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## GURDJIEFF'S "SALAD"

Although Mr. G. liked to have by his place at table a big pile of fresh herbs, dill, parsley, tarragon, and so forth, which he distributed to special guests, his meals rarely included what we would term a salad. What he called his "salad" was a soupy, highly seasoned mixture of raw vegetables that was nearer to a chunky "gazpacho." Ripe tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, dill pickles, herbs and spices were marinated to a thick consistency, redolent of fresh dill, fruit juices and gingery chutney. It was usually offered in a small bowl and was especially succulent with the smoothing, soothing addition of Smetana [sour cream].

The "salad" was certainly a gastronomic and exotic treat, in its various forms, for it was never exactly the same. But nowadays it has become associated in many people's minds with memorable Gurdjieff incidents, personal experiences with him, or stories repeated, and it begins to take on an almost legendary reputation. As a result there have been many (to my mind, usually mistaken,) attempts to recreate it, because even if one does manage to find the perfect basic ingredients, achieve just the right balance of flavors and textures, judge the timing of the marinating — ?

And then — when the people you are making it for treat it like some sort of sacrament, the partaking of which will aid them on the path to consciousness — !

Or worse yet, at the other extreme, as new generations come along, there are youngsters present who don't understand what this strange cupful is and save it for dessert?!

All right — so much for my personal reservations! But I confess, I myself do sometimes bother to make it at home — because I love it!

Once at the Hotel Wellington in 1949, Mr. G. had us make a big jar of "salad" and because we had no refrigerator, it was put to marinate on a windowsill. It slipped and fell down a dozen floors, crashing, (thank goodness!) not onto the busy sidewalk, but onto the solid covering over the main entrance. Happily, no one was hurt, and despite a loud noise, it was ignored. But for months the resultant red splash was visible from the front windows, evoking gruesome imaginings in many a hotel guest.

Then when Mr. Gurdjieff left New York to return to Paris, a great quantity of carefully imitated "salad" was proudly and lovingly prepared for him, sealed in a large earthenware crock and delivered to his first-class cabin aboard the "Queen Mary." In mid-ocean, reacting badly to several days of warmth and engine vibration, it finally exploded with copious and horrendous results to Cunard's walls and furnishings.

A year or so ago, I was eagerly awaiting the publication of Luba Gurdjieff, a Memoir with Recipes that Mr. G.'s niece had told me she was writing.

Knowing she had worked in the kitchen at the Prieuré, I naturally hoped that she would give, finally, an authentic version of the recipe in print to which I could refer

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anyone else who asks how to make “The Salad.”

But when her book came out I found that my dear cousin had decided to concentrate on the dishes she perfected during many years in London running her famous “Luba’s Bistro.” Oh, she mentions briefly that: “This salad seems to be famous all on its own,” but then cops out with: “We had something like it lots of times, not for big occasions but when somebody was coming, somebody new to impress, you know. My Uncle would say in a big whisper, ‘That is my salad.’ He used to come into the kitchen and make it himself. He was tasting all the time. Valya and I and my auntie used to cut, cut, cut, and give to him. You can’t have a recipe for it. It costs the earth! You put anything you can find in that thing” and she recalls variations and additions: radishes, nuts, seeded green olives, chopped prunes, capers, apples, even “some tomato ketchup brought from England because we couldn’t find any in France.”

In 1962 the New York Gurdjieff groups tried to make “The Salad” for a January Thirteen celebration. Lise (Tracol Etievant), now a Movements teacher at the Foundation had experienced working in Mr. Gurdjieff’s Paris kitchen and was on hand to supervise the process with many dedicated helpers.

My godmother Annette Herter stood by noting carefully the procedure they followed to make three hundred forty-six cup-size servings for the evening at the Foundation, plus thirteen generous portions to be sent out to Mendham for people left on duty there. Here is what she wrote down:

### **RECIPE FOR MR. GURDJIEFF’S SALAD**

(Note: the, so to say, ‘center of gravity’ is the specially marinated dill pickle and that dill juice. Only real Greek or Armenian places have this because they make it for themselves, and it has to ordered in advance...)

#### **TO BUY:**

10 large Bermuda onions (chopped or grated)  
60 at least, firm but ripe tomatoes (diced large) with their juice  
10 medium cucumbers (diced large)  
40 specially marinated dill pickles, medium-sized (diced small)  
4 quarts of the juice of these pickles  
3 large bunches of fresh parsley  
A good quantity of fresh dill  
2 quarts of grapefruit juice  
2 quarts of good apple juice  
4 quarts of real chutney (Mr.G. used authentic Major Grey)  
3 small jars of Dijon or other strong mustard  
1 pound fine granulated sugar  
Seasoning: salt, pepper (black and hot, red in powder), imported paprika and curry powder.

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We worked in two teams. Each team used a plastic baby bathtub and put into their tub the same quantities (half the total) of the ingredients in the same order. When everything was in, the contents of both tube were transferred to porcelain (not metal) bowls and kept in a very cold place overnight and for the following day. It was served that evening in glass cups with spoons.

Sometimes, at the Wellington, Mr. Gurdjieff let us add twelve hard-boiled eggs cut in small pieces. He himself measured out everything with his hands except for the liquids which he measured with his eyes. We used to keep the leftover, if any, in an earthenware jug. It does ferment, but in a really cold place can be kept quite a few days.

