

# THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE

## International Handbook



*Participants at the TOS Conference  
held at the international headquarters of the TS at Adyar, Chennai, India in January 2008*



*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. - Margaret Mead*



*Participants at the International TOS Conference  
held at the National Centre of the TS in America in Wheaton, Illinois in July 2007*

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# Theosophical Order of Service

## International Handbook

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# Welcome

This handbook is addressed to those committed to or interested in the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) as a vehicle for enlightened social action. It is designed to help them equip themselves as more effective workers and leaders in the undertakings of the TOS. It is for all who wish to see theosophical ideas made of practical use in the community.

The chief document presented is a set of guidelines for the administration of the TOS. Taking time to read these *Principles of Organisation* will provide a deeper understanding of the nature of this organisation that strives to help the Theosophical Society in its work of leavening society. Those wishing to explore the TOS's work, its aims, spiritual nature, history, or relationship with the Theosophical Society will find enriching articles here. Resources are included that can be used freely in brochures, posters, articles and talks about the TOS's projects.

Questions often asked include the following:-

How does one go about starting a service project within the TOS?

Is it all right for the TOS to collaborate with other organisations?

Can TOS groups take a stand on issues like nuclear energy, animal rights or population control?

How can the TOS help to spread the teachings of Theosophy?

If these questions are of interest, please read on.



The Theosophical Order of Service was founded by Dr Annie Besant in 1908 so that the sum of pain in the world may be reduced to some extent at least, and at the same time help its workers to learn, through their service and the attention they pay to the quality of their work, to purify the mind. The Order of Service has therefore a double purpose. From this point of view, it is not merely the doing of work which is important but the manner in which it is done and the purity of purpose behind it.

The TOS encourages self-forgetful service, and is the natural counterpart of the Theosophical Society's work to guide people to wisdom. It brings together those for whom Theosophy represents a dynamic force for the uplifting of human society and the protection of the planet. It is to be hoped that more and more members will join in its work of building up in this world an atmosphere of compassionate service and caring relationships.

**Radha Burnier, International President, Theosophical Order of Service**



## What is the relationship of the Theosophical Order of Service to the Theosophical Society?



In 1908, when Annie Besant created the TOS, she announced in a supplement to *The Theosophist*: “A number of members of the T.S., feeling the wish to organise themselves for various lines of service, to actively promote the first object of the Society, I hereby constitute an order, to be called THE T.S. ORDER OF SERVICE.”

It is interesting to note that Mrs Besant called the order the *Theosophical Society* Order of Service, which indicates its existence within and not separate from the TS. Most TOS groups operate simply as an autonomous department of the TS. Over the decades, around half a dozen TOS groups have become legally registered bodies (often because of the extensive nature of the community work they do) but this does not mean that they are apart from and outside the TS. All of the TOS's activities are supported and supervised by the International Secretary of the TOS who reports regularly to the International President of the TS who is ex officio International President of the TOS. TOS National Coordinators (sometimes called National Directors or Presidents) are in all but a few rare cases appointed by the International President of the TOS in consultation with the leader of the TS in the country concerned.

The TOS places the utmost importance on a harmonious working relationship with the TS. Its dearest wish is to support the TS as a place where social action as spiritual practice is valued and actively nurtured. Though the TOS is not present in all the countries where the TS is active, it is growing and aspires to become of greater and greater support to the TS in making the teachings of Theosophy of transformative value in the world. It provides a focal point and group context where TS members and friends may work along self-selected lines of service for the uplifting of humanity and the protection of the planet.

The TOS does not see its role as peripheral to the work of spreading Theosophical teachings nor does it see itself as simply duplicating the work of humanitarian groups. The TOS exists to show the world that Theosophy has much light to shed on contemporary issues of concern and can help people find meaning in suffering. It aims to demonstrate that service grounded in spirituality can engender far-reaching good in the world.

The Theosophical Society officially maintains neutrality in relation to various social and political 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.

For over 100 years, the TOS has made a significant contribution to the community outreach of the Theosophical Society. It considers its collaboration with the TS to be an honour.

