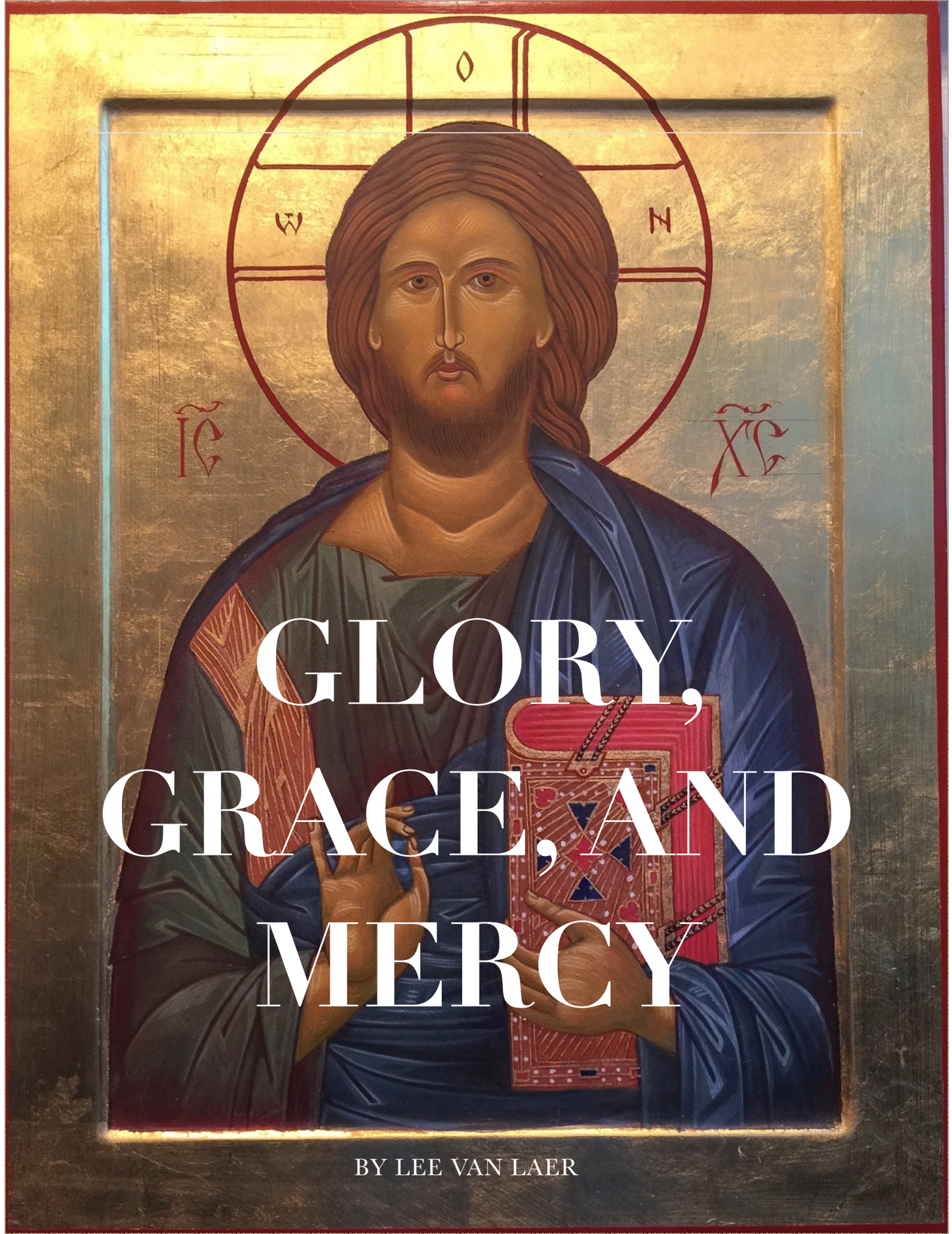

GLORY, GRACE, AND MERCY

BY LEE VAN LAER

Glory, Grace and Mercy

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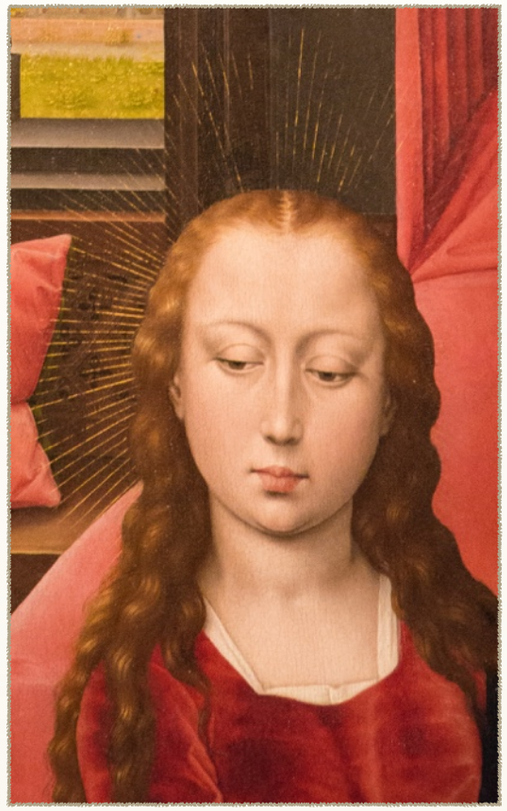
Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and women everywhere.



Detail of The Annunciation, Hans Memling
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Foreword

On the night of Thanksgiving 2015, our family got into a conversation about the nature of Grace and Mercy.

Having written about these subjects recently, it occurred to me that it might be worth collecting the essays into a small booklet.

The essays represent a collected train of mostly interrelated thoughts and impressions that developed during my last trip to China in October and early November of 2015. These long business trips often offer periods of relative solitude during which contemplation seems appropriate; and more often than not, the contemplative enterprise produces an essay or two.

Most (but not all) of these essays have been published in similar form on my on-line diary (aka *blog*, although the term seems, to me, rather outdated and inadequate) posted at Zen, Yoga Gurdjieff—Perspectives on Inner Work.

Most of these essays are about Christianity and prayer, albeit seen from a distinctly esoteric point of view. Readers unfamiliar with the ideas of G. I. Gurdjieff may find some passages and concepts here obscure or difficult; yet the gist of the material, which is meant to refocus one powerfully on an inner understanding of the search for God through Christ, is—I believe— accessible enough for any ordinary Christian with a mystical bent to digest.

My own mystical path within Christianity began in June 2001 with an initiation in Rome that led to a series of religious ecstasies.

The effects of that encounter have been, for all intents and purposes, permanent; the material in this booklet is written in the light of understandings that continue to be revealed as a result.

Lee van Laer

Sparkill, November 2015

Chapter 1

THE PRESENCE

Icon of Christ Pantocrator by Chantal Heinegg
Private Collection

The Presence

There can't really be any mistake about the way the Presence of the Lord is experienced, and what it is like... how I am... when the Presence is absent.

The Presence is not constant; and no one can go out and get the Presence. The Presence comes to me; I don't go to it.

This morning, for example, I was driving into Manhattan. Suddenly the Presence came, localized as it often is in a specific physical place—but immediately having a feeling impact, an emotional influence, over the entire Being, through the body.

I've been working for the last week to put myself more honestly under the influence of God, if that is even possible; that work has consisted of a new approach to the three principal prayers. I'll outline that approach:

We are vessels into which the world flows.

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

There is no I, there is only truth. The way to the truth is through the heart.

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

I call to thee from the depths of my iniquity. I have not delivered myself sufficiently unto thee; I know not how.

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

We recently received into our household a religious icon on loan from our friend Chantal Heinegg, an image of Christ Pantocrator.

This particular icon has had a strong influence on my prayer practice starting immediately, and was the source of inspiration for this prayer, which is a reorganization of an older set of prayers I was taught by Mary and Her various assistants a number of years ago.

Together, the practice seems to be refocusing around this question of there Presence of Christ, which I suppose has always been necessary, but for which the timing was not right until now.

I'd like to better remember the influence of Christ in my daily life, with his generous gifts which constantly flow; and I would like to better remember that I am a vessel for receiving,

as well as understanding that my ego is tiny and useless, and that my sins are many and insurmountable without help.

That, in a nutshell, is the whole of the practice; and I'm still trying to learn it after all these years.

The original articles about the three essential prayers can be found by following the below link:

The Three Essential Truths

Chapter 2

GLORY

Detail of The Annunciation, Hans Memling
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Glory

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

Why is this particular set of three prayers formulated so that the response is, in each case, the above phrase?

In order to understand this, we need to discuss all five of the elements, remembering that the sixth element in the phrase is always the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the Lord, or God, around which all of the other elements are arranged.

There's a way to arrange this progression on the enneagram, but I will leave that, perhaps, for a later explanation. Today we'll discuss glory.

The glory of God is a Great Perfection, and (in the abstract) the physical foundation of the universe itself, the absolute condition within which it manifests.

Now, the metaphysical aspect of glory is its greatest aspect, consisting as it does of complete perfection within all manifestations that can arise: the perfection of space and time, the perfection of vision, sound, sensation, taste, and all other senses. In fact every sense is a reflection of merely one aspect of the Great Perfection. When we indulge, through our intelligence and awareness, in any sense, we are being fed by an aspect of the Great Perfection. This takes place whether we are aware of it or not; because no aspect of creation is divorced from being fed by the Great Perfection.

Glory, in other words, is not just the absolute nature of God; because we all exist within the absolute nature of God. Glory is also the vehicle whereby all of creation itself is born, nourished, grows, matures, and then returns to the source. All the great religions, all of the great musics, great arts, dances, landscapes, and other works within the aesthetic and artistic range of man's (and other sentient beings') expression are attempts to objectify that great glory. So when we hear Beethoven's symphonies, or we see a painting by Goya, or we appreciate a sublime Buddhist sculpture or the temples at Angkor Wat, we are seeing a tiny, nearly infinitesimal fraction of that glory distilled and presented in a formal context that attempts to re-create glory itself, and remind us that we are products of it.

Glory is like a blue sky that contains the whole world and all emotion in it; it contains all longing, all wish, and everything that has ever happened, along with everything that ever has happened; and that sky looks out over a landscape that is equally rich and perfect, with beings in it who are equally intelligent and sensitive. This may sound idealized — and there are exhaustive idealizations of this understanding laid out in works such as the Flower Ornament Sutra. The work seems impossi-

bly complicated, with one miracle nested inside another for page after page and chapter after chapter, but it is actually just the *beginning of an attempt* to touch on what glory is. Its existence is analogous to all the notes in a symphony, which are laid out together in an attempt to remind us that the whole is, within every tiny aspect of its being, intimately related with all other aspects not only of itself, but everything else.

I'm aware that this is a mouthful. Perhaps several dozen mouthfuls. Yet we cannot leave ourselves with just an intellectual or theoretical appreciation of glory. Glory is meant to be drawn into Being through sensation, which is why the first prayer discusses the fact that we are vessels into which the world flows. All of the world is a product of glory; and we are thus like hummingbirds or bees who feed on the nectar of glory as we draw the world into ourselves, so that it can be contained and concentrated within our vessels.

We appeal to the Lord first with acknowledgment of His glory, and an awareness that through His glory— that is, the impressions that enter us — our own response can be born, grow, and move back towards God.

Religious ecstasy, as described in the ancient texts, is a process whereby glory is imparted directly by God, as a gift whereby the recipient can understand the nature of glory, which is otherwise impossible except in fractions so small that it is quickly and easily dissipated.

SUCH understandings draw a soul deeply towards gratitude in contemplation. Yet sentient beings cannot rely upon, demand, or invoke such experiences; *right work* and *right inner attitude* require an extra effort that arises within the world of increment, not one where the doors are opened at all times.

This discussion of glory and a trust in glory is, I know, completely absent from all the Gurdjieff literature; yet it is essentially impossible to understand the work we are about unless one begins, first, from an understanding of glory.

That is not just true for people in esoteric, or inner works; it is equally true with the exoteric or outer branches of all religions, which ironically place more superficial emphasis on appreciating this aspect of God.

It needs to be taken into the body far more inwardly in order for it to be of any practical use.

Chapter 3

GRACE

Detail of The Annunciation, Hans Memling
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Grace

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

We come to the second element of this prayer, which is Grace.

Grace is the path through which all of what the Lord bestows upon His creation reaches it. If we take glory as the pre-existing quantum state of all energy — its life within the Lord before it manifests — then grace is the point where the quantum state, or the absolute perfection of God and glory within all aspects of the unknowable, breaks down and takes a direction as either a wave or a particle.

But this is much too technical a description, even though in the sense of physics, it's accurate. Grace is a *path*; and it is equally *all of the points on the path*, not just the beginning point or the endpoint. The path is composed of all of the points on it; and so grace is both the beginning, the middle, and the end of all of the infinite directions that the emanations of the Lord take on their way from the Lord Himself into His creation.

In this way, just as glory is the absolute condition of perfection within which all creation arises, so is grace the vehicle whereby that arising takes place. Each and every thing, in other words, arises within and manifests through grace.

This may seem terribly confusing to us, because it means that even the worst and most horrible things that we perceive and and counter arise through grace, but there is a truth within this that is too refined and sublime to be appreciated within the context of our own understanding. (See Buddhi and Buddhiyoga in Sri Anirvan's *Inner Yoga*, an extraordinary analysis by any measure.)

The important thing to understand here is that grace is just as ubiquitous as glory, mapping the path from glory into Being. When we say that mankind has fallen from grace, we simply mean that his intelligence is separated from the experience of it. Intelligence needs to become opened and re-sensitized to grace, which is already there, in order to appreciate its presence.

Emmanuel Swedenborg called the appreciation of grace the *inflow*; Jeanne de Salzmann referred to it as a *higher influence*, which actually means exactly the same thing — as it must, since the experience of it is absolutely consistent, no matter which word one uses.

