

Early Influences

Dr. Keith A. Buzzell and Reijo Oskanen, 2005. Bergen, The Netherlands

Reijo: This is an exchange with Keith Buzzell in connection with his new book on Beelzebub's Tales, called Perspectives on Beelzebub's Tales. Of course, it also deals with some ideas put forth by Gurdjieff in In Search of the Miraculous by P. D. Ouspensky.

I would like to start, Keith, by asking you first about your entry into the Gurdjieff work. How did you come across the ideas?

Keith: It initially started when I was very young. I began looking for books in the arena of the spiritual when I was fifteen, sixteen. When I was seventeen, in 1950, I came across, within a couple months of each other, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* and *In Search*. Shortly before that I had come across, in a public library, John Bennett's first little book *The Crisis in Human Affairs* and, from that, got enough word information about names so that, tracking things further in the Boston Public Library, I actually found a mint copy of *The Oragean Version*. So, from that point, with those sources, I read by myself, and confused myself endlessly with questions that I could not have answers to, obviously. But subsequently, when I went through college and the college of music and eventually to medical school, at the end of my internship, I had written to C. Daly King several times in Bermuda. I had written to the publisher of the book and my letters were forwarded to C. Daly King and I finally got a letter from him, after three or four efforts on my part. He said very little, other than to wish me "good hunting," and he gave me the name of Dr. Welch in New York City. So, I wrote to Dr. Welch, and subsequently drove down, while still in my internship at the hospital, I drove down to New York City on a weekend and spent an afternoon with him and his wife.

Reijo: What did he talk about here then, that's at the end of the fifties, or early sixties ... ?

Keith: This would be 1960. At that point Dr. Welch said that the only work connection that would be possible would require me to move to New York City. No mention of the then-existing groups in Boston under Dr. Nyland or anything else.

Reijo: Although he wouldn't necessarily know of them...

Keith: Presumably... In any event, there was no other connection with work, other than my own reading, that continued through this time, until, quite serendipitously, [through] a friend of a friend who had just returned from his service tour Korea – his girlfriend happened to get a flyer advertising a ten-day seminar with Irmis Popoff on Long Island. So, I called Mrs. Popoff and she invited me to come down, and that was my first real contact with group work, from that point on. I was with Mrs. Popoff for the next a little over eight years. In the meantime we had begun small reading groups and such in Maine, and we would come down several times a year, four or five times a year, for the full ten-day seminars that Mrs. P. put on. These would be ten very full, extremely busy days of really concentrated work together.

Reijo: With movements?

Keith: Yes, with movements. This was a work-house called The Pinnacle. It had been called The Pinnacle long before Mrs. P. moved there, a very large, old, typical kind of small hotel that she took over, and she rented some rooms to Russian immigrants, and then the rest of the house, some eighteen or nineteen rooms were for group-work. There were at one point I think, nine or ten people who lived there, in the groups full-time at The Pinnacle and those of us from away, from Maine, would come down as often as we could for the seminars, and then also through the winter time, when there were no long seminars, would come down as often as we could for a long weekend, about three or four days at the weekend. So that continued through all the period of time that I was with Mrs. Popoff. Then Mrs. P. died in, I believe, eighty-five, eighty-six.

Reijo: She was studying the Enneagram a lot, and there was a book...

Keith: Yes, *The Enneagram* and *The Man of Unity*. That was a group effort that was interesting, but singularly amateurish, in a sense, because we were all young. But it was her way of encouraging us to try to think about the enneagram. In fact, [during] the one visit that Mr. Bennett made to The Pinnacle while we were there, he reviewed much of the material that subsequently went into the book and discussed it, criticized it and made various recommendations and so forth for the several hours that we had together. Then, as I said, after Mrs. P. died, we had, in the meantime, continued our group-work in Maine, but without any contact, up-hill as it were. . . . Eighty-seven, eighty eight, I had written a little book on the neurophysiology of television and the malignant effects and influences on the brain

of television viewing. Again, through one of these remarkably serendipitous happenings, John Lester, in Oregon, ended up, about a year after a talk that I gave in the hospital on the neurophysiology of television viewing – a tape that they made at the hospital and that had transferred through several people and ended up in John Lester’s hands about two years later!

Reijo: It is an incredible thing, an Australian, who has been most of his time in London, in the teaching there, having his practice in Harley Street, coming to Mrs. Staveley [in Oregon] and finding you through a coincidence!

