Spiritual Exercises in Novarodok Mussar and the Early Work

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Abstract

This article compares aspects of the teachings launched in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russia of two spiritual figures: Rabbi Yoseph Yozel Horwitz and George Gurdjieff. Yozel founded the Novarodok school of Mussar within Judaism; Gurdjieff founded the spiritual tradition known as "the Work" or "Fourth Way." There are of course great differences between Judaism and the Work, but some similarities might be expected between spiritual disciplines, especially similarities in practice as opposed to doctrine. This article explores similarities of some spiritual exercises in the Mussar school of Novarodok and secondarily in later or other Mussar teachings and in the early Gurdjieff Work and secondarily in its later development, specifically exercises that are undertaken in the midst of the ordinary activities of daily life. These similarities are interesting given the substantial differences in their Jewish and non-Jewish contexts.

Keywords: Mussar, Yoseph Yozel Horowitz, The Work, Gurdjieff, work on oneself, spiritual exercises, esotericism

Introduction: Novarodok Mussar and the early Gurdjieff Work

Among the spiritual teachers who appeared in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russia were Rabbi Yoseph Yozel Horowitz (1847-1919), whose students established Mussar yeshivas in Belarus, Ukraine, St. Petersburg, and Moscow, and George Gurdjieff (c.1877-1949), who visited St. Petersburg and Moscow around 1912, when he was beginning his teaching mission.[1] Yozel and Gurdjieff were never in the same place at the same time, but if their paths could have crossed and led to conversation, once each got over the strangeness of the other, they might have found that they had a lot in common both personally and in what they taught. Mussar (also spelled Musar), as a social movement within eastern European Jewry launched by Rabbi Israel Salantar (1809-1883), focused on the psychological-spiritual dimension of Jewish religious observance.[2] It aimed at the rectification of *middot*, character traits, as a way of strengthening the capacity of Jews to be Torah-observant and resist the allure of the *Haskalah*

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[1] Contact by Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg with the teaching of Mussar is very improbable but not inconceivable. Mussar was well established in St. Petersburg at the end of the nineteenth century, but by the beginning of the twentieth century Mussar groups in St. Petersburg may no longer have existed See Yehuda Mirsky, 'Musar Movement', *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. At: https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/2124.

[2] The Haskalah was the "Jewish Enlightenment," which refers to the opening of Jewish society to Western ideas after Jews were granted civil liberties in Europe.

or the revolutionary political movements of the time.[3] The Novarodok (also spelled Novardok, Novaredok, and Navaradock) school of Mussar launched by Rav (Rabbi) Yozel was the most radical stream of this tradition.

In revolutionary Russia, at a time when there was significant interest in the occult and esoteric, as evidenced by the prominence of the Russian Theosophical Society,[4] Gurdjieff introduced the spiritual discipline known as "the Work," aimed at the cultivation and expansion of consciousness and centered in the practices of self-remembering and self-observation, with affinities to Eastern Christianity, Sufism, Buddhism, and the Western esoteric tradition, but with no apparent connection to Judaism.[5]

A thorough study of the similarities and differences between Jewish Mussar and the Gurdjieff Work is beyond the scope of this article which focuses narrowly on some experiential aspects of these two traditions, primarily on certain spiritual exercises that were undertaken by followers. This article considers exercises practiced in Novarodok yeshivas in the early twentieth century, but also mentions other Mussar exercises not restricted to these dates and locales that are similar to or can be viewed as extensions of earlier Novarodok exercises. Similarly, the article emphasizes the early phase of Gurdjieff's teaching for which P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) is the canonical text but also mentions some later exercises that show continuity with those prominent in its early phase. In focusing on a class of exercises as opposed to the chronological development of these traditions, the organization of this article is thematic, not historical.

More specifically, the exercises of concern here are those practiced in the midst of the ordinary activities of daily life as opposed to special circumstances. Thus, Mussar meditative and contemplative practices, such as *hitbodedut*, pursued in seclusion and not undertaken under conditions of ordinary life, are outside the scope of this article. Similarly, meditation and contemplation exercises that became part of Work practice and the Gurdjieff Movements (sacred dances) are not discussed here.[6]

Exercises are offered in all spiritual traditions, including traditions not commonly regarded as religious. For example, Pierre Hadot increased our awareness of the spiritual exercises of the Greco-Roman philosophical schools.[7] Some exercises not greatly dissimilar to

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[3] The Haskalah was the "Jewish Enlightenment," which refers to the opening of Jewish society to Western ideas after Jews were granted civil liberties in Europe.

[4] Johanna Petsche, 'Gurdjieff and Blavatsky: Western Esoteric Teachers in Parallel', *Literature and Aesthetics*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2011), pp. 98-115.

[5] Gurdjieff makes some references to Judaism in Ouspensky's account of his early teaching. See P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949). For example, Ouspensky mentions "Cabala" (pp. 205, 283) and the Seal of Solomon (p. 282) in the essay on symbolism. In G. I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (Boston: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930), Moses numbers among the saints referred to as "messengers from above." "His Endlessness," one of Gurdjieff's names for God, has the same literal meaning as the Kabbalistic "*Ayn Sof*." The music Gurdjieff composed with de Hartmann included an "Essene Hymn." But no one has suggested that he drew directly from any Jewish sources, and this is not being suggested here.

[6] For examples of such exercises that are outside the scope of this article see Joseph Azize, '"The Four Ideals": A Contemplative Exercise by Gurdjieff', *Aries*, vol. 13 (2013), pp. 173-203.

[7] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* trans. Michael Chase (London: Blackwell, 1995). A preliminary study applying Hadot's work to the tannaitic period was undertaken by Jonathan Wyn Schofer in his work, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). The schools that Hadot wrote about were more philosophical than religious and one could extend his analysis to the relatively secular

those pursued in these schools or in Mussar or the Work are in fact also undertaken in secular psychological therapies that employ desensitization, paradoxical, and Gestalt behavioral practices.[8] In such philosophical or psychological traditions as well as in many religious traditions priority is given to practice over theory. In Judaism action is privileged over belief: *Halacha* (Jewish religious law, literally "path") is ultimately *le'ma'aseh*, to be done. Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of Faith* was a late development in the history of Judaism, and the distinguishing characteristic of being an observant Jew has always been performance of concrete *mitzvot* (practices normative under *Halacha*), not profession of any set of beliefs.

The Gurdjieff tradition has a similar emphasis on practice. Gurdjieff distinguished between practice, theory, and philosophy, and characterized different traditions as each specializing in one of these.[9] From his perspective, the role of theory was to guide experiential practice, i.e., to provide a basis for understanding the efforts that were to be undertaken and the experiences that might be encountered. The role of philosophy was to provide a broader context for theory. The priority of practice over theory or belief is evident in the name associated with the Gurdjieff tradition, namely "the Work." As Constance A. Jones writes:

> Not a religious teacher in any conventional sense, Gurdjieff did not inculcate beliefs, nor demand faith from his pupils; rather, he taught a practice that uses the circumstances of everyday life to reveal laws of spiritual influence he detected at the source of great religious traditions as well as esoteric teachings.[10]

There are obviously great *doctrinal* differences between Judaism and the Work. Given conventional views that posit the centrality to religion of doctrine and belief, one might expect that practice in these two traditions would be very different. To use statistical terminology, one might take *difference* in the practices of these traditions as a "null hypothesis."[11] On the other hand, if one is inclined to expect some deep similarities between religions/spiritualties one might hold that differences in the spiritual exercises of religious traditions should *not* be our expectation. Arguably, at the heart of any spiritual tradition is not belief but deed, so perhaps we should instead entertain a null hypothesis of similarity of practice.[12] One might even generalize this hypothesis and propose the idea of a 'perennial practice' as a more substantial

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school of Confucianism. See Martin Zwick, 'Jewish Mussar and Confucian Self-Cultivation', *Systems Science Faculty Publications and Presentations*, no. 216 (2019). At: https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/42737.