The words are, in point of fact, quite useless, since the inflow, that is, grace, is a Perfection that cannot be grasped with

the mind or written about with words in such a way as to impart its actual nature. All we can do here is examine an abstract of the abstract.

So I appeal to the Lord first through glory, which is the absolute manifestation of his Perfect being within all of creation (and outside of it as well) and secondly through grace, which is the path into which the Lord's influence flows into all of creation.

Grace is objectively manifested in Christianity through Mary and Christ, because they represent the direct path through which the highest grace, that is, mercy bestowed directly from God upon mankind within creation, reaches human beings. The birth of Christ through Mary and the sacrifice of Christ are not events that took place in the past, but events that take place eternally, internally, and throughout creation at every level, and in every moment.

That is, Christ is — as Gurdjieff explained — a living presence to be taken into us, not an idea. (See Frank Sinclair's Without Benefit of Clergy.)

Once again, grace is not a theoretical proposition. Grace exists within Being; because only through received Being can grace be made manifest as an existing force. This force reaches its living potential within the receiving of the energy through the path by the individual. That is to say, all inner activity that attempts to open us to a higher influence is an effort to become available to grace, which is the vehicle for God's presence.

Grace is an essentially transformational force, since the receiving of it immediately moves Being from the unnatural (but necessary) center of gravity it forms around its own kernel of ego into the sphere of the Lord's influence, where it is able to acknowledge its position correctly. This can happen over a long period of time, but it also happens in only an instant.

Chapter 4

MERCY

Detail of the Dormition of the Virgin, Hans Schauflein
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

The Oxford English dictionary defines Mercy as "forbearance and compassion shown by one person to another who is in his power and has no claim to receive kindness; kind and compassionate treatment in a case where severity is merited or expected."

The second part of the first definition is, "God's pitiful forbearance towards his creatures and forgiveness of their offenses."

From these two definitions, we see that Mercy is the quality of a *person*: that is, like all qualities that emanate from the heart of God, it is a quality of personhood. In other words, in addition to its absolutely objective quality which is universal — God's pitiful forbearance towards his creatures — it is also individual and personal; that is, in the same way that every angel receives the personhood of the Lord and finds himself or herself within it:

"Angels are in the Lord and he in them; and as the angels are only recipients, the Lord alone is heaven" —Swedenborg, Divine Love and Wisdom, 113-118

Every human being also receives the Lord, in the form of Grace and Mercy, since we are receptacles not only for the inflow of the lower nature of the world and creation, but also for these blessings, which are of a Divine nature.

Our ability to receive impressions from both of these levels is what makes us the bridge between God and His creation. In exactly the same way that organic life on earth fills a "shock" between earth and the moon in the ray of creation, so is the natural world and creation itself the moon for God, with sentient beings (man and like organic three-brained beings) forming the shock.

This goes a long way towards explaining why the moon is sensation — the created universe is God's sensation of Himself.

These questions deserve a great deal more study, but readers can see the essential outline of a Great Thought here, one that belongs rightly to God alone and is revealed throughout all the law and all the prophets.

In any event, let me speak a bit more about this idea that we have *no claim to receive kindness*.

One important point of self-observation is to understand this: and this is also the point of sensing our own nothingness. We are given everything; and everything, even the greatest pain, the worst plight, flows into us as a blessing — all of it is part of a sacred process that is given to us selflessly as a gift.

Now, it is possible to mistake selflessness as a lack of personhood, but nothing of the kind is so. Selflessness merely implies being part of a greater whole; and in the sense of angels being only recipients, we can understand that to be selfless is simply to knowledge one's existence within the personhood of the Lord.

Personhood is, conversely, the act of playing a role, or agency (see the first two definitions in the Oxford English dictionary.) As persons, we all play roles and act as representatives — hence Ibn Arabi's characterization of mankind as the Vicegerents of God's action within the material realm. Representatives have no personal claim — they undertake their actions on behalf of their master, a classic idea which is essential to understanding the story of Christ and the Centurion (Matthew 8:5-10.) Although we have no right to forgiveness and Mercy, it is given anyway. And it is given unstintingly and eternally, because it is Love itself, which is infinitely compassionate. (Remember that compassion is an essential part of mercy.)

In Islam, the quality of mercy is the absolute and utmost quality of the Lord; it trumps all the other aspects of God's Being.

We tend, I find, to frame this conceptually and interpret it in terms of specific worldly events; to objectify it and apply it to specific objects, events, circumstances, and conditions. That is to say, we refer to such-and-such a situation or condition and say, "Lord have mercy," hoping for an improvement in that condition—whether it be forgiveness and pardon of a criminal's sins and transgressions, or remission of disease. We hope, in other words, that by way of mercy the Lord will remove our obstacles.

Yet our obstacles are righteous and justified; and they are placed there by God. (In a similar vein, all the souls in Dante's purgatory understand that their punishments are just; the ones in hell don't.) God already has mercy: there is no condition in which mercy is not already in full operation. We don't need to ask for mercy; it is given by default. What we lack is not mercy, but *trust*, which is the offering we ought most rightly to place first and foremost before the Lord our God.

Yet we don't; and I see for myself that although trust is always the very best offering, I inevitably find some other thing to put between me and the Lord first.

I would rather not trust.

This objectifying of mercy, which turns it into a thing of attachments and negotiations—a place which clearly cannot be right for the most exalted property of the highest Being— is deeply mistaken. mercy can't be objectified; it exists as an action, not a thing (although it is in a material sense substantial, that is, mediated by divine substance), and emanates directly from the great and most infinite heart of the Divine Love. Things are already merciful; even the worst manifestation consists of a form of mercy which cannot be seen and cannot be measured, because the action of mercy is so absolutely inscrutable. Even the being of the devil himself is a form of mercy. This doesn't make wrong things right; but it does give them their place and their due, for they too are necessary. The wrong takes a terrible burden on its shoulders in order to affirm the right.

Readers can see from this discourse, which is brief and wholly inadequate, that the idea of mercy binds almost everything else in the universe together, acting as it does in its role of agent for Divine Love and compassion.

Hence Ibn Arabi's (and Islam's) explanation of mercy as the most absolute and supreme quality of God.

Chapter 5

GLORY, GRACE AND MERCY AND THE ENNEAGRAM

Detail of The Annunciation, Hans Memling
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

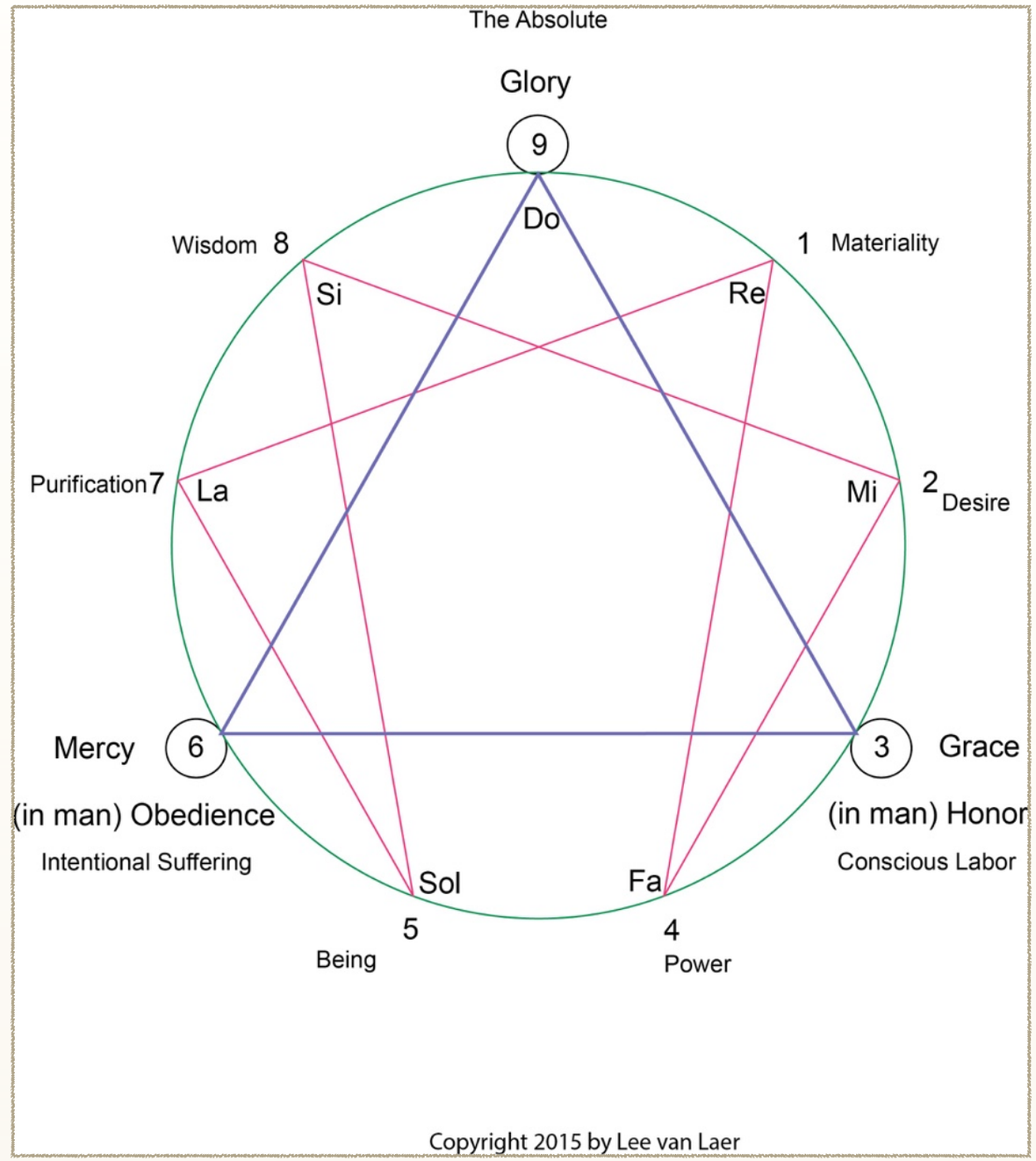
Glory, Grace and Mercy and the Enneagram

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

In order to understand the action of the forces of glory, grace & mercy on mankind, one needs to turn to the enneagram and see the place of each force in relationship to the circulation of the entire diagram. They embody the law of three in action, and this belong to the integers 3, 6, and 9, although the numeric relationship is not so important to understand.

Glory occupies the position of do, the absolute; it is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end, of all things and all creation. Creation begins in glory and is emanated from it, which is why all creation is inherently glorious: it takes its original nature from Glory, which is perfect and embodies all aspects of perfection. Because creation is one step removed from this absolute perfection of glory, it accurately reflects that perfection in all of its manifestations, but it cannot attain it.

Grace occupies the position of the shock between *mi* and *fa*, that is, the position of the number 3, or conscious la-



bor in Gurdjieff's system. A little thought on the matter will reveal that of course grace is the conscious labor of the Lord. This is the outside force that assists the development of the octave in this position. The conscious labor of the Lord consists, in its essence, in the embodiment of being, or "I." That

is to say, when we become persons, individuals, we embody the Lord as reflections of His glory; and in that embodiment (our own incarnation into the material) we take on the role of God; we are, as Ibn Arabi says, His vicegerents, that is, His personal representatives on earth.

The significance of this is that we are personal representatives, that is, our persons represent His person; we take on the burden of Being on this level on behalf of the Lord.

This is a critical point which must be fully appreciated in order to understand the full cycle. Remember that Gurdjieff speaks of the sorrow of His Endlessness; this deeply theological concept, which I have written about many times, takes on a new aspect here. The reason that personhood, embodiment of being, is a burden is because of this universal and all-pervading sorrow; in accepting personhood on behalf of the Lord (being born) we tacitly agree to assume a portion of the burden of sorrow which is carried by His Endlessness.

This responsibility to suffer is deeply embedded in the act of living itself; and the act of living is furthermore a task, a work and a responsibility specifically because of this. All of this can be discerned by understanding the action and meaning of conscious labor.

Mercy occupies the place of the second conscious shock in the enneagram, that is, the shock that ought to be placed between the notes *si* and *do*. Of course it is "misplaced" at the number 6, between the notes *sol* and *la*. But no matter, for now. The important point is that just as grace bestows and informs (inwardly forms) Being on the descending (right) side of the octave which represents our struggles in incarnation and the material world, so in just the same way does mercy purify and inform our spiritual being on the ascending side of the cycle. Mercy relieves us of suffering; that is to say, mercy, in the end, takes away personhood by returning us to the source from which we came.

In this sense death is, as I have said before, the culmination of all grace and all mercy and actually represents the greatest and most merciful benefit the Lord can bestow upon us. We are relieved of the burden of personhood through death; having done the work of the lord in life, we are rewarded with death, whereupon God takes the burden of sorrow back upon His own shoulders, in exactly the same way that Christ shouldered this burden.

Our initial agreement to shoulder the burden of the sorrow of His Endlessness is involuntary, or unconscious; and indeed every part of creation plays out its part in the commission of joy and suffering whether it wants to or not. What differentiates man from other parts of creation is his ability to consciously accept the burden of suffering through intention; this is the most essential lesson of the Christ, and relates directly to Gurdjieff's intentional suffering. The aim of existence, in the path laid out around the periphery of the enneagram (it is actually a three-dimensional and inner path, but for purposes here, one simplifies it) is to reach the point of conscious acceptance, which also, by the way, represents alignment with the Will of God, since travel around the circumfer-

ence of the diagram (or, through the octave) is above all other things a journey towards this higher principle.

Conscious acceptance is attainable—but its chosen assistants are glory, grace, and mercy, a triumvirate of forces all meant to help lift us upwards towards God.

In this sense our existence is forever played out within abundance, for these three Holy forces permeate all of creation at every level.