Keith: A remarkable coincidence, yes! John had to go to Washington DC to try and get his visa straightened out. He seemed always to have these questions about his visa. He called me from Washington, not knowing at all that I was at all involved in work, and I knew nothing about his involvement, and he asked if he could come up to visit me in Portland, Maine so that we could talk about television. When I brought John home from my office and we walked in the door, I had a representation of the enneagram hanging on the chimney and he looked and turned to me and he said, “Do you know what that means?” So, needless to say we didn’t talk about television from then on. We had a very full two or three days sharing impressions about his lineage and work and so forth. He encouraged me, in fact he said it was very important because Annie Lou, through the last four of five years of her life was not well, she would often have respiratory difficulties and so forth. John was concerned, he wanted me very much to meet her but he wanted us to get out there soon. Fortunately for us, Mrs. Staveley lived another six and a half--seven years and we became very frequent visitors.

Reijo: It is a very long way too!

We had lots of red-eye flights back and forth across the United States out to the farm in Oregon. So I went out there and gave a number of talks about material that was beginning to take form, that is many of the formative steps that have to do with the chapter Kundabuffer and with the symbol in itself as it was emerging which is a separate, interesting story all by itself. But, in any case, we continued in very close contact by correspondence, by telephone and by frequent visits with Mrs. Staveley and got to know, in particular, Toddy and Michael Smyth at the farm and we continued with them until Michael’s death and then since, have been very close with Toddy and with other people at the farm. So that is how it took place.

Reijo: And how it has gone on really? What are the main objectives in writing the book then? As I know, having read the book one time, it has also been edited by a team of five people you have been together with for a long time, including your wife, Marlena, Toddy, Bonnie Phillips, John Amaral...

Keith: ...John Scullion and John Amaral.

Reijo: What is the main aim for you now, when you are bringing the book into the market?

Keith: The aim in the book is a coalescence of aims over a very long period of time. Because of my training and in my background in Mmsic and especially in biology I have always had deep, continuing interest in neurophysiology and how the brain evolved and how it developed.

Reijo: You mentioned music. What are your music studies? Have you been playing the music for yourself?

Keith: Well, when I was very young, I was a clarinetist and studied -- thought that my career would be in music somewhere. When I got to go to the college of music, I continued doing quite a bit of chamber work with small groups and so forth, but I rapidly discovered that, while I was technically a competent clarinetist, I saw and came in touch with so many people who had tons more ability and a real musical capacity, and so I changed my major to the history and theory of music, and that is what my first two degrees were in. And then, while I was in graduate school, in the College of Music at Boston University, I got a summer job working in a hospital, and began to meet because I was in...

Reijo: But not as a clarinetist!

Keith: Not as a clarinetist, no, first in maintenance and then as an orderly, helping patients move around the hospital, and so forth. But I also came in contact, because they were, by that time, pretty much my own age, [with] the interns who were coming for training in the hospital were maybe a year or two older than I, but not much. And so, because I was in graduate school and I could speak the language of a graduate from college and so forth, I began to have longer and longer conversations with them, and realized that my connection through music, especially in history and theory was really with people. For instance, I studied choral conducting and I worked with choirs, but all of those connections were really relational connections, music was important and an important part of that, but I saw that the

most important part of my life-interactions were with people - and as a solo-clarinetist that was not going to fit the bill. And so, I kind of fell in love with osteopathy, through my work at the hospital. So, while I finished my Master's degree at Music College, at the same time I was taking all of my pre-medical scientific studies and, subsequently, went to the Philadelphia College of Osteopathy.

Reijo: So that's a separate college . . .

Keith: Yes, you are right, at that time one of the six in the United States, there are now thirty-something, a very rapid growth of the profession

Reijo: It was the same college at which John Lester was also an osteopath, I think at that time...

Keith: Yes, exactly, another coincidence! So, the aims for the book really came out of that feeling. Music subsequently appears to me as one of the most important of the reconciling forces. It is one of the things that speaks to the inner world of feeling and relationship, and so, it has continued to be, ever since a very important part of my life, relative to what my preferences are. Certainly, some of the strongest awe and wonder impressions I have ever had were the first two or three visits to The Pinnacle, with Mrs. Popoff, when they played the Gurdjieff music, I mean that literally knocked my socks off! It was just astonishing; and has continued to be, ever since a very essential part of connection with work-notions and methods.

