

From « TRANSFORMATION » by J.G. Bennett

'When the smallest fragment of Truth enters a man he can do nothing but obey.'
(*The Dramatic Universe, vol.3*)

Transformation is a process that must be started and kept going by various means. These means are four kinds, each of which makes a necessary contribution to the right balance of the whole. If we neglect any of them or if we exaggerate and rely upon one to the exclusion of the others, the process will be thrown out of balance and we shall run into difficulties; we may lose our way altogether.

We should look at transformation as something that is happening here and now. It depends on what we do, and this in turn depends on what moves and directs us. Each of the four means I am going to describe comes into our present moment from some source and that is why I have headed this chapter 'The Four Sources'.

These are:

1. LEARNING

We start from a position of ignorance of ourselves, of our potentialities, of ways, means and methods and of the laws that govern the process of transformation. This ignorance must be remedied. We must search and we must learn. Before we can learn, we must learn how to learn. We must wish to learn and not to expect to know without having learned. We may imagine that there is nothing we want more than to know the truth about ourselves and the world, but we show again and again by our behaviours that we simply close our mind to knowledge that does not suit us.

Even if we sincerely wish to learn, it still does not follow that we are willing to be taught. There is a story of a seeker after knowledge who asks a Sufi master to teach him and receives the answer: "If I am willing to teach you, are you willing to be taught?"

Some part of learning must come from ourselves. We must be willing to be sincere in our observation of our inner state and hidden impulses as well as our outside behaviour. But even sincere self observation needs to be directed by knowledge of what to look for and how to verify what we think we have seen. How are we to learn?

Learning is an unending process - unless indeed there is an end-point in the Beatific Vision when we shall 'know even as we are known'. Perhaps the Beatific Vision is only the start of a new life when we shall begin to learn things that no tongue can utter. My own belief is that the ability to learn is so precious a quality that it cannot disappear from the perfected man. To be able to learn is to be young and whoever keeps the joy of learning fresh in him remains forever young. Everything that closes in us the channels through which new knowledge can enter makes it harder to escape from the prison of our own ignorance. The ignorant man is like a prisoner who languishes in his narrow cell, which will become his grave, because he has not learned that the door is not locked.

... One should cultivate discrimination by forming the habit of suspending judgment on new ideas and people that we meet and yet not hesitating when we have seen enough to make a definite decision whether or not to pursue our contact with them more deeply.

We should study good costumes that have been followed for ages by different people and cultures and try to understand their real purpose. Such counsels as these may seem obvious and even trite, but the point is **to put them into practice**. Let the reader ask himself whether he is doing anything of a practical nature to improve his discrimination and judgment. He may find that he does the best he can to examine every important situation and take a right decision, but that it has not occurred to him that his 'best' might be improved.

I will suggest here a few rules that I have found useful and that may help towards 'right learning'.

1. Ask yourself whether what you are told or read can be verified.
If so how? Verify before you accept.
2. If you have no mean of verification, do not reject what you are told without first asking yourself whether it really matters to you if it is true or false.
3. If it really does matter, examine the source from which the knowledge comes and ask yourself if you are prepared to trust it until some means of verification turns up.
4. Never take anything you learn as final. Be prepared to look at it again.
5. Cross-checking is useful. It can give us confidence if we find that two bits of knowledge supplement and tend to confirm one another.
6. But remember that it is only possible to cross-check items expressed in the same language. We can get terribly confused if we try to compare one teaching with another unless we are sure that we know what both of them are trying to tell us.
7. Practice impartiality. Do not let 'like and dislike' influence your judgment.
8. Nevertheless, you must give full weight to your 'instinctive' reactions. They are more penetrating than your thoughts.
9. Learning 'what' and learning 'how' are not the same and yet they can never be separated. We do not really 'know' something if we do not know how to make use of the knowledge. Knowing how - learning to go through the motion - will not take us far unless we know what we are doing. In other words, the distinction between the theoretical and practical knowledge is only a matter of convenience. The two must always be blended if they are to give positive result.
10. Remember that all partial knowledge is precarious. Always try to see the whole to which an item of knowledge belongs. Even if you cannot succeed in seeing the whole, it is better to make the attempt than to remain with an isolated fragment.
11. Open your mind more and more.
12. Knowledge that is shared is better understood than knowledge that is hoarded.
We can learn best by teaching; providing we never forget our own ignorance and remember that learning-teaching is a two-way process in which the teacher receives as much as the learner.