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Well — yes — Thank you godmother Annette — This recipe may — in talented, conscientious hands — with suitably ripe ingredients — and someone with a flair for mathematics to adjust quantities (if you don't need exactly three hundred fifty-nine portions!) — aided by experienced veterans with experienced palates for tasting and correcting — etc. etc. etc— give respectable results.

It can be used as a base.

But my personal experience in making the salad and trying to live up to old taste and texture memories is that nowadays sensible adjustments need to be made.

Our American raw vegetables and fruits have too little flavor, especially in January, and give up too much liquid during the marinating. As a precaution, I personally replace the fruit juices and sugars that are listed, with undiluted frozen fruit juice concentrate. Pineapple or cranberry also work well besides the grapefruit or apple mentioned. I have never had to add any liquid after the marinating. In fact I even keep ready additional tomato concentrate to thicken the “sauce” and extra dill leaves, coarsely chopped, for last minute adjustments of texture as well as flavor and aroma. It must never be watery.

Most of the ingredients should blend into an opaque, liquid type of purée. Someone said recently: “Oh, kind of like a salsa!” but I guess it depends which kind of salsa you're used to. But the “body” of the salad should be recognizable, toothsome pieces of tomato and cucumber, so don't dice these too small since the marinating will shrink and soften them a lot. Try for half- to three-quarter inch pieces.

Since “ripe but firm tomatoes” aren't always so easy to find, I suggest a larger number of the smaller “plum tomato” variety which usually have a pleasant taste and hold up better to the hours of marinating, just as large watery cucumbers don't keep their texture as well as crisp fresh gherkins, or “Kirbys.”

Ideally, as ripeness is so important, one should buy extra quantities in advance, let

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them ripen, and carefully discard bad ones.

Thirty years ago they may have needed those “special home-made dill pickles” and they were difficult to find, but now very respectable substitutes are available in most big supermarkets. They’ll be still better if treated for several days by adding extra handfuls of fresh dill that can then be retrieved, chopped up and added to the final mixture.

Bermuda onions? Whatever happened to them? No matter! Sweet Spanish or Vidalia onions are fine.

Most important, expensive though it is in the supermarket, one just can’t stint on real Major Grey chutney or a very cleverly copied homemade substitute, or a half-and-half mixture of both. But I found it possible to order large jars very reasonably from a wholesaler. After all, economy as well as quality was characteristic of Mr. G.’s hospitality and generosity.

Authentic Major Grey chutney contains large firm slices of green mango in a thick syrup. So it is a good idea to empty the jars into a bowl and then, with big scissors, cut those slices into fine, small pieces so as to distribute them throughout each spoonful. It is their gingery piquancy that gives a subtle heat and depth of flavor. It is much preferable to the palate-numbing amounts of mustard or cayenne pepper used by some eager but inexperienced cooks being guided by “old timers” who may, I’m sorry to say, no longer have much taste sensitivity.

This aromatic spiciness is wonderful when a generous amount of sour cream is stirred into it. For large groups, since these days some people avoid cream, I suggest putting a single generous dollop on each serving which can then be blended in or put aside as wished, topped with a decorative sprig of fresh dill.

So your list of ingredients should include, per serving, a good tablespoon of sour cream and a piece of dill, washed, dried and trimmed, to be added at the last minute. Note: Two- or three-inch pieces of crusty French bread are a welcome accompaniment.

It isn’t always easy to achieve the cold temperature needed for the night’s marinating, but be warned, don’t put your salad outside unattended in winter. If it freezes, you will have a useless unpleasant mush.

On one of my trips to South America, remembering that the US customs allow Americans to bring home one bottle of “booze” duty free, I figured that from Brazil, the land of coffee, the obvious souvenir would be a real Brazilian coffee liqueur. But amazingly I couldn’t find one anywhere. They don’t produce it but import from Europe something made by Bols, or Kahlua from Mexico.

Since our Work groups down there are always in need of funds, I immediately suggested that this could be a good money-making project for them: make and sell,

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especially to tourists at the airport, their own local brand of “Licor de Caffè.”

I don’t think they really believed me or ever even tried it, but my experimenting for them developed a recipe which is luscious, quick and easy, and very inexpensive to make. The only costly ingredient is good vanilla.

My friends all ask for it at Christmas or as their “hostess gift” when they invite me.

So here’s how:

**SIMPLE IMITATION KAHLUA**

or

**DUSHKA’S COFFEE LIQUEUR**

Boil two cups of strong coffee (Of course to the Brazil Group I specified real Brazilian coffee, but any good one will do) with four cups of sugar until it is slightly viscous. Add another cup of hot coffee in which you have dissolved two ounces of instant coffee. If you use a whole vanilla bean, add it now. Let cool.

When quite cool, add two cups of the cheapest, tasteless vodka or brandy, and mix well. If you decide to use vanilla essence, add about three tablespoons now and Caramba! You already have about a bottleful ready to enjoy. If you use a real vanilla bean you’ll have to wait for about a month for your mix to steep.

So recycle some bottles, multiply the recipe as needed, design a catchy name and label, and go into business!

An additional sales gimmick for Americans might be a variation I once tried for an elderly Italian couple who loved my “product” but had been told by their doctor to cut down their caffeine intake. So for them at Christmas I made a few bottles following my usual recipe but substituted decaffeinated supermarket coffee, both regular grind for brewing and powdered instant, and it worked out just fine.

We could use a sugar substitute and advertise “Diet Kahlua”! ...or...??

**As Mr. Gurdjieff often said: “Send me nine percent!”**

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