

Zarathustra and Gurdjieff



Zarathustra



Gurdjieff

Through studying the 'Fourth Way' system of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, one can discover many similarities in the teachings of Gurdjieff, and Zarathustra. The best place to begin this examination is Gurdjieff's own writings and in particular his magnum opus [Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson](#), in which it is believed that he actually drew on oral teachings of Zarathushtra in crafting the character **Ashia Shiemash**, whom he envisions as one of the first great pre Judaeo-Christian prophets to mankind. It is widely considered by students of the work that Ashiata

Shiemash is actually a reference to the ancient Indo-Iranian prophet Zarathushtra.



Unknown artist's rendering of Ashiata Shiemash

Zoroastrianism's philosophy and Gurdjieff's teachings have many similarities: a focus on oral tradition and the transmission of important ideas 'mouth to ear,' that man is fundamentally good, the source consciousness is a singularity, triads and the Law of Three, and the development of Conscience brings about peace and prosperity to mankind.

There is a great relevance in the 'Fourth Way' teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff and in the teachings of Zarathustra. In fact there are many correspondences between the two teachings, and certain common fundamental ideas about the nature of man and the cosmos. For instance, things like:

Focus on oral tradition and the transmission of important ideas 'mouth to ear'

Remembering – or in other words, *initiation* is largely a matter of *remembering yourself*.

Man is fundamentally good in nature

Objective Consciousness and the idea that life is a **struggle against non-conscious mechanical forces** (The Druj)

The source of consciousness is a singularity (monotheism)

Conscience – The central aim of initiation is the development of 'Conscience' and that this further brings a social benefit of peace and prosperity for mankind.

Triads and the Law of Threes

The Sarmoung Brotherhood



It is further plausible that many of these core ideas following the destruction of Iran, Babylon, Byzantium etc, that the ideas would have survived orally in various pockets even beyond the tight ethnic group of the Parsis and Iranis. For instance the numerous Sufi groups throughout the Middle East which upon observation can be seen to have many of these same commonalities between Zoroastrianism and Gurdjieff. Perhaps the clearest instance of this is in the Sarmoung Brotherhood which Gurdjieff attributes to being the groups that he was initiated into and from which he received 'The System.'

In his book *Meetings with Remarkable Men* Gurdjieff goes on to relate the Sarmoung to the Nestorians, descendants of the ancient Byzantine Empire, their expulsion from Mesopotamia and the city of Nineveh, so the geography matches up nicely.

In fact The word *Sarmoung* uses the Armenian pronunciation of the Persian term *Sarman*, which may mean either "he who preserves the doctrine of Zoroaster" or "bee".

Regarding the meaning, the author and student of Gurdjieff, John. G. Bennet writes:

"The word can be interpreted in three ways. It is the word for bee, which has always been a symbol of those who collect the precious 'honey' of traditional wisdom and preserve it for further generations. A collection of legends, well known in Armenian and Syrian circles with the title of The Bees, was revised by Mar Salamon, a Nestorian Archimandrite in the thirteenth century. The Bees refers to a mysterious power transmitted from the time of Zoroaster and made manifest in the time of Christ.... Man is Persian meaning as the quality transmitted by heredity and hence a distinguished family or race. It

can be the repository of an heirloom or tradition. The word sar means head, both literally and in the sense of principal or chief. The combination sarman would thus mean the chief repository of the tradition.” Yet another possibility was “those whose heads have been purified”, in other words: the enlightened.

Oral Tradition

Gurdjieff always insisted that all of his knowledge of ‘The System’ came from oral tradition – the kind of knowledge that is passed from mouth to ear. In fact his father was an ‘Ashok’ a tribal storyteller of the rural Armenian/Turkish culture Gurdjieff grew up in. In his book [Meetings with Remarkable Men](#) he tells of how after the Epic of Gilgamesh was ‘discovered’ and published in the late 1800s, he then realized the power of oral tradition, for he had already been familiarized with all of the stories in this work by the oral tradition told him by his father. From this formative experience grew G’s belief that oral tradition was in fact a more powerful force than the written word for the transmission of esoteric ideas over time. This also ties in with his ideas about “Legominism.” A *legominism* is, according to Gurdjieff, “one of the means of transmitting information about certain events of long-past ages through initiates”.

