January 30, 2020 – Five Obligolnian Strivings  
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**A close up of a sign

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From Mr. G. *Tales...All and Everything*, "

And this took place as follows: "All the beings of that planet then began to work in order to have in their consciousness this divine function of genuine Conscience, and for this purpose, as everywhere in the Universe, they transubstantiated in themselves what are called the 'being-obligolnian strivings' of which there are five, namely:"

**Introduction:**

As a helpful learning device, think of the five strivings as interrelated concentric circles, or even as a helix spiral starting from the inside circle, moving outward:

First – Body

Second – Being

Third – Above (i.e. higher laws)

Fourth – Arising

Fifth – Assist

Furthermore, the five strivings harmonized with other simple summaries in other religious traditions. For example:

- The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

- Jesus’ Golden Rule

-Jesus’ Nine Beatitudes

- Moses’ Ten Commandments (first five personal, second five more social)

-The Five Obligatory prayers of Islam

The Five Pillars of Islam

**Context:** Gurdjieff’s teaching on the Five strivings is some of the most innovative spiritual writing in recorded human history. It can be found in chapter 26 in Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson. In that chapter Gurdjieff is teaching about the extraordinary and impactful teaching of a saintly being he calls Ashiata Shiemash, and how through the efforts of this man, a golden age in human history emerged. It was during this golden age of humankind that the Five Strivings emerged, as a consequence of a large-scale evolution in human consciousness. However, this golden age didn’t last. For what happened, and how the fall of human consciousness diminished the engagement with the Five Strivings, read the next chapter, Chapter 28 in the Tales.

**I. First Striving:**"To have in their ordinary being-existence everything satisfying and really necessary for their planetary body."

The first striving reminds us that the physical body is a vital aspect of our development, and we must not spiritually bypass the body. Mr. G calls this the "planetary body" and it contains everything related to our "being existence", which is different from Being. The being existence spoken of here in the First Striving is related to the what the Work tradition calls the First Body - namely, the physical organism, that requires physical food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep, health, love, and movement. The Work tradition also refers to the First Body as the Carriage, from the analogy that the Carriage represents the physical body; the horse pulling the carriage represents our emotions/desires; the driver holding the reigns represents mind/intellect. See Figure 1 diagram on *Commentaries,* p. 227.  "The first is the physical body, in Christian terminology the 'carnal' body..." p. 227, *Commentaries.* [Further Reading: pp. 218 - 235, *Commentaries.*]

**II. Second Striving:**"To have a constant and unflagging instinctive need for self-perfection in the sense of being."

The second striving is related to the Work idea of Self-Development, and more precisely Work on the side of Being. We are created as self-developing organisms.

"The whole of this work is about a change of being - that is, a change of the level of being at which a man naturally is - in ordinary life..." p. 2, *Commentaries.*

"You must understand that this work is not really about life; it is about something else that a man can begin to attempt quite apart from whether he is a successful politician, a famous scientist, or a well-respected butcher or baker or candlestick-maker. This works starts from man as a good householder - namely, from a man who has developed personality and can deal with life in his own particular way, reasonably enough. The third stage is all concerned with a possible further development of essence and that is why so m any apparently paradoxical or at least strange things are said in the Gospels - such are contained int he Sermon on the Mount - about man. They are all to do with allowing essence to grow at the expense of personality and this is the only way in which essence, which is too weak by itself to grow, can continue to develop..." p. 3 - 4, *Commentaries.*

**III. Third Striving:**"The conscious striving to know ever more and more concerning the laws of World-creation and World-maintenance."

The third striving connects with a very important aspect of the Work related to our understanding of our place in the order of things, or what the Work calls The Ray of Creation. Our place in the scale of life on planet earth and in the cosmos. Cosmology, which is our understanding of the universe we find ourselves in, grounds the teaching of the Work in a much larger container and context than just our existential, psychological experiences and events. While the work is about development of Being, the work is also about working on the side of knowledge, and the third striving reminds us that a significant aspect of knowledge is our understanding of all of life and our participation in and relationship to the cosmos.

"You will find that you have little force for thinking about the cosmological ideas of this Work. A person lives in his or her own very small cosmos which is his or her world and this very small world is governed mainly by self-interests. People do not yet live even in this world - this small planet called earth. This is due to a lack of development of consciousness, as are also so many of the troubles on this Earth..." p. 119, *Commentaries*

**IV. Fourth Striving:**"The striving from the beginning of their existence to pay for their arising and their individuality as quickly possible, in order afterwards to be free to lighten as much as possible the Sorrow of our Common Father."

This is one of the most poignant phrases and aims in all of the Work. The notion that God, Source, our "Common Father," has sorrow, invites very deep reflection. Just what might it mean that the Creator has sorrow?  And even more profound is that our efforts or lack thereof to fulfill our purpose on this planet, in the cosmos, has an impact on lightening that sorrow. That is to say, our development and awakening matters to God, to the cosmos, to self and to others. We truly live in quantum entanglement. The idea of paying for one's arising is related to the idea of reciprocal maintenance, in which we affirm weekly that "I give freely and receive joyfully."  Paying for one's arising is related to making conscious efforts to work against our personality, and to not express our negative emotions or mechanical, unconscious reactivity. Making payment may also be related to forgiving our debts and debtors, applied psychologically and spiritually, as taught in Jesus' teaching on the Lord's Prayer. That is, we make payment and pay for arising by forgiving others, by canceling the inner accounts of resentment we may have against someone, etc.

""...The Work idea that everyone is a 'self-developing' organism and must make *individual* effort. Each person much develop himself or herself on all sides...You have all heard that everyone has to make mechanical effort [being existence]. Organic life makes conditions such that every rabbit, every fox, every animal, every plant, and every man and woman, has to make *mechanical effort,* in order to live. But *Conscious Effort* lies beyond this level." p. 342, *Commentaries.*

**V. Fifth Striving:**"The striving always to assist the most rapid perfecting of other beings, both those similar to oneself and those of other forms, up to the degree of the sacred Martfotai, that is, up to the degree of self-individuality."

This Fifth striving reflects what Mr. G called the true aim of existence on Earth: “‘the highest aim and sense of human life is the striving to attain the welfare of one’s neighbor,’ and that this is possible exclusively only by the conscious renunciation of one’s own. (Tales, p. 1186). This relates to the Work idea of Conscious Love and what we call The Second Line of the Work - work with and for the sake of others. This is a factor in our wish for Journey Groups. And reminds us that we do not do our own Work or develop in a vacuum. We are integrated into life, relationships and various life responsibilities. We are monks in the world. Good householders, who wish to grow, evolve and develop. The fact that there is an adjective of time is curious: rapid perfecting. This suggests that we must make haste slowly because time is a factor. Perhaps this is the essence and intent of Jesus famous teaching, "Love the lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself..." (Luke 10.27).

**Further Online Resources:**

Cynthia Bourgeault,[*The Five Obligonian Strivings*](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/course/view/10195/becoming-truly-human-gurdjieffs-obligolnian-strivings%C2%A0%C2%A0)

Jan Jarvis, [*What Are We Obliged to Do: Thoughts on the Strivings*](http://www.gurdjieff-internet.com/article_details.php?ID=387&W=70)