[8] For example, Frederick Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1951) and Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, and Richard Frisch, *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974).

[9] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 23.

[10] Constance A. Jones, 'Gnostic Sensibility in Gurdjieff's "Work,"' In *The Gnostic World*, ed. Garry W. Trompf with Gunner B. Mikkelsen and Jay Johnston (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 518.

[11] The use of statistical terminology here is metaphorical, since a null hypothesis of difference is not only atypical but would require a quantitative specification of expected difference, here obviously impossible.

[12] In *Faust*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) responds to the opening of the *Gospel According to John*, which states "In the beginning was the word," with the contrary assertion "In the beginning was the deed." See Emily Warner 'The Translation of Faust', *Proceedings of the Deseret Language and Linguistic Society* Symposium, vol. 23, no.1 (1997). Arguably, it is the deed more than the word that is central to a life of the spirit.

basis for commonalities between religious/spiritual traditions than the well-known idea of a 'perennial philosophy.'

Esoteric Work on Oneself

The Gurdjieff Work is generally regarded – and was labelled by Gurdjieff himself – as "esoteric," but this label applies as well to Mussar even though it is not regarded as such. While this word applied to spiritual traditions is commonly used to indicate doctrines and/or practices that are kept secret from outsiders, a deeper use of this word would refer to the cultivation of a private spiritual realm of inner activity.[13] Both the Mussar and Work exercises discussed in this article require an inner intentionality that is invisible on the outside. A person committed to the practice of such exercises has an ongoing intentional inner life, often or at least intermittently valued above the person's outer life. Koch describes the inner activity in Mussar as "mystical-spiritual" and the Gurdjieff teaching is often characterized in the same way.[14] Intentional inner practices in the Work are referred to as "work on oneself," an expression also used in the Mussar literature.[15]

Ideally, a study of Novarodok Mussar and the early Work would employ both "emic" and "etic" methodologies, where an emic approach reflects the "position of a believer or the inner perspective, while an etic approach reflects the "position of a scholar or the outer perspective."[16] However, since the focus of this article is on spiritual exercises that are not generally visible from the outside, most sources referred to in this article will necessarily be those of practitioners of the two traditions or people close to them. But some outsider sources will also be cited, and hopefully the very comparison of the two traditions in this article will constitute something approximating an etic approach.

In both traditions work on oneself was not pursued in a solitary way, but in groups. Mussar groups were called *va'adim*. Salantar originally conceived of groups of adults (householders: *ba'aley batim*) who would meet in special houses – not synagogues or study halls – to practice Mussar. David E. Fishman writes that Novarodok va'adim were "modeled after an institution of the Jewish labor and revolutionary movement – the underground circle or cell;"[17]

> The proceedings were closed to non-members and bore a conspiratorial aura about them. In the privacy of these small, closed circles, the students engaged in the task of

[13] Makhabbad Maltabarova, 'Reading Western Esotericism: George Gurdjieff and His "Cunning" Esotericism," *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2020), pp. 179–196, discusses Gurdjieff from the perspective of views about esotericism expressed by both Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraff.
[14] Koch, *Human Self Perfection*, pp. 20, 166.
[15] For an example is the Weintraub biography of the Alter of Novarodok. See Rabbi Shlomo Weintraub, *The Alter of Novardok: The Life of Rav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz and His Worldwide Impact*, trans. Esther Ilana Rabi (Rahway: Mesorah Publications, 2020), pp.129-132). Another example is an online essay based on writings of Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag, 'What Beginning in *Lo Lishma* Means in the Work', *Kabbalah info* (1987/88). At: http://www.kabbalah.info/eng/content/view/frame/116021?/eng/content/view/full/116021&main
[16] Maltabarova, 'Reading Western Esotericism', p. 183.
[17] David E. Fishman, 'Musar and Modernity: The Case of Novaredok', *Modern Judaism*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1988), pp. 41-64.

> "working on themselves" with intensity and vigor … The secret circle was the arena where the worker became self-conscious, (a term which could be applied with equal validity to the Musarist in his *va'ad*) and imbibed the ideals of his cause.[18]

The secrecy and intensity that Fishman describes is no less common in esoteric groups that have spiritual rather than political aims. A member of such a group is a "secret agent," as it were, not working for a government or revolutionary movement but for his or her soul. Nearly everything said above about Mussar va'adim could equally be said about the Work groups which formed around Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg[19] – he once called them his "clubs" of a new type – which later became the core organizational unit in the Work.[20] Gurdjieff emphasized that groups were essential for inner work, once stating that "a group is the beginning of everything. One man can do nothing, can attain nothing. A group with a real leader can do more. A group of people can do what one man can never do." He spoke of "three lines of work": work for oneself, with others, and for the Work.[21] The second line was group work, which supported both the first and third lines. Groups regularly met separately and occasionally also together.

Exercises

Fishman describes Mussar exercises called *peules* (actions, doings) as follows:

> The performance of these acts constituted the core of Novaredok's program of character development. Peules were carefully planned, conscientiously repeated, and scrutinized after the fact for their personal impact. Va'ad meetings frequently reviewed the peules performed by members, and debated their efficacy and/or harmful "side effects."[22]

In the Gurdjieff Work spiritual exercises have similarly constituted the core of working for and on oneself and with others. Exercises were given by Gurdjieff to his groups, some to specific individuals and some to the whole group. Later, group leaders played similar but more limited roles. In more advanced and sometimes leaderless groups members often came up with their own exercises. In Work groups just as in Mussar groups exercises were conscientiously undertaken and repeated and the difficulties encountered and the experiences that resulted were shared by group members with one another. What was shared in group meetings was not to be disclosed to non-members. Following is a discussion of several exercises pursued in the midst of daily life by practitioners of Mussar and the Work.

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[18] Fishman, 'Musar and Modernity', pp. 47-48.
[19] These groups are described in great detail in Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*. See also Anna Butkovsky-Hewitt (with assistance from Mary Cosh and Alicia Street), *With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris* (London: Routledge, 1978).
[20] G. I. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am: All and Everything* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1975]), p. 89.
[21] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 30.
[22] Fishman, 'Musar and Modernity', pp. 48-49.

Bitachon and Confidence

One of the aims of Novardok Mussar practice was strengthening of the character trait (*middah*) of *bitachon*, confidence or trust in God's assistance in meeting the challenges confronted in religious observance and, more generally, in life. Meir Levin relates an account of a Mussar exercise of this sort:

> Around Chanuka [the Jewish month of *Kislev* (November-December)], was the time for practicing complete and total reliance on God.[23] Students would get a one way ticket to a distant destination with not a penny in their pockets. From there they endeavored to make their way back without asking anyone for help. Gaunt, pale, silent men that never asked for assistance were a common sight in Lithuanian towns and villages and kindhearted householders knew enough to offer them food and lodgings.[24]

If one has *bitachon*, one is not stymied by anxiety or worry, and one is able to act. One has a kind of freedom, and while enhancing one's freedom is not generally regarded as a goal of religious observance, it helps one to be able to perform *mitzvot* in the midst of social pressures and turbulent life situations. An argument might even be made that the possibility of a gain in personal freedom might have added to the attractiveness of work towards bitachon apart from its value for supporting a pious life. Freedom in action not only helps one perform the duties imposed by faith; it is even a reward of faith itself, of accepting upon oneself *ol malchut shamayim*, the yoke of Heaven. Those who accept this yoke find themselves free in a certain way.

