

Our Objects

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What we do in the Theosophical Society must be closely related to the objects for which the Society is established. In its Memorandum of Association, the seven objects of the Society are set out. The first three of these are the ones that indicate our purpose. The other four relate only to the material means of conducting the organization and are concerned with holding funds, acquisition of necessary property, the administration of any such property and "the doing of all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects or any of them including the founding and maintenance of a library or libraries". The seven objects of the Society are thus made up of what we may call a higher triad and a lower quaternary. It is the three initial objects that define what the Society is for.

The first Object is the only one that demands from members a definite belief. It is on the fullness and adequacy with which we implement this Object that our success as a Society depends.

The first Object is "*To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour*". This is clearly the most important. It is the only one that demands from members a definite belief, for it asserts that there is a universal brotherhood of humanity. Of this, fullness and adequacy with which we implement that undertaking that our success as a Society or as a Lodge or branch of the Society depends.

There are many organizations which profess various forms of brotherhood. Some of these are relatively limited and shallow, often restricted to handshakes and affabilities and perhaps cups of tea. The brotherhood referred to in the first Object of the Theosophical Society is not defined beyond the fact that we do not opt out of it on grounds of race, creed, sex, caste or color. Because the word "brotherhood" is widely used to indicate something that is often commonplace and conventional, it can easily be given little care or attention beyond the cups of tea or some equivalent emblem.

But brotherhood implies membership of a united and caring family. When a member of the Society enters a meeting of other members, can he feel that he is entering a family to which he belongs, interested in all the others and enjoying that ease and freedom which can be had only among those whom we love? Can he feel that he is at home?

The writer remembers a small incident that seemed to illuminate this aspect of our work. An old member, under stress, arrived at a Lodge meeting, sat down and burst into tears. To the honour of the Lodge, all the other members at once understood that this was the most natural thing, for the Lodge was home and offered sympathy and understanding.

It could be well to ask ourselves if the Theosophical meeting to which we usually go is a place where we or any other could easily and naturally burst into tears and where

we could be confident of help and sympathy. If it is not, perhaps some opening up of our sympathies and attitudes would be appropriate. Brotherhood requires an ample degree of mutual acceptance regardless of personal pieties or beliefs. As inner life is deepened, we come to know that inwardly we are all made of the same and have ultimately the same purpose and have to help one another along the same path within that purpose.

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On the structural side of the TS there are facilities for members unable, for reasons of distance or other circumstances, to attend meetings of a Lodge, to be "unattached members". But it is obviously better for even a very distant member to be included in a Lodge or group which will make such contact as is possible by telephone, recordings, letters, library service or other link and feel that the distant member is intimately at one with the group. More or less impersonal printed matter is too dismissive, however admirable its motivation.

It is also useful in any group of members to have within it somebody who is something of a "pain in the neck", somebody who has habits of thought and address that are awkward, who perhaps has a habit of repeatedly riding some hobby horse of opinion. It is useful because there is something of that awkward person in all of us and it is educational to see, as spectator and victim, the role being acted out close at hand by somebody else.

Generally people think of brotherhood as a moral matter, but it has also a profoundly psychological aspect. Our hostility towards others is closely linked to our own sense of personal identity and personal worth. In order to assert that I am me (which of course I am not), I fiercely try to demonstrate that I am not somebody else. Certainly brotherhood is closely responsive to our need to discover who we truly are.

The second Object of the TS is "*To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science*". Possibly the best way to encourage this study is to do it. But, if it is done merely as a bleak quest for information, that will not be enough. If it is to become interestingly encouraging, such study has to be brought to some extent into contact with what we call "real life", with our own experiences and those of other people. In fact it requires to be put in the setting of the first Object.

Then there is the third Object which is "*To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man*". This is probably the most misunderstood of our Objects. People easily think that it confers a licence to involve the Society in almost anything. But there are two very significant words here. They are the words "unexplained" and "latent". One finds members of the Society devoting themselves excessively to pursuits that involve much that is already amply explained and quite obviously patent rather than latent.

For a useful "rule of thumb" it might be helpful to remember that it is not the business of the Society to become much involved in subjects that are already well catered for by other organizations. It is not, for example, the Society's business to conduct astrology classes where there is already an available astrological association and access can be had to books and periodicals on the subject. This is not to say that astrology is to be banned. The present writer in the past wrote astrology columns for

two newspapers at the request of their respective editors, and was a member of an astrological association; but he hardly ever discussed astrology at the TS. Neither unexplained nor latent, it just did not seem properly to belong there.

The third Object contains two significant words, "unexplained" and "latent". Members of the Society should not be devoting themselves excessively to subjects that are already amply explained and are obviously patent.

At the present time there is a great interest in a wide variety of what are often described as New Age pursuits, from tarot cards to minor forms of psychism, from new methods of healing to forms are being catered for by various organizations and individuals and are not part of the main highway of Theosophical studies.

There are also many individuals who have set themselves up as gurus and created organizations round themselves. In some cases these represent secessions from our own Society or are cults of individuals who have followed some personal line in the past. Sometimes such people or their enthusiastic followers try to take over one of our Lodges or branches. But these cults are either outside or only peripheral to our own nucleus and are not part of that central advance that the Society has made during the last one hundred and twenty advance that the Society has made during the last one hundred and twenty years. During a dozen decades we have had many distinguished members who have devoted their attention to the latent and the unexplained, and we owe them a certain loyalty and prior attention to what they have passed down to us.

There are many peripheral topics that stimulate curiosity, but the objects of the TS do not throw the Society open as a field where "anything goes" or where time can be wasted on the superficial and on what is attractive but irrelevant.

Sometimes it has been argued that if we entertain the public with horoscopes, tarot cards and "magic" we shall attract more people to the Society, whom we can then attempt to interest with more adult subjects and pursuits. The writer has hardly ever seen this happen in fifty six years of membership and does not believe it works that way. Serious seekers after truth are likely to be put off by fortune-telling and attempts to develop "powers" and to acquire colourful mental images. The honest course is surely to make known our real concern for humanity and to seek the sympathy of those capable of helping in the formation of a stable nucleus of brotherhood, those who want to find in themselves and in others a deeper reality.