For more information about this perspective on the enneagram, use the following links to additional books:

Chakras and the Enneagram

The Universal Enneagram

Chapter 6

HONOR

Icon of Christ Pantocrator
Private Collection

Honor

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

If the three forces are sent from above, what does that leave for us to do?

This is the point of the second part of the form of prayer—*help me to honor and obey*—which represents mankind's sacred obligations in regard to God.

Honor and obedience are reciprocal properties in man which, of themselves, represent direct reflections of Grace and Mercy. There is, of course, no reflection of glory in mankind because of the high (actually, highest—as intoned in the phrase hosannah in the highest)) place which is occupied by glory. We are unable to reciprocate in this quality of God, which leaves us in essence incomplete. It's only by surrender to the Lord that we can compensate for this.

The word *honor* has so many important meetings in relationship to Christian practice that it's impossible to cover them all in the scope of a single essay. However, it is notable that the Oxford English dictionary includes the following meanings of the Latin root *honorem* as repute, esteem, official dignitary, honorary gift, ornament, grace, and beauty.

Of the list, esteem, grace, and beauty are essential in the understanding of sacred inner action. We esteem the Lord; we receive and appreciate his grace; and we dwell within his beauty.

So the action of honoring the Lord first includes the high respect, esteem, and reverence in accordance with his exalted worth and rank. (see first definition in the OED.)

Second, we adhere to standards whereby we have a fine sense of and strict allegiance to what is due or right. This is another quality of honor that is built deeply into the Christian lexicon of prayer; and it embodies the masculine, paternal qualities of loyalty and right action according to authority.

Thirdly (as with the first two, I take here the definitions in the OED in their appearing order) we take honor in its embodiment of the essential maternal and female qualities of virtue, chastity, and purity, inner qualities of the highest consideration.

So when we *honor* the Lord, we esteem the Lord; receive his grace; participate in his beauty; adhere to what is good and right; and remain virtuous, chaste and pure. One can see, in this way, that to honor the Lord embodies all the essential virtues not only of Christianity, but indeed, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and other great world religions. If we understand the word honor in a greater sense of its scope and attempt to taste and savor the meaning of this within our body and our being, organically, we call ourselves to a much greater and deeper appreciation of the sacred nature of both

Being and consciousness, as well as both the natural and spiritual worlds.

To honor is to consciously acknowledge; for it is impossible to honor without full awareness of one's place, and what one is honoring. Honoring is the act of appreciation. In the same way that God honors and appreciates man first by bestowing grace upon him, so man honors God in return. This is why I say that honor is a reflection of grace, the corresponding force on our own level which *acknowledges grace and responds*.

Honor must arise in three ways: through an intellectual appreciation, a feeling-appreciation, and a material appreciation. So it is a three centered activity, which makes sense, because it corresponds to conscious labor on God's part— a three-centered activity emanating from the forces of the Holy Trinity.

Man's corresponding response must be equally three centered, a mirroring of God's action, which gives us a clue as to why Gurdjieff so thoroughly emphasized the need for three-centered work. It simply isn't possible to properly honor the Lord with anything less than three centers: our minds, our emotions and our bodies all have to become involved.

To honor is to engage in the action of the whole mind, the "fourth mind" described by Gurdjieff in the final chapter of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*; so to honor is in fact an act of intelligence, although it is a refined and sublime intelligence we must bring to this action. To honor mechanically or unconsciously is not enough; to honor must, on our part, reciprocate the same conscious labor that the Lord exercises in bestowing grace.

We come to the Lord and honor Him, in other words, willingly.

Chapter 7

OBEDIENCE

Fragment of a Crucifix—French, 13th century
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Obedience

Lord Jesus Christ, through your glory, grace, and mercy, help me to honor and obey.

The root of the word *obey* was originally taken from a Latin expression meaning to give an ear to, to listen. So the idea of committing an attention is deeply rooted in the idea of obedience.

Today the word means to submit to the rule or authority of another; to *do what is bidden*. No doubt, the word means above all to submit to a higher authority; and although we of course take the word to mean an outer authority, it must, much more, mean an *inner* one.

I live, without a doubt, in the midst of a great confusion created by the oncoming rush of impressions from outer life. The pace and quantity of information reaching me has only increased over the last few decades; I find myself buried under an avalanche of often contradictory influences and impressions.

There is little consistency; and if I take a close look at the various little cogs and gears in myself that are attuned to react, I find that they don't have much consistency either.

The third part of the prayer, *I have not delivered myself sufficiently unto thee*, is an acknowledgment that I have no anchor, no consistency.

There *is*, however, a consistency to be found in the spiritual salvation of the Lord; and it is an ancient and unerring one. Yet it is mostly forgotten today; it has become old-fashioned to understand that one ought to submit to the Lord. Spiritual traditions are abandoned and even mocked.

So why should I bother obeying? It isn't the fashion now.

A human being can only speak from the deepest parts of themselves on such matters; we all become responsible for what we are, in an inner sense, and of course we constantly betray ourselves. How much more, then, do we betray the Lord and the blessings we have been given? It's a constant thing.

I don't know how to obey. I'm on a search for it. I know in my heart what the better principle is; I am aware of the good, even if I don't always embody it. But I need help getting there. I need the higher help of the inflow, without which there is no help. I can't reason my way to obedience; it has to come from the deepest and most convincing wish, a wish that asks for help.

Chapter 8

THE INNER GRAVITY OF BEING

Mosaic of Christ
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

The Inner Gravity of Being

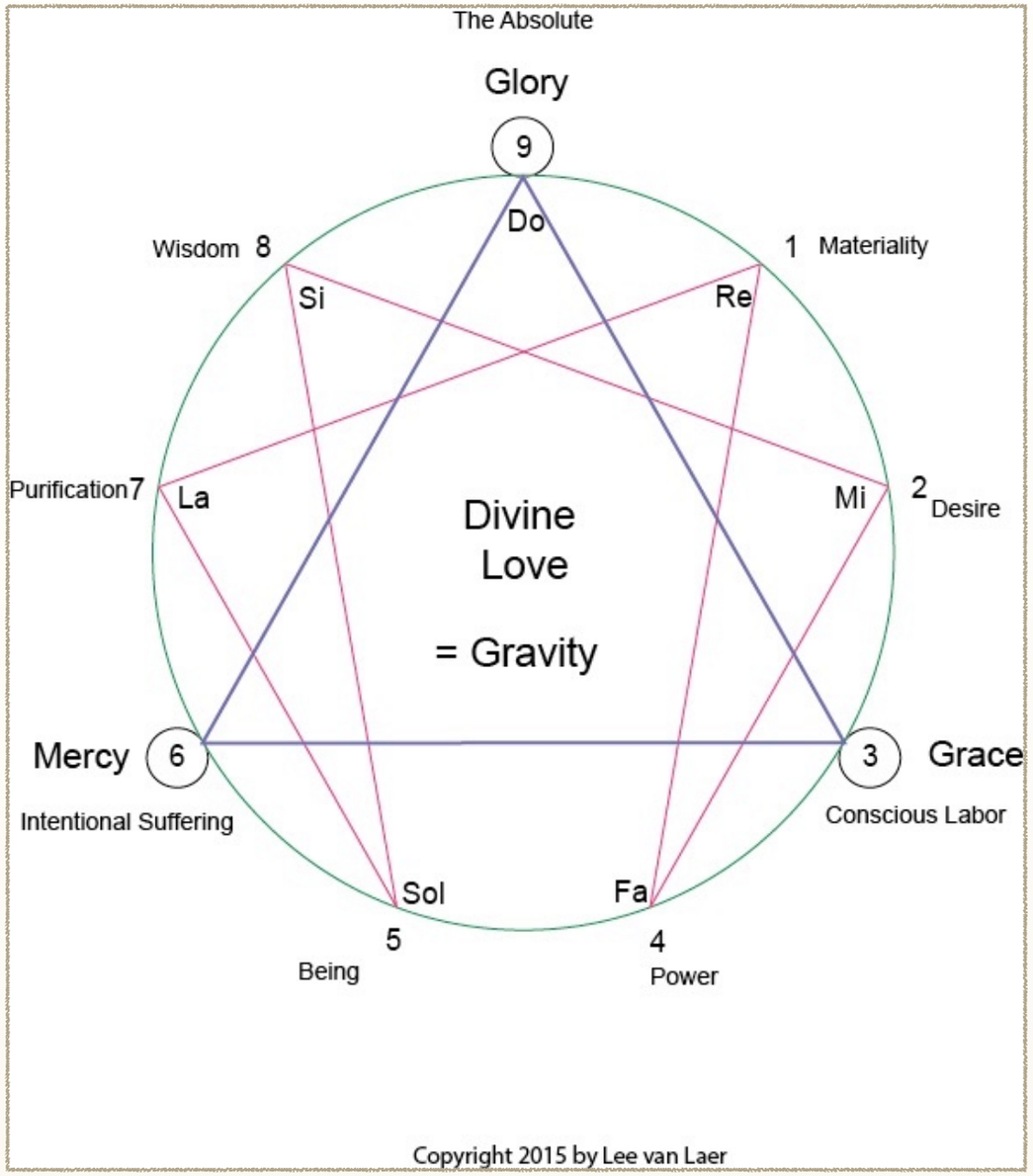
It's important to understand that the three qualities play the roles, respectively, of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (glory, grace and mercy, in that order) and that taken together these three qualities embody the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Trinity is not a separated entity, however; as has been taught for many generations in Christian theology, the trinity is actually a single Being. That single Being is Love; so glory, grace and mercy are all "second-order" aspects of Love.

Taken together they form, visually speaking, a perfectly stable and perfectly balanced entity, the equilateral triangle of the enneagram.

That triangle represents, in its entirety, Love; and one of the secrets of the enneagram is that the triangle (the Law of Three) always represents Love, in every iteration of the diagram, no matter what subject is applied to it, since Love is the Great Force of creation that causes the universe to come into Being, and all things to flow within it. (See Chakras and the Enneagram.) Of course the Law of Three has to represent and embody Divine Love, since it is the first order of law that emanates from the most Holy and Absolute presence of God.

We learn from this that Gurdjieff's conscious labor and intentional suffering are both in fact second-order, or directly



derivative, expressions of Divine Love; and once we hear that, it becomes surprisingly obvious. Of course they have to be aspects of Love, otherwise it would be impossible for them to be effective in their role as forces that fill the shocks. What else, in the end, could possibly serve?

Love, as in the Law of Three, is the force that informs (inwardly forms) the enneagram. All of the activity that takes

place in the multiplications (142857, 285714, etc.) is governed by this stabilizing force which completely anchors the diagram. The other forces in the diagram cannot operate effectively without this stabilizing presence.

Love—that is, glory, grace, and mercy— is actually the force of gravity.

Gravity is the stabilizing force in all systems; it is what makes order possible, because of the way in which it gathers matter together according to principles of attraction. It functions in this way on both a macroscopic and microscopic scale; Love draws elements, both material and spiritual, into relationship with one another in organized systems. This is the force of intelligence which drives all the perceived order in the universe.

We can thus say glory + grace + mercy = Love, = gravity, which is the formula, more or less, that runs the universe. It creates both the attraction of material physical gravity—which cannot be explained using ordinary physical law, since it arises directly from the emanations of Divine Love and has a transcendental and otherworldly source—and spiritual gravity, which binds the world together in relationships. Either way, instruments can't measure the force that creates gravity simply because it arises directly as a result of Love. (Those who wish to understand this better might refer to Swedenborg's explanations regarding a person's attractions, intentions, and loves, which primarily and ultimately govern everything that is possible for them, both on earth and in heaven or hell.)

Spiritual gravity is of course a quite different entity than material gravity. It arises within the inner receiving of glory, grace, and mercy, which need to become active in Being. glory, grace and mercy arise within inner processes according to the inflow, that is, they are inspired by receiving the influence of higher energy, which is the selfsame influence, i.e. inflow, described by Jeanne de Salzmann.

De Salzmann was emphatic about receiving this energy simply because unless it is received, the material needed to form a three-centered Being that can receive Love, and thus be further inwardly formed by it, does not have a durable kernel around which to crystallize; or, put in another way, there is no inner center of gravity, since that inner center of gravity must be formed by these three holy substances.

The inner center of gravity, which forms to receive the inflow, was referred to (rather parenthetically and to some extent inaccurately) as magnetic center by Gurdjieff in his conversations with Ouspensky. The conversations never revealed the vitally religious aspect of this inner quality, which was characterized more or less as an "organ" or "thing" (again, somewhat inaccurately) which conferred the ability to acquire better inner understanding—which is accurate, to some extent, though the Divine origin of that understanding was not discussed.

We may presume it was Ouspensky's objections to matters of faith, and Gurdjieff's awareness of same, that caused him to avoid explaining the situation in more precise terms to

Ouspensky. This left some of the more interesting esoteric features out of the picture.

To come under the influence of higher energies (or, higher centers, as Gurdjieff called them) means, literally, to have these energies flow into one's Being; and, furthermore, to have the capacity to absorb those energies. This is the meaning of the parable of the sower; seeds (grace and mercy) that flow into persons not prepared to receive them can't grow properly. What prepares that inner soil, principally, is humility—Gurdjieff's recognition of one's own nothingness. This can be roughly equated to both a lack of inner considering (selfishness and self-involvement) and an emptiness that allows for the Lord to enter Being unimpeded, as advocated by Meister Eckhart.

The inflow is what creates inner gravity; and this is sensed as a physical presence that grounds Being in relationship to life. The inflow is actively sensed in every case, when it is present; and it always forms a core of unspoken understanding, surrounded by and resting on a foundation of Love. This forms what I would call the Inner Gravity of Being, which corresponds directly to the material and physical gravity of the outside world, but is of a much finer spiritual quality. Insofar as a man or woman receives the Lord—receives glory, grace and mercy—into Being, they are gifted with the gravity needed to repose more fully in Being.