**Not out of right practice comes right thinking, but out of right thinking comes right practice. It matters enormously what you think. If you think falsely, you will act mistakenly; if you think basely, your conduct will suit your thinking.**

**Dr Annie Besant**

# THE INTERNATIONAL THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE



## PRINCIPLES OF ORGANISATION

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# THE INTERNATIONAL THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE

## PRINCIPLES OF ORGANISATION

### NAME

The official name of the body is The Theosophical Society Order of Service – as originally named by Annie Besant. However, through time, it has been shortened to the "Theosophical Order of Service" and this has come to be used in national groups around the world and in our own international publications.

Its International Headquarters is at the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai, India, while its administrative office may be situated at such address as may be determined from time to time.

### ORIGINS

The Theosophical Order of Service was founded by Annie Besant in February 1908 for members of the Theosophical Society "wish[ing] to organise themselves for various lines of service, to actively promote the first object of the Society": *To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.* (See Appendix A for Annie Besant's original notifications in *The Theosophist* of February and March 1908.)

### PURPOSE

The two-fold purpose of the Theosophical Order of Service is

- the unselfish service of the needy and suffering
- the inner transformation of the server.

### MISSION

Annie Besant summarised the mission of the Order in the **motto**:

**'Towards a union of those who love in the service of all that suffers'.**

Committing itself to this union, the TOS offers a framework in which:

- individuals may work along self-selected lines of service for the uplifting and protection of the planet and its children
- individual action can be strengthened by collaborative group action and advocacy
- the practical application of theosophical principles to issues of contemporary concern may be explored
- social action as spiritual practice is valued and nurtured.

As the service arm of the Theosophical Society, the Theosophical Order of Service shares, in the words of H.P. Blavatsky, the "most holy and most important mission" of Theosophy "to unite firmly a body of men of all nations in brotherly love and bent on a pure altruistic work, not on a labour with selfish motives" (HPB's Letter to America, 1888). It draws together like-minded people committed to respecting and serving the One Life in all beings. Further, it encourages the establishment of a personal rather than remote relationship with those in need, as suggested by H. P. Blavatsky in *The Key to Theosophy*: "The Theosophical ideas of charity mean *personal* exertion for others; *personal* mercy and kindness: *personal* interest in the welfare of those who suffer; *personal* sympathy, fore-thought and assistance in their troubles or needs." [Chapter XII, Section *On charity*.]

## **AIMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE**

*The T.S. Order of Service aims at making Theosophy practical in order that the sum of human misery within and around the areas of every branch of our Society may be visibly diminished. It will seek to model the conceptions arrived at by theosophical study, for their adaptation into useful forms of daily life [...] and it offers a common work to all who are willing to act on these principles.*

(Annie Besant in *The Theosophist*, March 1908)

To achieve its purpose and mission, the TOS aims:

- to support individuals striving to apply theosophical principles in their lives through altruistic service in their local communities
- to encourage and guide the formation of TOS groups for work in self-selected lines of service in many areas, such as planetary peace, animal and social welfare, environmental protection, healing, theosophical education and parenting
- to encourage networking of TOS groups with humanitarian service organisations and informal community action groups whose mode of action is consistent with the theosophical principles underpinning the work of the TOS. Such networking may include collaboration with environmental, human rights and United Nations support groups, for example.
- to encourage communication amongst TOS groups around the world so that they support, inspire and cooperate with each other
- to channel support for TOS projects, especially in developing countries
- to facilitate a rapid response amongst members to international crises requiring emergency relief
- to provide resource materials for members
- to provide training for members in skills and attitudes helpful in service work
- to organise international working conferences from time to time when such initiatives are considered beneficial to achieve specific outcomes.

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY**

The Theosophical Society values the Theosophical Order of Service as an avenue to express theosophical living, finding in it a setting where individuals may work with others at the local and international level, choosing areas of service that reflect their skills and interests.

The TOS places the utmost importance on a harmonious working relationship with the TS. Though the TOS has not so far been present in all the countries where the TS is active, it aspires to being a veritable partner of the TS in making the teachings of Theosophy of transformative value in the world. They share the vision of universal brotherhood that is embodied in the first Object, and complement each other in the distinctive ways they go about its promotion.

While the TS maintains neutrality on controversial social and political issues, the TOS provides a framework in which stands may be taken on matters of public concern.

Affirming that inner growth and service go hand in hand, the TOS seeks to help the TS in uniting those for whom Theosophy represents a dynamic force for both social and individual transformation.

## **ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The TOS is a decentralised organisation, engaging at grassroots level in practical activities in alignment with the International Principles of Organisation.

