

Box 9

SOUL POWERS AND POSSIBILITIES

THIRD EDITION

A Lecture on Some of the
Methods by Which Those
Powers That are Latent in
All Human Beings May Be
Evolved.



By L. W. ROGERS

PRICE 10 CENTS

THE THEOSOPHICAL BOOK CO.
RIDGEWOOD, N. J.

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SOUL POWERS *and* POSSIBILITIES

One of the most striking things within the knowledge of mankind is the fact that with all her cunning, science is unable to detect any difference between the cells that finally develop into a plant, an animal and a man. A great scientist, equipped with the best microscope that mechanical genius can produce, stands silent and baffled before the problem. One of these bits of protoplasm is to become a forest tree, a monarch of the wood that shall fling its sturdy arms against the storms for a century. Another is to become a jungle beast, a lurking impersonation of murder with noiseless step and cruel heart, a living terror to the hapless. The third is to become a human being, a man of soul and conscience, an image of God himself in wisdom, power and compassion. And yet each of the three makes its entrance into this visible world in the same material vehicle. All look the same and so far as we know are the same. Each is a medium of evolution for unfolding inherent powers. Beyond that we know nothing. Behind that lies the mystery of life. The great astronomer who comprehends the wondrous movement of the stars, who nightly gazes into that enchanting dome studded with a hun-

dred million visible suns and measures distances between worlds so accurately than the exact time of an eclipse may be known a century in advance—this man of marvelous intellect and the noxious weed that cumpers the ground begin their journey through the world from the same base, mere specks of undiffering protoplasm.

Why does one cell become a plant and another become a man? Something that we cannot grasp or analyze enters this matter from the world unseen. It is life coming into the visible. The forms we see, whether of plants, animals or men, are but the external expressions of the life within. Form is the medium through which evolution is accomplished; the aggregation of visible matter that invisible life draws about it for the purpose of functioning in the material world. Huxley, looking through his microscope, gives us this vivid description:

“Strange possibilities lie dormant in this semi-fluid globule. Let a moderate supply of warmth reach its watery cradle and the plastic matter undergoes changes so rapid and yet so steady and purposelike in their succession that one can only compare them to those operated by a skilled modeler upon a formless lump of clay. As with an invisible trowel the mass is divided and subdivided into smaller and smaller portions, until it is reduced to an aggregation of granules not too large to build withal the finest fabrics of the nascent organism. And, then, it is as if a delicate finger traced out the line to be occupied by the spinal column, and moulded the contour of the body, pinching up the head at one end, the tail at the other, and fashioning flank and limb with due proportions in so artistic a way, that, after watching the process hour by hour, one is almost in-

voluntarily possessed by the notion that some more subtle aid to vision than the microscope would show the hidden artist, with his plan before him, striving with skillful manipulation to perfect his work."

The universe is a vast panorama of evolving life. Evolution, progress, growth—this is the great thought nature forces upon the mind no matter in what direction we turn. All of nature's kingdoms are evolving. We ourselves are making a swift journey from infancy to age. Nations rise, mature, decline and die out, to be followed by others of a higher type. Race follows race and from decaying civilizations spring better ones. Planets themselves grow old, lose vitality and disintegrate, while others are forming from nebulous matter. Throughout the universe there is ceaseless change, eternal progress. In this fact lies the hope of man. What he now is he need not remain. Anything he can imagine he may achieve. Any power he can picture may be his. Child of the Universe, he is, like it evolving, unfolding, and the way to eternal progress lies before him. But the rapidity with which he evolves necessarily depends upon his knowledge of the laws of which he is the subject, and of which he may become the master. In his physical consciousness he knows much of physical and mental powers but little of soul powers or how to acquire them.

One of the most useful things that could come back to the people today is the old philosophy and the ancient Christian teaching of the immanence of God; that the Creator literally lives in every atom that exists; that every creature from man downward is an expression of His life; that each is, in very fact, *a part of the Supreme Being*, only dimly and vaguely, or perhaps not at all, realizing this stupendous fact. Yet in this sublime truth is the foundation of immortality and the possibility of all power. We are most literally

the sons of God and through the process of evolution we shall all in time attain the divine wisdom and power characteristic of the Christs and Buddhas of humanity. For some the process will be a long one indeed. Millions of years must elapse before the goal is reached. But for others the transition will be swift, covering a period of a comparatively very short time. Whether we shall grope painfully toward the light for what seems to our present consciousness like an eternity or evolve the soul powers and attain their wondrous possibilities in a limited number of incarnations depends of course upon the interest we take in the matter and the attention we give to it.