All of creation is arranged in order to participate in this action. So when one sees the world around one, one is actually looking at an active, complete, and comprehensive manifestation of this action of glory, grace, and mercy, which is present in all things and at all times, forever expressing and being expressed.

Chapter 9

EVERYWHERE, IN EVERYTHING

Detail from the Garden of Earthly Delights
Hieronymus Bosch
Prado, Madrid

Everywhere, in Everything

It may seem as though the ideas of glory, grace, and mercy are merely concepts, a philosophical peg to hang one's hat on.

It's easy to forget that these three material (but also metaphysical) embodiments of Divine Love are perpetually in action, everywhere, in everything.

Sometimes, when I walk the famous dog Isabel (who is, like me, growing very old and gray) in the morning, I sense the entirety of this Love and the way that it instantaneously and forever manifests all things and all being at every moment. If I am able to forget, for a minute, the tiny and constricted focus of myself — my obsession with my own agency – I become a blank canvas, upon which the world writes its Truth; and this Love arises, surrounds me, penetrates me— it is all that there is.

It is what Gurdjieff would have called an objective force: and when he said that there was really only one thing, this Love is what he was really referring to.

Although Love is, in fact, completely material in the way we encounter it, it's a shame that we have all become materialists in the way that we are. I suppose we don't have a choice; the action of grace, which embodies Love in the material, leaves us no choice but to be consumed by it; and it is only by the action of our own subsequent sacrifice, both inner and outer, that we can cause this world we are born into to spit us back outward and upward towards God, and Love, and the good things.

Jeanne de Salzmann said, at the beginning of the Movements film made in the 1980s (it has, regrettably, never been released to the general public) that everything is always in motion: either going up or down. By this, of course, she met the things either go towards the good — towards God — or towards the bad, that is, away from Him. In so far as we find a way within ourselves to move towards the objectivity of love, so far do we move towards God; and the more we move towards ourselves and our own greed and insufficiencies, the more away from Him.

Last night I was sitting on our deck looking up at the trees with my wife.

It occurred to me there under the spreading canopy—a blessing unto itself—as we view the world from this tiny and constricted focus of self, we invariably think that the world and the things in it are there to serve us. This is how things are arranged, both inwardly and outwardly.

This is a terrifying inversion; the first Truth — we are vessels into which the world flows — makes it quite clear, at the beginning and above everything else, that we are here to serve the world, and not the other way around. We're meant to receive the Love that forever expresses itself: Swedenborg quite rightly explained that God created the universe itself in order to receive the Love that emanates from His transcendental and Divine Being.

We are ever more responsible for this; to learn ever more and more about the laws of world creation and world maintenance is, in the end, to always learn about Love, because Love is what creates the world and what maintains it.

It's not just the set of the mechanical laws of physics and chemistry, which are just iterations of mathematics; there is no mathematics of Love, because it is a much higher thing.

One can do the math of the universe, but one can't ever do the math of Love.

It simply has to go into the heart and help Truth open.

Chapter 10

LOVE, MERCY, AND THE GOOD

Adoration of the Magi
Jan Mostaert
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Love, Mercy, and the Good

I

Gurdjieff mentions four specific "sacred" impulses in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. They are, respectively, Faith, Love, Hope, and Conscience. Of the four, however, only two are referred to as Divine — belonging to God — in some places in the text, and only twice does Gurdjieff mention Divine Love; Divine Conscience gets far more air time.

Yet mention it he does; and despite the fact that this concept plays such a central role in mankind's understanding of spirituality, the subject of Love is, within the range of my own experience at least, under-represented and under-discussed across the entire range of literature in the Gurdjieff oeuvre.

Pondering this got me to thinking about the relative importance of such matters to one's inner search; and as it seems to me to tie in so firmly to the question of good and bad, I was prompted to think of the difference between three major esoteric thinkers in their estimation of the most important quality of God.

—Dionysius the Areopagite says that Good is the most essential manifestation and quality of God.

—Ibn al 'Arabi (and, I think, Islam in general) says that the most essential quality of Allah is Mercy.

—Swedenborg says that the most essential quality of God is Divine Love.

> *Let us move on now to the name "Good," which the sacred writers have preeminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names. They call the divine subsistence itself "goodness." This essential Good, by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things.*

—Pseudo-Dionysius, Colm Luibheid, The Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist press 1987, P. 71

Readers sharing a deeper interest in this subject ought certainly to read all of chapter 4 of this book, in which Dionysius expounds at length on the manner in which Goodness is transcendent, emanates from the divine Godhead, and penetrates all things. This is a fairly high level doctrine that does not, in its essence IMO, distinguish itself from Sri Anirvan's contention, in Buddha and Buddhiyoga (see Inner Yoga) that all actions in the universe ultimately emanate from, and serve, Good — even actions that appear, on our own level, to be perfectly awful. While this contention is without any doubt extremely difficult for us to swallow, Sri Anirvan does present (for me) a compelling argument on the subject. I think we can all agree that this contention does not, at

its heart, deviates substantially from Christian doctrine, whereby all things serve God, and God is understood to be Good.

In any event, I'm left with the question of whether the name and quality "Good" truly surpasses the qualities of Love or Mercy. Are they truly separable from one another? And can one outrank the others in terms of a hierarchy of values?

Sufic thought is, I think, unambiguous in its assignation of Mercy to God (Allah) as His most supreme and dominant quality. While Ibn al 'Arabi admits that no one Name can technically dominate over the others in the hierarchy, since all Names are ultimately One Name, he still says that Mercy outranks and outweighs all other qualities in God.

In the past, I've pointed out myself that I don't see it as possible for God to be anything except infinitely merciful. In this sense, Sri Anirvan's universe—in which His Will eternally and perfectly moves everything in the absolute final direction of the Perfect Good—is also a world of Perfect Mercy, since Perfect Mercy must forever supersede, outrank, and outperform all forms of badness in order to attain the Perfect Good.

Yet I'm sure that Swedenborg's argument on this matter is the correct one; as I pointed out in Chakras and the Enneagram, Divine Love created and rules the universe and is the origin of all other things.

As such, I consider this position on Love to be entirely unimpeachable, regardless of other authorities and sources; and whatever I may say on the matter, wherever it is incorrect, keep in mind, is incorrect only because of me and my inevitable fallibilities —not because of the Truth from which it emanates, in an absolute and forever unadulterated form.

II

Real love is the basis of all, the foundations, the Source... It was by love that Jesus performed miracles... All accumulated vibrations create a current. This current brings the force of love.

Real love is a cosmic force which goes through us. If we crystallize it, it becomes a power—the greatest power in the world.

—Gurdjieff, Wartime Transcripts, meeting 18.

Divine Love is what one might call the atom of our universe. Readers may recall Gurdjieff telling Ouspensky that an atom, in esoteric systems, represents the smallest particle on any level:

" 'Matter' may be regarded as consisting of 'atoms.' Atoms in this connection are taken also as the result of the final division of matter. In every order of matter they are simply certain small particles of the given matter which are indivisible only on the given plane. The atoms of the Absolute alone are really indivisible, the atom of the next plane, that is, of world 3, consists of three atoms of the Absolute or, in other words, it is three times bigger and three times heavier, and its movements are correspondingly slower."

— In Search of the Miraculous, P. D. Ouspensky, pg. 87.

Inevitably, we must understand by this that the entire universe consists at its root of "atoms of God." These are the exact same particles of Divine Love which Swedenborg spoke about, and are covered in *Chakras and the Enneagram*. Said particles are the fundamental building blocks of the universe, which have the highest rate of vibration—the least density—and recombine in a literally infinite number of ways to produce all the material phenomenon of this universe as we experience it.

One of the interesting consequences of Gurdjieff's above remarks is, we can see, that Love is less and less animated and less and less vivified as it moves down through successive levels in the universe — for example, "world three," where Love has less total freedom of movement because it has already been bound by Law. (At the level of the absolute, everything is unbounded.)

Freedom from laws on a given level, in other words, consists in a general sense of *moving towards Love*, rather than away from it.

This is precisely consistent with Swedenborg's conception of both God and Heaven, in which those turning towards heaven always turn towards God, that is, towards Love. This movement towards Love is what people always actually mean when they talk about "freedom" in spiritual works of one kind or another, because there is no other kind of freedom, and nothing except Love can be free. Even Love is subject to law at all levels short of the absolute; but because all levels are composed of and created by Love, Love and freedom are actually synonymous from any practical point of view.

Divine Love cannot be separated, either, in its conceptual nature from the emanations of the sorrow of His Endlessness, which was Gurdjieff's expression for the way that God's Love manifests perfectly throughout every level of the universe, if it's correctly sensed and understood.

Christ's passion was a perfect expression of this fact; and for those to whom it looks somehow violent and abhorrent, I can only say, if it's correctly understood, it's the most extraordinary, beautiful, and perfect action that one will ever encounter — a gift that easily surpasses all human understanding.

We've been left with a set of habitual repetitions of this in our highest traditional Christian religious services; what they try to describe relates directly to the experience of receiving the sorrow of God, which is the highest religious experience possible for a human being. Creation was made, in point of fact, to help take on this burden, as Gurdjieff explains.

In his books he fails, unfortunately, to draw the inevitable straight line between this understanding and the passion of Christ, which ought to have been chalked in long ago.

In any event, the point of Episcopal, Catholic, and other Orthodox religious services is to bring us to an active, living sensation of this truth, not just a theoretical acknowledgment of Christ's sacrifice; and words to that effect can be found right in the service.

We end up in a place where we may begin to understand that Love, Freedom, and Sorrow are all cosmologically bound together in the triad of the Absolute, Conscious Labor, and Intentional Suffering.

III

Love can be defined as a deep affection, or — more superficially — as a romantic attraction. In the sense of the first definition, that is, the religious one, it penetrates to the bone. It is a form of caring; indeed, it is care above all, objective care. By this word objective I mean care that cares not for the subject or for care itself, but only towards the object that is cared for. It is a perfect care, that is, it has no taint of the self or egoism in it.

So Love is caring above all, and it emanates endlessly from the heart of God, which is beyond utterance and beyond conception. All things begin with this emanation of particles, which are then received by all that is material. Love can't exist without an object that is loved, of course; because care must be for something.

In the case of the universe and God, care is for creation, which is that thing which emerges from the wordless in order to receive the care that is sent to. This sending is Grace; a caring that is undeserved and unearned, but nevertheless exists and is given freely, without any preconditions or attachments.

I don't think that we can begin to understand what Love, Mercy, and the Good are before we organically understand the very physical and absolutely solid nature of the emanations of Love and the way they form everything that is. There is so much Love in even the tiniest object, event, circumstance, or condition that if we become sensitive to it and begin to receive its vibrations organically, it can easily overwhelm us. In point of fact, we generally understand Mr. Gurdjieff's admonition to come to a sense of our own nothingness in terms of an intellectual understanding of how tiny we are, and how little each of us means relative to the universe, whereas the most perfect and absolute sense of our own nothingness comes when we sense the Love within creation around us in even the least measure as an actual organic vibration that affects our Being—at which point the staggering nature of our existence may become, at least for an instant, clear.

Nothing can bring my understanding of the world, of life, of Being, and of creation more pointedly to this sense of nothingness than a sensation of the Love that creates and supports me. It's only in those instants that I can truly begin to suffer remorse of conscience, which takes place on a scale that erases all of the efforts I have ever made and puts me squarely in the light of how far short I fall, and how impossible it is for me to do any better.

This is the instant in which I truly understand Grace, and see how undeserving I am. In such moments, one has all the lies and nonsense cut away from them like so many soiled and torn garments, and one stands naked before the Lord. I pretend, in the broken love I profess for God, to wish for such moments, but they are terrifying.

One has to screw one's courage to the sticking point of one's own soul to face such things.

Mercy cannot be itself unless Love comes first, because Mercy must be caring before it is itself. And goodness can't be itself either unless Love comes first, because there can be no goodness unless Love makes it itself in the first place. What could Mercy unformed by Love consist of? What could Goodness unformed by Love consist of? While both are essential qualities of God, they would have no Being if Love had not made them. Everything gains its Being first through Love, and only afterwards becomes itself. It cannot have Self without Love, which is the secret heart of all Self.

IV

Students of esotericism are well familiar with the via negativa, a Way defined by the idea that one seeks only for the unknown, and defines God only by what He is not. We are separated from God by a cloud of unknowing; any name by which we call Him is incorrect.

One of the byproducts of this way is a habit of coming up with an endless list of descriptions of God, and then saying, one after the other, that each description isn't what God is like. If one were able to truly savor and deeply penetrate a specific instance here, and spend years contemplating it, the practice might prove useful, but simply writing lists of things that God is and then contradicting them by saying, He isn't this and isn't that is, in my experience, a grotesque waste of time, even though it looks impressive on the surface of things. It affirms a perverse (and negative, or inverted, but still very real) sense of power in the person who does it.

One of the potential yet very real hazards of the via negativa is that we instantly reach a result where we say God isn't loving, merciful, or good, because these are human concepts embedded in the material arising of the world, and thus disqualify themselves at once from being what God is. Even Being itself, which is clearly on the order of the essential nature of God, becomes something that God isn't. Although there is a deep truth in the idea that we can't know God in His entirety, denial of specifics and the rejection of qualities as they manifest creates a falsehood of its own.

I say that you can know God. And you can know God, to the extent that you have God in you.

This knowledge, this understanding, will always be fractional, because part of the Truth related to the manifestation of the material and the receiving of the emanations of God is that God's sorrow comes from His loneliness in the knowledge that he has the deepest wish for relationship with all of His creation, which He loves beyond all human knowledge, and the irrevocable fact that none of his creation will or forever can know Him fully.