...Learning is the means of connecting ourselves with ourselves in the first place (self-knowledge), and with what is not ourselves, in the second (objective knowledge).

Knowledge brings order and a sense of direction into our lives but of itself it does not transform us. For that, we must pass on to study the second source.

2. STRUGGLE

We wish to change and be transformed, we wish to make our lives as full and as useful as possible and to find and realize our own destiny. All these wishes have their place in all of us; they are there because there is an **Ideal**. All religions and all teachings agree that there is an Ideal or Perfect Man. This perfection is part of our nature. Children look at their parents. As they grow older the ideal becomes universal and objective. Even if they reject religion and refuse to associate the Ideal Man with God, the ideal still remains: we cannot live without it. The most distorted and horrible ideal is still for the man who longs for it his Ideal, and he must try to reach it whether he wishes or not.

We have all kinds of other wishes unconnected with the ideal. Even when we are pursuing it, we are incessantly distracted in body, feelings, and mind. There is no stable unity in us that can wish always and in all states and conditions for the same thing. It is thus obvious to us all that we have in us a conflict of wishes. In the ordinary way, we shift from one wish to another according to what happens to attract our attention or according to the habits of behaviour we have formed.

So long as life goes on in this way the various impulses neutralize one another and we get nowhere, or rather we drift imperceptibly towards that gradual weakening of all wishes which is the mark of growing old. When all wishes are feeble, we drift towards death. This should be understood by everyone and probably is; but, not knowing what to do about it, most people close their minds to the situation and excuse themselves by blaming their circumstances.

And yet what is required is really very simple. **One must organize a struggle of desires or impulses.** We have some power of choice: not perhaps as free as we imagine and yet sufficient to organize the “struggle of ‘yes and no’.”

For example, everyone can find in himself or herself inner attitudes of mind and outer habits of behaviour that are contrary to their own Ideal. He can ask himself if he wishes to keep or to be free from one or other of these. Out of this self-questioning can come a decision to struggle with the attitude or habit he has examined. This simple example illustrates what is meant by struggle.

Struggle is possible because we men are not one indivisible whole. One part of us can struggle with another, but only on condition of being aware of **inward separation**. This can be experienced very simply in relation to our own bodies. We usually say ‘I am tired’ when it is obviously correct to say ‘my body is tired’. Perhaps ‘I am not tired at all. If so, ‘I’ am separate from my body. I can then say to my body “you may be tired, but I want you to do so and so”. A struggle may follow and out of the struggle my body may obey ‘me’. The same kind of situations can arise in thousands of ways. Together these form the second great source from which the process of transformation is kept going.

Struggle with oneself can also be called self-discipline or ‘work on oneself’. It can apply to body, feelings and mind or to all three together. It can be on different levels of understanding and intensity. At this point, I am concerned only to explain the basic principle that **struggle depends upon our being conscious within ourselves of a separation of ‘yes’ and ‘no’**. Only when we are conscious of this separation can we make an act of choice between the two.

Here it is useful to see that the choice must be specific and it must be absolute: “either this action or that action”. There is no compromise. The doctrine of ‘no-compromise’ is

easily misunderstood. It is often supposed that it is general and applicable to our entire lives. This is only true for those who have reached such a stage of transformation that the separation between the supreme wish for the perfect **Ideal** and all other wishes is clear and unmistakable in all circumstances. Only such people can make a complete act of choice. For ordinary people, there can be no question of a total commitment outside the immediate situation embraced by their consciousness of their conflict of desires. I call this immediate situation the **Present Moment**. Most of the time our present moment is so contracted that there is no room for separation and we are **lost**, that is, our will is wholly taken up with the dominant impulse of the moment. In such a state, choice is an illusion. It is called **identification or attachment**.