Gurdjieff in effect gave a bitachon exercise to his student, Olga de Hartmann. He sent her off on an expedition to reclaim some objects left in a distant city. He also gave her a pill that she should take if she faced some emergency. While sending Madame de Hartmann on this trip was not cast explicitly as an exercise, it was one all the same. The bitachon he was striving to instill in her was not, however, confidence in heavenly assistance, but in herself, in her own capacity to face and overcome difficulty. So the self-confidence that Gurdjeiff wanted to instill was qualitatively different from the bitachon that was cultivated in Mussar. Still, one might argue that confidence in oneself and total reliance on God are not deeply all that different. And one might perhaps also view the pill that Gurdjieff gave her as a promise of extraordinary assistance, perhaps even something close to "heavenly" assistance – recall that this was a time that occult and esoteric teachings were very popular in Russia – should she find herself in need of it.

Thomas de Hartmann wrote about Gurdjieff sending his wife on this adventure:

> Mr Gurdjieff immediately decided that someone had to go to Essentuki to get what was left of our things and also to try to find the carpets he had stored there. A man could not go, because he would certainly be seized by either the White or the Red Army. It had

[23] While this "complete and total reliance on God" could be understood as denying the need for any individual effort and action, this radical rejection of self-reliance was primarily directed at denying that one need be overly concerned with securing financial sustenance for oneself and one's family.
[24] Meir Levin, *Novarodok: A Movement That Lived in Struggle and Its Unique Approach to the Problem of Man* (Lanham: Jason Aronson, 1996), pp. 17-18.

> to be one of our women, and Mr Gurdjieff decided that my wife was the only one who would be able to accomplish such a task.[25]

Olga de Hartmann wrote upon her return from this adventure that:

> For Mr Gurdjieff, certainly, the carpets were not important, nor were our belongings to us. They were just a pretext to have me thrown alone into life, to see how I could manage in conditions far more difficult than anyone, even Mr Gurdjieff, could imagine in advance. And most important of all was to see whether we both could accept such a task and deal with it.[26]

Gurdjieff wanted to instill bitachon in Madame de Hartmann. In those days in Russia sending people on a train trip to some distant location was an ideal way to pose challenges to an acolyte. The task Gurdjieff gave to Mrs de Hartmann was in keeping with his practice of "[acting] on his students in various ways calculated to place them in situations he believed were necessary for their development."[27]

Hishtavut and Internal considering, identification

A second type of Mussar exercise was aimed at achieving freedom from concern with the opinion of others about oneself. Such equanimity or indifference to outside influences is called hishtavut. Levin writes:

> Before Purim [the Jewish month of Adar (February-March)] they practiced boldness of spirit and disregard for ridicule for "Mordechai did not rise nor tremble" (Esther 5:9). A student would repeatedly go to a hardware store and ask for flour or to a grocery and ask for nails. Some entered strangers' homes on the Shabbos afternoon and asked for bread for their third Sabbath meal, for this was described in the Musar work, *Yesod* Hatshuva, as an act of courage. Some students paraded down the city streets in muddy and tattered clothing. In this fashion they trained themselves not to fear ridicule. Some Novarodokers generally wore poorly fitting apparel and at times made public spectacles of themselves, in order to teach themselves the inner fortitude and courage to stand in opposition to the whole world, if necessary, and to pursue their goals without flinching.[28]

Fishman describes the exercise as follows:

> A peule … was designed to uproot a specific moral defect of which the student was aware and involved the repeated performance of acts which embodied the opposite

[25] Thomas and Olga de Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin 1983 [1964]), p. 124.
[26] de Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr Gurdjieff*, p. 130
[27] Glenn Alexander Magee, 'G. I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way', In *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn Alexander Magee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 288. Gurdjieff also instilled *bitachon* in his followers by practical worldly guidance, see Tscheslaw Tschekhovitch, *Gurdjieff, A Master in Life* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions, 2006), p. 18.
[28] Levin, *Novarodok*, p. 18.

> virtue in the extreme. Since pride, arrogance, and the quest for social esteem, were considered the ubiquitous vices of yeshiva-students, they were the object of most peules. Asking a druggist for nails (or for butter), or walking down the street dressed in a repulsive, ridiculous manner, were peules for uprooting pride and the drive for social prestige and instilling in their place humility and an indifference toward honor.[29]

Fishman here gives a slightly different interpretation of the hishtavut exercise than the one given by Levin. He says that it was a device not only to undermine the drive for social esteem but also to undermine pride. But these two purposes might be expected to be positively correlated with one another. Liberation from the demands of pride might, however, become itself a source of pride, and the possibility of such counter-intuitive and undesirable effects was recognized. This is reflected in the cautionary story/joke about the Mussar students, working on the trait of humility by declaring their worthlessness, who, faced with a new recruit who loudly and proudly also proclaims his nothingness, react dismissively saying, "Not so fast! You've just come and you're already nothing? You have to work hard to become 'nothing'!"[30] This story shows that these students were less spiritually advanced than they imagined themselves to be, while simultaneously having them assert an important truth: It is an arduous spiritual undertaking to become nothing.

The *bitachon* and *hishtavut* exercises were aimed at acquiring freedom from fears and habits, from the expectations and judgments of others, and from the demand of ego for self-esteem and the esteem of others. The bitachon exercise was a deliberate placing of oneself outside of one's comfort zone, after which the exercise may or may not have induced the person to be especially aware of his inner state over the period of time that the situation continued. In the hishtavut exercise, while the challenging situation was concentrated in a shorter time interval, the active intentionality required by this exercise forced the Mussarnik to be intensely aware of his/her inner experiencings.

The exercise of deliberately putting oneself in embarrassing situations is one also found in the Gurdjieff tradition. Although it does not appear to be explicitly mentioned in the Work literature this exercise is given in groups. Casteel recounted the example of a group member who undertook this exercise by going into a copy shop that had a sign in the window saying "Reproduction services," and asking for help in getting pregnant.[31] It is plausible that this exercise of deliberately putting oneself in embarrassing situations may have been given in early Work groups, since Gurdjieff emphasized the harmfulness of what he called "internal considering." Ouspensky writes about this mental habit:

> Later on I understood what G. called [internal] "considering," and realized what an enormous place it occupies in life and how much it gives rise to. G. called "considering" that attitude which creates inner slavery, inner dependence. On the most prevalent occasions a man is identified with what others think about him, how they treat him, what attitude they show towards him. He always thinks that people do not value him enough, are not sufficiently polite and courteous. All this torments him, makes him

[29] Fishman, 'Musar and Modernity', p. 48.
[30] Weintraub, *The Alter of Novardok*, p. 123.
[31] Jim Casteel, personal communication to author, 10 August 2021. Casteel described experiences at Two Rivers Farm in Aurora, Oregon, an intentional Gurdjieff community founded by Annie Lou Stavely.