We are all perfect reflections of this truth in our own way, because we share this deepest wish, buried underneath the layers of protection that we grow over ourselves. If we receive the particles of God's sorrow and concentrate them in ourselves, eventually we can understand much more of this; but the essential point here is that we do quite exactly and precisely know God, without denying Him, through this substantial (made of substances, material) receiving of God's Being and God's nature—through our ability to take in impressions more deeply.

This should be a daily thing that begins with our organic sensation when wake up; but I've written much about that elsewhere. Just think on it. We need to take God into us as we live and breathe.

In any event, this idea of the rejection of God and the impossibility of knowing God becomes an intellectual exercise that unmasks itself as a misunderstanding, a form of sophistry, if one is not careful. Very careful. Because it is so

easy to do, people love it; yet the first and simplest contradiction is found in the organic sensation of Being, and the second and deeper contradiction is found in the arising of remorse of conscience. These are divine qualities that come without words, and although they are ever unknown through words, they are ever known through sensation and feeling, which are languages that belong more to God than the ones we have invented.

So mark well here in the marrow of your bones: God is Loving, and Merciful, and Good, and you can know this. There may be much that remains unknown, but if you reject the Good, and the Loving, and the Merciful in favor of some non-imaginary higher ground, your Hope goes with them.

Hope, let us remember, is a sacred property of consciousness as well as Faith and Love. Don't throw it out in order to find a way to think yourself important and knowing through a sophisticated unknowing. Unknowing is a thing of the material world, and, like everything else, easily turns into a kind of vanity before one notices it.

This is a powerful mask for vanity; if she wears it, she can rule us.

Chapter 11

LOVE AND SORROW

The Lamentation of Christ
Lucas Cranach the Elder
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

The Synonymity of Love and Sorrow

I.

I've often said that love and sorrow are the same thing. We're furthermore confused by the term *ecstasy*; one thinks perhaps that ecstasy and positive feeling constitute freedom, and many also seem to believe that somehow transcending our bodies into a realm of ineffable rapture must have something to do with spiritual fulfillment.

I've had the transcendent experiences, and I've had the ecstasies. Medieval ecstasies. Yet none of them make any sense unless one incorporates sorrow and anguish; and this is why it is only the passion of Christ that fully makes sense to me in the context of religious effort.

We don't know what real love is until we love enough begin to see we, too, would be willing to let God nail us to a cross to relieve the suffering of our fellow human beings. This is an attitude that cannot be bridged with intellectual analysis; one has to feel the sorrow in the very marrow of one's bones, and to begin to feel it on behalf of everything and everyone, in order to understand how appropriate Christ's crucifixion is to the context of our own religious effort.

Love is a material substance that penetrates all matter; of course, in fact, it creates matter as well as penetrating it. It's both synchronous and synonymous with sorrow, because there is no actual difference between love and sorrow at higher levels of experience. The words become indistinguishable from one another and end up being, relatively speaking, meaningless.

It's possible to develop a very highly refined intellectual experience of spiritual nature; and it's also possible to develop a very highly refined physical experience of spiritual nature; but these two aspects of spiritual nature remain incomplete without the feeling, or emotional, experience of spiritual nature, as expressed in love and sorrow.

This expands beyond personal love and personal sorrow, while remaining directly in contact with that same intimacy — and it expands beyond brotherly love and sorrow, which are shared experiences evoked by a higher level of Love within relationship. It expands into territory where Love and sorrow are understood as the direct influence of the divine, The Reality.

The Perfection.

Only an opening to perfect Love and perfect sorrow, which are what we most need in order to grow, puts all of our other loves and sorrows into a context whereby we measure our deficiencies.

Until we materially encounter perfect Love and perfect sorrow, and are directly and remorselessly willing to take

them into ourselves as perfect gifts of God's Love and sorrow, the measurements we take of life are always inaccurate. Taking measurement on behalf of The Perfection is on the order of intentional suffering: and although we probably understand this action as taking place in close proximity to our "ordinary" life—due to its incorrect location on the enneagram—it actually takes place on a very high level indeed, between the notes *si* and *do*.

It is, in other words, the very last step — the location, so to speak, of the Holy Planet Purgatory.

I become increasingly and absolutely convinced that all of the other actions of spiritual development are ultimately meant to bring us to this work of intentional suffering, whereby we have the capacity to receive and accept the Love and sorrow of God, which measures us so well that we discard our own measurements in favor of it.

This is, I believe, worth thinking on.

II.

Sometimes one goes a long way through life only to come to things, after great difficulty, that one sees one ought to have seen much more easily.

Life itself weirdly obscures things; it interferes with living.

Above all, I think that life draws us away from God with all of its events. I find myself immersed in a contradiction whereby I can only find God by living; yet it is living itself that draws me away, confusing me with the untold number of events that connect with my desires and fears to tempt me in one hundred directions — one thousand directions — every direction but that direction which turns me back towards God.

This morning I was lying on the bed looking at my feet, and I realized that although I have feet, I never think about them or know anything about them. Like the rest of my body and my being itself, I take these things for granted. An active and mindful relationship with them often seems to escape me. I'm not sure why I bring that up here, except that it somehow seems to have something to do with this insight that life draws me away from living.

It's this insight — an inward sight— that I want to come into a more intimate relationship with. That inward *vision* is also an inward *hearing*, and an inward *touching*: the necessary effort of engaging in impression within all of the parts, thinking, feeling, sensing. The inward sight urges me, with an instinct somehow long forgotten — yet still the ember burns — to forsake all other things and follow God, to be willing to turn away from every image and idol, from every edifice I have erected for myself, towards that great mystery of The Perfection.

I am in every way inadequate to this task. Yet I'm supported by Love; and it never allows me to forget that, even as

it sinks into my bones and reminds me of the essential sorrow at the heart of all Being. There isn't any difference between that sorrow and that Love; if there truly were a "terror of the situation," it might be to come to this moment in one's spiritual work and realize that all the freedom I thought I would buy with my effort is nothing more than the privilege of participating in this inescapable sorrow, which penetrates everything.

It has its opposite side, of course, yet that does not seem to be its primary manifestation.

I was on the street in Pudong (Shanghai) yesterday afternoon at lunch, preparing to cross traffic with my office staff. The street is lined with lovely flower boxes, bursting with extraordinary saffron-colored marigolds. There are a few petunias — shocking red — mixed in for effect, but the marigolds beckoned.

I bent down to smell them, to take in the beautiful yet acrid odor of their blossoms. It was then, taking in the wholeness of those flowers and that street and the sun that fell on everything, that I felt for a moment in every cell of my being God's generosity, and how he creates this beauty for us which is infinitely sustaining and infinitely joyful, even in the midst — and at exactly the same time — that this sorrow penetrates to the bone.

Thinking back on this, I realize that one cannot exist without the other. It gave me a taste of exactly what Mr. Gurdjieff meant when he said that every joy comes only from payment in the form of something already suffered. We must pick up our inner burdens (and our outer ones) in order to participate in God's joy; yet we must always return to the sorrow.

The allegory of the Holy Planet Purgatory is a quite perfect poetic rendering of this situation, even though it's written in prose. I say poetic because it leaves an enormous amount of empty space between the words which can only be filled by our own experience.

III.

Taking in Sorrow

Recent events in my life have reminded me that we need to be broken.

We believe too much in the world; and it is easy to do that. We trust the world, and we trust ourselves. This is the wrong place to put our trust, yet we do it always. It takes blow after blow for a person who wants to change before anything real can change in them.

It is heartbreaking, really, how much external suffering is necessary before any real inner suffering can begin. If a person is broken, and they are strong enough to survive it, they are lucky — there's a chance, once I realize I'm nothing, that I may develop a wish to be something. That wish will have to be inwardly directed, not outwardly, because no one can actu-

ally be anything outwardly. Our spiritual nature is, at its root, fundamentally separated from all outward things, yet it is hard to see that difference. It's essential, at the same time, that I see that difference, because I must create a strong inward connection.

I was broken down completely twice in life before anything real ever took place in me. The beginning of my life was at age 46. Up until then, I had never really lived, and I understood nothing. I was packed full of a lot of knowledge, and I had plenty of experience and clever ideas and theories, I didn't understand what it meant to be until I was destroyed for the second time. The first destruction of everything, which was my alcoholism and recovery, was just a warm-up that laid the groundwork for round two.

We need to be stripped of what we are. No one really believes that; everyone thinks that we can keep something and still become real in one way or another.

Christ's comment in the Sermon on the Mount —one cannot get out without paying the last penny—is ignored. Every single one of us is absolutely convinced we can keep that last penny in our pocket and hide it from God. It's touching and amusing, actually; how naïve can we be? We can't keep even a farthing without God noticing it. If He's merciful, He'll arrange things so that we are completely broken — and only then will His Presence come to us.

I suppose this sounds cruel; but it's actually an extraordinary form of love. We're unable to see our own vanity, and we're unable to sense our egoism. When God breaks these things in this, he's helping us so much that it can't even be imagined. Without the breaking, we would always remain enslaved and imprisoned by these features.

It often seems strange to me that I am so terrifically grateful for the suffering I have had in my life. I've been given the gift of understanding how valuable and useful it was; really, suffering is the most precious thing one can do, and to know this is to experience God's generosity. So the worst of fortune can be good fortune; and I never would have believed that when I was young. Perhaps my greatest blessedness consisted in how much the Lord helped me to suffer. It brought me to a completely different understanding of this question, which would have been impossible without the burdens that were laid on my shoulders.

Even so, my burdens were very light compared to some people. God is unusually merciful in this way with some of us; we can't know why, but we must accept.

There isn't any way to put a spin on this: in the suffering that breaks me, I must *actually* suffer. I can't play tricks by telling myself how wonderful the suffering is and somehow "turning it around" as it takes place in a form of spiritual tai chi; I need to go deep into the suffering as is, not misconstruing it, but accepting it and participating in it, if it's going to have the action I need it to have. That is to say, I need to be quite wholly invested in it, keeping at the same time one part of me on a touchstone that connects with essence.

I have to suffer and *see* it. It's that unflinching vision of my own suffering that I must swallow. It needs to be an intention of mine to suffer life as it is.

When I was in AA, I learned how to move past feeling sorry for myself (that's how every alcoholic begins, seeing themselves as a victim) and into a quite different attitude.

III.

Taking in Sorrow

part 2

Taking in sorrow intentionally becomes a deep practice.

Intentional suffering can't be an external action, taken in external directions. It *begins* there; but external suffering becomes almost at once an attachment to the external, and every attachment to the external needs to be clearly seen and defined in relationship to the nature of one's inwardness.

Even mindfulness easily becomes an external practice; we take almost everything this way, I find. It isn't unless we discover the living nature of inwardness as it actively manifests that we can begin to distinguish the external from the internal; until then, the natural effortlessly poses as the spiritual, and a person has no hope of distinguishing the difference; there's no comparative. Perhaps it's the awakening of this comparative that serves as the greatest shock a person ever gets, because up until then, one believes absolutely and irrevocably in the external—and the chimeric, ersatz version of the inner spiritual realm which it creates.

Yet when it finally comes alive, the inner opens into a realm of much finer vibrations; and they penetrate the body and the Being in ways that feed other, unknown parts. It's the unknown nature of these parts and the energies that rule them that becomes interesting; one is drawn into an inner world of participation quite unlike the outer world. This inner world of participation provides an intimacy impossible to achieve or understand in any other way; one *becomes a person*.

This is what the finer energy of Love does; it imparts personhood through essence.

This inner energy feeds the growth of the spiritual nature; and the spiritual nature arises exclusively to receive Love and sorrow. This work needs to be undertaken alongside and in conjunction with ordinary life, but is not mixed with it.

Actively saying yes, in an inner sense, to sorrow is to *go towards the sorrow*, to drink it as one would water. It thereby becomes a kind of wine; so the energy of life undergoes a transformation as it enters us. I can participate actively in that transformation as it happens, but only to the extent that I'm willing. It's entirely capable of taking place automatically, whether I'm aware of it or not. It's my *willingness* that makes a difference and changes the nature of the enterprise.