In the state of identification we cannot struggle, because there is no one there to struggle. In order to struggle something must bring about in us the state of separation. Any kind of shock can do this. When it is a physical shock we call it 'noticing'. When it is a mental shock we call it 'awakening of attention'. When it is a moral shock we call it 'remorse of conscience'.

Obviously, not all struggle is for the sake of transformation. Whenever we have an aim to be attained and find that we are not doing what is needed we 'make an effort'. This effort is a struggle against some weak or rebellious part of our nature. Sometimes we struggle to achieve unworthy or useless aims. In itself, struggle is neither good nor bad but is bound to produce a result. Through the struggle we grow stronger; by ceasing to struggle we grow weaker. If we can struggle with one desire, we shall find it easier to struggle with another.

Sometimes, people start on the way of transformation without any idea of what it means - simply because they do not like to be as they are. This dissatisfaction is itself a form of separation. Dissatisfaction, or awareness of being deprived of what one needs, is the force that prevents man from stagnating. What he does with this force depends upon what he understands. This is why knowledge must come in at the start of transformation. So long as we are dissatisfied and do not know what we really want, we shall probably do plenty of foolish things.

Self-knowledge and struggle with oneself go hand in hand. The link between them is discrimination. This can be expressed in the form of rules or 'guide-lines'.

1. Remember always that you can only struggle within your own present moment. Outside the moment of which you are conscious, there is plenty going on and you can know a good deal about it; but not struggle with it.
2. Organize your struggle: choose with what you will struggle and repeat the act as often as you become aware of the impulse you wish to struggle with.
3. Use discrimination. Do not be too ambitious. Learn to measure your own capacity.
4. Persistence will do what cannot be achieved by force. Drops of water wear away a stone: a cloudburst will leave it unchanged.
5. Don't be afraid of struggle. No one ever made themselves unhappy or injured themselves by struggle, unless they were over-ambitious, foolhardy, or vain-glorious.
6. Remember that present struggle is the key for future happiness.
7. Do not chop and change. A very modest plan of action carried through a conclusion can produce astonishing results.

8. Take decisions only when you are sure that you have both the intention and the ability to carry them out.
9. When in doubt of your ability, tell yourself that you will try your best. Then your 'best' must be your decision.
10. Never stop to regret failures or try to excuse them. They have got out of your present moment, and there is nothing you can do about them.
11. Your body is ignorant; be just to it. Your feelings change; do not count on them. Your mind is volatile; do not expect that it can remain stable within your present moment. In short, be realistic about yourself.
12. Never forget that no one else can do your struggling for you.

... Foolish, indiscriminate struggle – as if it were an end in itself – leads to no good. **Struggle is the organization of the power of wish.** Unless something in us wishes to struggle we can not do so. The wish may be unconscious or semi-conscious, but by knowledge we can bring it into consciousness and so be able to organize it.

3. SACRIFICE

So far all is plain sailing. We all recognize at least part of what is meant by learning and struggling. Now we come to a source the very nature of which is to be hidden. A sacrifice that is seen to be a sacrifice is not true sacrifice. We remember the counsels in the Sermon of the Mount. "Do not your alms before men to be seen of them", and of those who do so: "They have their reward." There is an obvious contradiction between these verse and the earlier one which says: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good work and glorify you Father which is in heaven." The contradiction disappears if one recognizes that the latter verse refers to struggle and effort, whereas the former refers to sacrifice and renunciation.

Before going further, I must try to answer two questions. Why is sacrifice necessary and how does it differ from struggle?

Sacrifice is necessary because **everything worth having must be paid for** and the word sacrifice is simply another word for payment...but it is not the same as purchase. Sacrifice and struggle work in opposite ways. When we struggle, separation comes first and choice or decision afterwards. In sacrifice we decide to separate ourselves from something that we are attached to. Sacrifice must not be a struggle; unless it is made out of a free act of will, it is not a genuine sacrifice. Nor is it a sacrifice if it is made to gain some specific benefit. That is why I say that by sacrifice we pay and yet we do not buy anything. This is the secret, even the mystery of sacrifice. In one way it is not a mystery because to give expecting a return for what we give may be admirable, but it is not sacrifice. In another sense it is a great mystery indeed, for it is a special kind of creative act that opens possibilities which cannot be opened in any other way.

