But conscience has such a force that false personality, with its lies, hatred, and pride, must lie low, humiliated. It is more correct to say that conscience is the unyielding adversary of false personality. There is no possibility whatever of reconciliation between them. Their struggle must end in the complete victory of conscience and the crushing defeat of falsity. Therefore conscience may be likened to the noble warrior who has banished all hatred from his heart but who nevertheless is unflinchingly prepared to defeat his adversary completely, because this is what *dharma*, divine law, commands him to do. Precisely this is the theme of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

⁹Man's whole work at trying to develop consciousness is about reaching a higher state, the third state, self-consciousness, with a view to making it permanent. This state exists within him as a potential. The organs that are its carriers exist. They are centres of the causal envelope, man's envelope of immortality. Our so-called normal state, waking consciousness, is the second, lower state. All kinds of thoughts, all emotional reactions, all self-conceptions, all the attitudes with which we relate to the surrounding world, other people and ourselves, all this is part of this lower. We seek to attain the higher, the third state. That is why we are called “seekers”. We are seeking the knowledge or truth of reality and of ourselves. But it is useless seeking if you cannot entertain any hope of finding what you are looking for; the seeker hopes to become a finder. And the seeker finds some part of the truth in the third state and then more in the fourth state. We cannot form any correct idea of what full, permanent self-consciousness means on the basis of the short glimpses of it we have caught. These glimpses rather show us the way to something that we can reach, something that we can find. What we can be certain of, however, is that in this third state intellect and emotion, or rather their higher counterparts, become utterly different from what we are used to. The united understanding of thought and feeling will be so different qualitatively from what they are in your mechanical states that you must exclaim: only now do I understand!

18.7 Conscience in Encounters with the Knowledge and Its Representatives

¹In Peter Brook's film *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, which tells the story of Gurdjieff's early search, there is a scene which depicts, in a realistic and moving way, how a seeker after knowledge, Russian Prince Yuri Lubovedsky, has his conscience suddenly awakened at his

encounter with an emissary from a school, in this state of higher consciousness has the most shattering insight about himself, and immediately makes the most important decision of his life. The scene is enacted in a teahouse in Cairo. Gurdjieff and Lubovedsky are sitting on the floor waiting for their tea when the emissary, unknown to them, enters. This is the conversation which then ensues between the emissary and Lubovedsky. The emissary begins:

²– One can think well here. You are Russian.

³– Yes.

⁴– I am glad to speak to someone from Russia. I have been in Russia. But that is not the point. Eh, Gogo! Gogo!

⁵– How do you know that name?! Only my mother and my nurse ever called me by it, and that was more than forty years ago!

⁶– Gogo! You have worked and suffered all these years. But you never knew how to work, how to let the desire of your mind become the desire of your heart.

⁷– Who are you?! How do you know me so well?

⁸– Does it really matter who I am or what I am? Is not your curiosity one of the chief reasons why your life has come to nothing? It is so strong that even now all you want is an explanation who I am and how I know you.

⁹The prince casts down his eyes and is silent. He is hit by conscience. Then he says:

¹⁰– Yes, Father. You are right. I have seen many miracles and tried to understand them. But it has brought me no real understanding. Yes, I am empty. It is too late. I do not truly want to know what I just asked you. I sincerely beg your pardon.

¹¹The emissary waits for a few moments. Then he says:

¹²– Perhaps it is not yet too late. If you feel with all your being that you really are empty, then I advise you to try once more. If you agree to one condition, I will help you. The condition is: die – consciously – to the life you have led until now and go where I shall indicate.

¹³After a few moments of quiet pondering, Prince Lubovedsky nods his answer, rises without saying a word, and follows the emissary out as he leaves. During the whole of this encounter and conversation Gurdjieff has been a silent outsider and observer.

¹⁴With his conscience awakened, the prince had a clear vision of all his previous life, how aimless and useless all his search had been, as its motivation was curiosity and thirst for sensations, not love of knowledge, seriousness, and responsibility, as he had imagined hitherto. In this state of higher consciousness he saw all the endeavour of his life as separated from his conscious self, and this conscious self was himself at that moment. It was of less importance that this conscious self was only temporarily present; the important thing was that it was present at that very moment. Now Lubovedsky realized that this long, failed endeavour of his was conditioned mechanically and driven mechanically, thus empty in the sense of empty of consciousness. According to Gautama the Buddha, apparent selves are impermanent, without self or soul, therefore empty, and inseparably bound up with suffering. Such a clear insight into the difference between conscious and mechanical states can arise only in a state of self-consciousness, in this case manifesting itself in a moment of conscience.

