

## John G. Bennett

### General

"**John Godolphin Bennett** (8 June 1897 – 13 December 1974) was a British scientist, technologist, industrial research director, and author. He is best known for his books on psychology and spirituality, particularly on the teachings of [G. I. Gurdjieff](#). Bennett met Gurdjieff in [Istanbul](#) in October 1920 and later helped to co-ordinate [the work of Gurdjieff](#) in England after the guru had moved to Paris. He also was active in starting the British section of the [Subud](#) movement, and co-founded its British headquarters.

Bennett was born in London, England; educated at [King's College School](#), London; [Royal Military Academy, Woolwich](#); [School of Military Engineering, Chatham](#); and the [School of Oriental Studies](#), London.

He was a Fellow of the Institute of Fuel, London, from 1938 onwards; Chairman, Conference of Research Associations, 1943–1945; Chairman, Solid Fuel Industry, [British Standards Institution](#), 1937–1942; Chairman and Director, Institute for the comparative study of History, Philosophy, and the Sciences, [Kingston upon Thames](#), 1946–1959." (Source [Wikipedia](#))

### Gurdjieff and Ouspensky

"After the First World War and the [Russian Revolution](#), many displaced people passed through Constantinople en route to the West. Part of Bennett's job was to monitor their movements. Among them were [G.I. Gurdjieff](#) and [P.D. Ouspensky](#), whom Bennett met through [Prince Sabahaddin](#). This reformist thinker had introduced him to a wide range of religious and occultist systems, including [Theosophy](#) and [Anthroposophy](#). Bennett became determined to pursue the search for a deeper reality. He had been profoundly impressed with Gurdjieff's ideas about the arrangement of the human organism and the possibility of a man's transformation to a higher state of being, and would later dedicate much of his life to the elaboration and dissemination of those ideas.

Gurdjieff and Ouspensky moved on to Europe, and Bennett remained in Turkey, committed to his work and fascinated by the political and social developments in Turkey. The sultanate fell and on October 29, 1923, the Turkish republic was proclaimed. Bennett approved permission for [M. Kemal Atatürk](#) to enter [Samsun](#), where he started the Turkish Independence struggle.<sup>[2]</sup>

Gurdjieff founded his [Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man](#) at the Château Le Prieuré in Fontainebleau-Avon, south of [Paris](#), in October 1922. Bennett visited in the summer of 1923, spending three months at the institute. This experience further convinced him that Gurdjieff had profound knowledge and understanding of techniques by which man can achieve transformation. Gurdjieff encouraged Bennett to stay longer, but Bennett was short of money and so felt obliged to return to work in England. Though Bennett expected to return to the group soon, he would not meet Gurdjieff again until 1948.

Bennett served the British government as a consultant on the Middle East, and interpreter at the 1924 conference in London intended to settle disputes between Greece and Turkey. He was invited to stand for parliament, but he chose instead to give his personal studies precedence over his public life.

He joined Ouspensky's groups, and continued to study Gurdjieff's system with them for fifteen years. Ouspensky broke off all contact with Gurdjieff himself in the early 1920s." (Source [Wikipedia](#))

### Subud

"In 1956, Bennett was introduced to [Subud](#), a spiritual movement originating in [Java](#) (an island in the [Republic of Indonesia](#)). For a number of reasons, Bennett felt that Gurdjieff had expected the arrival of a very important teaching from Indonesia. In spite of deep reservations, in November 1956 Bennett allowed himself to be 'opened' by Husein Rofé, a native Englishman [\[3\]](#) (1922-2008) who had studied in the East. Rofé used the [latihan](#) (the primary spiritual exercise used in Subud). ...

Bennett regarded the latihan as being akin to what the mystics call diffuse contemplation. He also felt that the latihan has the power to awaken a person's conscience, the spiritual faculty that Gurdjieff regarded as necessary for salvation. Bennett sent an invitation to Subud's founder, [Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo](#) (1901-1987) (aka [Pak Subuh](#)), to come to England. Pak Subuh came to Coombe Springs, where all Bennett's pupils were given the opportunity to be 'opened'.

Soon Bennett was instrumental in spreading Subud practice all over the world. He travelled extensively to spread the Subud exercise, sometimes in the company of Pak Subuh. Bennett translated Pak Subuh's lectures into various languages. His introductory book on Subud, titled *Concerning Subud* (1959), sold thousands of copies worldwide.