To illustrate the mystery of sacrifice, let us take the simple example of 'giving way' in argument when it is done by decision and not from weakness or fear. If two people are in opposition both claiming and believing that they are in the right, it is hard for both of them to give way unless they are compelled to by some stronger force. If either gives way unforced, because he chooses to sacrifice his pride or his 'face', the entire situation is

transformed. The sacrifice creates possibilities which were not there before. The mystery of this act is that it appears externally to be a sign of weakness, and yet it proves to be the contrary. It invariably happens that the one who makes the sacrifice ends up with the advantage - providing always that he did not do it with this result in view.

...Sacrifice is an art that must be learned. Its operations are not obvious, but they are not beyond the scope of anyone who has once grasped the principle.

The way I explain it to myself is based on my idea of the Present Moment as the field of action of my will. If I decide to put something to which I am attached outside of my present moment, I form a connection which goes 'out of time'. That 'something', because I am attached to it, has become part of myself: by separating myself from it, it becomes a channel through which new possibilities flow into my present moment.

...The essence of sacrifice is decision.

... It has to be understood that the decision has to be authentic. One of the Gurdjieff's Russian pupils tells this instructive story of his treatment of sacrifice. In 1918 at Essentuki in the Caucasus when life was very hard, he asked all the women of the party to give him their jewels. Mrs. H. had some family jewels that were not only valuable but her whole remaining material link with her past life. After an agonizing period of hesitation, she took them to Gurdjieff and put them before him on the table and walked out of the room without a word spoken. When she was half way out of the house, he called her back and said: "I don't need these, you keep them." Several years later the story was told at the Prieuré and soon after Gurdjieff again announced that he was in difficulty and needed all the money they had. An American woman brought her jewelry and laid it on his table expecting to be called back, but he only said: "Thank you very much," and that was the last she saw of it. When she complained bitterly that she thought it was a test: the others pointed out that even if it was a test, she had failed.

Not every genuine sacrifice is voluntary. Something may be removed from our present moment not by our own choice. If we are strongly attached – as for example when we lose a person near and very dear to us – we can respond by renunciation or by revolt. If we refuse to accept the separation and dwell upon our grief, in self-pity or refusal of life, we lose the true connection because we remain within our own present moment. If we accept the bereavement and renounce the impulse to brood over it and pity ourselves, the effect can be extraordinary, for we can become conscious of a connection with another world outside our own space and time.

I have insisted that when we make sacrifices we must not look for a return. This does not mean that there are no results or that one cannot recognize them. The fruit of sacrifice is **freedom**. Freedom is a very wonderful state of existence, for it is no less than the **possibility of a creative act**. True freedom is so rare in our human experience that few people can even recognize its taste. When we are free we are master of the present moment: we are not tied by the consequences of the past or controlled by influences outside ourselves. Freedom is almost the most precious thing in life: but the word has been so misused and so debased in its meaning that we take freedom to mean being without external constraints. The state of the word today gives the lie to any such definition of freedom. No one is free who is not inwardly free and the inner freedom

comes in the moment of sacrifice. As our sacrifices are only partial sacrifices – that is involving the attachment of only a part of ourselves - the inner freedom we can get does not last long. But so long as it lasts it is unmistakable.

Sacrifice is never easy. Until the decision is taken it seems almost impossible. Not physically impossible but requiring an act of will that we refuse to make.

...Sacrifices must be made freely. They must not be beyond what we can bear. And they must be made again and again. The most valuable sacrifices are made when we give up inner attachments. Everyone is attached to his or her picture of himself. This picture usually includes 'being in the right'. Few can bear to admit that they are in the wrong. Every time a person who has this attachment to being in the right is able to sacrifice it, he projects part of himself outside of the present moment and this creates a state of freedom that lasts until it is dissipated by activity.

Here are some rules I found useful in the practice of sacrifice.