### **Management of the International TOS**

At the international level, the TOS is managed by the International Secretary as an autonomous department of the Theosophical Society under the inspiration and guidance of the International President of the TS who is ex officio the President of the TOS. The Secretary is appointed by the President for the period s/he determines. A non-exhaustive list of her/his responsibilities is given in Appendix B.

In consultation with the national TS leader, the International Secretary may appoint a Correspondent for countries in which TOS activities are starting up or not ready to assume a more formal status. When the organisation and activities have sufficiently matured, the International Secretary encourages the TOS Correspondent and the TS General Secretary/President to consider making

operations official by registering its National Director/President/Coordinator with the International President.

The International Secretary may create an ad hoc advisory committee and working parties/committees to help in administrative work or specific tasks such as planning.

The International Secretary may appoint individuals to help in administrative and liaison work, such as:

- a bookkeeper
- an assistant secretary
- an assistant editor for international publications
- a webmaster
- a Spanish language coordinator to communicate on behalf of the International Secretary and support the work in Latin America
- a translation coordinator
- a fund-raising coordinator

The International Secretary is responsible for reporting activities and ensuring that proper books of account and other records are kept and regularly made available for auditing. An Annual Report and Annual Financial Statements are provided to the International President.

### **Management of National TOS Groups**

At the national level, groups operate either without bylaws as autonomous departments of the Theosophical Society or as independent legally registered entities. National Directors/Presidents/Coordinators are traditionally appointed by the International President of the TOS in consultation with the General Secretary/National President of the TS and the International Secretary but a large measure of freedom exists in their operations. Each country determines the length of term of its National Directors/Presidents/Coordinators.

National Directors/Presidents/Coordinators are responsible for the management of the TOS in their respective divisions, consistent with the aims and principles embodied in the International TOS Principles of Organisation. National Directors/Presidents/ Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that proper books of account and other records are kept and regularly made available for auditing. An Annual Report is provided to the International Secretary. A non-exhaustive list of her/his responsibilities is given in Appendix C. Sample rules for national and local TOS Groups that are not legally registered are provided in Appendix D.

Local group coordinators are appointed by the National Director/President/Coordinator or elected by the local group. With the support of the National Director/President/Coordinator and the International Secretary, they are responsible for building their group, sharing their understanding of the aims and theosophical principles embodied in the International TOS Principles of Organisation and assisting in the selection and management of service projects.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

All are welcome to join the TOS, whether members of the Theosophical Society or not. National and local group leaders, however, must be members of the TS in good standing. Furthermore, two-thirds of the members of any committees must also be TS members in good standing.

Membership generally costs nothing, though the contribution of a modest sum may be invited. On this point, Annie Besant said, "...it would be better to have no subscription in money, but subscription in definite work should be a sine qua non. Good work attracts money to carry it on, and the Order may trust to this law..."

### **Cancellation of Appointments/Memberships**

For a serious and weighty reason, the International President of the TOS, in consultation with the TOS International Secretary and General Secretary/President of the TS in the country in question, may cancel the membership of an individual member or the appointment of a National Director/President/Coordinator after ensuring that all avenues of mediation and conciliation are explored according to fundamental theosophical principles of brotherhood.

For similar reasons s/he may also close the TOS organisation in a country where the TOS group functions as a department of the TS and has no legally registered status. In this circumstance,

accrued funds will be disposed of according to the group's rules, and where there are no rules, by the Theosophical Society in its country of organisation for a compatible service project, or in the absence of a national TS, to the international TOS for suitable areas of service.

Those whose membership or appointment is terminated have the right to communicate directly with the International President to defend themselves or to choose someone in whom they have confidence to act as intermediary.

## ONGOING REVIEW AND PLANNING

Periodically, TOS members are encouraged to engage collectively in evaluating how well the organisation is working. Its officers may seek feedback on their skills and on their openness of mind in conducting the affairs of the Order and review the effectiveness of the structures and processes of the organisation in achieving its goals. The formulation of plans of action is encouraged to give direction to the work.

An example of the kind of evaluation exercise in which members participate is given in Appendix E.

