

The Inner Purpose of the Theosophical Society **by Annie Besant**

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of the European Section of the Theosophical Society

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It falls to my lot to close this Tenth Annual Meeting of the European Section of the Society, and to close it by saying a few words on the inner purpose of the movement, on the future for which it is preparing, on the work which lies ready to its hand. You have heard from the President-Founder of the Society something of the road that lies now behind us something of the hopes that inspired those who on the physical plane gave the first impulse to the movement. You have heard from our brother from India something of the dangers of the road along which we are walking, something of the great ideal which inspires the hearts of all true Theosophists, as of all spiritually-minded men and women.

We may go a little further along these lines of thought that have been traced for us, and see how the inner purpose answers to the outer work, how the impulse from the spiritual plane came to incarnate itself in the world around us, how the true impulse came that made the Society, from Those who gave it and who give it its life, Those who sent it out on its blessed mission to the world, how They chose the time and the agents for accomplishing once more on earth the work so often begun and still unended - the work of sending the spiritual herald to announce a new step forward in the evolution of humanity, to mark out the pathway along which men should travel in accomplishing the stage thus opened, sounding the note which was to dominate the whole, stamping on it the mark which was to be the sign of the growing, making the principles known on which the form should be moulded, and giving to the world the life which was to find a new body on the material plane.

That inner purpose of the Society may be said to be twofold: to the world at large, and to the members of the Society. To the world at large to herald the forward step to which I have just alluded; to the members of the Society to use them as the pioneers of that forward movement, making possible the road along which mankind should tread, hewing out, as it were, in front the path, smoothing that path with their own feet, giving their lives to make it possible - nay, even to make it comparatively easy - for those who should follow them. For as it is the glory of the Theosophical Society to herald the onward movement of the race, so it is the privilege of its early members to bear something of the burden which shall make that same burden lighter for the race that is to be born; to have the glory of the struggle though not of the victory; the glory of the sowing though not of the reaping; the scattering abroad of the seed of progress, leaving to others the glad days of harvest; content if in their day and generation they may make it possible that the great life beyond shall pour in fuller measure over the world so longing for its coming, and if they may be able by what they may learn - still more by what, having learned, they may practice - to raise in front of the race that is coming the ideal of a noble humanity, a humanity more divine than that which yet we have touched, making the ideal which the coming race shall partly realise, preparing the material out of which the statue of a divine humanity shall be hewn.

How shall that be done ?

Glancing at the past, trying to learn the lessons of history that lie behind us, we see everywhere in history that when a new growth is coming to man, when a new stage of evolution is approaching and man stands on the threshold of a forward movement, that then from the great Elder Brothers of the race, from Those mighty Ones who are the spiritual Guardians of humanity, from Those who offer in Their own most sacred persons the perfect ideal of man become divine, where strength and tenderness, where wisdom and compassion are wedded in one perfect form and life - from Them, from Them alone, comes ever the impulse that guides humanity forward. And at every critical period of history, when a new race or family is to be born, there comes from Them alone the first impulse for the new advance, and also the outline of the form in which that advancing life is to be incarnate. Look back into the past and you will see that with the birth of each great family of our Aryan race a new religion has been given to the world, the religion before the people. You will find that the religion thus proclaimed by some Great One, taking birth among men as the Founder of the coming creed, you will find that in each case He gives His religion for the moulding of a new civilisation, for the shaping of a new type of humanity, for the building and the forming of a fresh body for the life, and that in the main points of the religion you can foretell the main outline of the dawning civilisation. That is true, as you will find if you care to study alike in the history of India where the first family of the Aryan race took root, or in the neighbouring country of Chaldea, where another shoot took its place and left its life and wisdom, or westward still, when you come to Greece and Rome of the Keltic race, with its great traditions of religion and philosophy - moulding the civilisation of beauty in Greece and the civilisation of law in Rome. You find the same with the later-born western nations, who received even ere they lay in their cradle the great teaching of the Christ, to be to them what the teachings of His predecessors were to the nations to whom they were given, and to shape the western civilisation as the Others had shaped the civilisations that went before. And when we find in history that the coming of a new spiritual impulse has ever meant a forward step for man, when we find that the nature of that impulse has outlined the nature of the coming evolution - then what must we think when we see come another mighty impulse from the same immortal source, and what can we learn as we scan the characteristics of that impulse, as to the nature of the growth which lies next in space and time before the advancing feet of man ?

One great difference comes at once - springing as it were before our eyes - when we look at the difference between this movement and the others that have gone before it - a difference so great, so vital, so fundamental, that if we can see its meaning, some of the steps at least become clear before us; that if we can assimilate its significance, we have a veritable touchstone whereby we may test everything around us in science, in philosophy, and in politics, an Ithuriel spear as it were which we can use to touch every form that comes before us, to see whether within the form is hidden an angel of light, or whether there is veiled within some dangerous misleading demon who would draw humanity astray from the path which it ought to tread.

