**Meetings with Remarkable Men—Remastered** (1979)

Based on the book, “*Meetings with Remarkable Men*,”

by G. I. Gurdjieff (1963). Directed by Peter Brook

 *Meetings with Remarkable Men*is the story of a young man and his friends who undertake a search for the truth. Their travels are filled with obstacles and take them to many places where they meet many different people. They are finally told that they must find a secret society, the Samoung Brotherhood.

 What they learn from the Brotherhood is that human beings, as they are, cannot experience reality because they lack self-understanding. They essentially live in a waking sleep. They are basically “dancing in the dark.” The reason why human beings sleepwalk through life is that they lack an understanding of who they are, both as a human being and as an individual. With self-understanding comes a new level of existence.

 Gurdjieff believes that human beings come in three types. Some focus on the body; others focus on their emotions; and yet others focus on the mind. Self-understanding comes when the mind coordinates the body and the emotions, thereby bringing about self-awareness. Gurdjieff claims that self-understanding is actually not something new, but rather a recovery of something inside us that has been lying dormant. It is a “self-awakening.”

 Self-understanding is a result of developing the mind, but it is not merely a set of ideas. The result is a different experience of ourselves and the world around us. We are now able to experience reality, to live in the real world rather than sleepwalking through life. The human being who develops self-understanding is not a creature that has a particular set of ideas to be followed but a creature who experiences the world in an entirely new way. Religions call this Nirvana, Enlightenment, Moksha, Liberation, Salvation, Being at Peace, among other names. The names may be different, the path may be different, but the end result is a being that experiences the world differently, essentially a new person.

 For the human being who develops self-understanding, the ideas give us a different experience of life. Gurdjieff says of the self-aware life that in it morality is less important than developing a conscience. Morality is usually understood as following a set of rules or calculating the consequences of our actions. Having a conscience means becoming a different person. This reminds me of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche is often interpreted as saying that we should go beyond good and evil to a place where “anything goes.” But as I interpret Nietzsche, going beyond good and evil is similar to developing a conscience, becoming a different human being, one that recognizes the right thing to do without reference to rules or to calculating consequences. And having a conscience is something experienced rather than a set of ideas. Having a conscience means becoming a different person.

*Meetings with Remarkable Men*belongs to a popular genre of film where someone decides that there is more to life that what they presently experience. The person then sets out in search of a different way of understanding and experiencing the world. *Star Wars* (directed by George Lucas, 1977), for example, is the story of Luke Skywalker who leaves home to find the truth. He discovers, under the tutelage of the Jedi Master, Yoda, that there is a Force at work in the universe and that the Force has two sides, a light and a dark side. When he learns to experience the Force, he becomes a different person, one who is able to use the Force for good, rather than evil. In *The Matrix* (Directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999) Neo discovers that he is living in a world where he is imprisoned in an illusion to serve as a power source for the Matrix. He then undertakes a journey that shows him another world, one in which he becomes a different person, one who is free.

In *Jacob’s Ladder* (directed by Adrian Lyne, 1990) Jacob discovers that there is another realm of existence. As Louie tells him: “. . if you’re frightened of dying and . . . you’re holding on, you’ll see devils tearing your life away. But if you’ve made your peace, then the devils are really angels freeing you from the earth.” Eventually Jacob makes his peace and becomes a person who is free of the fear of death. Even in Harold Ramis’ 1993 film, *Ground Hog Day*, Phil undertakes a journey by reliving Ground Hog Day over and over. In the end the cynical, selfish, calculating Phil becomes someone who genuinely cares for others and is liberated from the cycle. Phil becomes a different person.

One might even see each of the movies in this “Sacred Cinema” series as a story of someone who is making a journey to seek the truth. The path is difficult, filled with obstacles but the journey ends in a new level of existence and understanding. The seekers of truth become different human beings. In the Christian vernacular, the seekers of truth are “born again.”

Dr. William L. Blizek is Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and

Co-Founder of the *Journal of Religion* *& Film*.