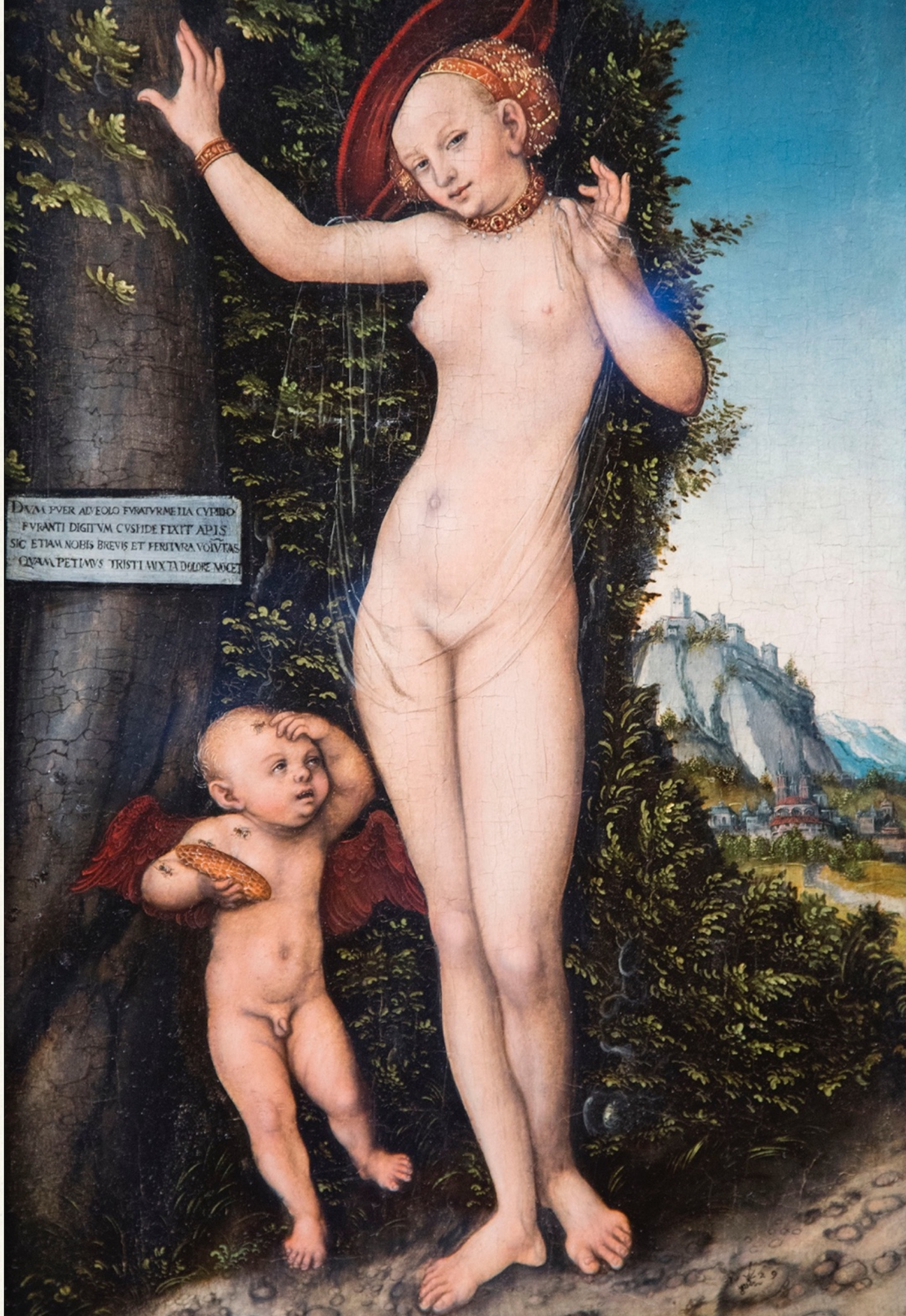
The fact is that all I'm speaking of here relates directly and exactly to the Presence of God. There is no need to call it any other thing, even as one attempts to define it in greater detail by particulars. The Presence of God fills us; we await it. There isn't anything else worth waiting for, even as we see the attachment of our lower parts to the world as it is. We can leave that be; there's little to be done for it anyway, and it will have its end, in any event.

What matters is this turning towards God; and there is no other worthwhile turning than the turning that takes place through suffering, and allowing the sorrow of God to enter us.

Here is where water truly turns to wine.

Chapter 12

THE INTIMATE ART OF SEEING



Cupid and the Bee Thief
Lucas Cranach the Elder
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

The Intimate Art of Seeing

I.

I often write about inner *intimacy*. We can't understand what it means to come into relationship with a finer—a *solar*—energy unless we become much more intimate with ourselves.

This is a very tactile action, one that engages a delicate inner touch. That touch is as light as a feather but very, very purposeful. It is willing to go towards what I am, which is at the same time both immensely satisfying and enormously uncomfortable.

It's uncomfortable because I would rather stay away from what I am organically. I need to see that more clearly.

This finer energy invites me to come into this intimate organic relationship. In order to do that I have to see much more precisely exactly what is inside me, that is, my inner relationship with myself, which ought to be one of an organism, not a theoretician. The intellectual mind is entirely theoretical. It has the analytical ability to approach this, but the tools that are used to see are tools of touching and feeling, which does not have words. That is to say, the intellect can approach this work and be there for it, even interpret it after that fact (as I do here now) but it is by itself unable to engage in the kind of work that is needed. It lacks the organic equipment, the inner equipment, needed to do this very precise and intimate kind of seeing; it can only do it, so to speak, after the fact, when everything is done and the leftovers of the process are being gathered.

That gathering actually doesn't take place intellectually either; the intellect is at best good at conducting a postmortem examination. The gathering takes place as finer energies are intentionally concentrated within Being—and at that, only through the intentional suffering of the activity.

One might say it this way: I see, and I suffer. I don't think; because that isn't what's needed here. It's the willingness to see, and to suffer that seeing, that gathers the honey in this process. I need to understand that much more organically, *in the spaces between my cells*, in order to gather that honey.

In order to do that I need to bring my impressions to the place where they enter the body.

Let's consider that question more carefully.

If I'm taking in impressions and following them to the source of where they are received, I'll see that they are received most deeply *in the cells themselves*.

So as impossible as it may seem to me, my attention needs to become quite cellular: I need to experience the attention of receiving impressions at a cellular level. To receive impressions in the attention of the cells themselves, and even in my atoms.

This is one of the chief esoteric secrets hidden behind everything Gurdjieff taught Ouspensky about the chemical

factory; yet it's remained unspoken and hidden simply because what's being proposed here seems, on the surface of things, quite impossible. When we're told to have an attention, no one ever discusses the fact that that our attention ought to become cellular, or atomic, in nature. And we never hear about that in spiritual literature, simply because the question is so very rarely understood in a proper manner.

Yet of course it must become atomic, since the inner attention must penetrate to the root of Being itself.

So let's investigate this question more deeply from this intimate and cellular point of view.

The very fine—perhaps impossibly fine—energy we seek to come into relationship with here is not the same circulatory energy of the chakras which yogis work with.

It's a very deep, integrated energy which is received at the same time in all of the cells of the body.

This is a global energy, a ubiquitous energy, which arrives everywhere at once and fills all of Being simultaneously. The emanations of the Most Holy Sun Absolute (as Gurdjieff called it) act in this manner because they affect all and everything and are not constrained. It is the fabric of Being itself we're discussing here; not any special organs in which it's concentrated.

We want to know what this fundamental fabric of Being feels like through our inner sensation of Being.

It's tempting to explain this fabric of Being with terms gleaned from physics, such as a quantum fabric. Yet strictly physical terms can't capture the living essence of this fabric, which is at the same time both material and spiritual; it forms a web that connects these two levels.

II.

If I become more attuned to this finer energy of cellular attention—an energy that is quintessentially solar in nature— I begin to acquire a completely different sense of life and what it means. This finer energy is what supports and sustains the manifestation of all life on the planet.

As I become more aware of it, I don't see the earth I walk on in the same way, and I don't see the sun in the sky in the same way. I don't so much *see* the sun as *feel* the sun. In the gnostic Gospel of Thomas, this is what Christ means when he says a person who seeks and finds will be "astonished." (The original word derives from Latin *extonare*, to "thunder out.")

A person can discover and concentrate this inner magnetism. That is to consciously know the solar nature of the power of Being.

I begin to realize that I'm part of a completely different enterprise than the external affairs a man or woman generally concerns himself or herself with. Human matters have, in point of fact, almost nothing whatsoever to do with the great work of the sun or the planets; although that connection is certainly possible, we have (as Gurdjieff so eloquently

pointed out in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*) disconnected ourselves so decisively and so thoroughly from this work that we haven't even the slightest inkling, really, of what it might mean to participate more fully and deeply in it.

The work of the sun is above all a work of Love; and if there's one thing we can see is lacking in mankind as it exists today, it is that very same Love. Magnetism in its gross sense is a material projection of Love, but magnetism also exits in much finer and more concentrated forms than the grossly physical. In mankind we call the automatic manifestation of such finer magnetism *charisma*; and we recognize its power, even though it's generally destructive when it arises spontaneously in human beings.

Developing a finer sensation and a more precise attention attunes me much better to the magnetism of the sun's emanations; I earn the opportunity to understand life from the context of a different level, on whose behalf I undertake work.

By *work*, I mean several quite specific things, the first of which is to become intentionally aligned with this higher, or solar, energy. In order to do this I cultivate my connection to the energy with this finer, tactile quality of wordless attention; and I participate in an inner intention to go towards that energy. My inward movement draws a reciprocal response from the energy itself; we move towards on another.

The second action of my intention in work is to receive, and suffer, what Gurdjieff called the sorrow of His Endlessness. The sorrow is, of course, that same substance so perfectly expressed by the passion of Christ; yet I think Gurdjieff's term is a quite good one, and summarizes all of its nature for both Christian and non-Christian peoples.

No one else I know of—no other spiritual teacher—has expressed the receiving of this sorrow as a material substance (particles) in quite the same way as Gurdjieff. It's not a type of work at all familiar to most spiritual teachers, as we can see from outward teaching and literature. Gurdjieff brought, here, one of the most esoteric and essential points of any spiritual teaching to his pupils. It's a very high level of inner work—the highest, in point of fact—and it was, in a word, nothing short of revolutionary to disclose a matter this esoteric to the world at large, no matter how elusive a real understanding of it may remain to the average person.

In any event, this work of *receiving* is also a distinctly magnetic work, since magnetism is what concentrates the power of Love and draws it together in a form that has more material effects on us, and on the world at large. In doing so, magnetism concentrates the power of Being and of consciousness itself into manifestations of Being at higher levels. The world is, at its subtle levels where mankind can't see it, being drawn into ever deeper and more loving relationships; an intricate web of relationship entirely dependent on this force of Love forms and evolves. All of manifestation and life itself is dependent on this subtle force. Emmanuel Swedenborg, who spent most of his life trying to understand the nature of the world through what was (for his time) a consummate understanding of the physical sciences, eventually understood that

this much more subtle force of Divine Love lay beneath and animated all creation.

Chapter 13

INTO THE MIND OF GOD

Detail from the Garden of Earthly Delights
Hieronymus Bosch
Prado, Madrid

Into the Mind of God

Some Cosmological Thoughts

I.

No one can know what existed before the universe came into Being.

This point of discourse removes speculation about why there is a universe from there realm of science, since it is impossible to do experiments to verify any hypothesized state of being, existence, or anything else that may have come before the big bang. So we can't have a scientific discourse about why there is a universe; all we can do is engage in discursive thought about the matter.

It's a fine piece of territory, perhaps, for *Gedankenexperimenten*, that is, thought experiments, which is what Einstein used to create the foundation of his great theories regarding the nature of physical reality.

Let's take the universe as a reflection of the mind of God; God being that transcendent and unknowable principle of Being which corresponds, roughly speaking, to the infinite and perfectly ordered, low-entropy singularity where all matter and energy (as we know them in today's latter-day, dissipated and expanding ever-higher-entropy universe) were unified in a state that lies beyond the dimensions (including time) of today's universe.

Being—we're going to use that term as interchangeable and synonymous with God in this essay—existed before the big bang. We can say that with a high degree of certainty, since it is impossible that the singularity that produced the universe was in a state of non-Being. While a description of that pre-existing range of Being forever escapes us, we know that there was Being, simply because the nature of all things precludes the emergence of Being from Non-Being. Causality—which we can, according to science as well as reason, assume as a postulate—cannot be violated. The big bang can't be invoked without a causality; it happened for some unknown but definite reason, and acted on things that were; there was, in other words, a Being that preceded the big bang, and it was acted upon by forces unknown in such a way that the big bang took place.

Another way of saying this is that there was a Reality *before* the big bang, simply because the real (our universe) cannot have proceeded from the unreal. Transformation may change the nature of the real but its fundamental realness must remain forever inviolable.

In this way we presume Being—the Real—as preceding the creation of the universe and, furthermore, we can presume it was the highest possible form of Being, since we know—from what took place during the big bang—that it was in a state of unimaginably low entropy, that is, all of the energy and matter we observe in today's universe was some-

how infinitely compacted into an infinitely small space "outside" (preceding) today's universe—in perfect order.

I'll refer to this preceding real as *The Perfection*, since it is perfectly ordered and, presumably, is still extant, and coincident, with the web of reality in which this universe rests its feet.

It has not, in other words, spent even the tiniest fraction of its unlimited potential in the creation of our one universe. Because we can already see, from its nature immediately before the big bang and immediately after it, that there is no way to constrain it or put limits on its potential or nature, we cannot limit its action during the big bang and constrain it, conceptually, to that single action. Its unknowable nature, combined with its known nature according to the nature of this universe that emerged from it, suggest an infinite capacity for action, not a limited one.

So we can't presume that all of the Being that preceded the universe and created the big bang was used up in the big bang. Far from it. The big bang presumes an infinite "state of preceding-Being," and (as it happens) the multiverse theory plausibly hypothesizes an infinite number of universes evolving from a multiplicity of big bangs, each one creating a separate bubble universe.

I pointed out in some earlier essays that there is a possibility these bubble universes are coincident, that is, they all occupy the same space-time continuum, but are separated from one another by their nature as independent universal entities. In this theory all coincident universes share identical laws, but not identical events.

In any event, this model still has Being as the antecedent for all universes, since universes cannot come from nothing. What IS has to follow the principle of conservation of information: all of the information we observe in the universe has to have been there *before there was a universe*. This is the place of Being in the model; it *pre-exists physics*.

So before we have a physics of any kind, we must invoke Being.

Does this mean Being is a non-physical principle? It *contains* physics; yet physics cannot constrain being, which is why its manifestations escape some apparently lawful consequences of material existence—for example, spooky action at a distance, which is a product of being that supposedly "violates" what we know about physics; chiefly, that the speed of transfer of information between any two physical objects is constrained by the speed of light.

We don't have to do maths to understand Being. Being comes before mathematics, which is the consequence of Being, not the producer of it. Being produces physics and mathematics, and not the other way around. Things have to *be* first before mathematics and physics can arise and exist. The two are admittedly entangled; but Being takes priority.

Pondering these questions, I have been wondering about the why of things. Why, for example, does matter bend space-time? It's possible to describe the phenomenon, but the

underlying question seems to me to relate to questions of Being, not mathematics. The fact that black holes bend space and time so definitively into themselves seems interesting here.

After mulling this over for a few days, by sheer coincidence, the New York Times published an article on quantum entanglement. It occurred to me, on reading the article, that physicists have been absentmindedly researching and describing the qualities of God, from a material physical point of view, for decades now without anyone really understanding what they are up to.