Reijo: Your book itself can be read, there are many different threads, they are all more or less about All and Everything and some other ideas presented by Gurdjieff, but all the chapters can be read separately. There is the red thread of course, in it also, and for me, on the first reading, what made a strong impression were the chapters on Kundabuffer and particularly on the 'hydrogens'. I have been studying it in my way and . . . Why did he not use old elements and use "the 'hydrogens'?"

Keith: I think it is because of the Renaissance. For me, the most essential aspect of the Renaissance is that this is the port-hole through which, what we call, a modern scientific discipline entered the western world. Granted, that its first appearance, those which are dramatically pointed to, and attested to, historically came through art, through music, but especially, through the visual arts first, through painting, sculpture, the appearance of the third dimension in painting – that tremendous fascination with exploring all manner of manifestations in art of the third dimension. A third dimension introduced, when it comes in through art as it has so often in history, because I think we see, for instance, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, we see relativity entering long before Einstein, as a conception, as a perception of the world. Much of the impressionist, the late romantic music, impressionistic painting, much of the sculpture, the poetry is very relativistic, has a clear recognition that we are moving into a new world, a different world, and science is a kind of “Johnnie come lately” in terms of coalescing that into mathematical formulations and so on. Well, the same thing went on back at the time of the Renaissance, I believe. The first entry is, as I said, through the arts but very quickly, the fact that there is a third dimension means, in a sense, in a picture or in a painting that you see, it depend upon where you are standing – what it is that you see. So, the independence of the observer, relative to the event that is taking place, enters into life in an increasingly, [initially] very subtle but eventually very overt way. So, “depending on your point of view” was not something the church or civil authority, at that time, wanted [to have] any truck with! So, all of the inner-world of man, in terms of his behaviors and belief-structures and so on, was structured by religious civil authority, but yet, entering through music and the arts, the notions, the freedom of expression and the freedom of perception that comes from seeing things in a three-dimensional way – that it depends on where you're standing who is right, who is wrong. What is better? What is higher? What is lower? It depends on where you are! And those ideas began to invade our religious perspectives, our philosophical perspectives; it certainly invaded our scientific perspectives with Galileo, Bruno and all of that development then. And so, this gigantic clash took place that has continued right up to the present. We have this amazing clash between a perspective that puts all of its evaluations and values on revelatory experience through the great traditions, or the remnants of the great traditions, and on the other side, with the increasing, this mushrooming growth of science, it is not like that: it is demonstrable, testable, verifiable, always there are hypotheses, there is no revelatory experience in a scientific perspective, except for the “Aha!” moment, perhaps. So we have, I think, from that point on, to me, in the western world, this immensely important division that takes place between a perspective that essentially says: “The inner world of man, in terms of values, purposes and meanings, etc. . . . belongs to the church, or to the philosophical arena, but primarily to the church. The nature of the material world, physical world belongs to science.” Well, if you look back, the original scientists, as we look at them now, even up to the time of Darwin, even that late, but Newton in particular, these were deeply religious people, and, in the context of their own time, deeply spiritual people. But

unfortunately, this, for me, this division that had taken place earlier left science eventually in a circumstance where it played Pilate. It washed its hands of any responsibility for what it was discovering relative to the social inner life, life of purpose, values and so on. It simply said, “We have nothing to say about human values, we are just talking about the nature of the physical world and descriptions of it in mathematical terms.” And that is not real, not at all real for me, and I think the cataclysm that was building through the latter part of the 19th century, Gurdjieff puts in such quixotic senses in the eruption of the First World War in the early part of the 20th century – this is one of the sequels! This is one of the inevitable results of this division, because now all of the civil authorities, all of the political leaders, they all have God on their side! Their God – wherever it happens to be. Science, through its technological effluent, gets co-opted by political leaders and [they] use the effluent of science, the technological applications to build bombs guns and tanks and so forth and so on – and this is [such] a real crisis, a gigantic crisis in human affairs that my feeling is that this is one the main reasons for Gurdjieff’s appearance at that time. It was to reconcile those two worlds.

Reijo: The material and the spiritual.