1. Any desire for reward that creeps into sacrifice destroys its value.
2. Be intelligent in your choice of objects to sacrifice.
3. Do not sacrifice at expense of others, unless you are able to make it up to them.
4. A half-hearted sacrifice is not much of a sacrifice.
5. Sacrifice what is precious to you in this present moment.
6. Never bargain over sacrifice.
7. Do not be fool-hardy and attempt sacrifices that you will regret.
8. Measure what you can bear. This is the measure of what you are.
9. Search yourself for attachments and ask yourself whether you are ready to sacrifice any of them.
10. Right sacrifice is made for a good reason, but not for a good result.
11. Keep your sacrifices hidden from others, or if this is impossible contrive to make it seem that you did well out of them.
12. Sacrifice must not be the result of struggle, but of decision. It is a decisive act that is made in a moment and there must be no hesitation or second thoughts once the decision is made.

Sacrifice is possible because man has free-will. It is likely – at least this is what I believe – that the only way in which free-will is exercised is in the act of sacrifice. When this act is made we have a period of freedom: when what we do and what we are are one and the same. This disintegrates, but it leaves a trace behind and this trace grows until it becomes the heart of our True Self, that is our real 'I'.

...The opportunities for sacrifice arise constantly in the normal conduct of our lives. They do not all have to be taken, but they should be recognized and understood. The man who has learned the value of sacrifice - and the joy of it too - has gained access to one of the great secrets of life and of transformation.

4. HELP

If sacrifice consists in thrusting something precious out of the present moment; help consists in allowing something precious to enter. It may not be at all obvious, but the question whether or not transformation is possible without help is the key to the whole

problem of a human life. I do not mean the question whether help is useful, but whether it is indispensable. If help is not indispensable, then at least in principle we can change ourselves by an action that can be produced completely by our own will. This means that our present moment must contain something that would enable it to become radically different (unless it is radical it is not transformation) from what it is now.

Some people say that such radical change is possible, and that the 'something' that makes it possible is really nothing but luck. The human brain, they say, is so immensely complicated that hundred of millions of combinations are being formed every minute. One of these combinations may be completely original and open up new possibilities without any need for help from outside. The same kind of argument is used to reject the idea that any Great Intelligence is at work on any scale large or small. Life appeared on the earth, they say, because out of inconceivably numerous chemical reactions in the primitive ocean or atmosphere of earth, a self-reproducing molecule could have arisen on the earth by sheer chance – good or bad luck as you choose to look at it.

On this argument, the entire atheistic and mechanistic philosophy of modern life is based and that is why I said that it is the key to the whole problem of human life. We are not concerned here with the tremendous philosophical thesis that blind chance can produce out of chaos, without direction or purpose or intelligence, a state of affairs – that is human life on earth – in which we find all three. Our question looks much simpler: can we expect to change ourselves simply by our own native wit and determination? In our own case, we do not need to shut out the rest of the world as philosophers must do in studying such questions as 'Could life have arisen on the earth by blind chance?' We can at least draw upon the available knowledge of what can be done and how.

The question must, therefore, be more carefully framed. Can we change ourselves by our own native wit, plus what we can learn from others, plus our own determination? My personal belief, based on nearly fifty years' experience, is that we need 'something' that does not reduce to any of the three elements I have discussed so far: that is, learning, struggle and sacrifice. This 'something' resembles what is called in chemistry a **catalyst**, which acts in a marvelous way to make an almost impossible process go quickly and easily.

...My own belief is that the transformation of man is by nature such a slow and difficult process that scarcely one person in a hundred million could accomplish it in a lifetime, but that help is available which makes it possible for quite ordinary people to achieve it.

Help is like knowledge inasmuch it has to enter our present moment from outside and beyond. It is unlike knowledge inasmuch it does not enter through the mind. It is different in yet another way, namely, that it does not come from the same time and space as our mind and body live in. This is why it cannot be 'taken' or 'bought' as knowledge can be gained by learning, strength by struggle and freedom by sacrifice.

