



Man's Most Important Mistake, by G. I. Gurdjieff

One of mans most important mistakes, one which must be remembered, is his illusion in regard to his I.

Man such as we know him, the 'man-machine,' the man who cannot 'do,' and with whom and through whom everything 'happens,' cannot have a permanent and single I. His I changes as quickly as his thoughts, feelings and moods, and he makes a profound mistake in considering himself always one and the same person; in reality he is always a different person, not the one he was a moment ago.

Man has no permanent and unchangeable I. Every thought, every mood, every desire, every sensation, says 'I.' And in each case it seems to be taken for granted that this I belongs to the Whole, to the whole man, and that a thought, a desire, or an aversion is expressed by this Whole. In actual fact there is no foundation whatsoever for this assumption. Man's every thought and desire appears and lives quite separately and independently of the Whole. And the Whole never expresses itself, for the simple reason that it exists, as such, only physically as a thing, and in the abstract as a concept.

Man has no individual I. But there are, instead, hundreds and thousands of separate small I's, very often entirely unknown to one another, never coming into contact, or, on the contrary, hostile to each other, mutually exclusive and incompatible. Each minute, each moment, man is saying or thinking, 'I.' And each time his I is different. Just now it was a thought, now it is a desire, now a sensation, now another thought, and so on, endlessly. Man is a plurality. Man's name is legion.

Try to understand that what you usually call "I" is not I; there are many "I's" and each "I" has a different wish. Try to verify this. You wish to change, but which part of you has this wish? Many parts of you want many things, but only one part is real. It will be very useful for you to try to be sincere with yourself. Sincerity is the key which will open the door through which you will see your separate parts, and you will see something quite new. You must go on trying to be sincere. Each day you put on a mask, and you must take it off little by little.