

The Task of Becoming Sixth-Race Man¹

by

Seymour B. Ginsburg

‘Some wise man, seeking Deathlessness, with inturned gaze, beheld the Atman,’ says the Kathopanishad. The goal of finding the identity of the individual with the universal – That Art Thou, I Am That – is what Theosophy terms ‘Sixth-Race Man’. Seymour B. Ginsburg compares how this aim is variously illuminated in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky, G.I. Gurdjieff, and Sri Krishna Prem and Sri Madhava Ashish.

‘The task of becoming “Sixth-race man”, oriented towards the Spirit, is by no means easy. The leap we have to take to the Sixth cannot be made without intentional effort. Unlike our arrival at manhood, we are subject to no inescapable compulsion to grow. Against our will we can neither be thrust upwards from below nor pulled upwards from above. Having achieved an instrument of its own will [man], it is through that instrument that the divine Will achieves its purpose. It is as if the divine Will cannot compel itself by itself, and we, who are essentially moments in or of that Will, must give ourselves to the fulfillment of its purpose if that purpose is at all to be fulfilled.’²

So wrote Sri Madhava Ashish, and these words give the central theme of his book, *Man, Son of Man* (1970). It was this book that led me to meet Sri Madhava Ashish (born Alexander Phipps 1920-1997), a Scottish engineer turned Hindu monk, in 1978. In the spring of that year, in my personal quest for meaning, I had come across Helena Blavatsky’s writings (hereafter referred to by her famous initials ‘H.P.B.’) and joined the Theosophical Society. I eagerly attacked H.P.B.’s *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*, thinking that an understanding of her thought would provide a key to life’s meaning. But I found her rambling 1400-page commentary on a mystical poem, possibly from a pre-Babylonian creation myth, that she called the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, to be unintelligible to me. Yet, I sensed something important in what she was attempting to say. In the effort to understand, I was led to two additional books of commentary on these stanzas, the first being *Man, the Measure of All Things* (1966), co-authored by Madhava Ashish and his teacher, Sri Krishna Prem, another Englishman who had come to India in 1921 and who had also become a Hindu monk. This book describes the nature of the cosmos based upon the *Stanzas of Dzyan*. The second book, the aforesaid, *Man, Son of Man*, describes what man is and the intentional effort required of him.

What makes a Master?

I knew from the time of our initial meeting in 1978, that there was something special about Sri Madhava Ashish, but exactly what that something was, I could not then put my finger on. I decided to return to see him the following spring, writing to him to request this. Thus began an extensive correspondence between us in which I asked him all manner of questions concerning theosophy, how to approach the study of dreams, and the subject of Masters, the men whom H.P.B. called her

teachers, and who presumably transmitted psychically to her, the *Stanzas of Dzyan*.

Sensing my confusion about the subject of Masters, Madhava Ashish suggested that if I were to return to India to see him, I should first visit another man, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who lived in Bombay, in order to help me to understand just what makes a Master. This visit in 1979 to see Sri Madhava Ashish would become the second in an annual pilgrimage that continued for nineteen years until his passing in 1997.

I asked Madhava Ashish many questions about Masters, because I wanted to know what makes a Master in the context of theosophical teaching. Many of his responses in his letters to me on this and other subjects were published in 2001 in the book, *In Search of the Unitive Vision*, a collection of more than one hundred of his letters. The newly published Quest Book, *The Masters Speak: An American Businessman Encounters Ashish and Gurdjieff* (Quest 2010) recounts that earlier version.

Of particular interest is Madhava Ashish's remark in a 1989 letter about Masters, linking the Russian mystic G.I. Gurdjieff with H.P.B.'s teachers:

'The Master is one with the Spirit. He exemplifies the final attainment. He is what is as yet only a partially realized potential in your own being. You can "recognize" him only to the extent that you can feel the responses in your essence when like answers to like. G [Gurdjieff] is a Master.'³ (Letter, Jul. 7, 1989)

In another letter Madhava Ashish had this to say about Masters:

