

THE POWERS LATENT IN THE HUMAN BEING Exploring our Third Object

Pedro Oliveira

Historical Background

When it was founded, in 1875, the Theosophical Society (TS) had only one object: “The objects of the society are, to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe.” In 1878, the first mention of our future third Object was introduced: “The objects of the Society are various ... to acquire an intimate knowledge of natural law ... study to develop his latent powers ...” In 1879, the plans of the Society included: “d) To seek to obtain knowledge of all the laws of Nature and aid in diffusing it; and especially to encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people and so termed the Occult Sciences.” Another change took place in 1881, when the fourth object of the Society was declared to be “To explore the hidden mysteries of Nature and the latent powers of Man, on which the Founders believe that Oriental Philosophy is in a position to throw light.”

A closer approximation to our current third Object came about in 1886, when the third Object of the TS was declared to be: “A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man.” In 1890, the wording of the third Object was again altered: “To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the psychic powers latent in man.” The definitive wording came in 1896: “To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.”

At the beginning of this exploration our third Object, one element stands out: the Theosophical Society has always upheld the search of the knowledge of universal laws, sometimes referred to as unexplained laws of Nature, *before* any investigation of the powers latent in the human being. This point, I would like to suggest, is of profound significance for it shows that whatever powers are unfolded or actualized within us, they so are out of an understanding of the intrinsic order and lawfulness at work in the universe as a whole. Such an approach encourages an attitude of self-responsibility in our investigation of the deeper aspects of existence while showing that the unfolding of latent potentialities needs to take place according to the inherent order of the universe.

Foundation for Investigation

In an article in *The Theosophic Messenger* James I. Wedgwood wrote:

There is one outstanding feature which marks the attitude of the Society to the problems of psychism and magic. It is the great stress we lay on spiritual ideals, unselfishness, preliminary purification. There are societies who do more practical investigation work than – apart from our few leaders – we do, and some who even practise ceremonial magic without restrictions of mental, moral and physical (dietetic) purity. Our work may seem

more barren of immediate results; but we are building a sure foundation, and much of the foundation work of a house lies out of sight.¹

Sometimes the latent powers mentioned in our third Object are taken to mean, by some, psychic powers of all sorts and complaints have been made over the years that the TS does not *teach* people how to develop them. But the wording of the third Object is very clear: “to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.” The word ‘investigate’, whose dictionary meaning is ‘inquire into, examine, study carefully’, comes from the Latin verb *vestigare*, ‘track’. Real investigation aims at arriving at the truth concerning a question, a problem or a situation. Therefore, our Founders have chosen as the motto of the TS “There is no Religion higher than Truth”, which seems to indicate that our investigation does not stop at the level of phenomena but is intended to go to the very heart of all existence.

Necessary Qualifications

C. W. Leadbeater wrote about the qualifications which are necessary for the investigation suggested in our third Object:

Has the Society neglected its Third Object? If so, it is open to you to remove that reproach by beginning to study it now. Classes may be formed to read and discuss the voluminous literature on the subject, for before undertaking a serious and long-sustained effort to attain these powers, it is well to be absolutely convinced that there are powers to attain. When that stage of certainty is reached, it may be worth while to consider their cultivation. There is no doubt that one who is able and willing to enter upon that arduous course may be of the greatest use to his fellow-men, but it is indeed hard to find one who possesses all the necessary qualifications, for they are not only physical and mental, but moral. And uttermost unselfishness and lack of all personal pride are among the first of these pre-requisites.²

It has been suggested that our three Objects should not be approached in a piecemeal fashion but should be seen as part of a purposeful whole. Universal Brotherhood without distinction is the first and foremost among our Objects and is the quintessential keynote of the Theosophical Society. One of the Adepts that inspired its foundation equated it with philanthropy and altruism, for real brotherhood implies a mind and a heart without barriers of any kind. The corollary of this principle is that the latent powers we seek to investigate are those that can help to manifest, in our daily lives, an understanding that has in it the quality of compassion and profound sympathy. Seeking to actualize inner potentialities out of selfishness and pride, *even when these exist unconsciously to ourselves*, goes in the opposite direction of what the TS stands for.

Learning to Go Deeper

Dr Hugh Shearman, a very perceptive theosophical author, in an article in *The Theosophist* commented on the nature of the unexplained laws and latent powers:

Occult truths are never hidden from us by anybody. We reveal or conceal them ourselves individually by what we are and what we are not yet. The laws of the occult world are unexplained because they cannot be spoken about in the language of personality. The powers of the occult world are latent because they are powers belonging to the Whole, and not to the part which thinks itself separate from the Whole and from other parts. So the great experiment is proposed to us of moving on from investigation of personality to investigation of a pure individuality beyond personality and then, beyond that, Universality.³

One of the impediments on the path to spiritual realization is the deep-seated notion of possessiveness. We tend to think and behave as if there were things in life which are fundamentally ours. Closer examination reveals that such a notion is nothing but folly. We may gather around ourselves objects which may be necessary for our use but the objects, like our own bodies, are necessarily transient. Theosophy makes it exceedingly clear that the real human being is not limited to bodily sensations, emotions and personal thoughts. Our truer self is said to be of the nature of steady awareness, which is open to dimensions of existence normally ignored by the everyday personality. The heart of this awareness, the theosophical teaching says, is a realization of the undivided nature of all existence. Such awareness is in itself a latent and undiscovered power, for once it manifests itself in the field of our experience it brings about a complete transformation of our minds, our actions and our responses. The unfolding of such awareness is the unique privilege and responsibility of the individual for whom the investigation suggested in our third Object has become a way of life.

