

Gurdjieff on Conscience, as recounted to P.D. Ouspensky in “*In Search of the Miraculous*,” taken from the edition published by Paul H. Crompton Ltd 2004, Pages 155-156.

“‘Conscience’ is again a term that needs explanation.

“In ordinary life the concept ‘conscience’ is taken too simply. As if we had a conscience. Actually the concept ‘conscience’ in the sphere of the emotions is equivalent to the concept ‘consciousness’ in the sphere of the intellect. And as we have no consciousness we have no conscience.

“Consciousness is a state in which a man *knows all at once* everything that he in general knows and in which he can see how little he does know and how many contradictions there are in what he knows.

“Conscience is a state in which a man *feels all at once* everything that he in general feels, or can feel. And as everyone has within him thousands of contradictory feelings which vary from a deeply hidden realization of his own nothingness and fears of all kinds to the most stupid kind of self-conceit, self-confidence, self-satisfaction, and self-praise, to feel all this *together* would not only be painful but literally unbearable.

“If a man whose entire inner world is composed of contradictions were suddenly to feel all these contradictions simultaneously within himself, if he were to feel all at once that he loves everything he hates and hates everything he loves, that he lies when he tells the truth and that he tells the truth when he lies; and if he could feel the shame and horror of it all, this would be the state which is called ‘conscience.’ A man cannot live in this state; he must either destroy contradictions or destroy conscience. He cannot destroy conscience, but if he cannot destroy it he can put it to sleep, that is, he can separate by impenetrable barriers one feeling of self from another, never see them together, never feel their incompatibility, the absurdity of one existing alongside another.

“But fortunately for man, that is, for his peace and for his sleep, this state of conscience is very rare. From early childhood ‘buffers’ begin to grow and strengthen in him, taking from him the possibility of seeing his inner contradictions and therefore, for him, there is no danger whatever of a sudden awakening. Awakening is possible only for those who seek it and want it, for those who are ready to struggle with themselves and work on themselves for a very long time and very persistently in order to attain it. For this it is necessary to destroy ‘buffers,’ that is, to go out to meet all those inner sufferings which are connected with the sensations of contradictions. Moreover the destruction of ‘buffers’ in itself requires very long work and a man must agree to this work realizing that the result of his work will be every possible discomfort and suffering from the awakening of his conscience.

“But conscience is the fire which alone can fuse all the powders in the glass retort which was mentioned before and create the unity which a man lacks in that state in which he begins to study himself.

“The concept ‘conscience’ has nothing in common with the concept ‘morality.’

“Conscience is a general and a *permanent* phenomenon. Conscience is the same for all men and conscience is possible only in the absence of ‘buffers.’ From the point of view of understanding the different categories of man we may say that there exists the conscience of a man in whom there are no contradictions. This conscience is not suffering; on the contrary it is joy of a totally new character which we are unable to understand. But even a momentary awakening of conscience in a man who has thousands of different I’s is bound to involve suffering. And if these moments of conscience become longer and if a man does not fear them but on the contrary co-operates with them and tries to keep and prolong them, an element of very subtle joy, a foretaste of the future ‘clear consciousness’ will gradually enter into these moments.