'It may be a fact that some of the Masters derive their being from other worlds than this one. But too much attention given to this speculation can lead to the false view that they are so special as to have no relevance to the lives of ordinary mortals like us. In fact, so many of them have arisen from the ordinary mortals of this planet, and from so many different races and cultures on this planet, that they provide us with examples of what we should and can become here and now.'⁴ (Letter, Jan. 24, 1989)

One of the reasons Madhava Ashish sent me to meet Sri Nisargadatta was because Nisargadatta was an example from his own life of what we should and can become here and now. Unlike Ashish and unlike Ashish's teacher, Sri Krishna Prem, both of whom lived ascetic lives in the remote Himalayas, Nisargadatta was an ordinary middle-class Indian shopkeeper with a wife and four children, living in the midst of the craziness that is Mumbai (Bombay). In that sense his attainment is something to which any of us can aspire. Gurdjieff also tells us this. He says, 'each one of us must set for his chief aim to become in the process of our collective life a master.'⁵

Gurdjieff described this circle of Masters, of which he was one, to P.D. Ouspensky, calling them the conscious inner circle of humanity. He said to Ouspensky, 'The inner circle is called the "esoteric"; this circle consists of people who have attained the highest development possible for man, each one of whom possesses individuality in the fullest degree, that is to say, an indivisible "I", all forms of consciousness possible for man, full control over these states of consciousness, the whole of

knowledge possible for man, and a free and independent will.’⁶ He went on to explain that this esoteric circle is surrounded by a mesoteric inner circle of people and that circle is in turn surrounded by an exoteric inner circle. These three concentric circles represent different degrees of understanding but are all part of the conscious inner circle of humanity, as distinguished from an outer circle of mechanical humanity to which belong the vast majority of human beings.

Although I did not realize it at the time, it was because Gurdjieff’s teaching derives from the same source as H.P.B.’s teaching, that Ashish recommended that I study it and, in particular, the practical ‘how to’ that is the hallmark of Gurdjieff’s teaching. That source is, in Gurdjieff’s terms, the esoteric conscious inner circle of humanity. H.P.B. called that same source, the Masters of Wisdom. H.P.B. claimed to be the student of three teachers, counterparts of Gurdjieff, whom she called her Masters. These teachers are part of that esoteric conscious inner circle, as is Gurdjieff.

‘Much arrant nonsense has been published about Masters, attributing to them all sorts of supposedly miraculous powers to tantalize a gullible public. These powers, called *siddhis* in Indian literature, are not at all relevant to the teaching brought to us by these Masters, and whether any of them could perform such *siddhis* is highly problematic. But it is verifiable that certain seemingly unusual capacities can be developed in human beings through special training. These include, among others, such talents as telepathy. But we love our myths whether they are accounts of Jesus raising someone from the dead or another Master flying magically from the hills of India to Mt. Kailash in Tibet each day for his morning meditation.’⁷

Whatever the truth in our myths, they are the least important aspect of our inquiry. What is important for us to understand is that H.P.B.’s adept Masters were a succession of human beings rather than a cosmic hierarchy of supermen. The actual ‘miraculous’ power that they did have in common, was the ability to communicate with H.P.B. and others at a distance, a power known under various words such as ‘telepathy’, of which there are many verified accounts in human experience. P.D. Ouspensky, for example, wrote in amazement of Gurdjieff’s telepathic powers, saying: ‘With this the miracle began ... It all started with my beginning to hear his thoughts.’⁸

What we call ‘telepathy’ is a natural function of our connectedness with each other at levels of the psyche, more interior than the turning thoughts of the lower mind as distinguished from higher mind. The Masters, at one with the Spirit, but having followed the Bodhisattva path of compassion toward their less evolved brethren, continue to guide humanity with telepathically transmitted wisdom both while incarnate and after leaving the physical body. We usually regard received wisdom as insight. Such insight often comes during silent meditation and through the symbolic language in which dreams speak to us. This is why Sri Madhava Ashish placed such importance on our sitting quietly in meditation for long periods of time and on paying attention to our dreams and the symbolic language in which they speak.