## END OF PRINCIPLES OF ORGANISATION

### APPENDIX A:

#### Historical background

Mrs Besant outlined a governance structure consisting of Leagues and Local, Regional, Provincial and National Councils operating under an international Central Council. Using different names, this structure largely reflected the structure of the TS itself, with several differences:

- a. The Central Council's principal executive officer was not necessarily the International President of the TS but could be (and has been from inception) someone deputed by him/her: at first called the 'organising secretary', then the 'international secretary'. The Central Council was not, once the TOS was sufficiently established, to be appointed by the International President of the TS or the executive head of the TOS but elected by the members of the National Councils themselves.
- b. The Chairperson of a National Council, however, was to be appointed by the Central Council.
- c. No definitive Constitution for the Order was drafted and registered, leaving it *de facto* operating at the international level as a department of the TS. Leagues were supposed to make their own bylaws, however. In practice, national TOS bodies, especially those with relatively large operations, tended to register as legally independent bodies operating under the laws of the land, while continuing to work in good rapport with the TS. Some bodies, especially the smaller ones, have operated, and most still operate today, unregistered and with no written rules.
- d. Membership of Local Leagues was open to all, whether they were members of the TS or not. Annie Besant explains this: "*The object is to keep the whole movement permeated by theosophical ideals, but also to permeate the outside world with the same ideals.*"
- e. A lot of freedom characterised the original conception of the TOS: "Its Leagues will be animated by a common spirit – the effort to adapt Theosophy to the daily life of men, and to supply methods for co-operation among like-minded people – but they will be diverse in methods and in opinions...." (Annie Besant in *The Theosophist*, March 1908.)

Annie Besant's original statements of notification in *The Theosophist* of February and March 1908 can be obtained from the International Secretary.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Responsibilities of the International Secretary**

The role of the International Secretary is to:

- relay the policies, focuses and requests for projects of the International President to group leaders and members around the world
- summarise the year's work for the President
- support National Directors/Presidents/Coordinators in their work
- support groups and individuals in the setting up and management of specific projects
- circulate information on the TOS and answer questions about its activities through publications, e-newsletters, e-mails, articles, lectures and PowerPoint presentations
- encourage and supervise the starting of new groups
- encourage and channel financial support for TOS projects in developing countries and for emergency relief
- organise international conferences from time to time in order to deepen links amongst active TOS workers and increase the effectiveness of their collaboration.

## **APPENDIX C:**

### **(i) Responsibilities of the National Director/Coordinator/President**

The role of the National Director/Coordinator/President is to:

- nurture, inspire and support local TOS groups, ensuring that the spirit of our motto, '...a union of those who love in the service of all that suffers' permeates their work
- develop and maintain strategies to enhance communication and networking between TOS groups and with community groups that share similar principles
- maintain good communication with the national TS, informing TS groups about the purpose of the TOS and its relationship to the TS and promoting TOS activities amongst the membership at large
- encourage TS groups with no associated TOS group to start one and support them in doing so
- organise gatherings of organisers, beneficiaries and donors, where appropriate, in order to create fraternal links amongst them
- obtain an annual report from each TOS group in the country, organise the annual meeting and plan the TOS contribution to the national TS convention
- coordinate the collection and despatching of donations for international TOS projects, where appropriate
- provide an annual report to the International Secretary and contribute to the promotion of the TOS internationally through its publications.

### **(ii) Role of the Correspondent**

In places where the TOS is not yet operational or just starting up in an informal, tentative way, the International Secretary identifies an individual to act as Correspondent. This person's function is to:

- keep in touch with the International Secretary, reporting on the service activities of individual TS members or of a fledgling TOS group
- relay information to fellow TS members and to the TOS group in particular about what is going on in the TOS in other countries, about opportunities available for participation in its work and about the resources, support and guidance available.

Should the Correspondent manage to sustain activities until they are on a solid footing and when s/he has demonstrated commitment to the TOS and an understanding of the nature of its work, the Correspondent may be encouraged by the International Secretary to consider taking on the role of National Director/Coordinator, according to the stated Principles of Organisation.

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **Sample rules for national and local TOS Groups that are not legally registered.**

#### **1. Purpose and Aims of the TOS in (country)**

- These will be taken from the Purpose, Mission and Aims of the international TOS Principles of Organisation.

#### **2. Relationship with the International TOS**

- The TOS in (country) will cooperate with, and be accountable to, the International TOS President and the International Secretary.
- The TOS in (country) will comply with the policies, rules and guidelines of the International TOS.