To the person who is willing to co-operate with nature in the development of the soul powers latent within him rapid progress is possible. But of course this transformation from comparative ignorance to divine wisdom, from helplessness to godlike power, cannot be brought about in some miraculous, instantaneous way. *It is a process of evolving*, of growing from spiritual infancy to spiritual manhood, but the growth may be a swift unfolding in the light of theosophic knowledge, as a bud opens into bloom while the sunlight falls upon it, or it may be a painfully slow process accomplished in the gloom of ignorance.

Knowledge and power are two names for one thing. There can be no power without knowledge, without enlightenment. All possible power is eternally existent in the universe and it becomes available to each individual as knowledge of the universe is attained. As civilized people we are using steam and electricity to carry forward many complex processes of commerce and manufacture that sustain the life of the race. Were we to be replaced tomorrow by an equal number of savages their ignorance of what to them would be the secrets of our civilization would render them power-

less to sustain life in such an environment and they would promptly perish. Most literally knowledge is power.

This is none the less true of other planes than this—that knowledge is power. Spiritual power, like physical, is the result of enlightenment. Indeed, it *is* enlightenment. In what we call the waking consciousness we have but a fragmentary expression of the ego that each of us is. It is as much of us as can come through the physical brain and body and be expressed in the physical world. Some can express much, some but little. Some are very wise and some very ignorant, some very capable and some very helpless; but not because the egos are wise and stupid; only because more or less of the true self can gain expression in the physical life. The intellectual difference between the philosopher and the peasant, between the great inventor and the ignoramus, is merely one of human development,—of having reached a point in evolution where much or little of the self can be expressed in the visible world. It becomes, then, a matter of tremendous importance to know something of the process by which more and more of the wisdom and power of the soul, or self, may be expressed in daily life; for upon that depends happiness.

The method by which spiritual illumination is attained is no new thing although it is so little understood in our modern civilization. For ages the science of the soul has been the highest study of the race and the way in which men might live in order to enter upon the path that leads to rapid development was taught in all the ancient civilizations with mathematical exactitude. In the early days of the Christian Church this science of the soul had its place and those who most earnestly desired to enter upon the upward way found that very desire the means of contact with the teaching not given to the indifferent masses. In this inner teaching

of the early Christian Church, as in the systems of its predecessors, there was one word of vital significance. It was *purification*. Purification must precede all acquirement of power. It was, and is, the foundation of all occult sciences. Without purity of mind and body there will not only be failure to attain complete success but great danger in the use of the partial knowledge acquired.

Purification, then, is the doorway to occult development, and the purification begins with the physical body and the lower mind. The process is, therefore, a double one—physical and mental. The physical relates to the reconstruction of the visible body—to slowly but surely changing *the character of the matter* that composes it. It is one of the simple and well-known facts of physiology that the matter constituting the physical body is continually changing. Like any other machine the body wears out. Its tissues are constantly giving way even when the body is in a state of rest. Were this waste not made good from the food and drink taken into the body it would, of course, speedily perish.

In some parts of the body, as, for example, the hair and the nails, the rapidity of the growth is easily observed. In others it is very slow. But within a certain period *all* the matter of the physical body wears out, passes away and is replaced by new material. What that time is has not been definitely determined. A generation ago it was placed by some physiologists at seven years, but later observation and study of the subject has greatly shortened the estimated period. While physiologists may not be able to agree in estimates of the time there is no dispute about the fact itself. But the time required for the transformation is not of great importance. The vital thing is that it occurs and that within a period of a very few years all the physical matter in the visible body of any human being will, imper-

ceptibly but none the less certainly, have been replaced by other physical matter obtained from that person's food and drink.