I first wrote of the connection between Gurdjieff and Blavatsky’s teachers for an article, ‘HPB, Gurdjieff and the Secret Doctrine’ that appeared in *The American Theosophist*, in the spring of 1988.⁹ In December of that year Madhava Ashish wrote a letter to me endorsing this connection:

‘The particular characteristic of the T.S. is its direct inspiration by the Masters or Bodhisattvas. They fielded H.P.B. and stood behind her all her life. G. was one of them, which is why his teaching is in the same tradition.’¹⁰ (Letter, Dec. 12, 1988)

In the introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P.B. gives a prediction, ‘In Century the Twentieth some disciple more informed and far better fitted [than the current author H.P.B.] may be sent by the Masters of Wisdom.’¹¹ She goes on to write: ‘These two volumes should form for the student a fitting prelude for Volumes III, and IV. Until the rubbish of the ages is cleared away from the minds of the Theosophists to whom these volumes are dedicated, it is impossible that the more practical teaching contained in the Third Volume should be understood.’¹²

Gurdjieff actually brought the practical teaching in oral form, and he gave it out piecemeal to Ouspensky and others in the early Russian groups of his students beginning about 1912. Ouspensky recognized this. He wrote, ‘I realized very clearly that a great deal of time must pass before I could tell myself that I could outline the whole system correctly.’¹³ Eventually, Ouspensky did outline the teaching and wrote it down as he understood it. This written account, published as *In Search of the Miraculous*, constitutes the most widely known, authoritative exposition of the oral teaching imparted by Gurdjieff.

The elders of the Theosophical Society in the first decade of the twentieth century, under the leadership of Annie Besant, were not unmindful of H.P.B.’s predictions. They chose J. Krishnamurti as the predicted disciple who would come in the twentieth century, calling him the new world teacher. Krishnamurti, although a high teacher, rejected this role in his arguably most important speech ‘Truth is a Pathless Land’ given before thousands of theosophists in Holland in 1929.

Let us now look at Gurdjieff’s position when he came public in Moscow beginning in 1912 and consider his actions over the next decades. Let us also assume that he is a Master, a member of the esoteric conscious inner circle of humanity, as Sri Madhava Ashish recognized. Gurdjieff’s connections with theosophy ran wide and deep, notwithstanding his negative views about naïve early theosophists and other occultists who did much fantasizing. Two of his closest students, P. D. Ouspensky and A. R. Orage, both of literary prominence in the first half of the 20th century, were well known speakers for the theosophical movement. Two lesser known figures in the theosophical movement of the 1920s, Maude Hoffman and Trevor Barker,¹⁴ became pupils of Gurdjieff when he visited London in 1922 and went with him to Fontainebleau in France to help prepare the *Prieure*, a residential occult school, to receive students. During this period, these two pupils of Gurdjieff were working on the transcription, editing, compilation and publication of *The Mahatma Letters*, a series of letters written by H.P.B.’s teachers, her Masters, to British officials in India in the late nineteenth century.

Let us assume that Gurdjieff wants to give the world indications that he is the teacher predicted in *The Secret Doctrine*, who will bring the practical teaching. How does he do it? Of course, he actually brings the practical teaching. That is his job. It is why he was sent in. By the 1920s Gurdjieff is aware of Krishnamurti’s designation by theosophists as the new world teacher. He can hardly stand

in opposition to this. It would appear unseemly and he would be accused of self-serving. What does he do? Gurdjieff, after an auto accident in 1924, which determined that he would have to close his school, dedicates himself to writing. He begins to write the intentionally mythological *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*, and writes into it a scenario that will fulfill H.P.B.'s *Secret Doctrine* predictions.

At the end of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff tells us: 'There is in our life a certain very great purpose and we must all serve this Great Common Purpose – in this lies the whole sense and predestination of our life.'¹⁵ Gurdjieff goes on to tell us that although everyone is equally a slave to this great purpose, the man or woman who has developed his own 'I' is conscious, and 'he acquires the possibility, simultaneously with serving the all-universal Actualizing, of applying part of his manifestations according to the providence of Great Nature for the purpose of acquiring for himself "Imperishable Being"'.¹⁶