> think and suspect and lose an immense amount of energy on guesswork, on suppositions, develops in him a distrustful and hostile attitude towards people … what somebody thought of him, what somebody said of him—all this acquires for him an immense significance.[32]

The need to work against concern with the opinion of others is related to where one's sense of self, one's "identity," is located. Not only may it be located in the opinion of others, but it may even be located in material objects. Levin writes that in Novarodok the "owner of a new coat was expected to lend it to others before wearing it himself, to remove the taint of possessiveness from his heart."[33] Underlying possessiveness is identification with the object one wants to possess or is proud to possess.

The Work teacher John Godolphin Bennett (1897-1974) writes about the power of identification with possessions in the following anecdote:

> Once a wealthy lady in one of Ouspensky's groups about 1923 said in a weekly meeting that she wanted at all costs to be free from herself and asked if she could do anything about it. Ouspensky asked her to name some possession to which she was particularly attached. "Yes," she said, "I have a Dresden tea set that belonged to my grandmother and is still intact." Ouspensky said: "Break one of the cups and you will know what it is like to be free." Next week she returned in tears and almost hysterical saying that she had tried a dozen times and could not bring herself to do it. Ouspensky's dry comment was: "So you see this desire for freedom is not worth one cup."[34]

Identification is a much more general phenomenon than possessiveness. Indeed, it is the normal condition of human beings and what Gurdjieff meant when he said that human beings are "asleep" and mechanical. Ouspensky writes:

> This in turn is connected with one of the most fundamental characteristics of man's attitude towards himself and to all his surroundings. Namely his constant "identification" with what at a given moment has attracted his attention, his thoughts or his desires, and his imagination…Man is always in a state of identification, only the object of identification changes.[35]

Hesed and External considering

The Mussar *hishtavut* exercise did not aim at cultivating indifference towards others. While striving to be unconcerned about what others thought of them, Mussarniks were urged to be greatly concerned with how they could help meet the needs of others. Yozel distinguished between these different concerns as "One must accustom oneself not to reflect on other people at any time except when one considers how best to benefit them."[36] *Cheshvan* (October-

[32] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 23, 151.
[33] Levin, *Novarodok*, p. 17. See also Weintraub, *The Alter of Novardok*, p. 133.
[34] J. G. Bennett, *Transformation* (Charlestown: Claymont Communications,1978), pp. 43-44.
[35] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 150.
[36] Levin, *Novarodok*, p. 130.

November) was a time to focus especially on acts of benevolence (Hesed). Hesed – like bitachon and hishtavut – is another *middah* (character trait) that Mussar practitioners worked on. Gurdjieff also contrasted "internal considering" with "external considering," which corresponds closely to Rav Yozel's distinction between what one should and should not concern oneself about. Ouspensky writes about this as follows:

> The opposite of internal considering and what is in part a means of fighting against it is external considering. External considering is based upon an entirely different relationship towards people than internal considering. It is adaptation towards people, to their understanding, to their requirements. By considering externally a man does that which makes life easy for other people and for himself. … External considering requires a knowledge of men, an understanding of their tastes, habits, and prejudices.[37]

Gurdjieff's instructions were identical with those of Rav Yozel: never to engage in internal considering – how one is seen by others – but always to engage in external considering – how to benefit others, and perhaps also oneself.

Of course, to the extent that one is also motivated by possible benefit to oneself, a Mussar evaluation of an act of external considering would regard it as *lo lishma* – not for the sake of Heaven (literally, "not for the Name") – as opposed to *lishma*, for the sake of Heaven, i.e., with the right motivation. But pace Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), self-interest is not alien to Jewish ethics. As the *Pirke Avot* states "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?"[38] Moreover, it is said that "out of lo lishma, one comes to lishma."[39] This assertion maintains that from a virtuous deed performed repeatedly but with the wrong motivation, the right motivation will eventually follow. Lo lishma motivation might be analogized to scaffolding that allows an arch to be constructed and that is dismantled after the arch has been completed. An alternative metaphor, used by Wolbe, is that actions lo lishma are like the lower rungs of a ladder whose higher rungs represented actions lishma. One cannot ascend a ladder without starting on the lower rungs.[40]

The idea that entering upon a path of work on oneself for egoistic reasons will, if seriously pursued, eventually become transformed into work for non-egoistic reasons does not appear to have been explicitly articulated by Gurdjieff or his followers, but is implicit in the Work idea that while one begins work as one is, with an initial aim consonant with the conditions of one's actual life, over the longer term one must not work for "results," i.e., for enhancements of one's personality or for special experiences, but rather for the Work; in Mussar terms, *lishma*, i.e., for the sake of Heaven.

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[37] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 153.
[38] *Pirke Avot* (Ethics [literally Chapters] of the Fathers). At: https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.1.2?lang=bi.
[39] "Rabbi Yehuda said, 'Rav said, 'One should always engage in Torah and *Mitsvot*, even if *Lo Lishma*, since from (literally: from within) *Lo Lishma* he comes to *Lishma*'" (*Pesachim* 50b5). See 'For its Own Sake', *Sefaria*. At: https://www.sefaria.org/topics/for-its-own-sake?tab=sources.
[40] Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur, Volumes 1 & 2* (Beis Hamussar, 1986 [1966]). Recording and translation by Rav Yoram Bogacz. At: https://torahdownloads.com/c-12-alei-shor.html. Wolbe (1914-2005) was a disciple of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, Alter of Slobodka, and Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm. "Musar Movement," *Wikipedia*. At: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musar_movement.

Hitlamdut and Self-observation, self-remembering

Both Yozel and Gurdjieff understood that external and internal impressions are normally not perceived in full consciousness and are thus not subject to deliberate control or conscious acceptance. Levin quotes Yozel as observing:

> A person often allows his mind to become an open inn. People and ideas come and go, leaving behind thoughts and impressions, while the owner stands there at the door in astonishment and does not know his own soul.[41]

Although this quotation by Yozel shows that he was aware of the power of one's thoughts and impressions, one wonders if Novarodok Mussar included peules that call for paying attention to thoughts and impressions immediately as they arise.

One does, however, find this call explicitly in the later Mussar teachings of Wolbe who advocated a practice he called *hitlamdut*, literally self-study. The Hebrew tri-letter root of this word, *lamed-mem-dalet*, means "study" and this word is in the verb form of *hitpa'el*, which is reflexive: the 'hit' in hitlamdut meaning "of self." The practice of hitlamdut entails observing one's internal state and external behavior in any situation with an attitude of curiosity and wish to learn, not only situations involving mitsvot such as the saying of prayers, but also situations unconnected with any formal religious observance, including situations far from routine. This practice is intrinsically private and illustrates the "esotericism" spoken of in the beginning of this article.

Gurdjieff gave great emphasis on inner work connected to the taking in of impressions. Similarly to the above quotation from Yozel, Ouspensky writes "we do not feel ourselves, are not aware of ourselves at the moment of a perception, of an emotion, of a thought or of an action."[42] Mindfulness efforts to gain such awareness are central to the Work and are referred to as "self-remembering" and "self-observation." Self-remembering, arguably the primary exercise of the Work, is the practice of divided attention in which one directs some attention inwardly while also maintaining outward attention to one's external actions and to the environment. Self-observation is intentionally planned self-study in which one tries to directly observe thoughts, feelings, and actions in particular situations. Jeanne de Salzmann writes about the observation of feeling as follows:

> I blindly trust my feelings. I never doubt them. I believe they express a pure vision and do not see that they really reflect implacable conditioning. Because of this I do not see the absolute necessity to observe them – that is to remain in front of them without reacting, to be merciless towards my desire to react. My wish to know my feelings must be stronger, without either excusing them or rejecting them. [43]

[41] Levin, *Novarodok*, p. 129.
[42] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 188.
[43] Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2010), p. 70.

