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THE ROLE OF STUDY IN THE THEOSOPHICAL LIFE

Annie Besant once said that the foundation for a truly theosophical life rests upon the three pillars of study, meditation, and service. Let's consider what it means to study. For many people, study implies reading, gaining new information and ideas, comparing that to what we already know, and then storing it on our internal hard drive. Dr. Besant, however, had something quite different in mind when she emphasized the role of study. For instance, we can make a lifetime practice of reading articles and books while nothing of a fundamental nature changes within ourselves. We remain essentially the same person, week after week, year after year, until we cry out in anguish like Goethe's Faust:

I have, alas, studied philosophy, jurisprudence and medicine too, and worst of all theology.
With keen endeavor, through and through—and here I am for all my lore, the wretched fool
I was before.

Let's consider the second Object of the Theosophical Society: "To encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science." We might ask, comparative study to what end? Why this emphasis on study? Surely, academic achievement is not the *raison d'être* of the second Object.

In his *Introductory Studies in Theosophy*, author Adelaide Gardner gives us a clue:

The comparative method of study necessitates the use of the higher or subtler element in the mind. The higher mind is synthetic and unifying, as compared with the contentiousness of the analytical mind, used for ordinary objective thinking, which is separative in its action.

I think Annie Besant would agree that one purpose of the second Object is to activate the higher faculties of mind, thereby enabling the seeker to go beyond the domain of empirical knowledge into the realm of unitary wisdom, wherein shines the unfading light of truth. Endless study leading only to the accumulation of more knowledge has limited value in the spiritual life, but the type of study that facilitates a state of interior wisdom has been praised by the greatest of philosophers throughout the ages.

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