Although Madhava Ashish told me to study Gurdjieff's teaching and he, himself, was a great fan of the mythological *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, in another letter he made the following comment about what he called the *Man* books: 'G's system is tantalizing, but mythological in form. G did not intend to provide a rational framework. As he says at the beginning of the book [*Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*], he aims to destroy preconceived nations. Frankly, you will get a clearer approximation of the facts from the *Man* books [*Man, the Measure of All Things* and *Man, Son of Man*]. I think you will find G's ideas making more sense against the framework those books sketch.'¹⁷ (Letter, Feb. 26, 1993)

Madhava Ashish said this to me in 1993, but it would be 2008, another fifteen years, before I picked up on his hint and began to re-examine the *Man* books, and especially *Man, Son of Man*. Gurdjieff wrote in mythological form, just as Blavatsky wrote *The Secret Doctrine* in a confusing 19th-century literary style. A more modern and straightforward explanation was needed, and this is what was given to us, in my view, by the esoteric conscious inner circle of humanity in the 1950s, telepathically transmitted through Krishna Prem and Madhava Ashish and written down by them in what Ashish has called the *Man* books. Ashish authored another book explaining the spiritual significance of dreams. He showed me this book in manuscript form in 1979, but continued to work on it almost until his passing in 1997. In his preface to that book (not included in the early manuscript), *An Open Window: Dream as Everyman's Guide to the Spirit*, he makes an extraordinary disclosure as to the source of the wisdom contained in the *Man* books. This was published posthumously in 2007:

'We [Prem and Ashish] went through a high period [in the 1950s] when a night without a dream was a wasted opportunity, a forgotten dream was a breach of trust. We hurried through our many chores to be free to pace up and down in the morning light, seeking meanings and their ramifications. Then as the mind began to come under control, little visions began to appear in meditation whose content was more direct, less concealed by symbols, than in ordinary dream. There was direct, personal instruction. And there were dreams which threw light on the Cosmogogenesis and Anthropogenesis of the *Stanzas of Dzyan* on which we were attempting to write a commentary. Yet there was never

direct dictation. One always had to struggle to understand what the symbols were saying, so that one was personally responsible for the form in which the general scheme was presented.’¹⁸

Madhava Ashish further disclosed the source of this wisdom in relation to the meaning of the *Stanzas of Dzyan* in a 1992 letter: ‘I suspect that [Alice] Bailey added a lot of her own ideas [to the channelled writings that came through her]. This is inevitable and even desirable. The difficult question is how truly did she report from D. K. [Djwhal Khul, a theosophical master], and how near or distant from the truth were her own speculations. You can ask the same questions about the *Man* books [*Man, the Measure of All Things* and *Man, Son of Man*]. This is why we [Krishna Prem and Madhava Ashish] wrote that the commentary has to stand on its own. Saying that inspiration and instruction was given by D. K. and others would add nothing to the validity of the work. We know to whom we owe it, but we are not going to make him answer for our misunderstandings and mistakes. By the same token, don’t hold D. K. responsible for Alice Bailey’s vaporings.’¹⁹ (Letter, Jan. 7, 1992)

Ashish’s disclosure of how the wisdom in *Man, Son of Man* was received echoes H.P.B.’s own admission as to how she received the knowledge that enabled her to write *The Secret Doctrine*, also through the medium of visions in dreams and in pictures presented to the inner eye in meditation. About this she wrote: ‘Knowledge comes in visions, first in dreams and then in pictures presented to the inner eye during meditation. Thus have I been taught the whole system of evolution, the laws of being, and all else that I know—the mysteries of life and death, the workings of karma. Not a word was spoken to me of all this in the ordinary way, except, perhaps, by way of confirmation of what was thus given me—nothing taught me in writing. And knowledge so obtained is so clear, so convincing, so indelible in the impression it makes upon the mind, that all other sources of information, all other methods of teaching with which we are familiar dwindle into insignificance in comparison with this. One of the reasons why I hesitate to answer offhand some questions put to me is the difficulty of expressing in sufficiently accurate language things given to me in pictures, and comprehended by me by the pure Reason, as Kant would call it. Theirs is a synthetic method of teaching: the most general outlines are given first, then an insight into the method of working, next the broad principles and notions are brought into view, and lastly begins the revelation of the minuter points.’²⁰