It is partly because of this truth that theosophists lay much emphasis upon the importance of pure food and drink. Most of them are vegetarians for two reasons: because of the moral wrong done in destroying the lives of sentient beings and because of the injury done to the physical body through the savage custom of eating flesh. In a consideration of the physical purity of the body we have to deal with the latter question only.

The material of which a body is built determines as certainly whether it is sound and sensitive as the material of which a building is constructed determines its strength and durability. This difference of texture is by no means apparent to the physical senses. Two buildings may look precisely alike on the exterior and yet one may be sound and durable while the other has concealed within its walls structural weakness that dooms it to early collapse. The physical bodies of two persons may differ quite as radically and yet give no outward sign of the fact. One may have a body built only of pure and harmless materials, and capable of responding to superphysical vibrations, without differing outwardly in appearance from one whose body is coarsened with meat and wine.

The student of occultism regards his body as an instrument with which he is to work, knowing that his rise to spiritual illumination and power depends largely upon how pure, sensitive and receptive he can make it. Therefore, he carefully avoids all that will coarsen its fibre and destroy its sensitiveness, placing meat and most classes of food and drink that have passed through any stage of fermentation

among the tabooed articles of diet. In this he merely co-operates with nature in physical purification. He sees to it that only pure material is supplied and of this material nature slowly builds him a *new* physical body. Thus, within a few years, by intelligent use of his knowledge he comes into possession of a body capable of things that could not have been accomplished by the body he previously possessed.

Undoubtedly something can be done even with a poor instrument and we frequently find people with coarse and even repulsive bodies, who are able to exercise clairvoyant faculties. But there are nearly as many degrees of clairvoyance as of intellect and a study of such cases will prove that by no possibility can the term "spiritual illumination" be applied to them. Clairvoyance, in itself, is no more spiritual than eyesight. In the case of the fortune-telling variety of seer it usually indicates psychic tendencies brought over from occult practices of some sort in a previous incarnation and by no means proves that those thus endowed are at a higher stage of evolution than others. Quite the reverse may be true. Dogs and horses often exhibit similar sensitiveness. It is said that at a materializing seance a dog is the first to become aware of a materialization and will growl, or show other signs of seeing, before even the people who are somewhat sensitive are aware of the approach of the materializing entity. Very low types of human beings may be clairvoyant and certain kinds of psychic powers are commonly found among the red Indians and the African negroes. Such clairvoyance is connected with the sympathetic nervous system and is extremely limited in its scope and possibilities. At best it can give but fragmentary and uncertain glimpses of superphysical life. But these are often so startling in their mysterious disclosures as to make it appear that the universe is an open book before the seer. A little careful observation, however, soon proves that the ap-

parently all-wise clairvoyant is quite helpless and ignorant when endeavoring to obtain other information that is comparatively simple.

The clairvoyance that is *incidental to spiritual unfoldment* is a very different thing indeed. It is "clear seeing" or the gaining of knowledge, through the awakening into activity of certain organs in the brain that lie dormant until the desire for the higher life begins the work of their vivification. This, only, is the clairvoyance that is linked with spirituality and wisdom and which is no more related to the other than thinking is akin to breathing.

The purification essential to the development of soul powers can be hastened enormously by the careful exclusion from the diet of flesh and alcoholic drinks but there is another most important thing requiring attention. This is the purification of the mind. One might live a lifetime on pure and wholesome food but if his mind were permitted to dwell upon impure thoughts he would be hopelessly shut off from spiritual illumination. Fortunately the mind, like the body, can be manipulated by the self, of which it is quite as much a mere instrument as is the physical mechanism through which it works. We often say that while we can control the speech, and not utter the thought, we can't help having the thought. This is true if applied to certain kinds of thoughts, especially those arising from the circumstances of the moment, in the minds of those who have never attempted to control their mental processes. But it is not at all true of those thoughts which are largely the result of desire—thoughts that can be welcomed and entertained in the mind as agreeable guests, or which we can decline to recognize and refuse to harbor by simply resolving to fully occupy the mind with pure and useful thoughts, and thus leave no place for the undesirable sort. The great majority of our thoughts are the result of

