

THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE GUIDELINES

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your interest in the work of the TOS. As you may already know, the Theosophical Order of Service was founded by Annie Besant in February 1908, six months after she was elected International President of the Theosophical Society. For over one hundred years, it has made an important contribution to the Theosophical Society in its work of uplifting society. Described as ‘a union of those who love in the service of all that suffers’, an early expression of its aims was:

- To minimise the sum of misery in the world;
- To forget oneself in working for others;
- To eliminate selfishness and substitute love as the rule of the world;
- To live to the highest that is within us.

The Theosophical Society, with its emphasis on complete freedom of thought for every member, officially maintains neutrality in controversial political and social issues. The Theosophical Order of Service, on the other hand, acts as a forum where members may air their views and take stands on affairs of public interest. It offers a framework in which people may engage in practical and humanitarian action, by promoting the First Object of the Theosophical Society: *the formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood*.

You will find material here to help you start a group, if you wish to. Included is some background information essential to understanding the nature of TOS work. What matters most, once the reading is done, are your ideas, enthusiasm, compassion and patience.

When starting a group, it is best to select an activity on which you and your fellow workers are most keen. Issues commonly focused on include animal concerns, the environment, healing, world peace, prison reform, theosophical education and parenting, poverty, illiteracy and child welfare. The object is to relieve suffering, increase awareness of social injustice and seek underlying causes and long-term solutions.

Starting the first TOS group in your country

The following is general advice and may need to be adapted for your country's circumstances, so please discuss your plans and seek specific advice from the TOS International Secretary.

Once you have a nucleus and have the blessing of the TOS International Secretary and your local TS branch leadership or General Secretary/President, you can then let others know that a TOS group is functioning and they are welcome to join. The group may be publicised through an item in the Lodge newsletter, a note on the notice board, leaflets, etc., or you could work the other way around: announce your intention of starting a group, then decide on activities through discussion with those who respond.

The TOS International Secretary is available to give support and advice. A ‘Correspondent’ (or ‘Corresponding Liaison’) should be found to keep in touch with her. Once it becomes clear that the interest and activity of your group are sustained, your TS General Secretary/President will need to register with the International President of the TOS, Mrs Radha Burnier, for official status by submitting the name of a suitable TOS representative. This is best done through the TOS International Secretary.

Starting subsequent TOS groups

Once your first group is actively engaged in a service project, members of other TS Lodges or Branches may become interested in forming a TOS group. This is done in consultation with and the help of the ‘Correspondent’ and the TOS International Secretary.

In countries with already active national TOS organisations, the formation of new groups is governed by the constitution, rules or established practices of the national TOS organisation. The National Coordinator, Director or President is available to provide advice and assistance. In India, the Regional Committee and the National Committee are also available to give support.

It is useful for TOS workers to have an interest in current events and a critical awareness of what is happening in the world. (Mrs Burnier’s ‘On the Watch Tower’ articles in *The Theosophist* are outstanding in this respect.) The role of the TOS is not to organise more lectures *about* brotherhood, but to demonstrate brotherhood *in action*. The TOS worker is ever seeking the light that theosophical teachings can cast on issues of contemporary concern.

Happy service!

Diana

Write at any time to the current International Secretary of the TOS for advice and support: Diana Dunningham Chapotin – Résidence Isabelle, 18 avenue Berlioz, 93270 Sevran, France

Tel/fax: 33 0 1 43 84 05 44 E-mail: tosinternational@wanadoo.fr

Various informational and inspiring items are available here as background to your work. They include:

- An article by Annie Besant from *The Theosophist* of March 1908, explaining the source of her inspiration for the TOS
- Interviews explaining how the TOS groups in Brazil and Canada were started up or reactivated, along with ideas for your own activities
- Inspiring invocations that can be used with your group
- “Brotherhood: A Forgotten Object?” by Joy Mills which considers the matter of TS neutrality in political and social issues
- “A Life of Service” – an article by Rachel Naomi Remen on the nature of service
- “How Can We Help?” – an article which addresses the oft-asked question ‘Why should I choose to participate in the TOS as opposed to an already existing charity?’
- Introductory brochures of the TOS in various countries that may serve as models for your own brochure.

A TOS healing ritual is also available from the TOS International Secretary.

Never doubt that a group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

--Margaret Mead