How are we to understand the nature of the wisdom that communicates with us through the psychical insights of people like H.P.B., Krishna Prem and Madhava Ashish? Can we imagine that it is really Gurdjieff himself when Gurdjieff appears in a dream, or that it is Jesus supplying the insight that sometimes comes in silent meditation, or that it is Maurya who calls our attention to a passage in a book that answers a question? Perhaps it is best to see this wisdom simply as coming from ‘Spirit’ or whatever we wish to call it. Ashish explained it this way in another letter:

‘Any one of those beings (if it has any meaning to speak of there being more than one essential being) can look out through the eyes of any existing form that has eyes. There is a series of masks, shaped in the familiar forms of Gurdjieff, Jesus, the Buddha, Maurya, etc., so that idiots like us can recognize them, through which the one power can communicate with us. Yet there is a sense in

which ‘The Great Russian Bodhisattva’ whom we last knew as Gurdjieff, at a certain level, is distinguishable from other bodhisattvas.’²¹ (Letter, Oct. 11, 1989)

The ‘certain very great common purpose’ in our life

When we look at the more practical teaching that Gurdjieff brought, we begin to understand the requirement for intentional effort that we each must make, as insisted upon by Sri Madhava Ashish, by Sri Nisargadatta, by G.I. Gurdjieff and by all other masters. It is through this practical teaching – the psychological and physical self-awareness or self-witnessing exercises – that we actually do come to know ourselves. We become aware of being conscious of ourself.

Among the most important statements in *Man, Son of Man* are the following three, in which is revealed the answer to the question: what is this certain very great common purpose, of which Gurdjieff wrote, in which lies the whole sense and predestination of our life? It is there stated:

‘The only unqualified Subject in the Cosmos is the One, which can never under any circumstances become an object of its own awareness.’²²

‘The primary creative impulse arising in absolute, undifferentiated Being can be described as a desire within Being to know itself, a desire which begins by producing a distinction between the subjective Knower and the desired object of knowledge, both separated and linked by the desirous act of knowing, and which ends by a multitude of knowing units being clothed in the objective garments of apparent form. There is, in other words, a purposeful striving within the unmanifest source of all things to make its inherent qualities apparent to itself – a necessary effort, because the diffused consciousness of Absolute Being cannot become aware of its own qualities until both a separation has been made between Knower and Known, and its qualities have been objectively represented.’²³

‘The urge to travel the path of spiritual endeavour springs from the Cosmic Being’s urge towards its own fulfillment, an urge that is implanted in our hearts as it is implanted in the hearts of all creatures of the Divine Will. The inner goal towards which we are urged to turn is the goal of the cosmic cycle, and the purpose to gain that goal through man is the purpose of the whole process of evolution.’²⁴

Because, as is explained in *Man, Son of Man*, the diffused consciousness of the Absolute Being cannot become aware of its own qualities until both a separation has been made between knower and known, and its qualities have been objectively represented, an artificial division by Spirit, in which it divides itself into subject (masculine) and object (feminine), is necessary. The release of energy, known as *fohat* in theosophical literature, resulting from this division can be either attractive or repellent between the first and second forces. It is the third force represented in the trinity of Christianity and the trimurti of Hinduism.

The nature of man

The Diagram of Spirit in the form of man, which follows, graphically illustrates two series of numbered ‘races’ and the watery middle-region between the unmanifest transcendent and the materialization. It is intended to describe the nature of man and to help clear up confusion in an understanding of the Stanzas, because there are two series of seven orders of being in the Stanzas, not one, and man, more importantly, belongs to the non-materialized world of the watery mid-region than to the materialized *homo sapiens* vehicle. As Ashish states it: ‘We belong to those [intermediate] worlds more importantly than we do here, for from them we come and to them we return, and there, in some measure, both the memory of our source and the memories of our prior lives return to us.’²⁵