What is that mark, that unique characteristic ?

Every great Teacher coming to the world has brought as His priceless gift to man some new proclamation of spiritual truth in the form of a new religion. This movement alone, of all the great religious impulses of the past, brings no new religion to mankind, proclaims in no new formal shape the world-message, calls no men to come apart from other faiths and other creeds and place themselves within a pale, which, while it shuts them in for special teaching, shuts others out as not members of the faith, as outside its special proclamation. Alone of all the impulses it speaks, not of a new religion, but of the common basis

of all religions alike. Differing from all that went before, it does not build a new church, it does not found a new philosophy, it does not raise a wall of separation round those who accept it, those who reject it being without. It proclaims one basis for all. It teaches religion, and not a religion; that which is common to all, not that which shall be special to a new church or a new faith. It makes its basis in the unity of all its forerunners, so that it joins all together instead of adding a new one to the many faiths of the world. That is its great mark, that its unique characteristic- one belief for all in one spiritual life, one common evolution, one goal which all may approach, and approach by different roads. Every road right for those who walk in it; every road divine, and men able to reach God therein.

So at the beginning of our race was it stated, and now practically that is put before the world as the stage that it should try to realise; every man remaining in his own road, every man remaining in his own religion, no converting from one faith equally divine to another, no proselytising in one faith by another; all faiths equally divine, for all have one source and seek one goal; every man of every race right in his own religion and only wrong when he denies the inspiration of the religion of his brothers; right whenever he raises loving hands in worship, wrong whenever he pushes out angry hands in rejection; right whenever in his worship he knows that all languages are one in the ears of the Divine that hears them, wrong only when he thinks his voice the only one that can pierce the heavens and reach the divine throne; wrong when he denies to his brothers the same Fatherhood that he claims as his own.

The unity of every faith that loves God and serves man, that is the message which comes to the world as the inner purpose of the Theosophical movement: to draw all faiths together, to see them all as sisters, not as rivals, to join all religions in one golden chain of divine love and human service. That is the purpose of our movement all the world over - to reverence and serve religion wherever we find it, and to pierce through the varieties of the outer faith to the unity of the hidden life.

That, then, our work. But if that be our work, then are we not false to it in its most essential meaning, if anywhere we carry strife instead of peace and speak words of exclusion instead of words of love? They only are the true Theosophists, they only reflect in small degree the spirit of the great Brotherhood of Teachers, they only are worthy messengers, however feeble, of their divine message who carry out the spirit of brotherhood amid all the warring creeds, and who not only carry the message of peace, but live the peace they teach,, and show the ideal of brotherhood in life as thoroughly as they proclaim its reality in words.

But what does it foretell for the future? It foretells the dawning of a civilisation where unity shall be the keynote instead of strife; where co-operation shall be the means of life rather than competition; where beyond the development of the individual in the combative intellect, the spiritual unity shall begin to dawn in the eyes and in the lives of men. For as surely as this truth is given in spiritual form, as surely as the existence of that spiritual brotherhood of man is a fundamental truth in nature, so also it is true that the life must find its fit form in which to incarnate, and that deeper understanding, closer bonds, more real love between nations now apart, shall tread in the wake of the Theosophical movement, and shall bring in due course of time to the earth we live in a peace which at present lives only in the higher regions of the universe. That is the promise which it lifts before our eyes, despite the struggle of the warring world; that the hope - full of peace and bliss - which it points to in the future beyond the battle-field and the massacre, beyond the poverty and the misery, beyond the heart-break of the present, into the heart-joy of the future. The work to which we are called is to form a nucleus of souls at one, to show by our lives the unity we proclaim, to live love in a world of hatred, to live peace in a world of strife. That, and nothing

less than that, the high mission to which we are called; that, and nothing less than that, the noble duty that is bound upon our shoulders ; and just in proportion as we live it, we shall make it possible for others ; just in proportion as our lives are its preachers, will the sermon take effect on the hearts of men.

But if you realise that, what can shake you in your devotion to this movement ? What can trouble your serene confidence in the certainty of the joy that lies beyond ? The Society in its outer form may be shaken over and over again. It is well that it should be shaken from time to time, for how can the weak and the strong be separated - as they must be separated for a while until the hardest of the battle is over - save by so shaking the Society that only those whose vision is clear, whose hearts are brave, whose wills are strong, shall be able to stay within the pioneer band who are hewing out the road to the future ? The place of the weak is not in the forefront of the struggle. The place of the weak is not in the worst shock of the combat. Rather, easier strife for them, an easier pathway, sufficiently difficult to draw out their strength, but not difficult enough to drive them to despair. For those who are strong, as we heard just now, for them the place of hardest fight and keenest struggle, and those who would be the pioneers of the future must be willing to bear and strong to endure. Theirs the place within the forward rank of the movement, making possible for the weaker the treading of the up-hill path.