Certainly any of Gurdjieff’s knowledge of Zarathushtra would have come from oral tradition, NOT from books of academicians or historians. In fact the first modern comprehensive writing on the subject of Zarathushtra came from explorer Anquetil du Perron who after many years of courageous exploration throughout the Middle East in search of the ancient prophet finally stumbled upon the Parsi sect in India, and subsequently published the first translation of the Avesta in three volumes in 1771. Even such publications were not widely available, especially in the late Nineteenth Century Armenia where Gurdjieff was born. Again it can only be assumed that all of his knowledge here came from oral traditions.

Remembering

From the beginning Ashiata’s own origins are divine and purposeful. He has a super-ability for seeing truth and and right-order. He sees that the way of helping others see truth is to help them remove their own **buffers** to truth. Gurdjieff here introduces the idea of ‘kundabuffer’ to refer to the

idea of a tightly programmed behavior of not seeing truth that has become so culturally ingrained that people come to believe it is **biological**, not unlike the Christian concept of original **sin**. Ahsyata's mission – like Zarathushtras – is to remind people that seeing the truth and the good begins with a **decision** to see it, in other words seeing behind 'the lie' of original sin.

Kundabuffer thus represents the great obstacle to Remembering yourself, and remembering yourself becomes the central task of the Gurdjieff Work as discussed by his student P.D Ouspensky in works like In Search of the Miraculous or The Fourth Way. What may seem in the surface a simple act quickly becomes deep and complex the more one personally explores and experiments with it.

The idea of Self-Remembering is clearly reflected In the cosmology of Zarathushtra where all humans on Earth actually began as conscious souls **before** coming here. In this pre-soul state they do have some awareness of what life is like on Earth, and eventually the great evil and 'Terror of the Situations' inspires them to come to Earth to fight for the good – for consciousness and conscience. However in being born into this world one of necessity forgets much of the previous life. But **one can remember**, and one can find others to **help** one **remember**. In Zarathushtra's system this remembering the fight for good equates directly to the remembering of the self spoken by Gurdjieff. Each act of remembering the self is thus also a conscious act and a fundamentally good act.

Man is Fundamentally Good

When we recall that sense of existence in our Pre-soul state, we may also recall the reason we willfully chose to come to Earth – to fight against evil I.e. Ignorance, unconsciousness, coercion and mechanicalism. This is the first fundamentally good decision we made, and so our existence sent on earth is the result of this decision for the good. Thus in Zarathushtra's system the fundamental goodness of man is not only a moral truth but a **metaphysical** truth as well.

This idea is in direct contradiction to the doctrine of **Original Sin**, so common to contemporary Christianity. The idea there is that man is fundamentally evil, is born into the world as an evil being, and so all of his life must be an effort to make good on this – to pay off his cosmic debt. An entire negative and pessimistic attitude about how to approach

the phenomenon of life has grown from this, beyond monotheism and even to influence secular ideologies. For instance, much of science views man to have evolved from a vicious and violent simian species, who only by the grace of civilization can avoid descending back into total chaos and interspecies predation. In the far political left of the Green Party and animal rights extremism you further find the idea in the form of anti-humanism – that humans are the problem where the environment is concerned and overpopulation the cause of most social problems.

In these systems man's fundamental evilness is conversely a moral and metaphysical truth – it is not in any way based in any decision that you personally made, it is rather the burden you must bear for someone else's (I.e. Adam and Eve) bad decision. All of these systems are simply re-iterations of the idea of Original Sin, which is really more of an attitude or a negative emotion. Zarathushtra sweeps all this nonsense away with the idea of man being fundamentally good, and reminds us that it was the **original** perspective only later clouded and perverted by monotheistic wise-acting. It didn't even enter Christian Doctrine until the 2nd Century by way of Irenaeus.