Man is shown on the left side of the diagram as macrocosmic inner man, the Adam Kadmon of Gnosticism and Kabbalah. The seven orders of being represented by the seven circles on the right side of the diagram represent biological evolution providing vehicles for the ingression of consciousness. In *Man, Son of Man* we are told: ‘The descending order of creative powers meets the ascending order of physical forms at the junction between the desire level [the bottom circle of the parabola on the left] and the physical level [the fourth circle from the bottom of the series on the right].’²⁶ In terms of the biological evolution of a suitable vehicle, that junction takes place in the *hominid* vehicle, the precursor of the *homo sapiens*. Note also that the diagram is divided into three parts: (A) The unmanifest transcendent, the divine Unity, which is Spirit when nothing yet existed; (C) The materialization where ‘the descending order of human characteristics meets the physical order of animal evolution’;²⁷ and (B) What is called in *Man, Son of Man*, ‘the watery mid-region’. In *Man, Son of Man*, Madhava Ashish writes: ‘We have begun by plunging directly into a discussion on the strange, shifting, uneasy “waters” of the Matrix – the mid-region of magical effects, ghosts, astral bodies, and other occult phenomena. Let us meet the question squarely. Those who reject this strange, magical area of experience as “old wives’ tales” and “superstitious nonsense” are rejecting the key to the secret of life along with it.’²⁸

‘It is extremely difficult to give an adequate description of this deceptive middle-region of the universe. ... It has neither the relatively stable definition of the sensible universe, nor the intellectual clarity of the unmanifest Transcendent. So difficult is its nature to grasp that nearly all academic scientists prefer to ignore its presence, and so treacherous are its paths that most spiritual teachers seek to decry its importance. Yet we live constantly in its “watery” atmosphere, our life and our very existence depend upon it, and every physical form in the universe has arisen through its mediacy, for it is the subtle, impressionable link between mental concept and physical form. In effect, it is the same energy-filled space out of which this universe has grown and in which it stands, but only at this outermost edge of the manifestation do those energies reach a sufficient intensity to become visible to us.’²⁹ This mid-region is the region that explains telepathic communication from the Masters to H.P.B., Krishna Prem and Madhava Ashish, and that demonstrated by Gurdjieff and recounted by Ouspensky.

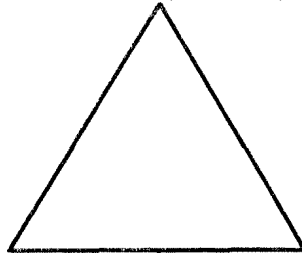
DIAGRAM OF SPIRIT IN THE FORM OF MAN

In three parts A, B, and C, and two series of seven races, one series being the parabola of inner man, the other a progression of vehicles for the ingression of inner man into physicality in accordance with natural selection.

Part A. The Unmanifest Transcendent, the Divine Unity from which all proceeds and whither all returns. (SD I,1)³⁰

Part B. The watery mid-region between the unmanifest transcendent and the materialization. ‘The mid-region of magical effects, ghosts, the astral bodies, and other occult phenomena. Those who reject this strange, magical area of experience are rejecting the key to life along with it, for without [it], there could be no womb of becoming and no human birth.’³¹

ENERGY (FOHAT)



MASCULINE (SUBJECT)

FEMININE (OBJECT)

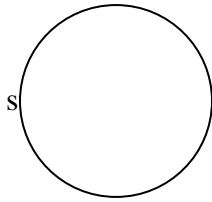
Parabola of Being of Inner Man

Physical

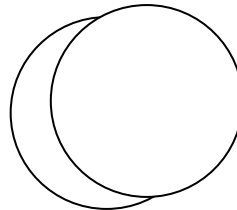
Vehicle

7th race man

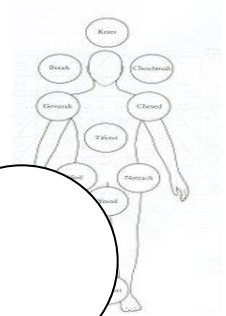
Kadmon



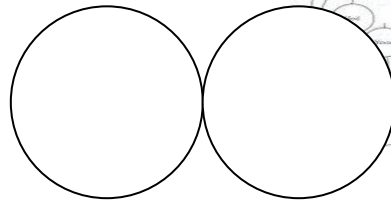
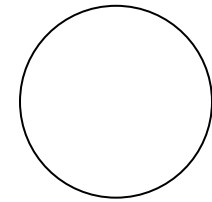
the unity



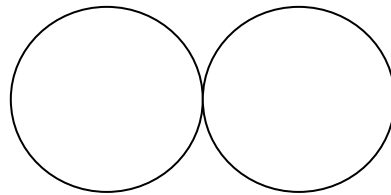
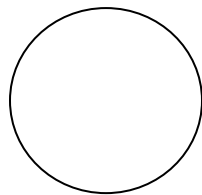
Adam



6th race



man is turned inward toward Spirit and requires our intentional effort to enter into it.