#### **3. Membership**

- Membership in the Theosophical Order of Service in (country) is open to both members and non-members of the Theosophical Society who are in sympathy with its purpose and aims.
- Membership generally costs nothing, though the contribution of a modest sum may be invited.
- A record of membership will be kept as accurately as possible, including contributors and participants.

#### **4. Areas of service**

- The TOS Group will select areas of service that are of interest to members, relevant to the community and consistent with the Purpose, Mission and Aims of the TOS. Examples of areas of service are peace, animal and social welfare, environmental protection, healing, theosophical education and parenting.
- Members may work individually, collectively as a local TOS group and/or contribute to national projects.
- Any chosen project should be consistent with theosophical principles.

#### **5. Establishing a committee**

- Where a committee is established, at least two thirds of the members of a committee shall be members of the Theosophical Society in good standing.
- Decisions shall be made by the committee's vote and records of committee meetings shall be kept.

#### **6. Financial accountability**

- Where donations are collected or funds are raised, records of account shall be kept and made available for auditing.
- Funds shall always come from ethical sources.
- Funds shall only be donated to projects or activities consistent with the Purpose, Mission and Aims of the TOS.

#### **7. Reporting**

- An Annual Report of activities and financial transactions shall be provided to the TOS members in (country) and to the International Secretary.

## **APPENDIX E: Example of an evaluation and planning exercise**

Here is an example of the kind of evaluation exercise in which members participate to consider the overall direction toward which the organisation should be heading. The TOS has based one of its Plans of Action partly on the fruit of this exercise.

### **A Vision for the TOS**

How would you reply to this question?

*What kind of international TOS do we want to see when it is fully developed; when it is in full bloom?*

Here are some of the responses that emerged from a worldwide circulation of this question in 2007:

#### **Response 1**

The Theosophical Order of Service is a global organisation made up of individuals united in living the theosophical life that recognises and respects the One Life at all levels of existence. They are committed to serve that Life in altruistic action and to work on the personal transformation required to do so. They work with others locally or internationally, choosing lines of service that reflect their skills and interests. They respect the right of all to be on this planet and to undertake their journeys in whatever way they choose.

#### **Response 2**

As the service arm of the Theosophical Society, the Theosophical Order of Service is a shining light, drawing together like-minded people with a single purpose: to better humankind and the planet. Its members assist those in need in hands-on, direct ways at ground level, making a genuine difference in their daily lives. Committed to reaching out to the community at large, the Theosophical Order of Service recognises no boundaries of generation, religion or culture.

#### **Response 3**

The Theosophical Order of Service is a dynamic partner of the Theosophical Society, demonstrating how social action fits into spiritual practice. It is composed of individuals who recognise and respect the One Life in all beings and whose service is rooted in theosophical principles. Members of the Theosophical Society value the Theosophical Order of Service as an avenue for the expression of their commitment to the ideal of universal brotherhood and planetary peace.

#### **Response 4**

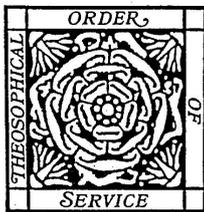
The Theosophical Order of Service is an international organisation made up of like-minded people who love in the service of all that suffers. They are committed to serving not only human beings without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour but also plants and animals, in order to make the ideal of universal brotherhood a reality.

#### **Response 5**

Key ingredients of a Vision Statement: One Life; work on personal transformation; respect for the rights of all; TOS as the service arm of the TS; ideal of universal brotherhood and planetary peace; direct hands-on work to make a difference.

## Theosophical Order of Service Emblems

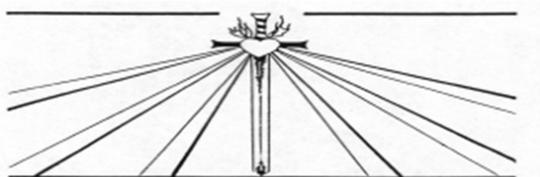
The emblem of the international TOS is the rose with a lotus flower in each corner. Here are some of the versions available:



THEOSOPHICAL  
ORDER OF SERVICE



Many groups have designed their own emblem or logo for national and local use. Here is a selection:



A union of all who love in the service of all that suffers



All of these emblems - and more - are available electronically on the International TOS website (<http://international.theoservice.org>) in the *Resources* section. Some of them are in Portuguese and Spanish. If you would like an emblem translated into your language, please contact us and we will try to help.