In Gurdjieff's cosmology, man like all other 'Three-Brained Beings' in the universe will naturally grow and evolve toward conscience. On Earth however a great cosmic disturbance (first moon crashing into the earth) interfered with this and resulted in man perceiving reality 'upside down.' The Gurdjieff work of achieving Objective Conscience is this really a work of returning to man's original state of goodness, which is his birth-right.

The idea of man being fundamentally good in fact corresponds with many other systems considered **outside** of the established realm of 'normal' and 'common' like LaVeyan Satanism, Setianism, Ayn Rand's Objectivism and can in fact even be traced back to Aristotle. It is also worth noting that such systems – and thus the idea of man being fundamentally good – are largely unpopular with mainstream culture.

Objective Consciousness

Gurdjieff attributes to Ashiata many first and unique accomplishments in the areas of philosophy and initiation, and many of these correspond very closely with what we know of Zarathushtra. For instance, he says

“The Very Saintly Ashiata Shiemash was the only Messenger sent from Above to your planet who by his holy labors succeeded in

creating conditions in which for a certain time the existence of its unfortunate beings somewhat resembled the existence of three-brained beings with the same possibilities that inhabit other planets of our Great Universe.” (BTTHG p. 318)

In so many words he is saying that this prophet is the only one who was actually successful in creating ‘peace on earth’ – the aim that every other prophet touts but never really accomplishes. In a more esoteric sense what this really means is that mankind generally achieved **objective consciousness** and real and lasting **Conscience** for a time, one of the practical results of which of course would be relative peace on Earth.

It is often said of Zarathustra that this was accomplished in the reign of Cyrus the II of Persia, founder of the Achaemenid Empire (600 – 530 BC) which followed the teachings of Zarathustra and was well known as one of the most peaceful and prosperous societies in history. Cyrus **respected** the customs and religions of the lands he conquered, following a successful model of administration working to the **advantage** and **profit** of its subjects. He also freed the Jews in Babylon and earned a special distinction in the Jewish Bible as *Messiah* and is the only non-Jew to be so-called.

In the ongoing work of the individual the enemy of Objective Consciousness is embodied in the idea The Druj – an Avestan word meaning “The Lie.” The Druj encompasses all the forces of ignorance, mechanicalism, coercion, slavery, abuse, negative emotions and so forth. Though drawing on different terminology and symbolism – the moral basis **consciousness = good, non-consciousness = bad** reveal a great harmony in these teachings and a shared core-value.

The Source of Consciousness

It is also possible that the Jews of Babylon under Cyrus were influenced by the monotheistic model of Zoroastrianism, and it is widely recognized by scholars that Zarathustra taught the first form of monotheism. Here again we find reference to this aspect of Mazdaism in Beelzebub’s Tales in the world ‘**Olbogmek**’ which means, “There are no different religions, there is only one God.”(BTTHG\ p. 319). (“Bog” is Russian for “God” as fans of A Clockwork Orange might have recognized).

Zarathustra is universally acknowledged by scholars as producing the first form of monotheism in the character of Ahura Mazda – which is often

translated simply as "Lord of Wisdom." However some scholars assert that Maz-dah is an adjective meaning approximately "he who places (everything) in his mind" (not "wisdom as is commonly rendered.) [[The Spirit of Zoroastrianism](#), Prods Oktor Skjaervo p.13] Such a translation runs much closer to the more technical and specific sense of consciousness and self-consciousness taught by Gurdjieff.

Conscience

It is clear in Beelzebub's Tales that the significance of conscience pervades the teachings of Ashiata Shiemash, that it is central to his teachings and that all of his other ideas revolve around it.