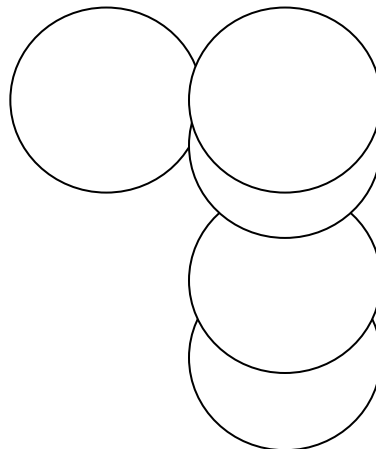
5th race is

out-turned
Part C. The Materialization

Hominid pre-

Homo sapiens

4th race man



Animal

Vegetable

Mineral

In the Materialization, 'The descending order of human characteristics [inner man] meets the physical order of animal evolution.'³²

The intentional effort required to become 'Sixth-race' man

The intentional effort necessary to the task of becoming 'Sixth-race' man about which Madhava Ashish writes requires what Gurdjieff has called 'conscious labour and intentional suffering' throughout *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*.

Madhava Ashish was more specific and in a 1989 letter he listed aspects of the intentional effort that one must make to enter the 'Sixth race':

- '1. Keep up the self-remembering exercises all the time.
 - '2. Give your mind food for thought which stimulates your aim.
 - '3. Increase the periods and frequencies of meditation.
 - '4. Record dreams and visions and work on their meanings.
 - '5. Try to get inner sanction for even simple daily actions. The point is that the whole of your life has to be integrated around the centre, and not just the spiritual bit of it.
 - '6. Open yourself to the psychic contents of events, from perceiving the flow of life in plants to noting synchronicities.
 - '7. There is a connection between self-remembering and meditation. Keeping yourself centred at all times makes it easier to get into meditation at special times.
- 'This sort of effort is directed to a transpersonal goal. If you are dedicated to the way of the Masters (i.e. not to selfish liberation, but to helping others), then the Masters personify the goal. So your efforts take you directly towards them.'³³ (Letter, May 25, 1989).

The lot of those who fulfill 'the very great purpose' in their life and acquire 'imperishable being'

'Few men of our planet have at any time achieved the actual experience of the essential unity [of being]. Yet that he is able to achieve such experience is the key to man's significance in relation to the whole range of manifest and transcendent being, for of all the forms evolved by the divine outpouring, in man alone the bright mirror of Mind relates the field of content to the focus of consciousness in the act of understanding. From this act both the Self of Man and the universal Self accumulate their store of experience. Then, when the long process of evolution comes to fruition, the Man-Plant flowers, the cycle of the evolution is complete, man is God and God is man, not only in principle but in full knowledge of the fact.'³⁴

‘Our task is therefore to re-find that inner unity in which subject and object, man and woman, are once more fused in the blissful mingling of complementary natures. And to do this we have to sift every sensation, emotion, and thought, always reserving the more subtle or inner component of its content, until we come to know that sensations are the caresses of the cosmic Woman in whose embrace we live. Each one of us, indeed, is man and woman in one. Driven out from the paradisaical androgyny of the supreme bliss by the fiery wrath of the creative outrush, we have once again to bring our two halves together.’³⁵

‘He who blends his individual being with the Great Being enters into the bliss of the divine Source and as an individual ceases to exist. ... The only certain survival of individuality occurs in the cases of those of us who reach the perfection of human evolution and are dedicated both to the preservation of the essential Wisdom and to the service of the Essential Being of the Cosmos.’³⁶

Madhava Ashish summed up our role as man in his obligatory pilgrimage towards entering the ‘Sixth race’ this way: ‘The perfection of man can only be achieved by intentional effort of the individual to discover his essential unity with the macrocosmic Man and so to complete the evolutionary cycle which begins with unexpressed potentials of life and ends with manifest vehicles through which the divine awareness achieves knowledge both of its essential unity and of its manifold nature.’³⁷