Not excusing or rejecting them is an aspect of refraining from "the tendency to judge what one observes" and is critical for impartial self-observation.[44] *Hitlamdut* entails the same attitude of impartiality in curiosity-motivated study. It resembles self-observation and it generates self-remembering. One adopts the attitude of a novice who is learning how he/she is in various situations. This attitude resembles the Buddhist idea of "beginner's mind." In a remarkable passage, Wolbe says that one might adopt this attitude even while dying: one could learn what it is like to be in the process of dying.[45]

Self-observation and hitlamdut are not introspection or self-analysis, in which one ponders one's behavior and tries to reconstruct one's inner state after an event. Rather, they are direct observation in the moment, involving the active and intentional directing of attention towards internal and external impressions. As systematic, empirical, and impartial study, they might be considered to exemplify a type of "inner science."[46] This perspective on self-observation was offered by Johanna J. M. Petsche who writes:

> Gurdjieff pupil Jane Heap characterized Gurdjieff's system as "neutral scientific observation of one's self - taking notes on the body in the scientific manner. First the physical; later, notes on the mental and emotional centres." Blavatsky and Gurdjieff, like other modern occultists, proposed a new perspective on the world that responded to people's spiritual needs while retaining a scientific, materialist basis to their teachings in line with the scientific thinking of the day.[47]

However, after-the-fact analysis, for example by keeping a diary as outlined in Lefin's *Chesbon Ha'Nefesh*,[48] also played an important role in Salantar's idea of Mussar practice, and a Work exercise similar to Lefin's review of one's actions but different in its implementation is visualization of the day's events done just before going to sleep.[49] While visualizing the day's events is more experiential than keeping a written journal of behaviors that pertain to what one is working on, it is also after the fact. The point here is just to note that both Mussar and Work traditions offered exercises that call for in-the-moment attention to one's state as well as exercises that call for after-the-moment retrospective examination of one's actions.

In Wolbe's teaching hitlamdut was not solely directed towards one's own behavior. In keeping with Yozel's quote about being concerned with other people only for the purpose of benefiting them, Wolbe describes an exercise that involved trying to see directly what was needed by another person.[50] If possible, the Mussar practitioner might try to provide to the other person what he/she needed, but the hitlamdut exercise was to see, not necessarily to provide, what the other needed.[51] This effort resembles the Work effort of external considering.

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[44] Magee, 'G. I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way', p. 293.
[45] Wolbe, *Alei Shur 2*, (73) 192 (at the very end of this track).
[46] Martin Zwick, 'Personal Knowledge and the Inner Sciences'. In *Systems Theory and Theology: The Living Interplay between Science and Religion*, ed. Markus Locker (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), pp. 49-61. At: https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/42742.
[47] Petsche, 'Gurdjieff and Blavatsky', p. 106.
[48] Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin, *Cheshbon Na'Nefesh* (Feldheim, 1995 [1845]).
[49] A. R. Orage, *Psychological Exercises* (Newburyport: Weiser, 1989), p. 105.
[50] Wolbe, *Alei Shur 2,* (75), p. 198.
[51] Still, Mussar is embedded in *Halacha*, so providing what the other needed would be a mitzvah, a good deed. An unparalleled example of being able to see what the other needed and then to provide what was needed is

Although Gurdjieff actually denied the possibility of providing or even knowing what the other wants, he called on his students to love their neighbour:

> You cannot say anything or do anything for another. You do not know what you need for yourself, you cannot know what he needs. Work with purpose for him. But play your role. Be apart internally … Externally speak as he does, so as not to hurt him … Do what I tell you, you cannot do more. Love of your neighbor; that is the Way. Bring to everyone that which you felt for your parents.[52]

That the exercise of hitlamdut focused on the ability to see rather than to provide what is needed illustrates the fact that the special contribution of Mussar was its concern with the capacity to be ethical and religiously observant. Gurdjieff similarly said that his teaching could be considered "esoteric Christianity" and aimed at developing the capacity to be a true Christian: "Every real religion…consists of two parts. One part teaches what is to be done … The other part teaches how to do what the first part teaches."[53]

One of the Wolbe's motivations for advocating hitlamdut was that because the aim of Mussar exceeded the demands of *Halacha*, pursuing these aims could produce the unintended and undesirable effect that practitioners would regard themselves as better than others, and this would engender *ga'ava*, self-pride. Wolbe thought that hitlamdut could counter this tendency since it was to be the learning activity of a novice. A similar concern about the possible unintended effects of spiritual practice was expressed by the Work teacher Maurice Nicoll who wrote:

> But work must be done in the spirit of the work—that is, in the sense and feeling and valuation of the work. This must enter into every effort of work, for no one can work for himself alone, otherwise the results go only into false personality and so into merit. A man must work from love of the work.[54]

Ga'ava is one manifestation of what in the Work is called "false personality," aspects of personality that are not inherent to the person's character but are those internalized results of external influences that actually serve no useful purpose.[55] Urging that work be done from love of the Work corresponds to the Mussar imperative to work on oneself lishma, i.e., not for any ulterior motives but for the sake of Heaven, or, as Gurdjieff put it, "to diminish the sorrow of Our Common Endless Father."[56]

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contained the account of Rabbi Salantar's death. Salantar, in his last hours, saw that the person attending to him was fearful of being left alone with a dead body. In an ultimate act of *hesed* Salantar's last actions while alive were to reassure the attendant that no harm would befall him from his own dead body. See Abraham Socher, 'Accounting for the Soul', *Jewish Review of Books* (2015). At: https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/1502/accounting-for-the-soul/.

[52] Gurdjieff, *Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings 1941-1946*. (Ventura: Book Studio, [1941] 2009), pp. 1-2.

[53] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 304.

[54] Maurice Nicoll, 'The idea of transformation in the Work, Part II', in *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, Vol. 1 (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1980 [1952]), p. 55.

[55] P. D. Ouspensky, *The Fourth Way* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 164-185.

[56] Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, p. 374.

Tikkun and *kibbush ha'yetser* and Impressions, negative emotions

More is possible and essential with respect to impressions than hitlamdut or self-observation. What is critical is our immediate reactions to the stream of impressions that we constantly receive from our internal and external environments. Lack of freedom in personal action is rooted in being dominated by these ultra-rapid reactions. If reactions can be seen immediately as they arise, slavery to these reactions can be noticed, and over time a person can become freer from this slavery. Moreover, seeing a reaction at the very moment of its inception can channel the internal energy of this reaction in a different direction, engendering a heightened state of consciousness. A Jewish member of a Work group recounted an experience of being in an elevator and when its doors opened suddenly finding himself face to face with someone he strongly disliked. His seeing the internal surge of antipathy that flooded his body was followed, as he walked out of the elevator, by his discovery that he was in an unusual state of heightened consciousness. When he described this experience to the *mashgiach* (spiritual counselor) at a local yeshiva, the rabbi responded, "Ah, Mussar!" and referred him to the Mussar book *Alei Shur* of Shlomo Wolbe.[57]