...Gurdjieff explained this kind of help to me in August 1923 when I was at the Prieuré in Fontainebleau. I can reproduce the conversation almost exactly, because I wrote to my wife the same day and she preserved the letter. I had just such a demonstration of Gurdjieff's ability to help one to accomplish the impossible when he said to me: "A man who wishes to change must have the necessary energy. Say he needs one hundred units,

but with all his efforts he can only collect ten. He is helpless. Suppose he meets a man who has much more energy than he needs for himself. That man can lend him ninety. Then he will do what he wants. Afterwards he must repay. Now you cannot do anything by yourself, so I must help you. There is a special substance - let us call it "higher emotional energy" that you need. You do not know where to get this substance, but I know. Later you will know too and then you will understand this work. Those who can give this substance to others who need it belong to a special section of the highest caste of humanity." I said to him: "How can I get the help I need?" He replied - we were talking in Turkish - "When you say **Amar** (Mercy!) with all your being. Only then can you be helped."

This conversation may give the impression that the helper himself produces, or even creates, the substance. It is not so. He is really more like a channel of transmission. His secret and his achievement are that **he has found the way to connect himself to a source which is outside of his own Present Moment**. He can transmit because the person helped enters into his present moment and can benefit from what he himself receives.

...We are trying to achieve an harmonious state of being in which we are free to fulfil the purpose of our existence. This means, first of all, bringing order into the chaotic state of our inner life - I hope that the reader will agree that our inner life is very little under our control and is very far from a state of stable harmony.

If disorder can produce order by its own activity - which is much to be doubted - it certainly does so far too slowly to be of much use to us in our own lifetimes. If so, then help is a crucial factor and we must find the way to obtain it.

The kind of help we are looking for is one that will enable us to do - with reasonable hope of success during the limited time we have between birth and death - what in theory, at least, we could do without help. I cannot make any rules about help, because its nature is to be spontaneous and unconstrained. We cannot command it to come to us, nor even 'earn' it. This is why it is said that true help has always a gratuitous character.

...I shall therefore summarize some of the situations in which I have had a personal experience of help:

1. The presence of people who have completed their transformation or are on the way to it. These are commonly called 'holy men'. I have described some ways in which they help.
2. Visiting places in which intensive transformation has occurred. These are 'holy places' or sanctuaries. I would include visits to the tombs of saints, because in my personal experience such visits can produce extraordinary results.
3. The help given by a teacher to his pupils. This presupposes a teacher who made a contact with a Source of help. This kind of help can be very specific, because that teacher can choose the right time and place to give it. The teacher-pupil relationship facilitates the transmission.

4. Special rituals and ceremonies in which the transmission is made. This is called initiation. Each kind of initiation brings the initiate in contact with a particular help-substance or possibly a combination of several. When initiation is authentic – and I am afraid this is rather seldom – the initiate receives a permanent link with the source of help and is taught how to draw upon it when necessary...

5. I must now refer to spiritual or supernatural help. This is called **Grace** and its action is of two kinds: personal and communal. The former reaches the innermost nature of man and enables him to live a transformed life. The latter – called ‘charismatic’ – gives people various powers – of healing, prophecy, interpretation...I can only state my personal conviction that supernatural, spiritual help is a reality and that it works throughout the truly religious life of man irrespective of any particular form of belief.

6. Spontaneous and unaccountable help. I must put this in a separate category for it is a strange phenomenon that is, above all, characterized by being non-causal...All kinds of people in all kinds of situations find that moments come when doors seem to open by themselves, when the impossible becomes not merely possible but easy. One calls this Inspiration, but it does not cover all the varieties. Without this kind of help, I think human life would soon be overtaken by a progressive disintegration on every scale from private to planetary existence.

7. Finally, I come to the help that comes in moments of utter despair. This is different from spontaneous help because it is clearly connected with a visible and tangible situation. Gurdjieff explained it by saying “Nature hates vacuum. When you make empty, help will enter.” There is, however, a strangely purposive quality about this kind of help. Nearly everyone I have asked – and there have been hundreds – confirms that they have unmistakably received help of this kind. It is referred to innumerable proverbs and fables of all peoples and all times, so it must be a general heritage of mankind.

It is as if there were a great Universal Reservoir of help substances which ordinarily we cannot tap, but to which we have a secret channel. In moments of despair the channel opens and help-substance flows in.

*“Awareness is the ocean of existence. Let it loose and your words will rage.
But if you tend it like a fire to discover the truth,
you will find how much of that there is in what you say. None!”
(from ‘Naked Song’ by Lalla)*