**The following article was originally published in *The American Theosophist* of October 1967. It discusses the role of the TS in response to civil and political unrest that the United States was facing during the Civil Rights Movement, and examines the question of whether the Theosophical Society – the Theosophist – should engage in social and political reform. Its interest for TOS workers is obvious.**



## Brotherhood: A Forgotten Object?

Joy Mills

Elsewhere in this issue appear a number of statements written by members who feel an increasing concern that the Society, through its membership, is not speaking or acting boldly enough in these days of civil and racial unrest. The ideal of brotherhood is given vocal allegiance, they suggest, but is not implemented by action. Certainly all who read the history of this Movement, since the

inception of the Society in 1875, will recognize that its most prominent leaders, its most influential officials, never hesitated to speak out on behalf of *human* rights and, when necessary, to act in support of their convictions.

The first public activity of the new Society, undertaken by Colonel Olcott and HPB, was the cremation, in 1876, of the body of Baron de Palm – an action that drew public condemnation and threatened the reputation of the fledgling organization as well as that of its “hapless founders.” As Josephine Ransom, in *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*, suggests: “It would seem as if the real significance of the whole affair lay in the fact that it was the Society’s first trial of its willingness and courage as a *body* to face public opinion and institute a reform in convention...” Examples are countless to indicate that the founders were tireless in acting out in their very lives the convictions to which they had given full allegiance in establishing the Society: the little known incident in New York, when they befriended thirteen stranded Muslim Arabs in a demonstration of practical brotherhood; the taking of *Pansil* or *Pancha Sila* [the Five Precepts] to become lay-Buddhists, devoted to promoting religious understanding and effecting brotherhood among differing religious groups. Today, the most respected and honoured name in all of Buddhist Ceylon is that of an American – the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society, Colonel Olcott. Others who followed the founders gave no less noble examples: Damodar, high caste Brahmin, breaking with all caste customs in an acknowledgement of genuine brotherhood; Annie Besant and George Arundale, interned for supporting home rule in India; Clara Codd jailed with other leading suffragettes in the fight for women’s rights.

The list could be continued. Each one who has stood unequivocally for the betterment of humanity, for the redress of social wrong, and the alleviation of human suffering – whether their name be emblazoned among the leaders of the Society or recorded simply on its rolls among the thousands whose names are unremembered in the passage of time – each one who has thus committed themselves heart, soul, and body to the primary objective of this Movement has answered the clarion call of the Adept: “The *Chiefs* want a ‘Brotherhood of Humanity’, a real Universal Fraternity started...” The same Adept wrote further: “The term ‘Universal Brotherhood’ is no idle phrase. Humanity in the mass has a paramount claim upon us... It is the only secure foundation for universal morality. If it be a dream, it is at least a noble one for mankind: and it is the aspiration of the *true adept*.”

The stormy career of Dr Annie Besant presents the most dramatic evidence of personal involvement in the great social and human issues of an age. In reply to criticisms directed against her for her work on behalf of India during her presidency of the Society, and the

consequent possible involvement of the Society in the home rule movement, Dr Besant cited the *Articles of Association* of the Society, sub-clause (d), wherein it is said that one of the ways in which the Objects are to be pursued is “The doing of all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects or any of them.” In her opinion, she said, this sub-clause secured “to the Society as such, the right to do *collectively* all things incidental or conducive to the formation of a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.”

Can the Society, should the Theosophist, engage in social and political reform? This is the question that inevitably arises, and the Society’s traditional neutrality in political affairs, as well as its official declaration of full freedom of thought for every member, is often quoted as evidence for collective non-involvement and even as an excuse for personal lack of concern for social ills. Yet while staunchly defending these fundamental positions of the Society, the founders (both those referred to as the Inner Founders and those who acknowledged full allegiance to the Adept impetus) did not evade the essential responsibility inherent in the early directives concerning brotherhood. In her *Key to Theosophy*, HPB responds to the question as to whether the Society is a political organization: “Certainly not. It is international in the highest sense in that its members comprise men and women of all races, creeds, and *forms of thought*, who work together for one object, *the improvement of humanity*, but as a *society* it takes absolutely no part in any national or party politics.” When asked further if the Society then stands aloof from social questions, HPB replies: “The *very principles* of the T. S. are a proof that it *does not* – or, rather, that most of its members do not – so stand aloof.” In a memorable letter from one of the Adept Founders of the Society appear the words: “The only object to be striven for is the amelioration of the condition of *man* by the spread of truth...” and the Master K. H. states that the truths of occultism must prove “constructive of new institutions, of a genuine, practical Brotherhood of Humanity.”