"After the second transapalnian perturbation occurred to this ill-starred planet, that is, after the 'loss of Atlantis,' the action of the cosmic law of Solioonensius in the common presence of your favorites took place at least forty times, and each time, thanks to this strange need of freedom which has become fixed in the majority of them, almost the same thing took place as has recently been occurring among the groups inhabiting that part of the surface of your planet called 'Russia.' "Here it is extremely important to note that these terrifying processes could never have occurred among the three-brained beings of the planet Earth if those data for engendering the being-impulse of Conscience, which had remained intact in their subconscious—data to which the Most Saintly Ashiata Shiemash was the first to turn his attention, and which he relied upon for the fulfillment of his mission—had taken part in the functioning of that consciousness of theirs which has become habitual for them during their waking state. "It is only because the data for the sacred impulse of being-Conscience do not take part in the functioning of this consciousness of theirs that the action of the law of Solioonensius, as well as of other inevitable cosmic laws, assumes these abnormal forms which are so lamentable for them." (BTTHG p. 571)

Many significant ideas can be found in this passage. To begin with, in calling him the first Beelzebub is saying not only was Ashiata the first to identify the importance of Conscience, but that the word fully supported and defined his existence and mission on Earth. Conscience, or the development of 'Being-Conscience' can protect us from these deleterious influences. Thus the development of Conscience goes hand-in-hand with the discouragement of animal-sacrifice, and really violence in general.

Conscience also can be seen to emerge with central importance in the teachings of Zarathustra and we find evidence of it in key ideas like Daena Vohuni which is often translated as 'good conscience.'

Another way Conscience is approached in the Fourth Way work is in the elimination of contradictions, for it is impossible to experience true conscience while one holds on to internal contradictions. P.D. Ouspensky once wrote:

“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**

Conscience is the fire which alone can fuse all the powders in the glass retort, and create the unity which a man lacks in that state in which he begins to study himself.” (Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous)

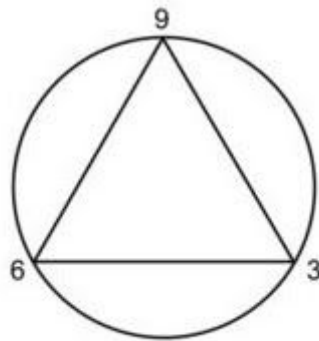
Ashiata actually has a very personal association with Beelzebub himself, as it is Ashiata that gets Beelzebub pardoned from the transgressions of his past:

“And thus to one of the planets of this solar system, the planet called “Earth,” a Messenger was once sent from our Endlessness – a certain Ashiata Shiemash. And as Beelzebub had fulfilled a special task indispensable to his mission, this Messenger, upon his return to the Sun Absolute, earnestly besought His Endlessness to pardon the once young and fier but now aged Beelzebub.” (BTTHG p.49)

This ties in with the Mazdan approach to ethics which asserts there is no transgression that cannot be forgiven. That there is no Original Sin which metaphysically connects us with evil, but that good can at anytime be Remanifested by the decision to do so. In popular monotheism the fundamental nature of man is evil – he is born into the world this way due

to the sins of Adam, and therefore the whole of his life clouded with shame and a sense of indebtedness for expenses he did not himself occur. In Zarathushtra and Gurdjieff's world, man comes into the world fundamentally good, but forgets this over the course of life. Yet he always has the opportunity to remember, that is why Teachers, Prophets, Saoshants, and Messengers from Above return to Earth at various times, to remind us.

Triads – Law of Threes



law of three

Generally speaking there are quite a lot of tripartition and triadic structures in both Zoroastrianism and the Fourth way. In Zoroastrian the cosmos is triadic with a Spirit world, a Material world, and then a yet-to-come divine world of spirit-matter fusion. There is also the triadic maxim of "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds," with 'good' meaning of high quality.

An important triad in the Gurdjieff work is the Law of Threes, referring to the interaction of positive, negative and neutralizing forces in nature and in man. With Ashiata Shiemash, the great triad comes from the surviving tablet that survived the 'big wars' on which was inscribed the 'sacred being-impulses' of Faith, Hope, and Love. This triad also appears in Corinthians 13:13 but as one reads the Ashiata's inscriptions one can't help but suspect a deeper triadic pattern at work:

FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE

- Faith of consciousness is freedom
- Faith of feeling is weakness
- Faith of body is stupidity

- Love of consciousness evokes the same in response
- Love of feeling evokes the opposite
- Love of body depends only on type and polarity
- Hope of consciousness is strength
- Hope of feeling is slavery
- Hope of body is disease

Reference: Magi of Conscience – Zarathustra and Ashiata Shiemash