Keith: The most, most important thing that I have, as an aim, to contribute a tiny little bit is to explore, from as many directions as possible, this reconciliation of science and spirituality. In the line of my own life, through the study of music and my early studies, I wanted to be a monk for a while when in my early twenties. There was always this very, very spiritual aspect of asking questions and purpose, but then I fell in love with science! And I never felt that the two were incompatible, at all, and I still don’t. I think, expressed in the book, I try several times to talk about the awe and wonder in the world of the scientist and how he must have the same devotion, the same purity of purpose as a monk has in a monastery. And we are not talking about different things. We are talking about different aspects of the world, the material world is not the same, the ‘hydrogens’ demonstrate it. The material is down here, as we described it around hydrogen 96 and further down. But, there is this world of higher ‘hydrogens’ that is in direct continuity, it is not a different world, it is part of the same world and it must now be reconciled because that is where all value and all purpose have to come from. It is out there, but it is also inside. We are true micro cosmoses.

Part of it is theory, with respect to images, the very largest part is fact. The very difficult part with images is that the neurosciences of today still cannot give us a clear explanation of why I see what I do; or why I hear what I hear, but we are a long way from where we were even fifty years ago, a long way. In seeing, that first of all, we have these *resonant representations*, that is what an image is, a proportionate, resonant representation of some aspect of the world. . . . some aspect, not all of it. After all, we see in the visual spectrum one octave, and there are eighty-some octaves in the electromagnetic spectrum.

Reijo: ...and we hear in that spectrum . . .

Keith: In other parts of that derivative, yes. And that is true of all our senses. But it is also true of all of our inner senses. All of our feeling states are images. I know the first time, because I used to talk about feeling state on television, when I used to give talks on the neurophysiology of television viewing, and always many in the audience would have difficulty with that. How is my love, or my feeling of irritability or my anger – how is that an image? There is always some difficulty with that and it is true, the point I am trying to get across is that it is a creation, a mechanical creation, that we can trace the history of very specifically through brained-life, starting 600 million years ago, and we can trace the sensory systems, all with an aim, an immense evolutionary aim and advantage of being able to perceive aspects of the world beyond the physical body. That is what our first brain does, the physical brain of survival. Whereas, the second brain is really the same fundamental mechanisms, in terms of neurophysiology, but, instead of aiming to the outside world it turns inside, to our inner world of the states of the physical presence of the physical body; hormonally, chemically, circulatory-wise, in many, many different ways. The end result of all of that gathering of data related to the state of the body is what we appreciate, or subjectively experience as an inner sensation, being hungry, being tired. We don’t really call those emotions, we call them inner sensations, but then it graduates right across the spectrum of feeling from the world of sensation to what we would call the world of true feeling to love, devotion, anger and suspicion and all of those things...

Yes, often it is like that. We don’t appreciate it that way and if this approach in the book accomplishes anything for people of the work, who are interested in work, I hope what it will do is give substance to what Gurdjieff is talking about in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, and that is that the world of images, whether they are images of the outside world, or images of our inner world, or, most importantly, in a sense, images

of the abstract world of our true intellectual potential--that, regardless of the images, they are all made, they are all created by this marvelous instrument of the human body, but they are only a resonant representation [and] in that sense they are not reality. What I hear is what I hear, but it is not what was 'out there'! No, it is what entered me through my particular sense [and it is] the same for my other sense, sound, touch, taste, etc..

The same for my inner world. For example if I begin to discover that my feelings of anger or irritability, when I track them back in time and I ask myself ... a task Mrs. Popoff gave us, after a number of years, was called "roots." You must study the roots. Where did these things come from? Where, in your past, did they emerge? And it was a very, very interesting process of discovering that some of these happened when you were three years old and they were no big deal, but they got stuck! I mean they got really impressed into us...

Reijo: The picture was made!

Keith: The picture was made, and through that it shows up, it is almost as if it throws up a kind of an out-of-focus lens, but that is how we see the world and we become suspicious of it, afraid of it or act aggressively towards it or are retreating away from it, or whatever, but they are not real, that's my point. They are real relative to our inner world, of course.

Reijo: They feel real.

Keith: Absolutely, but they are resonant representations and it becomes possible for us, in trying to isolate enough attention from the image itself to observe that as an image. This, to me, is what proper self-observation is all about eventually, that something begins to appear that has the attention, the directed attention as its fundamental instrument; only that, just focused attention. And then there is the image and we begin this inner separation that, for me, is such a fundamental part of work. We must establish a place inside of us that is in the world, in that world --but not of it! It is able to see it, but see it as an image that is something that is created inside each of us that is created by one of our brains. And as soon as that begins to happen the sense of freedom that enters is quite remarkable, as we all have experienced. Does that give some clarity to that?

Reijo: Yes, I think that is the gist of your writing on the 'hydrogens' as I wanted to ask you.