In the United States today, we are experiencing, as we all know too well, an explosion of violence unprecedented since the days of the Civil War. Our cities have become open wounds revealing the long festering sores of injustice, misery and human degradation as portions of our population have been forced to live in circumstances of poverty, persistent unemployment and rat-infested slum housing. We are learning the price of unfulfilled and broken promises. No section of our nation has been exempt from the storm of too long pent-up bitterness, fear, frustration and despair; north, south, east and west the fires have blazed – red flares against a static past to announce a new day of justice must be born. We deplore the violence that destroys, maims, cripples, or kills; we cannot condone the violence that spawns riots, sets fire to property, looses angry mobs to pillage and to rob. But there have been other types of violence too long condoned: the violence of pride and prejudice, the violence of the mind and heart set against the liberation of the human spirit in another human being. What of the violence done to human dignity, to human rights, to human needs, through long years of injustice and indifference?

Are we not, as members of the Theosophical Society in this nation, at this time in our perilous experiment of democracy which guarantees the same right to *all* people, which protects individual liberty and secures individual freedom, are we not especially challenged to speak forth and to act on behalf of the human – the whole human being, as revealed in the ageless wisdom of Theosophy, seen in the stupendous vision of our god-like potential – without reference to color, creed, national origin? What role shall it be our privilege to play in these days of national and international crisis? To stride forward at the pace set by our past leaders or to wait quietly in the backwaters of history for the storm to pass? Has the First Object become only words to be repeated by chairpersons at our public lectures, or is it to be implemented by our lives? Words alone are frail packages for human hopes, but words can also stir the conscience of humankind; they can incite violence or they can point the way to the constructive achievement of a genuine brotherhood.

It is my own conviction that we cannot – we dare not – evade our present responsibilities as Americans and as Theosophists to speak to the issues of our day, and the gravest of those issues is the one of human rights. *How* we may speak and *how* we act in this present hour of crisis are questions to which there are no single answers, and each of us must determine for ourselves the nature and extent of our commitment. The Society's First Object is a declaration of purpose; let us not forget it nor obscure it by standing aloof from its practical implementation.



In the famous letter from the Mahachohan, given as Letter 1 in Mr Jinarajadasa's compilation of *Letters from the Master of the Wisdom* (First Series), there appear these challenging words: "The white race must be the first to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the dark nations. ... This prospect may not smile to all, but he is no Theosophist who objects to this principle." And the Adept writer continues: "He who does not feel competent enough to grasp the noble idea [of the Brotherhood of Humanity] sufficiently to work for it, need not undertake a task too heavy for him."

However heavy the task, however long or difficult the way to its accomplishment, dare we shirk the burden?



Our own progress takes place best when we least think of ourselves, and are concerned with giving such help to others as is in our capacity.

*N. Sri Ram*



What burdens Mother Earth most  
are not the mountains, nor the  
oceans, nor the giant trees, but the  
minds that will not melt with the  
suffering of others.

- Naishadha Charita



*Members of the TOS Group in Finland*

# In the Service of Life

Rachel Naomi Remen

(Reproduced from the *Noetic Sciences Review*, Spring 1996)

In recent years the question *how can I help?* has become meaningful to many people. But perhaps there is a deeper question we might consider. Perhaps the real question is not *how can I help?* but *how can I serve?*

Serving is different from helping. Helping is based on inequality; it is not a relationship between equals. When you help you use your own strength to help those of lesser strength. If I'm attentive to what's going on inside of me when I'm helping, I find that I'm always helping someone who's not as strong as I am, who is needier than I am. People feel this inequality. When we help we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity and wholeness. When I help I am aware of my own strength. But we don't serve with our strength, we serve with ourselves. We draw from all of our experiences. Our limitations serve, our wounds serve, even our darkness can serve. The wholeness in you is the same as the wholeness in me. Service is a relationship between equals.