Matters it then to us, if this be true, that our thought shall spread everywhere without our name? Rightly did our President tell us that all over the world these thoughts were moving, and that within the limits of the different faiths you find the Theosophical ideas proclaimed. That is the testimony to the reality of our work, that the only reward that it is well that we should look for - not that we shall be known as leaders, but that the ideas may permeate throughout the civilisation in which we are living; not that our names shall stand high as teachers, not that our names shall be known as thinkers, but that the teaching shall spread everywhere, no matter what lips proclaim it; that the knowledge shall spring up on every side, no matter by whom that knowledge at any time be given. Enough to sow; let anyone have the name of the sowing to whom it may happen to come; let those who can only work when they are praised, let them have the credit of spreading the ideas everywhere. Let us be content with the noble work of labouring, so that the ideas may go everywhere, and let every church take them as its own - they *are* its own if it only knew the treasures that its Teacher gave it. Ours enough to point out where they may be found, and let others hold them up before the eyes of the world. Those who are able to reach the people, let them take the truth and speak it, so that everywhere its sound may be heard. When from Christian pulpit a Theosophical truth is taught, let all our hearts see in that the reward for which we have been labouring. If our Master's truth be told, what matters it who shall tell it? If any eyes see His beauty, what matters whose hand it is that lets fall the veil ?

For those of you who are members of this great Society, who hold it the highest privilege that Karma could bring to you to be one of the workers in this movement for humanity, for you what is the future offered you, for you what the prize of the high calling which is in the far future to-day ? To know what Those who have gone before us have known, so that our knowledge may be used for the helping of the ignorance of the world; to tread the path which Those have trodden before us, that narrow, ancient path that is opened for us by the Sages and can only be shut to us by our own weakness, by our own folly, by our own sin. No other hand in heaven or earth can close the gateway of that path against any human soul; only its own hand can close it, for thus hath spoken the law. To you the path is clear in sight, proclaimed again in the hearing of all. Coming into the Society you take, as it were, your first step in that direction of which the ending is to be one of the Saviours of the world.

What magic lies in those four words ! What music in the inspiration which they bring to the human soul! To be a world-Saviour - what does it mean ? It means that all the world's ignorance is less because you know; that all the world's sin is less because you are pure; that all the world's sorrow is less because you are sharing it; that all the world's weakness is less because you lend to it your strength. Struggle to be strong, not in order that you may be strong, but that world may be stronger. Struggle to be wise, not that you may be wise, but that the world may be the wiser. Struggle to be pure, not that you may be pure, but that the whole world may be nearer to the purity that is divine. Care not for your own joy, for your own happiness, for your own satisfaction. Care only for the upward treading of the world and the little help you may bring to it. You must either be lifted or lift. You must either be a clog or wings to lift the world upward on its road. That is the great choice which lies before you in coming into this movement.

Your Self has chosen that destiny even if your brain as yet knows it not. That your brain may know it as your Self knows it, that your intellect may recognise it as your Self has recognised it - that may be the outcome of your worship, of your devotion, of your learning; for this only is worth living for -that the world maybe better because we have been living in it; this only is the one crown of humanity - that the man crowns himself with thorns in order that others may be crowned with life immortal.

THE THIRD OBJECT OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

A MEMBER asked me a few days ago :

Have we not as a Society rather neglected our Third Object? Very few have investigated the powers latent in man at first-hand. Is not the time coming when the Third Object should receive more attention?

We, who are members of the Society, have we attended to it ? Perhaps not very assiduously. There are obviously two ways of investigating. People may make experiments for themselves, or they may study the experiments made by others. The latter method is that which is usually employed in the study of most sciences. It is only a few of us who take up any science and actually experimentalize in it. All of us at school long ago learnt something of astronomy; but I hardly imagine that many of you bought a large telescope and went into the study at first-hand. It happens that I did ; therefore I may say that I have a little first-hand knowledge of astronomy. Naturally, most of my information on the subject comes from books; I cannot pretend to have made astronomical investigations in the sense of trying to discover anything new; but I have at least confirmed something of what I have read in the books; and most people do not even go so far as that. I suppose that it is the same with many sciences. A person may know a great deal about any subject without having actually tackled it himself.