By 1960, Bennett had concluded that the practice of 'latihan' alone was inadequate, and he resumed the work that he had learned from Gurdjieff. By 1962, Bennett left the Subud organization, feeling that a return to the Gurdjieff method was necessary. " (Shorted Source [Wikipedia](#))

### International Academy for Continuous Education

"By 1969 the company which had been formed to explore structural communication – Structural Communication Systems Ltd. – was floundering and Bennett's health, too, was in a dangerous state. After his recovery, Bennett looked afresh at the situation and the conviction came to him that he should take up the work that Gurdjieff had started at the Prieuré in 1923 and been forced to abandon. He would start a School of the Fourth Way.

Bennett became very interested in young people, especially those who surfaced from the social and cultural turmoil of the 1960s with serious questions about the significance of life but with few satisfactory answers. As part of his research, Bennett attended the rock music festival on the [Isle of Wight](#) in 1970. The outcome was the establishment of an "academy" to teach some of what he had learned in trying to discover the "sense and aim of life, and of human life in particular."

On the twenty fifth anniversary of the Institute, in April 1971, a jubilee celebration on the theme of The Whole Man was held. In a very short time, primarily in the USA, Bennett recruited many students and in October 1971 the International Academy for Continuous Education was inaugurated in Sherborne, Gloucestershire.

Bennett had begun this enterprise with no programme in mind and with only a handful of helpers. Initially, his ideas had involved running a school in the midst of 'life-conditions' in Kingston with two dozen students, but contact with a young representative of the New Age Movement in the USA persuaded him to think in terms of larger numbers and a relatively isolated locale in the countryside. Bennett realized that work on the land (which he considered to be an essential part of teaching the proper relationship between mankind and the rest of creation) would require a

larger number. Both Hasan Shushud and Idries Shah made recommendations that, for the most part, he disregarded.

He quickly attracted one hundred pupils, and in 1971, with the support of the Institute for Comparative Study, he inaugurated the International Academy for Continuous Education, in the village of Sherborne, [Gloucestershire](#), England.

The name was chosen "to indicate on the one hand its Platonic inspiration and on the other to emphasise that it was to offer a teaching for the whole life of the men and women who came to it."

As he tells the story in his autobiography, although various spiritual leaders had urged him at various points in his life to strike out on his own path, it was not until near the end of his years that he felt fully confident to assume the mantle of the teacher. Bennett relates how Gurdjieff had told him in 1923 that one day Bennett would "follow in his footsteps and take up the work he had started at Fontainebleau." In 1970, following the promptings of a still, small voice from within that said, "You are to found a school",

Bennett proposed that there should be five experimental courses each of ten months duration. The courses proved fruitful, and many people have continued, as he had hoped, to work with the ideas and methods he presented.

In April 1972, the Sufi Hasan Lutfi Shushud (1901-1988)<sup>[4]</sup> came to stay for a few months at the Academy. Shushud and Bennett had met in Turkey ten years previously, and Shushud had visited Bennett's Surrey home in 1968, at which time he initiated Bennett into his wordless, universal zikr. Bennett concluded that Shushud's wordless universal zikr produced results similar to those of the latihan, while omitting many of the risks attendant on 'opening' people through Subud. Bennett observed that occasionally there are people 'opened' through Subud who experience some harsh and/or dangerous effects (for which they are unprepared) during the operation of the latihan. This observation led him to have reservations about the supposed absolute safety of the latihan for the general public. As a result of these reservations, Bennett became increasingly attracted to the [Khwajagan](#) (Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia) as presented in the teachings of Shushud. In 1973 Bennett's publisher Alick Bartholomew commissioned Bennett and Shushud to co-write a book whose tentative title was *Gurdjieff and the Masters of Wisdom*. Before the book was ready for publication Shushud pulled out of the project, telling Bennett that he did not trust the publisher, apparently on the grounds that Bartholomew had deducted state income tax from the advance payment for the book. However, eventually it became known that what Shushud was really objecting to was Bennett's contention in the book that Gurdjieff had established personal contact with the Khwajagan, and that therefore it is very likely that at least some of Gurdjieff's major teachings are based directly on what he had learned from the Khwajagan. Due to Shushud's disagreements with Bennett over this issue, Bennett ended up dividing the proposed book into two separate books, titled respectively *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (1973) and *The Masters of Wisdom* (1975) (not published until after Bennett's death). However, in spite of Shushud's disagreements with Bennett over this issue, it appears that Bennett nevertheless (in the end) borrowed heavily from Shushud's teachings on the Khwajagan (probably against Shushud's wishes), in order to bring his book on that subject (*The Masters of Wisdom*) to a successful conclusion.

There are a number of mysterious things about Shushud, who certainly had unusual powers. Bennett makes a brief reference to these in his book *Witness*, and many others have attested to them. While criticising Bennett's methods, Shushud impressed on him that "Your only home is the Absolute Void". However, Shushud eventually agreed that what Bennett was doing for young Western seekers was more suitable for them than his own strict methods of fasting and zikr.