In one of his last letters, Sri Madhava Ashish wrote of the mystery of being: ‘The root of the mystery of being lies at the root of the awareness which perceives the universe. Every human being is human by virtue of that awareness. Every human being is or can be aware that he is aware. When that self-awareness is traced to its inner source, then only can the identity of individual with the universal be found, then only can the mystery of being be solved.’³⁸ (Letter, April 22, 1996)

References:

- ¹ This article is based on the wisdom of Sri Madhava Ashish as recorded in his book of letters: *The Masters Speak: An American Businessman Encounters Ashish and Gurdjieff*. Wheaton: Quest Books, 2010, and in his book of commentary on the *Stanzas of Dzyan: Man, Son of Man*. Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1970.
- ² Ashish. Sri Madhava. *Man, Son of Man*. 284.
- ³ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*. 138.
- ⁴ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*. 137.
- ⁵ Gurdjieff. G.I. *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. 1950. New York: Penguin-Compass, 1999. 1236.
- ⁶ Ouspensky. P.D. *In Search of the Miraculous*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950. 310. See also 309-15.
- ⁷ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*, 273. 'The famous Lahiri Mahasaya, the man you've read about in Yogananda's book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, claimed to have done his daily worship on Mt. Kailash. Yogananda did not mention the fact that the Mt. Kailash he refers to is in Ranikhet, whereas the reader immediately thinks of the Mt. Kailash up in Tibet. So Lahiri Mahasaya presumably, sort of magically went up to Tibet and back again every morning. It's one of these confusions.' (Letter, Dec. 22, 1979)
- ⁸ Ouspensky, 262. See also 262-4.
- ⁹ *The American Theosophist*, Spring Special Issue, Vol. 76, No. 5, 1988. Ginsburg, Seymour B. 'HPB, Gurdjieff and the Secret Doctrine'. 146-155.
- ¹⁰ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*. 128.
- ¹¹ Blavatsky, H.P. *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I. xxxviii.
- ¹² Blavatsky. *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II. 797-8.
- ¹³ Ouspensky. 64.
- ¹⁴ Maud Hoffman, an American Shakespearean actress residing in England with her close friend, the theosophist Mabel Collins, became executrix of the estate of A. P. Sinnett and inherited 'the Mahatma Letters' which Sinnett had collected. She wrote a full-page article for the *New York Times*, February 10, 1924, describing life at the Prieuré under her teacher Gurdjieff. Hoffman appointed Trevor Barker, a British theosophist, to edit the Mahatma Letters for publication. Some of this work took place while Hoffman and Barker were pupils of Gurdjieff.
- ¹⁵ Gurdjieff. 1226-7.
- ¹⁶ Gurdjieff. 1227.
- ¹⁷ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*. 230.
- ¹⁸ Ashish, Sri Madhava. *An Open Window: Dream as Everyman's Guide to the Spirit*. Delhi: Penguin, 2007. xvii.
- ¹⁹ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*. 128.
- ²⁰ Blavatsky Collected Writings BCW XIII pg 285. A fragment from the pen of H.P.B.; at least it is attributed to her in *The Theosophist*, Vol. XXXI, March 1910, pg. 685. It was likely written shortly after *The Secret Doctrine*.
- ²¹ Ginsburg. *The Masters Speak*. 137.
- ²² Ashish, *Man, Son of Man*. 241.
- ²³ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 5.
- ²⁴ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 36.
- ²⁵ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 123.
- ²⁶ Ashish, *Man, Son of Man*. 194.
- ²⁷ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 143.
- ²⁸ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 85.
- ²⁹ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 86.
- ³⁰ Blavatsky. *S.D.* I. 1.
- ³¹ Ashish, *Man, Son of Man*. 85.
- ³² Ashish, *Man, Son of Man*. 143.
- ³³ Ginsburg, *The Masters Speak*. 151-2.
- ³⁴ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 37.
- ³⁵ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 213.
- ³⁶ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 336-7.
- ³⁷ Ashish. *Man, Son of Man*. 18-19.
- ³⁸ Ginsburg, *The Masters Speak*. 281.