So you will be doing something in order to learn about the powers latent in man if you read carefully what has been written of them, if you try to understand what these powers are, and to convince yourself of their reality by studying the enormous mass of printed evidence. Of course, you can do a good deal more if you take the thing in hand and try for yourself. A number of our members have been encouraged to do this, and a great deal of instruction has been given in regard to meditation, which is one of the safest of the methods of approaching this subject experimentally. But not all methods are safe; we have to remember that investigation at first-hand into the development of psychic powers has its dangers, and the tradition of our Society has always been to discourage people from rash experiments - I think quite

rightly.

Many books have been written upon Yoga practices - some of them, I fear, by people who have little practical acquaintance with the subject; and in a number of cases harm has resulted from ill-judged attempts to follow the directions given. I am told that there are Indian Yogis who give instruction in these arts ; but the Yogi usually teaches only those who are definitely his pupils and follow him everywhere. He therefore has his experimenters always under observation, and can at once check anyone who may be running into danger; whereas the man who learns his Yoga from a book has no such safeguard. I have myself received a large number of applications for help from persons who have seriously injured their brains, their nervous system, and their constitution generally, by plunging blindfold into this kind of psychism; and, sadly, often no effective help can be given. It is so easy to lose one's balance - so terribly difficult to regain it. That is why our beloved President has forbidden the sale of such books at any of the Theosophical shops under her direction.

The President at least has been most careful not to give any dangerous advice, and has explained to her pupils that they should at once stop all meditation if any dangerous symptoms appear - even such as a headache. Those to whom psychic unfoldment comes fairly naturally, who would therefore be in very little danger, have been able to make progress along this line. But no one wants to be responsible for people risking their lives or their reason, and consequently those who know something about the subject have been exceedingly careful as to what they said. I personally made no attempt in that direction at all, until it was suggested to me by my Master that I might with advantage make certain experiments. I took that to mean that he would watch over them, so I made the experiments and the endeavour succeeded ; but I dare not advise any other person to do the same thing. I suppose the Master satisfied himself that in my case it could be done safely. I must not describe the method - indeed, I promised not to do so; but I have written what little I may as to the later stages of the training in my booklet *How Theosophy Came to Me*.

Still, there are certain things that we can all try without danger. The scheme of meditation which I have suggested in the final chapter of several of my books is quite harmless; but remember that you must not overstrain. These operations do involve a certain strain, whatever line is adapted; but they should not involve direct pain of any sort. In ail such cases, we are working either with the higher vehicles altogether, or if we are using chiefly the physical brain, we are trying to make it do a little more than it is intended to do; and that is always a dangerous thing to attempt, so it must be done with the greatest care, and very gradually.

" Have we neglected our Third Object ? " We have always been told that the development of psychic faculty is not a necessity till a certain rather advanced stage is reached. Obviously, then, what we have to do first of all is to work at our character. Most of us find that there is still something to do along that line. My own plan, as I have already said, was to wait until I was directly told by my Master to move. That is absolutely safe, of course. Many of us might be willing to run a small risk for the sake of making some definite attempt in that direction; but that is, naturally, a man's own responsibility.

It is an uncertain undertaking, for no one can tell when any result will be reached. Some people with slight effort obtain at least indications that psychic powers may open; others try for a long time without any observable effect. At any time the man steadily working may break through, and no one ever knows how near he may be to success. On the other hand, we are bound to tell enquirers that we do not know how long or how difficult it will be. No person undertaking to train another could *promise* anything; even if

he could see the past karma of the applicant, it would still be impossible to speak with certainty.

The intermediate stage of carefully studying the subject is always open to us, and is always useful. Study the case of the people in whom such powers are developed. I myself learnt a good deal about such things before I made any attempt to advance in them myself. I went into the Highlands of Scotland to examine cases of what is called "second-sight". That is a bad name for it - it is really foresight. I examined very many cases, and absolutely satisfied myself that this strange foresight is possible, though without trying any experiments of my own. I think such a course might be called study of the powers latent in man, and of course it is open to anyone.

Then there are experiments in telepathy or psychometry; many people can do something in that way with a little practice. Then there is always spiritualism, although the latter is chiefly concerned with trying to prove the return of the dead to earth. A great deal in mediumship, however, indicates the possession of latent powers by man; though spiritualists preach the idea from another side, and wish a man to be absolutely passive and lay himself open to influences of all sorts, which we consider unsafe.

The line recommended to us has always been to try to develop your own powers; to be active, not passive. It is true that the spiritualist tries first of all to engage a "spirit-guide" - some dead person who will act as a sort of guardian to the medium, and drive away all evil influences, while leaving him open to what is good. But this is not always sufficient; I have seen one case, at least, in which a spirit-guide was absolutely overpowered by an evil entity; and if a certain great person had not been physically present at that séance, it would have meant death for one or two people. So the spiritualistic method of investigation is not to be unreservedly recommended.