This account calls to mind an anecdote that Koch cites from *Reshit Hokhmah* (*Beginning of Wisdom*) by Eliyahu de Vidas about the "happiest moment" of a Hasid (a pious Jew) traveling on a ship who secluded himself in an isolated part of the ship to commune with God. A traveller who chanced upon, sneered at, spat at, and then even urinated upon this Hasid, then strangely found himself "not hurt by [these] acts at all." The Hasid immediately experienced a great joy in the indifference that he felt towards these offences, which he understood as evidence of his reaching a high level of humility – in Mussar terms, of having achieved a major *tikkun ha'yetser*, a "fixing" (improvement, correction, repair) of his nature, his character.[58] *Tikkun ha'yetser* is contrasted with *kibbush ha'yetser*, an idea tracing back to the *Pirke Avot* saying "Who is mighty? He who conquers his nature." *Kibbush* (control, literally "conquest") involves struggle with negative aspects of one's character that are not yet "repaired."[59]

However, an alternative or supplementary explanation for the joy experienced by the Hasid might see it as the result instead of kibbush, which caused the surge of energy that would normally accompany a strong reaction to being treated this way being redirected in him into a different psycho-physiological channel. In Mussar terms, what made his non-response to insult possible was his practice of *hitbodedut* (meditative seclusion) that might have enabled him to see his immediate reaction and achieve a successful kibbush of it. As Koch expresses "we deal here with a very brief description of a mystical technique, a mystical experience of sorts, an altered state of consciousness, as well as an enormously high degree of self-control." Kibbush can be accomplished in two different ways. Although usually it entails the blocking and suppressing of the reactive manifestations of yetser, occasionally – admittedly rarely – if done rapidly and skillfully, kibbush can bring about the transformation of the energy of *yetser* by the

[57] Anonymous, personal communication (2015).
[58] Koch, *Human Self Perfection*, pp. 207-208.
[59] The relative importance of *tikkun* vs *kibbush* is a theme in Mussar literature. Repeated *kibbush* may eventually lead to *tikkun*, but the capacity for *kibbush* is still essential, since a challenge can arise for which an accomplished *tikkun* is inadequate.

seeing and accepting of this internal reaction, i.e., by "conquering" any external manifestation of it.

Gurdjieff taught the possibility of such transformations, which requires the general practice of "self-remembering, also called the "first conscious shock," and the specific practice of refraining from expressing negative emotions. He emphasized that "it is very useful to try to struggle with the habit of giving immediate expression to all one's unpleasant emotions…self-observation and self-study must, from the first, be accompanied by the struggle against the expression of unpleasant emotions."[60] But the non-expression of negative emotions is valuable not only for self-observation; it allows the possibility of a "second conscious shock."[61] Fremantle described this possibility as follows:

> In giving man the power to direct his attention voluntarily, Nature has given him the germ of free will … The attention, automatically attracted to every strong impression, goes out to the object producing the impression in such a way that the energy of the attention is caught, absorbed in the reaction, and lost.[62]

But attention need not always be captured in this way. If attention is consciously controlled and with immediate opposition to the expression of negative emotion:

> the products of suffering are not obliged to flow into the channels of the defense mechanisms … When, through the practice of recollected attention, this movement of defense becomes familiar, it is possible for the feelings to redirect it in such a way as to effect its transformation into positive feelings.[63]

Gurdjieff urged his students that once they could regularly practice self-remembering, they should actively seek situations of intentional suffering which present the possibility of giving themselves the second conscious shock:

> One needs fire. Without fire, there will never be anything. This fire is suffering, voluntary suffering, without which it is impossible to create anything. One must prepare, must know what will make one suffer and when it is there, make use of it. Only you can prepare, only you know what makes you suffer, makes the fire which cooks, cements, crystallizes, does. Suffer by your defects, in your pride, in your egoism. Remind yourself of the aim. Without prepared suffering there is nothing. [64]

Rodney Collin (1909-1956), a student of Ouspensky, put it this way:

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[60] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 112.

[61] The "theory" for these exercises (the two conscious shocks) is Gurdjieff's "Food Diagram," this diagram depicts "digestions" of ordinary food, air, and impressions which occur as sequences of transformations of these three material substances, equivalently viewed as energies, in an "esoteric alchemy" that enables the formation of a soul or in Gurdjieff's terminology, the development of "higher being bodies." See Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 178-193

[62] Christopher Fremantle, *On Attention: Talks, Essays, and Letters to his Pupils,* ed. Lillian Firestone Boal (Denville: Indications Press, 1993), pp. 42-43.

[63] Fremantle, *On Attention*, p. 44

[64] Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, p. 4.

> The miraculous in relation to negative emotions begins with the idea of the second conscious shock – the transformation of negative emotions into positive ones. It began for me with Ouspensky's saying that if we had no negative emotions, we would have no chance for development. They are our own inexhaustible raw material for transmuting into that divine energy what would otherwise be inconceivable with our logical efforts.[65]

The story of a Work practitioner encountering someone he disliked and the story of the Hasid who was humiliated by another traveler, both of whom then experienced a sudden infusion of energy, are plausible accounts of the giving/experiencing of the second conscious shock.

Involvement of the Body

Both Mussar and the Work include exercises that involve not only the emotions but also the body. Both emotions and the body were sources of temptations to be resisted, the emotions indulging in pride and seeking honor and fame, the body craving pleasures, often sought by indulging in excesses of eating or in non-normative sexual activity. Mussar has often been characterized as an ascetic path. For example, Ruth Wisse quotes the opening of Chaim Grade's story about Novarodok, "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner," as follows:

> They continued to observe all the laws and customs meticulously, but the weariness of their spiritual struggles lay upon them. For years they had tried to tear the desire for pleasure out of their hearts, and now realized they had lost the war with themselves. They had not overcome the evil urge.[66]

This characterization of Novarodok Mussar oversimplifies the relationship it advocated towards the *yetser ha'ra*, the so-called "evil inclination." Despite its name this yetser is not actually bad. The rabbis long ago noted that were it not for the *yetser ha'ra*, a man would not marry, raise a family, or conduct business. A more accurate characterization of the aim of Novarodok Mussar would be the subordination of the *yetser ha'ra* to the *yetser tov* (the "good inclination"), more specifically the subordination of the body (and emotions) to the intellect, governed by *Halacha*.

Rav Yozel articulated this aim, saying, "So it is with this world. A person has the power to enliven and awaken the good in himself, to enshrine and set his intellect to rule over all his desires. What does he do instead? He uses this ability to subjugate himself even more to his lower instincts" and "The worst thing that can happen to a person is to remain asleep and untamed."[67] While Grade was a Novarodok yeshiva student who speaks from personal

[65] Rodney Collin, *The Theory of Conscious Harmony* (London: Vincent Stuart Ltd, 1958) p. 55.
[66] Ruth R. Wisse, 'My Quarrel with "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner",' *Tikvah*, December (2020). At: https://ideas.tikvah.org/mosaic/essays/my-quarrel-with-my-quarrel-with-hersh-rasseyner. This responds to Chaim Grade, 'My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner', trans. Milton Himmelfarb, in *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, eds Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (London: Penguin Books, 1981). This characterization is more fully developed as depictions of a Mussar Novarodok yeshiva in Chaim Grade, *The Yeshiva*, trans. Curt Leviant (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976).
[67] Levin, *Novarodok*, pp. 127-128.

experience, to say that Mussarniks were trying to "tear the desire for pleasure out of their hearts" does not do justice to the subtleties of the radical aim of Novarodok Mussar.[68]

Gurdjieff taught the same subordination of what he called the "planetary body":

> You must educate your body with your head, consciously. It is very simple. Never allow it to do what it wants. You make it do everything contrary to that which is loves … One must inure it to struggle. You are always right when you resist your body … Your personality can educate your body. He in which the body is strong and has the initiative over him, this one is null. He who has his body enslaved is intelligent.[69]

This subordination makes living less mechanically and more consciously possible. But although Gurdjieff regarded the body as an invaluable "denying factor" for work on oneself, he did not advocate asceticism as necessary or desirable in the spiritual path that he taught. Indeed, one of his five "Obligolnian strivings" stated that beings should strive "to have everything satisfying and really necessary for their planetary body."[70] Still, the above words of Gurdjieff resemble Grade's characterization of Mussar.