feeling, of desire, and grow out of our desire-attitude toward people and things. Thoughts of jealousy, lust, gluttony, avarice, etc., have desire as their life and inspiration. The miser, the glutton and the libertine are what they are because of uncontrolled desire and they differ from each other only in the object of the desire. The desire may be almost unconsciously possessed, as it doubtless is with many people who eat too much; or it may be a strong desire constantly vivified by thinking and planning to possess more, as in the case of the miser; but it is the desire that produces the result, whatever may be its degree of intensity. That which we really desire the mind naturally turns to and dwells upon, and the inevitable result is that sooner or later we come into contact with the object of the desire and suffer for it or profit by it, as the case may be. The right thought and desire leads onward to the acquisition of soul powers through which we become masterful and free, while the wrong thoughts and desires chain us still more securely to that mode of life in which we appear to be the helpless and unhappy victims of senseless chance.

But which are right and which wrong desires; and what are pure and what impure thoughts? In the spiritual sense any mental activity that coarsens and hardens and tends toward the strengthening of the lower nature may properly be called impure. The desire-thoughts of the miser are as destructive of spirituality as those of the sensualist. Each is fatal to the higher life but in a different way and the mental and moral purification we are considering must be accomplished by gaining freedom from them. This naturally applies equally to all the desire-thoughts that stimulate the activities of the lower nature. The only method of escaping them is by fixing the mind upon loftier things and turning the attention to useful and unselfish activities. This is the process of the purification that is more vitally important

than purifying the physical body, essential as that unquestionably is.

So a most important step on the upward way toward spiritual illumination and the possession of soul powers is to firmly resolve that the desires and emotions shall come under the control of the will. We must put a check on the physical desires, impulses and passions and resolutely turn the mind away from them. Nobody will come into possession of any power worth having until he does this. Before we can control anything else we must learn to control ourselves. One plain reason for this, aside from the impossibility of spiritual force working through gross matter, is that whoever has not the moral strength for self control would be a dangerous custodian of occult power. Both body and mind must be brought under control, if the soul powers are to be evolved, and both must become instinctively obedient to the higher self. This can be accomplished only by definite and persistent effort. An excellent method of beginning the conquest of the lower nature is to select a certain weakness and endeavor to replace it with strength and balance. A point where almost everybody can begin is with the control of the temper, for there are very few people who do not sometimes become angry. Anger is a disintegrating force injurious to those who generate it. Every time the impulse to give way to anger is checked, we have won a point; we have taken an infant step in conscious evolution, and the work becomes easier.

So it is with the whole list of physical desires and their unbridled gratification, among which the desire for various stimulants may serve as an illustration. They are all merely tyrannies of the body. Tolerating such appetites and, indeed, sensual impulses of any description, constantly builds coarse and still coarser matter into the astral body. Besides

the misfortunes this may lead to in this life it will certainly lead to unpleasant experiences in the astral region after death, for if the astral body contains a preponderance of the matter of the lower levels it will detain us there until that coarser matter has been left behind. In other words, if the purification of the body has not been accomplished voluntarily here it may be done painfully there, for dropping the physical body and shifting the consciousness to the astral world does not change our real nature or free us from our desires. Consequently when the man of strong appetites and impulses reaches the astral world he still has all these desires of his physical life, but has no means for their gratification. Now thought and desire work much more vividly and intensely in superphysical than in physical matter and therefore it would have been infinitely wiser had these things been controlled and mastered in this life. So, when we set a watch over our thoughts and desires now, we are doing more than merely beginning the development of new soul powers. We are also saving ourselves future trouble.

In addition to the constant efforts to purify the mind and body perhaps the most important factor in the work of evolving soul powers consists of taking the right attitude toward the problems of our daily life. The feeling that we are the helpless victims of our environment, that we are unable to control circumstances, and, above all, the feeling of resentment toward what the thoughtless regard as unjust suffering,—all these states of mind must be put resolutely aside. A truer conception of the facts of nature is essential to success. We must realize that we live in a universe of law, of cause and effect and, therefore, of justice. Nothing can befall us that is not both just, as the outcome of causes we have created, and necessary as a factor in our further development. No sounder philosophy was ever proclaimed than that which declares the ordinary misfortune to be a blessing