The reason that matter bends Spacetime is because of the Perfection, which is expressed quite precisely in the nature of quantum entanglement.

The Perfection, which is another word we can use for God and his Divine Love, is expressed quite simply as a wholeness that, in its essence, is indivisible both within and outside of time. Any apparent division that arises in the material world as a consequence of the separation of physical locations between expressed properties of God (material arisings) is, as both Vedic and Buddhist sources would say, illusory; the Perfection preserves its wholeness regardless of separation in space and time.

Now, this wholeness is of a very fine nature, made up of particles too fine for consciousnesses to directly encounter or instruments to directly measure; but physicists have already understood the law of this nature in terms of the idea that information, in the known universe, *must always be preserved*. That is, no matter what happens, in the transformation of materials and the exchange of energy, the total amount of originally present information (prior to the given transformative event) is conserved.

The one step the physics community has not taken yet—which I believe is eventually inevitable—is to understand that information, which presents to us as a series of discrete events that serially form relationships with one another, is actually a single and whole thing which corresponds to the Perfection.

Readers wishing for a more medieval, yet entirely accurate and exactly corresponding, understanding of the nature of this "indivisible dividedness" should read Ibn al Arabi, who definitely understood these properties at a much better than average level — certainly better than modern physicists do.

Because information is a single and whole thing, whether one looks at its wholeness or looks at the sum of its parts, when it is divided into smaller parts — and at the quantum level, we encounter its finest level of division — none of it can never be destroyed, because all of it exists as a single thing in the mind of God. This is, as Ibn al Arabi points out, even more miraculous when we consider that the entire universe and all creation is only one single thing in the mind of God, which has an infinite number of things in it. (and he puts it precisely thus.) Those who consider this proposition in regard to the (now relatively ubiquitous) acceptance of the theory of the Multiverse will understand that the reflection

of the Perfection within this one universe is just a single instance of manifestation of an infinite and eternal number of reflections.

Given the nature of the Perfection, *of course* quantum particles end up entangled and perfectly preserving their whole essential nature in their two parts if they are divided by space. Because their essential nature is transcendent, Loving, and eternal — that is, outside of time — their wholeness is expressed instantly in their relationship to one another, and is not affected by the physical constraints of the manifesting universe, that is, the speed of light and of time itself. One ought to expect this result — yet physicists call it "spooky." It's only spooky if one wants to believe in ghosts instead of God, which is a rather banal approach to the supernatural, but, I suppose, inevitable in some senses.

Pondering this further, it became clear enough to me that the attraction of gravity and the bending of Spacetime take place as a consequence of the intimacy that inherently exists between all the elements of the Perfection as they manifest and express themselves. They begin, before material creation arises, in an eternally and inseparable intimacy of relationship that consists wholly of Love, which is the sum of all things both known and unknown. Entering material creation as a Perfect expression of that Perfect Love, they create laws that are perfect — without flaw, and entirely informed by intention—which explains why all of the universal constants are so finely tuned to create a universe with sentient beings in it. This is not randomness or accident; it is just one more demonstrable proof of the Perfection, which in Perfect Love created a universe of Perfect intimacy.

The Perfection expresses Perfect intimacy at the quantum level; and because this Perfect intimacy is the foundation of all things, it cannot be extracted from manifested reality, no matter how imperfect interactions on higher levels appear to be. One could get into long and rather complex arguments about the nature of causality, good, evil, and so on regarding this matter, but I have treated those subjects at great length in many other essays.

The intimacy of the Perfection affects material reality by creating a force of attraction between all material arisings. Because it is superior and eternal, lying outside of, before, and after spacetime, it bends the physical nature of spacetime towards itself wherever the intimacy brings material particles (which are actually forces, or names in the mind of God) together. So each material manifestation of gravity is actually a visible physical expression of Love. The nature of Love is attractive; it is a bringing together in relationship.

Followers of the Gurdjieff method might be interested in Jeanne de Salzmann's numerous comments about physical gravity and relationship to inner spiritual work, since the two subjects are far from separated. Insofar as we participate more directly in the emanations of Love, that is, the particles of sorrow of His Endlessness, so too to that extent do we directly experience the physical manifestation of the Perfection within the intimacy of attraction that it creates on the quantum level.

Make no mistake about it, human organisms are able to do this.

Much more could be said about these matters, but I believe the outline is sufficient for readers to go deeper into themselves and appreciate the nature of the Perfection and our responsibility in coming into relationship with it and expressing it quite differently than our egoistic impulses generally impel us to.

At the very least, an appreciation of these ideas may lead us to a bit more respect than we are accustomed to feeling while we are busy making money and killing each other.

II.

Real love is a cosmic force which goes through us. If we crystallize it, it becomes a power—the greatest power in the world.

—Gurdjieff, Wartime Transcripts, meeting 18.

The nature of space-time and our spiritual beings cannot be separated. We are intricately and irrevocably creatures of mathematics; we are, equally, creatures of a mystery we will never penetrate.

The only weapons we will ever have to wield in that battle is our love for life, and for one another.

One of the more common things that one hears say is, "I'll love you *forever*." The implication is that love is somehow subject to time. In order to understand how this is not true — that love is eternal — one needs to consider the phenomenon of quantum entanglement. Read the link; because the principle is a very real one, an actual property of the universe.

The phrase physicists use, quantum entanglement, poorly chosen, because what they are actually observing is quantum intimacy, which is a manifestation of Love. Because Love exists outside of time — it is eternal, without beginning and without end—of course it acts instantly over distances. This is not a surprise property of physics; it is an expected property of the eternal, and here we have a perfect example of the manifestation of the eternal, in its most literal sense — affecting matter itself.

I'm not sure how much more of an example people require of the existence of these forces; but if one insists on mislabeling it with incorrect scientific terms, of course, one can't identify it for what it is. In point of fact, Gurdjieff said many decades ago that human beings were unable to distinguish between radiation, which takes time to get from one place to another, and emanation, which is divine and acts instantly on all the matter that it encounters, regardless of distance.

We should discuss this quality of intimacy a bit more, because it is the exact nature of the relationship God, who is Love, and his creation. Creation is intimately made of Love — that is, the finest particles of creation (quantum particles) are made of Love. Love has an eternal (outside of time) quality of attraction, that is, those things which love one another are mutually attracted. Readers who understand this matter for more than a theoretical point of view will begin to under-

stand at once that this is why matter bends material of space time towards itself in an attractive force we call gravity. Gravity is, at its root, physical action of love on the material world, expressed at its most intimate level.

We are intimately bound to God, and to one another, through this attracting force of love which lies at the quantum root of the reality we inhabit. There is nothing spooky about quantum "entanglement;" if one understands why it is there, one realizes it is predictable and lawful, and exactly what ought to be there, exactly where it is. It is a foundational quality.

One might say that quantum intimacy, the eternal binding of forces together in relationship, expresses, in an unexpected way, the sentimental romanticism of the idea that we will love one another forever. Given that there can be no "forever" in Love, which exists both before time and after it (explaining, by the way, what came before the Big Bang) we cannot use that word. But we can say that God Loves the world eternally, and that Love is eternal. All of creation is invited to participate in the experience of that in so far as we come into intimate relationship with the material nature or creation.

Oddly enough, our organisms are built to do exactly that, because our sensory ability extends to levels we cannot imagine — even the quantum level. This is what Gurdjieff meant when he said that one can only sense the higher by reaching upward within consciousness in so far as one reaches lower into levels beneath oneself within that same range of consciousness. We are meant to build a ladder from stars to the quantum level; consciousness is an action that binds all of reality together.

I know that it sounds presumptuous to say it, but this is not a grandiose theory with no means of proof. Proof lies in our ability to develop the organic sensation of being, and the organic sensation of feeling. We can combine these two organic sensations with the organic sensation of thinking, which is mindful or conscious thinking; and if the these three parts function properly, there is no doubt that we will fully sense questions I am discussing above in a very practical and direct manner.

Chapter 14

LAWFUL ACTION

Cutting the Stone
Hieronymus Bosch
Prado, Madrid

LawfulAction

What is Lawful Action?

A reader asked this question today, and I was delighted by how simple the question is, and how absolutely difficult it is to properly wrap one's mind around it.

The question can be viewed from so many different perspectives that it brings up recollections of Gurdjieff's discussion of worlds — and perhaps it needs to be tackled that way. Unfortunately, I'm writing this in Guangzhou, without recourse to my favorite reference tools, that is, dictionaries of word etymology and the Oxford English Dictionary. So I'm going to have to think through this carefully on my own.

I find I want to discuss this idea of lawful action from three different perspectives. The first perspective is a universal perspective related to love, the Perfection, and the nature of the universe. The second is in relationship to law and its expression in the earthly realm and on this planet; and the third would be my personal experience of law within practice. So let's call these three sections Law and the Perfection, Law on Earth, and Law Within Practice.

I. Law and the Perfection

In a way, it's impossible to understand anything at all without first trying to understand its relationship to the Perfection and to Love, which are the ruling forces in every manifestation of Being ("all that was, is, or can be".) As such, all law is consequent to Love and the Perfection and flows outward from them. The Perfection is before law and beyond law; law is one of the names of God.

Mr. Gurdjieff once offered Ouspensky the seminary student's comment in regard to law: "Even God cannot beat the ace of spades with a deuce." This comment sounds important and clever, but Gurdjieff was here guilty of himself engaging in the kind of intellectual sophistry that, in another part of the book, he berates Ouspensky for.

The simple fact is that the Perfection comes before the ace of spades, the deuce of spades, and cards themselves. We can't have a conversation about whether or not God is subject to laws governing material creation, because they are consequent. It is, in other words, necessary to reframe the question by understanding that it isn't that God can't bring himself into the situation of law and interfere with it; it's that law can't raise itself to the level of God and be interfered with. Almost everyone understands Gurdjieff's statement to Ouspensky backwards, and thus fails to see its ultimate implication.

Once we see this, and understand it properly, we may understand that all of creation and everything that lies within the identifiable range of thinking and experience is irrevocably and forever separated from God. Ibn al Arabi cites this absolute separation from the Divine as a lawful — & perhaps the first and most absolute — lawful condition imposed

on creation. Meister Eckhart imposes a similar veil of insurmountable unknowing between us and the Perfection; so it's nonsense to speak of the Perfection in terms of aces and deuces. Or, for that matter, in any other graspable or material terms.

Law is a form of order. In the Perfection, which existed conceptually, at least in terms of the world of physics, in a singularity, a perfectly ordered world of, for all intents and purposes, zero entropy. I speak of the Perfection when I speak of this "place of God's existence." (It is a misnomer, because despite Gurdjieff's description of God's place of existence and its opposition to the merciless Heropass, the place of God's existence is just as much God as God is.)

"Here" (i.e., essentially, no-where and no-time) in God there is only one single, perfect, and whole order, so no law is needed.

Law, like every other concept, is one of the Names of God, a force—a derivative manifestation preceded by God within the Perfection. Law only arises, insofar as we can understand it, within the context of creation, where it is necessary in order to impose order in the absence of the Perfection, where it's a default, rather than a striving.

One can say that all law and material creation is ordered in such a way that all of material creation has a striving to transcend law and return to that Perfectly "lawless" and absolute condition of Divinity (Truth) represented by the Perfection. Law is, in other words, not just a set of rules, restraints, or constrictions: it is a ladder one climbs back towards the Perfection itself. All of the angelic and heavenly hierarchies arranged in enneads (eg. Dionysius the Areopagite, the Memphite Theology) are meant to represent the progressive orders of law. We should note that law is always progressive; even in modern science, law is defined by its postulates and foundational propositions, from which other laws derive. Mathematics works in exactly the same way.

When we use the phrase lawful action, therefore, we refer to an action based on foundational postulates, arranged in a hierarchy, that regulates progression through that hierarchy in an effect – cause – effect manner. Reciprocity is inherent; that is, all things find themselves in relationships constrained by the effects of the hierarchy and the location one occupies in the ladder it creates. The enneads of lawful hierarchy must be traditionally arranged in circular format, since there is no beginning and no end.

We might ask why law exists on our level. Why do we have it at all? Physics and science have hypothesized the possibility of disordered, non-universes, where the laws of physics as we understand them do not function, matter is never created, etc.

I think these propositions are, once again, a callous form of sophistry. Once we understand the Perfection for what it is, that is (as near as we can approach it, given its unapproachability) an inviolable and supreme unity beyond all hierarchies and orders, we understand that it cannot and does not emanate and create subordinate realms (in our case, our universe) that do not perfectly reflect its own nature. The Perfec-

tion, being above all else perfect Love, creates not only that which is perfectly Loving — it can never and will never create anything else — it also only creates that which is perfectly ordered. This, by the way, explains the perfect refinement of the cosmological constant and its companion values for manifestation of matter in the universe, whose exquisite fine tuning has been a subject of marvel and wonder among physicists and mathematicians for nearly a century now.

Law, in other words, is a consequence of Love, and it is also a material result. Just as Love is absolutely material and gives birth to everything we perceive as material, so is law, at its root — in its essence — perfectly loving and perfectly ordered, endlessly branching into an infinite number of very fine roots that grow in to the material essence of Being and of the substance and essence of the universe itself.

One of the interesting consequences of this fact is that sentient beings, parts of creation reflecting consciousness, and most especially the potential for self-consciousness, which is one of the higher orders of consciousness, are able to sense these very fine roots of Perfect Love and Perfect Law that extends into every crevice of creation. Being is inextricably intertwined with Perfect Love and Perfect Law, because they form, in their own way, a Trinity which is a mirror of the holy Trinity in the Christian world.

We embody that Trinity as the basis of our arising, and we carry it within us in our cells, our organs, our brains, and all of our manifestations. We are cosmological extensions of Perfect Love and Perfect Law, and every single one of the things that we do—even the ones that appear destructive and chaotic—must, as Sri Anirvan points out (see Inner Yoga) ultimately conform to the original requirements of that Love and that Law.