A large difference must, however, be noted between Mussar and the Work in their relationships to the body. Mussar exercises can lead to awareness of bodily sensations as an indirect effect of attention given to thoughts and emotions, for example, as a consequence of the open awareness fostered in the practice of hitlamdut. But the Mussar tradition did not have, in Rav Yozel's teaching or before or after it, exercises that consisted specifically or primarily in attending to bodily sensation. By contrast, work involving the body is central to Gurdjieff's teaching. Sensing the body was an action that followers were urged to do as often as possible.[71] It is valuable in work against internal considering and identification. It is essential in giving oneself the second conscious shock. Very generally, it is a component of self-remembering.[72] Gurdjieff explained simply, "It is something that makes you independent when you are with people."[73]

Moreover the idea of "three-centered" work is at the core of the Work tradition, the centers being thought, feeling, and sensation/movement. Using this terminology Mussar might be characterized as "two-centered," as focusing only on thoughts and feelings, and omitting a component centered in the body.[74] On the other hand, in the *Halachic* context of Mussar bodily action is inextricably involved in many *mitzvot*. For example, leaving a bathroom is an occasion for a blessing that expresses gratitude for the normal functioning of one's body. The Mussar practice of studying with *hitpa'alut*, with emotional arousal, done by saying aloud personally

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[68] Part of what accounts for the perception – and partial reality – of Mussar as a teaching of asceticism is the change from Salantar's conception of Mussar as being for mature adults to its later pursuit in yeshivas where Mussar encountered the powerful sexuality of youth, an explosive mix.
[69] Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, p. 29.
[70] Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, p. 386.
[71] Sometimes sensing was done in conjunction with verbal affirmations or chants which involved emotion-laden words and this is done also in some of the Movements (sacred dances) of the Work.
[72] Magee, 'G. I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way', p. 292.
[73] Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, p. 5
[74] Edith Brotman's *Mussar Yoga: Blending an Ancient Jewish Spiritual Practice with Yoga to Transform Body and Soul* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2014), attempts to provide this missing component.

meaningful passages from Torah texts, also involved bodily movements, so the body as a third center was in this sense also an aspect of Novarodok Mussar.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated similarities (and differences) in some spiritual exercises undertaken amidst the ordinary activities of daily life by followers of Mussar and the Work. These commonalities of practice between two ostensibly very different spiritual traditions might be a basis for fruitful dialog between them.[75] Commonalities of practice do not of course belie the great differences that exist between Judaism and the Work not only in belief and doctrine but also in realms of practice. There is nothing, for example, in the Work that is analogous to Halacha.[76] There is nothing in Mussar or in Judaism that is analogous to the Gurdjieff Movements. Still, one can easily imagine practitioners of hitlamdut and self-observation learning from one another in conversations rich in mutual understanding. Followers of Mussar might find the Work notion of self-remembering pointing to an expansion and deepening of Mussar practice. Followers of the Work might find the Mussar distinction between *kibbush* and *tikkun* a useful conceptualization of work on negative emotions, and the nuance of lo lishma leading to lishma a valuable corrective to a simplistic rejection of an aim of self-improvement or of "working for results." More generally, the terminology of one spiritual discipline might help to articulate explicitly inner actions and experiences that are grasped only implicitly by the other discipline. Discussions of how Mussar va'adim and Work groups function might open up new perspectives and possibilities for both.[77]

In focusing on exercises that are well characterized by the Gurdjieffian phrase "Work in Life" this study has narrowly considered only a subset of the exercises undertaken in Novarodok Mussar and the early Work and further pursued and developed in later phases of both traditions. Omitted from consideration have been exercises mostly undertaken under special conditions, for example meditation/contemplation exercises done in solitude or in group

[75] See, for example, Esther G. Chasin, *Mitzvot as Spiritual Practices: A Jewish Guidebook for the Soul* (Lanham: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997). Chasin was a student of the Work in an early period of her life.

[76] There is nothing comparable in the Work to obligatory *mitzvot*. But this sharp distinction obscures an interesting point. *Halacha* (Leviticus 19:18) commands "*lo tikom, v'lo titor*": do not take revenge and do not harbor a grudge, and these would be aims of *kibbush* and *tikkun,* but *how* one is to refrain from these common reactions is not specified by *Halacha*. Taking revenge is illustrated by refusing to lend a neighbour an implement because the neighbour previously refused to lend his implement; harbouring grudges is illustrated by being willing to lend the neighbour the requested implement but by pointedly adding, "You weren't willing to lend me your implement, but I am willing to lend you mine," 'Revenge and Bearing a Grudge (Lo Tikom veLo Titor)', *Halachipedia*, September 7 (2023).
At: https://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Revenge_and_Bearing_a_Grudge_(Lo_Tikom_veLo_Titor).
For Gurdjieff taking revenge and holding a grudge illustrate "making accounts." See Maurice Nicoll, 'Internal Accounts and Forgiving', in *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, Volume V* (Stuart & Watkins, 1968), pp. 1585-7. The Work exercise of avoiding or giving up "accounts" is precisely the inner action needed to be able to observe this *Halachic* command, so this Work exercise would be an appropriate Mussar exercise.

[77] One major difference is that members of Work groups are frequently reminded that they have come to work on themselves, not on others. In contrast to this, mutual correction is viewed in Judaism as an actual obligation that stems from collective moral responsibility. Chastisement (of others) is even a literal translation of the word "mussar," although chastisement is only to be done if the other is open to it; if not, correction of another is forbidden.

gatherings specifically for such purposes. It should be noted however that some exercises of this type can be undertaken in the midst of life activities. Moreover, these practices are prominent in both traditions, [78] so a comparison of meditation and contemplation in Mussar and in the Work and a consideration of the relationship between these practices and those conducted in "daily life" would be of interest. From the perspective of exercises undertaken in ordinary life, meditation and contemplation enhance one's capabilities to engage in such exercises, but meditation and contemplation are more than that; they are attempts to reach towards the mystical and transcendent. But a discussion of the relationship between mystical/transcendent and the ethical/immanent is beyond the scope of this article.

Also omitted in this article has been discussion of the "theory" that underlies these exercises, and the "philosophy" (or theology) that provides a context for the theory. Different theories might underlie similar practices, so comparison of similarities and differences of "theory" in Mussar and the Work would be worth exploring. Just to illustrate: There does not appear to be any analogue in the Mussar literature to the conception of levels of materiality (so-called "hydrogens") that is central to the Work theory of the digestion of impressions. There may however be, in the Kabbalist scheme of levels of soul, namely *ruach-nefesh-neshama*, a rough analogue either to these levels of materiality or to Gurdjieff's hierarchy of personality-essence-real I. The Kabbalist notion that neshama must be actively acquired and maintained by action in the world also resembles Gurdjieff's idea of the Work as involving the crystallization of higher "being-bodies" or of "real I."[79] While Kabbala is a distinct stream within Judaism, Kabbalistic Mussar, which significantly predated the movement launched by Salantar, is an aspect of this stream, as was noted by the story noted above of the insulted Hasid.

