

AN ENDURING VISION

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From 1875 to 1896 the Objects of the Theosophical Society were progressively modified in order to embody, in their wording, the organization's essential purpose and aim. The fact that they have remained unchanged for over one hundred years, in spite of the fact that several attempts to change them were made over the years, is clear evidence of their enduring significance. They clearly represent what the Society stands for, the nature of its work, the Society's relevance to the progress of humanity and to the inner transformation of the human being. They can therefore be seen as visible expressions of that Divine Wisdom which the Society seeks both to embody and to serve.

The first Object is 'to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour'. A few people haven't taken exception to the word 'brotherhood' and therefore refused to have anything to do with the TS while accusing it of sexism. But a close examination of the wording of our first Object clearly indicates its all-inclusiveness, for it embraces the whole of humanity without any distinctions. It is evident that only a mind without barriers such as prejudice, bias, self-importance, and pride, can really contribute to form such a nucleus for, as N. Sri Ram wrote, brotherhood is the only right relationship. Every relationship that is not based on this all-inclusive, selfless, and universal understanding sooner or later is beset with problems because the personal element in the human mind has at its core the inbuilt notion of its separateness from all others as well as from reality itself. Because this notion contradicts the underlying oneness of all life it generates suffering, both for the individual concerned as well as for others.

The conditions prevalent in the world today amply demonstrate not only the relevance of the Society's first Object but also its urgency. There is unprecedented insecurity in the world which has fuelled an atmosphere of war. Ethnicity and religion are being used as shameful excuses for hegemonic politics and domination. We have created one of the most bizarre paradoxes in history: the information technology revolution has brought us closer like never before, yet we remain bitterly divided and clinging to our own self-interest, whether it is at individual or at the collective level. Very sophisticated knowledge coexists with an appalling fragmentation, sometimes fostering it.

It is therefore important to understand that universal brotherhood without distinctions is not another ideology to counteract other ideologies. It involves a process of real and irreversible transformation of the human mind, referred to in some religious traditions as love and in others as compassion. The first step is the acceptance of the other as he or she is and for that we need to learn to go deep within our consciousness, to reach a deeper dimension in ourselves where harmony and peace reign. Universal Brotherhood was referred to, in the early years of the TS, as 'the only secure foundation for universal morality', probably because when brotherhood is a reality in our lives we perceive each person's intrinsic dignity, and respect and honour it. Just think for a moment how different this world would be if at least for

a nucleus of people this perception became a reality!

The second Object of the TS is ‘to encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science’. Religion, philosophy, and science can be seen as different approaches to Truth. They may have distinct perspectives on the universe, the human being, and the Divine Ground, but all of them are concerned with Truth, with a search for meaning, with what Paul Tillich called ‘ultimate concern’. They all enquire, along different lines, about the nature of reality and each of them throws light on certain aspects of the universal Truth or Existence. The Sanskrit word *sat*, commonly translated as ‘truth’, also means ‘boundless existence’. Truth, in this sense, is not a mental construct or a notion, but the ultimate Reality. Religion, philosophy, and science are perhaps age-old attempts to probe the apparently fathomless mystery of existence.

By engaging in such a study, the human mind acquires breadth of vision and perspective, becomes free from parochialism, and renders itself more receptive to the extraordinary significance inherent in life. As C. Jinarajadasa put it, ‘even a wayside flower throbs with the message of the cosmos’. The great religious teachers, philosophers and scientists were deeply aware of this profound dimension of life and therefore their teaching upholds the unity of humanity, the sanctity of nature and the splendour of the universe. Among the many qualities present in their sublime minds one stands out, namely tolerance, the respect for differences and the total absence of any desire to persuade others to their viewpoint. In the words of Madame Blavatsky, they all searched for Truth ‘freely and fearlessly’.