in disguise. Each furnishes its lesson and brings its quota of soul strength, and our attitude toward such a life-event not only determines to what extent we spiritually profit by it but also how little we really need to suffer from it in the physical consciousness. To rail against our life troubles is as senseless as it would be for a pupil to hate his teacher because a lesson is assigned and an examination is prepared for him. It is by passing through these difficulties of daily life that we evolve the spiritual nature and every trying situation should be welcomed as an opportunity for gaining strength and balance. Sometimes people thoughtlessly ask why, if God is all-loving as well as all-powerful, He does not abolish all hard conditions and give us only an easy life. Perhaps for the same reason that the teacher does not solve the hard problems for the school-boy while the latter amuses himself on the play-ground. For the same reason that if a parent possessed great wealth he would not give his son large sums of money to squander and thus start him on the road to ruin. He would give him the same education and training that he otherwise would, however unpleasant the son might think it at the time and however much he might prefer all the glittering idleness that unlimited wealth could furnish. It is just because the father loves him that he desires to develop his noblest qualities, and he would know that only the stern realities of life could cultivate in him ability, courage and self-reliance. The boy without money, obliged to make his way in the world, to rely upon himself, may not realize the fact, but he is learning invaluable lessons that lead to future success. Most of the strong American characters have struggled upward through hardship—the Jacksons and Grants who moved in the field of force, the Henrys and Garrisons who, in the greater realm of intellect and conscience, gave trend to mighty events in human life.

Poverty and pain are the forge and fire from which comes the manhood that challenges our admiration—that combination of heart and brain that lifts mankind to nobler thoughts and higher things. From this forge comes the steel of character that stands every strain in the storm and stress of life; that keeps its poise when whirlwinds of passion sweep the race; that can stand alone for conscience sake; that scorns the slanders of the base, braves the threats of selfish power and defies the fury of the mob in its heroic battle for the rights of man. One of our “blessings in disguise” is that adversity in which we learn to suffer and to sympathize, to struggle and achieve.

Of course, poverty and pain are not, in themselves, desirable. They represent conditions above which we should have arisen—above which all of us without a single exception *will* finally rise. But until that stage in our development is reached they are a necessary part of the evolutionary machinery and do a useful work. When a man has lost the last vestige of selfish desire there can be no more poverty for him; and when he has fully comprehended the unity of all that lives pain can no longer afflict him.

Power and responsibility naturally belong together. To acquire the one necessarily means to assume the other. Power that is not balanced by a sense of responsibility is dangerous both to the possessor and to others. It is much better not to evolve the soul powers than to misuse them, for such a course would, under the law of karma, entail the most unfortunate results. Therefore every student of occult development should be much more anxious to be useful than to be powerful. Unless he would possess power to be used only in the helping of others he would a thousand times better remain in ignorance of its possibilities. He must look well to the motives that prompt him for in this lies his safety. Whoever would rapidly

evolve the inner power must not shrink from the responsibility that goes with it or hesitate to pay the price that nature demands for it—the responsibility of using it beneficently, and the price of sacrificing selfish interest to the common welfare. Until the aspirant can feel that this is not for himself but for others, not to enable him to dominate but to serve, he is not ready to enter upon the way that leads to spiritual enlightenment; and his efforts, instead of bringing success, will be but as the beating of the air. Sincerity, compassion for the unfortunate, and unselfish devotion to the welfare of others, can alone guide him safely and surely in the right direction and bring to him, in good season, the success he has earned.

To become masterful is the work before all who would thus evolve the soul powers and know their incalculable possibilities. It is not an easy thing to do. It means the exercise of such persistence as is rarely encountered. It means the slow but sure creation from within of a dauntless courage that is one of the proofs of man's divinity. It means the evolution of an inner confidence that no failures can shake and a self reliance that no multiplied adversities can conquer. It is a heroic work that requires a serene and reasoning faith in the justice of the universe, coupled with the dauntless spirit in Henley's lines:

“Out of the night that covers me,
 Dark as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods there be
 For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how straight the gate,
 How fraught with punishment the scroll.
 I am the master of my fate,
 I am the captain of my soul!”

Note: Self-Development and The Way to Power, by L. W. Rogers, price 25c, is published by The Theosophical Book Co., Ridgewood, N. J.

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