Human beings do not sense this in themselves and have forgotten it, which leads to extraordinarily tragic consequences which are, nonetheless, (and, to us, paradoxically) absolutely lawful and loving.

II. Law on Earth

The cosmological implications of Love and Law are beautiful and far-reaching; yet we find ourselves constrained on this level within a set of laws that are for the most part nowhere near as pretty. They appear to be quite rigid, unforgiving, and even mechanical, uncaring, and unmindful.

A lot of what we see of law from our level appears to be reflexive and automatic. Some of it even appears to be punitive. For example, even though gravity itself arises from a quantum expression of Love and Perfection, which forever seeks to draw itself back itself and gather more force of Love, when we fall down and break our bones, gravity does not seem loving or friendly. It's impersonal. Things that are impersonal (or, as Mr. Gurdjieff called them, objective) are often upsetting to us, generally speaking. At least they are to me — more highly evolved beings who have transcended their ego may feel differently. If you can, be my guest.

In any event, the constraint of law is inexorable on our level, because certain things simply must be, no matter what, if a ladder is to have rungs and one is to be able to climb it. The rungs, for example, need to be a certain distance apart from one another, and that distance quite certainly ought to be consistent — hence the law of octaves. Every position in the hierarchy has to have its requirements and consequences for failure to meet them, that is, lawful actions determine the course of events acting on objects according to circumstances and conditions. (This is why I refer to the environment we inhabit as one of objects, events, circumstances, and conditions. It's another way of saying we are constrained by law.)

The Perfection — God (please be patient with me, I just like to keep reminding people that these are the same thing) has an essential, eternally (outside time) loving wish that we return to it and experience the Perfection directly — that is, God wants all of His creation to return to Him so that we can be reunited. He is a truly loving Father in this regard.

Unfortunately, the consequences of material creation basically forbid that, so there is what one might call an internal separation, leading to the Sorrow of God. Gurdjieff attempted to paint a picture of this eternal separation in his book, Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson, in the chapter The Holy Planet Purgatory. It depicts a place subject to all of the laws, where every law, so to speak, save the last one has been transcended.

That last law is the same law that Ibn al Arabi cited when he said that there is a lawful and permanent separation between material creation and, as he called it, The Reality. (i.e., the same entity as my Perfection.) The Holy Planet Purgatory presents an impossibly loving, impossibly beautiful, and infinitely merciful environment created for souls who reach the final stage and realize there is no final way home.

The chapter is accompanied with some unusually complex and detailed yogic insights into the nature of law both in general and on our level ; without getting into details (which would lead into many more necessarily boring pages of commentary and text) we can summarize by pointing out that Gurdjieff is saying (as he repeats often throughout the book) the constraints of law determine everything on the material level, which is, roughly speaking, "earth," that is, planetary conditions on every planet ranging from the moon all the way up to the Holy Planet Purgatory.

Gurdjieff calls these the "laws of world creation and world maintenance," and, although he spendt a great deal of time defining them numerically to Ouspensky (see In Search of the Miraculous) he told Bennett that one cannot ultimately know these laws through "mathematik" (see Idiots in Paris; and this comment will eventually lead us to part III, Law Within Practice.)

Law reflects a supreme intelligence in its order; and that supreme intelligence is perfectly reflected and accurately defined by all of the natural interactions on this level. That is to say, the marvelous results of evolution on the planet, and the extraordinary consequences of chemistry (leading to the crystalline forms that not only our minerals, but also the DNA

molecule) are none of them accidental in the least. Accident implies (but does not necessarily require) a lack of intelligence—yet nature is supremely intelligent.

Let's examine that, because it relates to the nature of law itself. The expression of intelligence is mechanically consequential; that is, the rules follow one another without the apparent action of intelligence; but the intelligence is inherent and displayed in the arrangement of the rules themselves, not their outward actions.

One can view it this way: a human being designs and makes computers. The computers are nothing more than machines which execute instructions (a mechanically consequential expression of intelligence) but the computer can only do this because of a pre-existing intelligence which has formed the laws (physical conditions, rules, and constraints) within which it operates. That is to say, before the mechanical operations of the computer can take place, an agency (extraneous and superior acting operative agent) has laid out the conditions under which the computer is built and operates.

On the level of earth those conditions are referred to as natural law; and the sciences have for generations engaged in an argument about whether or not God exists, that is, whether or not an agency above and beyond the laws of nature has designed those laws. Swedenborg, one of the consummate scientists of his own age, was adamant in his insistence that those who believe in nothing more than natural law have completely failed to grasp the nature of things. His arguments on this subject are not just compelling, they are entirely accurate and true; but one has to understand enough in order to grasp them, and this is precisely where many in the sciences are lacking. A priest is far more likely to understand him than any chemist.

Random laws, which is what atheism would have us believe in, cannot produce random results. Lawful action, on our level, is not in any way random; all we have learned of it demonstrates inherent predictability, which is in fact (and quite ironically, when you thin k about it) what all of the scientific method is based on. Experiments must be reproducible. My own conclusion here is that since law is not random, its genesis cannot be random either.

On the level of earth (materiality), Love constrains lawful action to operate within the parameters defined by the limits of cause and effect. Causality proceeds from the requirement that all elements of the Perfection, no matter how many "atoms" (irreducible particles, as measured by levels) they break down into, must completely retain the wholeness from which they were birthed. Hence quantum entanglement (see my related essay Into the Mind of God) and all other reciprocal symmetries and asymmetries within material creation. Information (the inherent nature of the Perfection, which is the sum of all information, both known and unknown, manifest and unmanifest) cannot be destroyed.

The preservation of information is, in a certain sense, the ultimate lawful action, since it is essentially inviolable. That which is of God cannot be destroyed or corrupted because it is, in its nature, eternal and perfect. Treasure "laid

up in heaven" is inner understanding connected to this inviolable source. Nature has had to do some apparently impossible things (quantum entanglement being the best example) in order to comply with this law; and the places where those unique and remarkable phenomena arise (another example are the event horizons of singularities) are the locations where law comes closest to touching the Perfection.

Inevitably, they lead to mystery.

III. Law within Practice

All of this is heady stuff; and I am not at all sure this in any way helps us to know how to live our lives. There can be, with understanding of these matters, a certain helpful way of intentionally conceptualizing one's place within a given moment, because the matters discussed above are not abstractions; they are very real conditions which we are currently inhabiting. Nonetheless, even if we believe they are true, we don't sense them directly or think about them. In order to do so, we must come into touch with a certain organic vibration; but only after many years of practice does that really become possible. At that time, as my dear friend M. once put it, one feels the work in one's body.

I like her way of putting it.

Yet perhaps the most important thing for me to understand within daily practice is lawful action; and while it's easy enough to grasp, in an overall all sense, lawful action from the external point of view—if I am hit with a bat, my bones break, etc.—it is the inner nature of lawful action which matters by far the most to my inner work.

The human body is a receiving organism, designed for the ingestion and transubstantiation of both coarse and subtle energies and substances from different levels. My inner Self forms its psychological and spiritual life according to a complex process of inner transubstantiation: the ingestion and digestion of food, air, and impressions.

Without a lot of mumbo-jumbo, it is up to me to try and come to a practical, sensate experience of this reality not as a theoretical activity, but an active and living process in which I participate.

I say, "without a lot of mumbo-jumbo," because the landscape of yoga adepts is populated with any number of colorful distractions and extravagant complications. Few people who engage in inner practice can resist being attracted to embroidery, the more of it and the more colorful the better.

In this way people fail to engage in the deeply subtractive and humbling process of shearing their inner sheep (cutting all the dirty wool from Being) and instead adopt forms with more and more buzzwords, attitudes, clothing, and other accoutrements. Innocently, and without ever intending damage, we aggressively externalize inner practice without ever seeing it. It is a cunning thing that looks exactly like real inner work, but isn't—because it has found very sneaky ways to avoid the necessary suffering. We don't suffer enough—we don't want to suffer enough—and even though this is the most important lawful action we can undertake, we don't ever understand it from an inner point of view. Our conception of suffering is very nearly entirely outward.

The mind turns outward very easily. We need help from other parts in order to avoid it.

In order to experience lawful action in the most practical physical and chemical ("not with mathematik") sense possible, I need to develop a personal sense of organic inner intimacy that, in its own sensory right, and within its range of possibility, mirrors the intimacy reflected by the interaction of law within creation. That is, I need to begin to develop an inner sensation that takes into account the lovingness and intimacy that gives rise to my Being.

Gurdjieff alludes to this, for example, in the following passage:

"…one must change the way of working. Instead of accumulating during one hour, one must try to keep constantly the organic sensation of the body. Sense one's body again, continually without interrupting one's ordinary occupations—to keep a little energy, to take the habit… Our aim is to have constantly a sensation of oneself, of one's individuality. This sensation cannot be expressed intellectually, because it is organic. It is something which makes you independent, when you are with other people."

—Wartime Transcripts, Meeting #1

Yet it's in Jeanne de Salzmann's work, which picked up and carried on where Gurdjieff left off, that this idea begins

to find its fullest expression; and she ties the action of law, both inner and outer, earthly and cosmological, together into a single inner practice dependent (at least at ground level) on this inner sensation of Being, which is (unsurprisingly, given its nature) intimately linked to the development of an inner gravity.

This inner gravity is closely linked to the development of one's own inner solar system, and it can attract powerful forces to help any inner work. The lawful action at the root of it is the power of attraction of Love, or "magnetic center," as Gurdjieff called it.

There are inexpensive and superficial forms of charisma which create an outward, interpersonal magnetism; more often than not it manifests in destructive ways. Most of us have encountered this kind of thing, and it is often mistaken for real magnetic center, which is exclusively an inner phenomenon.

A person with real magnetic center in them will often be entirely without outer charisma and there may be no sign whatsoever that their inner work is drawing this kind of force into them. Usually, in fact, the more powerful such force becomes, and the more one suffers inwardly, the more secret it must become. This is because the lawful action of inner suffering is strictly between a person, an individual, and God. Exchanges made in this realm are made public only at the expense of one's soul.

The true adept knows this and does not reveal their own work, even though they must be generous with the results of it. Lawful action requires that what is earned must at once be given away; generosity is on the first order of law in this regard.

My personal inner relationship with myself has everything to do with these possibilities. If my sensation is not an active and living presence—if I have to invoke it and "force" it to participate in the effort of Being—there is a natural resistance. The organic sensation of Being must be respected enough and given enough latitude of its own that it arrives of itself to support the effort.

This is a different understanding than the yoga of "doing things," which prevails in today's understanding of inner yogic effort. It ought to be noted that despite his essential admonition, man cannot do, Gurdjieff did little to help dispel these misconceptions; far too much of the written material surrounding his work (including some of his own) invokes will in ways that aggressively invite misinterpretation. Readers need to turn to de Salzmann's notes in The Reality of Being for the beginnings of a correction to these many attractive misconceptions.

Lawful action within Being, then, consists of an organic "I am—I wish to be" that comes not just from the words and the mind, but also from body and feeling. The organic sensation of being is the I am of the body; and there is an equally (well, in point of fact, more) powerful I am—once again, wordless— that arises in feeling, if the proper connections are made.

I think I wish to stress here that understanding the laws of world creation and world maintenance is an inner action, not an outer one; it's the lawful actions creating and maintaining my inner world that govern me (read Ibn al Arabi's Divine Governance of the Human Kingdom.) So my view of law as pertaining to outward actions needs to be turned upside down and inside out.

A Summary

The fundamental nature of reality is such that all action is, in its essence, lawful, so in a certain sense, when we use the word "lawful" to describe "action" it is completely redundant. There can be no action that is not lawful, by simple virtue of the fact that all action ultimately derives from lawful sources, and, indeed, from Love itself, which is the Alpha and Omega of all actions small and large.

Perhaps, when we refer to actions as lawful, it is just a way of reminding ourselves that we live under law, always and everywhere. In a similar vein. devout Muslims, whenever they refer to a future event, invoke the phrase Insh'Allah: if God wills it. Things take place solely in accordance with the Will of Allah alone; that is, law.

We forget this at our peril.

Chapter 15

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee van Laer was born in Yonkers, New York, in 1955, and spent a good deal of his childhood in Hamburg, Germany. He has spent the majority of his adult life in the Gurdjieff work, and is an active member of the New York Gurdjieff Foundation.

Lee is an import professional by trade, and has traveled extensively worldwide, particularly in the Far East. He holds a degree in fine art from St. Lawrence University, and is a fine artist, musician, photographer, poet, and writer.

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Additional books by Lee van Laer available on the ibooks store include:

Books about the Gurdjieff work and esotericism

Chakras and the Enneagram — the relationship between Gurdjieff's enneagram and the ancient yoga system of chakras.

The Law of Three— Essays about the Trinity, from a Gurdjieffian point of view

The Universal Enneagram— a collection of essays about meanings of the enneagram according to the system of the Names of God.

Glory, Grace and Mercy— Essays on Christian esotericism

Books on art:

The Esoteric Bosch— The first of two books about artwork of Hieronymus Bosch, this volume treats the Garden of Earthly Delights, the adoration of the Magi, and other important Bosch paintings, unraveling the complex symbolism used by the artist and explaining their esoteric, or inner, spiritual meanings.

Bosch Decoded— *The esoteric Bosch, volume 2*— This second book explores meaning in The Temptation of St. Anthony and The Haywain, along with some other works.

Sacro Bosco—*Parco De Mostri*— an exploration of symbolism and meaning in the extraordinary mannerist garden created by Pier Francesco Orsini in the late 1500's.

Fiction:

Reasons Why the Dead Don't Speak —Two novellas about death, one on the order of a fairytale, the other in a modern setting.

Homecoming— A crime novel with a supernatural twist.

A Great Big Bag of Money— A crime novel without a supernatural twist.