In the same year (1973), Bennett began editing Gurdjieff's Third Series of writings, *Life is Real Only Then When I Am*, undertaking its publication on behalf of the Gurdjieff family (who were having difficulties in dealing with the Gurdjieff Foundation). He also revisited Turkey, meeting with Hajji [Muzaffer Özak](#) al-Jerrahi<sup>[5]</sup> (1916-1985), the Grand Shaykh of the Halveti-Jerrahi Sufi Order.

During the period of the second course at the Academy, a Theravada Buddhist monk and teacher from Cambodia named [Bhante Dharmawara](#)<sup>[6]</sup> (1889-1999) came to Sherborne at Bennett's invitation. During his visit Dharmawara introduced meditation techniques that continue to be practised by many people.

Other visitors to the Academy were Süleyman Dede<sup>[7]</sup> (1904-1985), head of the [Mevlevi](#) Order in Konya, as well as Süleyman Dede's disciple [Reshad Feild](#) (1934-2016). Idries Shah paid a brief visit during the first year, but soon left, with harsh views on the attitudes and disposition of the students.

Throughout the period of the Institute's existence, Bennett had been toying with the idea of founding a spiritual community. He saw the [Sermon on the Mount](#) as a document describing the true community. His contact with Idries Shah combined this in his mind with the possibility of establishing a Power House where 'enabling energies' could be concentrated. He set his sights on some kind of self-sufficient community, populated by Sherborne graduates, to evolve out of the school. He was profoundly influenced by contemporary ideas, such as those of [Schumacher](#), about the need for alternative technology and by the argument of conservationists for intelligent, ecologically sound agriculture. He was also greatly impressed that his spiritual hero and inner teacher, [Khwaja Ubaidallah Ahrar](#) (15th century) had turned to farming after his period of training.

The soaring price of land in the UK led to Bennett's interest in starting something in the USA. In 1974, he signed an agreement whereby the Institute loaned \$100,000 to a newly formed society for the foundation of a psychokinetic community. He signed this document shortly before his death on December 13, 1974.

The [Claymont Society](#) was founded to attempt to carry out Bennett's vision, but without the help of his guidance.

In the summer of 1974, he visited the [Maharishi Mahesh Yogi](#) in Rome to question him about Transcendental Meditation and his interpretation of the [Bhagavad Gita](#). Bennett had been initiated into TM several years before and first met the Maharishi in 1959. He disputed Maharishi's presentation of the Gita in which he eliminated the need for sacrifice and suffering.

In the last year of his life, he gradually made it known to those working with him, that his own personal task centred on the creation of a way of religious worship that would be accessible to men and women of the West who were lacking in religious formation. During this period he made experiments with the Islamic [namaz](#) and Sufi [zikr](#).

The teachings he developed in his last years were recorded and published in a series of books put together by Anthony Blake. He showed that at last he was independent of Gurdjieff and had his own understanding of the spiritual world, based on a radical questioning of all current assumptions.

Bennett died on Friday, December 13, 1974, shortly after the start of the fourth course. That course, and the fifth, were completed by his wife, working with a few of his most experienced pupils." (Shorted Source [Wikipedia](#))

## References

1. *Witness: The Story of a Search (Autobiography)* (1974: *Omen Press, Tucson, Arizona; First U.S. ed.*). *Hodder & Stoughton, 1962. ISBN 0-912358-48-3.*
2. [Certificate Photo](#)<sup>[*permanent dead link*]</sup>
3. Husein Rofé (May 3, 1922 - February 2008) - His name originally was Peter Rofé. He was born in [Manchester, England](#), and he died in Singapore.
4. Hasan Lütfi Şuşud (Hasan Lutfi Shushud) (June 8, 1901 - January 1, 1988). His year of birth is given in many sources as 1902, which is incorrect. Also, his middle name Lütfi (Lutfi) is misspelled "Lufti" in many sources. See: (1) <http://www.readingrumi.com/hasan-shushud> (2) <https://www.odakitap.com/hasan-lutfi-susud>
5. His name is also spelled: Hajji (Hadji) Muzaffer Özak Ashki al-Jerrahi (1916 - February 12, 1985). Some sources give his year of death as 1986, which is incorrect.
6. Bhante Dharmawara (February 12, 1889 - June 26, 1999) - Other forms of his name are: (1) Bellong Mahathera (2) Mahathera Vira Dharmawara (3) Samdach Vira Dharmawara Bellong Mahathera.
7. Süleyman (Suleiman) Dede (1904 - January 19, 1985) - A more complete form of his name is Süleyman Hayati Loras Dede.

## See also

- [J.G. Bennett Foundation](#)
- [Video Section about J. G. Bennett](#)