

Work in the Dark

[R Hodges](#) © May 2025

It was the 1970's. The world was crawling with Gurus, especially the West Pole, the San Francisco Bay Area. Pentland, the main Gurdjieff leader in San Francisco, once said: "All the other gurus teach enlightenment. I teach endarkenment." Few understood. But it was true—you could go in to see him with a wonderful question that promised to illuminate everything if you could only get an answer. Thirty minutes later you came out shaking your head. You didn't understand what had happened. Your question was like yesterday's sports scores: meaningless. You didn't recognize that he had given you the gift of endarkenment.

Rene Guenon in *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta* says that the highest state of consciousness is deepest sleep, coma. His lowest state is what we call waking consciousness. It is true. Waking consciousness gives us an illusion of seeing reality, but it is only instrumental, only for the purpose of behaving so as to effectuate the goals of needs and drives.

I have experienced several deeper states in which it is possible to examine with a kind of remanent consciousness: 1) dreaming sleep, in which the "I" loses its tenuous grip on continuity, in which human drives and one's history of having one's drives frustrated are represented in visual/emotional inner theatre; 2) hypnagogic imagery between sleep and waking in which a chaos of changing images are half-visualized accompanied by delicious exalted feeling; 3) sleep itself in which consciousness is reduced to an essential point, with no thought, no feeling, no sensation. The sleep ecstasy can be tasted in the moment of waking up and can be maintained for a period of time by refusing the impulse to go out into the world. This is the Vedantic state.

Endarkenment is Buddhist *nirvana*, escape from the wheel of reincarnation. Sufi *fana*, extinction of the ego, mystic marriage with "the beloved" (i.e. Allah, "the One Alone" as parsed by Corbin in *Alone with the Alone*). The bardo of the Clear Light at the moment of death in Evan-Wentz's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In *Beelebung's Tales*, the transmigration to Sun Absolute of the Third Body (Soul) when it finally separates from the physical body and the body of vibration ("kesdjan body"). All these are poetic images of the great ecstasy symbolized by death and sleep.

When you wake from sleep, the sun blinds you with bright daylight. You have to shield your eyes, and even so they water. You think you are seeing reality; but you only are seeing images, imaginary things lit up by an image of the sun.

In Plato's allegory of the cave the soul is chained and can only see shadows on the wall. This is actually an inverted image of the Mystery of Eleusis, in which the initiate goes down into darkness and then is shown *REALITY*. What the initiate is initiated into is death. Eternity. Some said this experience confers eternal life. Perhaps there was a potion that was drunk, or perhaps anesthetic gases (CO₂, H₂S) seeping up through chthonic fissures. Some say it was theatre, in which a dazzling beam from a special fire lit up ghostly forms of unknown things. But these are just plausible theories: nobody really knows. The Mystery was a secret, its telling punishable by death. And nobody ever told. Except Socrates, who told Plato, who wrote it up (in inverted image) in *The Republic*. It is the possible crime, never disclosed in Plato's *Death of Socrates*, for which Socrates was condemned and executed. Not just that he perverted the youth of Athens by teaching them skepticism about the gods. He did that, but others did so just as much and got away with it (Diogenes for example).

The mystery of the mysteries is that you have to go down into darkness in order to *see*. It is also the mystery of the solar eclipse, in which the moon at its most absolute conjunction *eats* the sun. An era ends and a new one begins, time loses its battle with consciousness and begins anew, some say. A new chapter in the Book of Kismet. In the Aztec and Maya mysteries Aztec a ritual is enacted every 52 years, the Aztec "century," a full cycle of their calendar—all the old fires in the land are put out and a sacred new fire lighted, which must be kept burning continuously for the next 52 years. This is also the mystery that Gurdjieff speaks about, of the moon eating people, their emanations of unconscious pain.

The Dark Sun is an esoteric symbol in Sufism and other ancient traditions. In alchemy the first stage of transformation is *nigredo*, the blackening, the "decomposition" of existing human soul substance into primordial elements in order for them to recombine in noble form. The dissolution of human vanity in the face of Freudian pain locked within dark chambers of the heart.

There are many traditions of blind seers, for example Homer was said to be blind, it may be from this that he developed his powers of bardic imagination. The Kogi people who live in splendid isolation in the mountains of Columbia have a tradition of a training of seers in which they are raised completely in the dark. Deprived of ordinary seeing, they develop second sight, the power to see into the heart of people and the world (*The Heart of the World*, Alan Ereira).



Man, Seer in darkness

This is an example of a principle of human development: inner power is engendered by being squeezed for a long time in *aporia*, an impassable gap between what one must do and what one can do (e.g. seeing in the dark). This is how apprenticeship works in many arenas: craft, science, art, music, medicine, sport, writing, religion, politics, etc. In Gurdjieff, one *aporia* is teacher training: the trainee is made responsible for the inner development of a group of people long before he truly understands how to assist such development. Often the trainee is compromised morally, he simply adopts the false belief that he does have such knowledge.

Groups of people committed to a particular project are important venues for pressure that can make people achieve together what they could not alone. There is a bonding that is socially and emotionally rewarding. But there is also a darkness: individual initiative beyond the group agenda is often discouraged. This increases the pressure and the possibility to succeed within the group, but reduces openness. People usually fall into groups without consciously facing the *aporia* of self versus selflessness. Many traditions of development degenerate because of the loss of meaningful *aporic* pressure. This is a law of ordinary collective existence, the way things go. But in groups with an objective standard, for example orchestras, in which the musician is an organ played by the music, this cannot happen so easily.

Gurdjieff used the method of *aporia* pressure with groups and individuals: he gave one student a very difficult task and told her: “must do, even the impossible.” Under such pressure the person undergoes *djartklom*—one becomes two, the two struggle, which evokes a third force. To see within is to be dual. This is Descartes’ method of “doubt,” doubleness, being of two minds examining, questioning, the other. The Devil, the Double alongside God. The head is separated into *actor* (often a mere *talker*) and *seer*. A subtle scene, always tending to collapse, the actor slips into the I-slot, or the seer does so. Unless the third eye stabilizes its position and keeps the two subjective selves separate by keeping both in view, objectivity is lost, the “subject” becomes identified with whatever occupies “I.”

How can this separation be? A mystery, unknowable because to “know” it would be to collapse it into mere knowing. Man and woman, in being testicle and testament of truth, are and must remain third-force-blind. To *be* and to *do* without the distortion and self-weakening of imposed self-consciousness. This is the esoteric understanding of all traditional Ways, including the teaching that Gurdjieff brought.