Today, while science has experienced stupendous progress in many areas, its supposed ‘ethical neutrality’ continues to pose many challenges to the world community, like the issues involved in cloning technology and genetic engineering, to mention only a few. In spite of the efforts of scientists like David Bohm, Rupert Sheldrake, and Fred Hoyle, among others, the mechanistic fortress of modern science remains intact after many centuries, and reality is still seen as a collection of separated things and consciousness, referred to as the ‘hard problem’, as just the by-product of the brain’s chemistry!

If science has progressed religion has apparently walked backwards, with fundamentalism being the rising force in many religious denominations, even in India, the land of the Buddha, Sri Krishna, and Sri Sankaracharya. In the west, many traditional church buildings have been sold and the congregations have either dwindled or disappeared, and many, many people felt betrayed by their religion. This does not mean that the essential religious teaching of many traditions, which points to the eternal Truth, has been invalidated. The fact is that the religious system has eroded, lacks vitality and spiritual acumen, which only independently minded individuals can have. In view of all this the motto of the Theosophical Society continues to be profoundly relevant: ‘There is no religion higher than Truth’.

The third Object of the TS is ‘to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers

latent in the human being'. Many find this Object difficult to understand. How do we investigate the unexplained? It has been said that our third Object involves the exploration of what is hidden or occult. It has nothing to do with 'occult arts' though, but with what in India is called *gupta-vidya*, 'hidden wisdom'. 'Hidden' here does not mean mysterious but simply that which is beyond the confines of the ordinary, superficial mind. For such a mind, only what can be seen is real. Therefore, it only sees appearances, never the essence, the heart of existence, the Ground of Being.

For such an investigation a new faculty has to be awakened in the human consciousness, that of spiritual intuition. The word 'intuition' comes from the Latin verb *tueris*, 'to look'. So, intuition is to look within, to discover a deeper dimension in consciousness, and therefore to learn to look at life with new eyes. The wisdom tradition affirms that when such an awakening takes place it affords an insight into the uncreated essence of Nature and the human being, both being indissolubly one.

Intuition has been referred to as spiritual perception, a capacity to see the essence, the core, the kernel of things, which goes much beyond appearances and sensory-induced cognition. Such a perception penetrates the world of the True, the Good and the Beautiful, values which are beyond time, but which are essential if humanity is to survive the present onslaught of violence, greed, and ignorance.

By understanding the hidden laws of Nature, we are able to cooperate with her in her benign designs, thus furthering the unfolding of her uncreated riches in every living creature. For Nature is indeed the Divine Mother and all creatures 'live, move and have their being' in her. All the ancient cultures that revered Nature manifested enormous creativity, a deep sense of peace and cooperation, as well as a life-altering awareness of beauty. Our present-day humanity has lost its link with Mother Nature, but it can be restored through reverence and study of her open book.

Self-culture is essential. If we live only at the surface of our being we are allowing, in the words of *The Voice of the Silence*, the senses to make a playground of our minds. The latent powers mentioned in the third Object are those faculties that, once awakened, can help us to see life much more deeply. They do not necessarily refer to psychic abilities, like clairvoyance or telekinesis, because these abilities, when developed, do not automatically change the deep-seated self-centred patterns which have governed the human mind for millennia. Newspapers all over the world are full of ads of 'clairvoyants' offering people solution to all their problems!

Perhaps one of the powers alluded to in our third Object is the power of listening. We react to everything we see, hear, and read according to our own opinions and partial knowledge. Real listening can be transforming for those who are truly hearers, *akoustikoi* as Pythagoras called them, who are those that have established in their lives a non-reactive space of observation and clarity. Those who truly listen understand, radiate peace, are free from self-interest, and therefore their actions are benign for they become embodiments of

goodness.

After 126 years our three Objects remain extraordinarily relevant and throwing light on many serious issues today, like war, violence, religious fundamentalism, environmental desecration, injustice and cruelty, alienation, and lack of meaning in life, and many others. Perhaps the reason why they remain valid is because they continue to address very profound needs in the human being: to relate to others meaningfully and lovingly, to explore the ultimate meaning of existence and to discover who we really are. The Theosophical Society could not possibly have had a better beacon for its work.