¹⁵When Lubovedsky, through this shocking realization of his own emptiness, had reached a state of passivity of his personality, a state where a higher consciousness suddenly appeared, the emissary was able to have a serious talk with him, teach him, lay down for him the conditions of that decision which he could make only in such a state. It would have been utterly meaningless for the emissary to speak to Lubovedsky as long as he was in mechanical states, for then the emissary would have addressed only the personality, chock-full of robots. And those robots would have brought up nothing but objections, excuses, justifications. Therefore it was necessary for the emissary to provoke a state of higher consciousness, self-consciousness, in Lubovedsky. What the emissary now was able to convey is called C influence. This means an

influence that can be transmitted by a conscious being to a human being when the latter temporarily is in a self-conscious state. It is of the utmost importance that the man obeys the instructions he receives in that state, since any objection he may raise can only come from his own personality with its apparent selves (robots), can never come from the conscious self, and by allowing them to act he would discontinue the state of self-consciousness and revert to a mechanical state or, expressed differently: from being awake fall asleep again.

¹⁶On such an occasion one should refrain from making proposals of one's own. The teacher or guide is a conscious being who knows what the seeker needs better than he knows it himself. (Once again the important esoteric theme of the difference between desires and needs: we desire what we do not need, and we need what we do not desire.) At best such proposals are just unnecessary, at worst they burden the further journey with obstacles or detours. However, the guide may let the seeker's self-will have its way to teach him a lesson. Remaining self-will demonstrates that his first perception of his own emptiness did not cut deep enough, and then the seeker needs some more experience. This, too, is shown in the film *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, in the series of scenes beginning with Gurdjieff and Professor Skridlov seeking out the Dervish Bogga-Edin in Bukhara. Bogga-Edin opens the conversation with Gurdjieff. Skridlov says nothing.

¹⁷– Have you found what you are looking for?

¹⁸– I have found nothing. I do not even know how to search. There is never any answer. What can I do now? I am desperate.

¹⁹– You will never find the answer by yourself. Alone a man can do very little. His only hope is to find a place where real knowledge has been kept alive. I advise you to try to find the Sarmoung Brotherhood. Go up the Amu-Darya; go towards Kafiristan. It is a dangerous undertaking. You will be risking your life. But at the right moment there will be a guide.

²⁰– Can I take my friend with me?

²¹– I think you may, if you can vouch for his honour.

²²Once in Afghanistan, Gurdjieff and Skridlov chance upon Father Giovanni, who leads a group of monks of another brotherhood. They stay as guests of the group. Gurdjieff's promised guide does not turn up. Then one day Professor Skridlov tells Gurdjieff as they are sitting alone with one another:

²³– Father Giovanni has consented to take me under his protection. I am going to stay here. I have a feeling I have nothing more to seek.

²⁴Only now is the obstacle removed that Gurdjieff put on his path by his uncalled-for proposal to the Dervish Bogga-Edin. At the same moment a boy steps forward to Gurdjieff to tell him:

²⁵– Your guide is waiting.

²⁶(Note: Kafiristan, present-day Nuristan, is a province in Afghanistan.)

18.8 *Metania*

¹In conscience, there is something that resembles remorse somewhat but still should not be confused with remorse such as it usually expresses itself: an inner chaos of self-destructive, negative emotions, just as meaningless and useless as the negative emotions that led to the action which the man now regrets. Instead we should speak about *metania* (sometimes written *metanoia*). This word, which is used in the Gospels, means “rethinking”. In contrast to chaotic, negative, lower emotional, destructive remorse, which cannot lead us anywhere, *metania* is a creative, positive, higher emotional and higher mental state, where we receive help to see how we can make good what we have violated, find a new way, be reconciled with the things or beings that we have ill-treated.

²In schools, metania is a necessary tool in the pupils' work on themselves, a tool without which they cannot develop consciousness. The person who is not transformed need not merely be one whom the teaching of the schools never reached. It may also be one whom the teaching has indeed reached but who is careless about it, neglects it. This is not very serious, however; it is practically inevitable at the beginner's stage and is generally corrected by the man himself as time goes by. It is far more serious, though, if the man expresses negative emotions or derogatory attitudes to the knowledge or the elder brothers from whom he received it. It occurs ever more often in this period of decline we are now experiencing that people, through one part of their being, praise esoterics and bear witness of its great and positive influence on their lives, but through another part of their being, slander and calumniate the individuals to whom they owe the little esoteric learning they have been able to pick up. If they were hit by a wee bit of conscience, they would realize that they had to make metania for what they had violated or else lose the possibility of a renewed contact with the knowledge in future lives. Ingratitude was never a path to the sublime knowledge.