More generally, if the spiritual exercises of Mussar and the Work are considered a kind of "inner science," an exploration of the theory and philosophy (or theology) underlying these exercises might suggest an interesting connection between religion and science that is radically different from connections that are commonly considered.

The discussion in the previous section of a variety of similar exercises in Mussar and the Work might suggest that both traditions had a "one size fits all" approach to spiritual exercises. This was not the case either for Mussar or for the Work. Both insisted that beyond exercises that everyone should undertake, inner work was necessarily also individualized. Gurdjieff gave specific exercises to individuals, typically privately; what was appropriate for one was not necessarily appropriate for another or for the group as a whole. Individualized teaching reflects the importance in modernity of individual differences. Mussar, despite being part of an ancient religious tradition, had a similar individualistic aspect. Weintraub observes:

> Rav Yisrael [Salantar] said that to improve *middos*, entire books should be written about every single middah … In truth, each person must write a book about himself, since he has his own traits and skills and life circumstances, his own enemies and

[78] Levin, *Novarodok*, p. 10, notes that Yozel "continued to consider seclusion to be indispensable for self-improvement. He came to believe, however, that periods of separation could be … combined with intense involvement in communal work." While Gurdjieff taught Movements to his early St. Petersburg group, meditation/ contemplation exercises only became prominent in later phases of the Work. See Butkovsky-Hewitt, *With Gurdjeiff in St. Petersburg and Paris*, pp.129-134.
[79] Koch, *Human Self Perfection*, p. 99; p. 112.

> battles, and everyone has different challenges. Since every person is an individual, every person has to prepare his own weapons.[80]

This modern orientation toward the individual in Mussar did not originate with Salantar who founded Mussar as a social movement. It was already apparent a century before in the early modern period in the work of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramḥal) (1707-1746), whose book *Mesilat Yesharim* (*The Path of the Just*) is a Mussar classic, and one of the three books that Salantar republished in Vilna. (One of the other books was Lefin's *Chesbon Ha'Nefesh*, discussed above.) Luzzatto's circle of spiritual colleagues might be regarded as a forerunner of Mussar va'adim and this circle engaged in practices of self-observation. In Ramḥal's teaching, Garb notes:

> each individual models their own self-observation. I would add that this is also why Ramḥal devotes some space … to castigating the false *ḥasidut* [piety] … based on imitation of external practices rather than inward self-study...Ramḥal, in a freshly modern sense, is not attempting to decide between two forms of textual authority, but rather brings forth one's own depth as a major source of authority.[81]

The "modernity" of Mussar thus inheres in its shifting the locus of authority to some extent to individual experience, which naturally suggests a focus on spiritual exercises, and in the salience of its psychological orientation: Salantar was a precursor of Freud in his appreciation of the power of unconscious psychological factors. The "modernity" of the Work shares this centering in individual experience and psychology. It manifests also in connections to other religious traditions, which this article seeks to supplement by pointing to similarities to the Mussar stream of Judaism. The Work is also modern in its exploration of the possibility of a synthesis of ancient wisdom and contemporary science. Such exploration is outside the scope of this article, but see an early work of Needleman and the magnum opus of Bennett, who attempted such a synthesis by interpreting Gurdjieff's ideas scientifically and philosophically.[82] There is certainly more to be said about practices of Novarodok Mussar and the early Work and their later developments and about the psychological and characterological effects of doing the types of exercises discussed above. Exploring the similarities (and differences) between revolutionary circles and esoteric circles might broaden such analyses. A very different type of study that could shed further light on these practices might examine the charismatic personalities of Yozel and Gurdjieff, their deep critique of the common human condition, and how they worked on themselves. Perhaps to provide social and cultural context, it might be of interest also to consider the challenging revolutionary situation in Russia during which these teachers launched their movements.

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[80] Weintraub, *The Alter of Novardok*, p. 36.

[81] Jonathan Garb, 'Mussar, Curriculum and Exegesis in the Circle of Ramḥal', *Tikvah Working Paper 01/12* (Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization, 2012), p. 16.

[82] Jacob Needleman, *A Sense of the Cosmos: The Encounter of Modern Science and Ancient Truth* (London: Doubleday & Company, 1975); J. G. Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe: Vol. I: The Foundations of Natural Philosophy (1956); Vol. II: The Foundations of Moral Philosophy (1961); Vol. III: Man and His Nature (1966),* (Petersham: Hodder and Stoughton).

In sum, although Mussar and The Work differ greatly, in the realm of practice the difference is not as great as one might imagine or expect. This partial similarity is unlikely however to be specific to these two traditions; it is no doubt also true to some extent of any practice-centered spiritual disciplines. In the beginning and the middle – there is no end – of any spiritual path is the deed.

Glossary

Adar: a month in the Jewish calendar that spans February-March
Alei Shur: Mussar classic by Shlomo Wolbe
Ayn Sof: a Kabbalistic name of God, literally "without end"
Ba'aley batim: householders
Bitachon: confidence or trust in God
Cheshvan: a month in the Jewish calendar that spans October-November
Cheshbon Ha'Nefesh: Calculation (Accounting) of the Soul, a Mussar classic by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin
Ga'ava: self-pride
Halacha: Jewish religious law, literally "path"
Hasid: pious Jew (distinguished from a follower of Hasidism)
Hasidut: piety
Haskalah: "Jewish enlightenment": opening of Jewish society in Europe to Western ideas after Jews were granted civil liberties, starting in late 18th century
Hesed: benevolence
Hishtavut: equanimity or indifference to outside influences
Hitbodedut: meditation or contemplation, pursued in seclusion
Hitlamdut: self-study
Hitpa'alut: Mussar practice of studying with emotional arousal
Hitpa'el: a reflexive verb form, i.e., the verb action is done to oneself
Kibbush ha'yetser: control, literally "conquest" of one's nature or character
Kislev: a month in the Jewish calendar that spans November-December
Lamed-mem-dalet: three letter (l, m, d) root of the verb meaning "to study"
Le'ma'aseh, to be done, to be enacted in practice
Lishma: for the sake of Heaven, literally "for the Name"
Lo lishma: not for the sake of Heaven, literally "not for the Name"
Mashgiach: in the context of Mussar, a spiritual counselor
Mesilat Yesharim: *The Path of the Just*, a Mussar classic by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto
Middot or *middos* (plural), *middah* (singular): character traits
Mitzvot: religious practices normative under Halacha
Mussarnik: a practitioner of Mussar
Ol malchut shamayim: the yoke of Heaven, i.e., the observance of Halacha
Peules: exercises, actions, doings
Pirke Avot: *Chapters (Ethics) of the Fathers*, Mishnah (part of Talmud), an early Mussar text
Rav: Rabbi
Reshit Hokhmah: Beginning of Wisdom, a Mussar book by Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas

Ruach-nefesh-neshama: levels of soul in Kabbalah (in increasing proximity to the divine)
Tikkun ha'yetser: fixing, improvement, correction, or repair of one's nature or character
Va'adim: Mussar groups
Yetser: one's nature, character
Yetser ha'tov: aspect of one's nature or character that is good (ha prefix means "the")
Yetser ha'ra: aspect of one's nature that needs correction or subordination, literally one's "bad" nature (ha prefix means "the")