The Power of Intuition

In his article in *The Theosophist*, C. R. Groves, a former General Secretary of the TS in England, states:

The powers latent in man include all the future possibilities of human development. Psychic powers may be included, although their future value is extremely doubtful. The power which is of the greatest value is the power of intuition, of spiritual perception; the knowledge of “That by which all else is known”. It is this power which will enable us to follow the well-known hint of the Master K.H. – to take hold of the wave of intellectuality and guide it into spirituality. This can best be done not by the development of psychic powers (clairvoyance, etc.), but by the awakening of the sympathy and understanding of the intuition, by which the qualities of the indwelling life may be immediately and unitively experienced.⁴

There are many for whom the word intuition is a synonym for ‘hunch’, ‘gut feeling’ or similar expressions. According to the Wisdom Tradition, real intuition is a profound power of our innermost consciousness, a faculty that reflects the uncreated light of the Spirit which is our deepest Self. When this faculty is truly awakened it helps us to see life and all its relationships in a true and objective light, *as they are*. Ancient teachings also

affirm that such perception, rather than being cold and sterile, is profoundly compassionate for it dwells on and is nourished by a realization of the unity of all life at its deepest level. This being its nature, it becomes clear that any ‘power’ still centered on or identified with a separate self cannot reflect the tremendous reality of intuitive perception. In it there is no ‘knowledge of’ something; there is non-mediated, direct, instantaneous *knowing* which manifests itself as a completely different form of relationship: sympathetic, other-centred, complete and helpful. It easy to see that the awakening of such power in the human consciousness would help in making the principle of Universal Brotherhood without distinction a reality in the world.

Individual Responsibility

N. Sri Ram, the fifth international President of the TS, expressed his thoughts on the nature of our third Object thus:

It is said sometimes that we do not pay much attention to the Third Object these days, but we have to realize that such investigation as it calls for requires people trained to undertake it, and then their competence and findings cannot be easily proved by others. There will always be room therefore for skepticism and differences. A person who is psychic or clairvoyant may say, “I see such and such things,” but he may be seeing only projections of what is already subconsciously in himself, creating forms out of his own ideas and visualizing them. It is only people who have the necessary training and faculties who can undertake investigation in a real sense, as distinguished from mere study of what others have said on the subject. As what the seers or investigators, competent in different degrees, say is not open to verification by us, we have to judge it with our own reason and understanding. The work of the Third Object, in the sense of investigating the unexplained and the latent, can therefore be undertaken only by individuals on their own responsibility, or occasionally by a team, and not by the Society as a whole. Brother C. W. Leadbeater, or even H.P.B., was not officially commissioned to undertake any such task; they undertook whatever they did along that line of their own accord and published the results of their research for the benefit of all.⁵

Although there were a number of seers associated with the Theosophical Society, the Society, as an organization, has not formally endorsed the observations and discoveries of anyone of them, not even of our distinguished Co-Founder, Madame Blavatsky. As she herself so eloquently wrote, “in its capacity of an abstract body, the Society does not believe in anything, does not accept anything, and does not teach anything.”⁶ If the TS had established *any* teaching of *any* author as authoritative all search for Truth within it would have come to an end. Therefore the Society leaves its members entirely free in their own search, while reminding them through its Objects, its motto and the writings of its Founders and successive leaders of its enduring purpose: Universal Brotherhood without distinction.

Gateway to the Spiritual Path

Perhaps the third Object may be seen as the first gateway that leads to the ancient Path to Wisdom. Only the individual member and student can walk the Path. Nobody else can do it on their behalf. All spiritual traditions emphasize that the beginning of the Path involves purification, and they also suggest that the greatest impurity is selfishness in its many forms. The three first steps on Madame Blavatsky's *The Golden Stairs* are "a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart." They are the foundation of the Path to Wisdom and may be considered equally relevant to the investigation of unexplained laws of Nature and powers latent in the human being.

Endnotes:

¹ "Propaganda and the Third Object", February 1911.

² "The Third Object of the Theosophical Society", *Adyar Pamphlet no. 184*, April 1934

³ "The Third Object", March 1949.

⁴ "Our Third Object", July 1957.

⁵ *The Theosophist*, December 1964.

⁶ "The New Cycle", *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 11, p. 124.