Helping incurs debt. When you help someone they owe you one. But serving, like healing, is mutual. There is no debt. I am as served as the person I am serving. When I help I have a feeling of satisfaction. When I serve I have a feeling of gratitude. These are very different things.

Serving is also different from fixing. When I fix a person I perceive them as broken, and their brokenness requires me to act. When I fix I do not see the wholeness in the other person nor trust the integrity of the life in them. When I serve I see and trust that wholeness. It is what I am responding to and collaborating with.



There is distance between ourselves and whatever or whomever we are fixing. Fixing is a form of judgment. All judgment creates distance, a disconnection, an experience of difference. We cannot serve at a distance. We can only serve that which we are willing to touch. This is Mother Teresa's basic message. We serve life not because it is broken but because it is holy.

If helping is an experience of strength, fixing is an experience of mastery and expertise. Service, on the other hand, is an experience of mystery, surrender, and awe. A fixer has the illusion of being causal. A server knows that he or she is being used and has a willingness to be used in the service of something greater, something essentially unknown. Fixing and helping are very personal; they are very particular, concrete and specific. We fix and help many different things in our lifetimes, but when we serve we are always serving the same thing. Everyone who has ever served through the history of time serves the same thing. We are servers of the wholeness and the mystery in life.

The bottom line, of course, is that we can fix without serving. And we can help without serving. And we can serve without fixing or helping. I think I would go so far as to say that fixing and helping may often be the work of the ego, and service the work the soul. They may look similar if you're watching from the outside, but the inner experience is different. The outcome is often different, too.

Our service serves us as well as others. That which uses strengthens us. Over time, fixing and helping are draining and depleting. Over time we burn out. Service is renewing. When we serve, our work itself will sustain us.

Service rests on the basic premise that the nature of life is sacred, that life is a holy mystery which has an unknown purpose. Fundamentally, helping, fixing and service are ways of seeing life. When you help you see life as weak, when you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. From the perspective of service, we are all connected: all suffering is like my suffering and all joy is like my joy. The impulse to serve emerges naturally and inevitably from this way of seeing.

Lastly, fixing and helping are the basis of curing, but not of healing. In 40 years of chronic illness I have been helped by many people and fixed by a great many others who did not recognize my wholeness. All that fixing and helping left me wounded in some important and fundamental ways. Only service heals.

***Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin.***

**--Mother Teresa**



# The Courage of Commitment

Joy Mills



Custom and habit may lead us into patterns of thought and action which, by their very repetition, seem to be lacking in freshness and spontaneity. Precisely because the theosophical philosophy presents us with a panoramic view of life, with great ideas whose grandeur dwarfs our normal petty concerns, we may often feel inclined to retreat into the security of a philosophical cave of speculation rather than confront the actualities of existence in terms of a positive commitment to action. To what extent can we become committed? Is there a manner in which we can act so spontaneously that action, arising out of an inner commitment to principle, meets the need of the moment with a freshness appropriate to that need? These, surely, are questions which call for serious consideration by the theosophical server. As members and friends of the Theosophical Society we are challenged to engage in a dialogue with the world, but for such a dialogue to be effective we must probe the nature of our own commitment.

The neutrality of the Society as an organisation, the emphasis upon complete freedom of thought for every member, the absence of authoritarian or credal statements that define (and thus delimit) Theosophy, these may serve as cloaks in which to wrap ourselves as protection from the cold winds of the world's needs. True freedom of thought, however, a freedom in which we examine with a mind unprejudiced by the past not only the great ideas which are the principles of the Wisdom but also their implications in terms of ethical and moral action – should leave us vulnerable, capable of being touched by the problems of humankind. Love, like freedom, is a certain vulnerability of the spirit which keeps us ever open to hear the cry of all who suffer; out of such openness there arises the spontaneous act to meet the need of the moment.

In writing on the question of the Society's neutrality, a past president, Mr N. Sri Ram said:

“What is called neutrality really means that a member is not committed to anything besides the Three Objects of the Society and each must have complete freedom to understand and disseminate the Wisdom according to his own temperament and capabilities. A society which stands for Wisdom, which induces right action, cannot be neutral as between right and wrong. But in matters with regard to which differences of opinion may arise, the Society acts not as an organisation but through its individual members. If the members do not apply Theosophy in such ways as may be possible for them, the Society will soon become an inert or dead organisation.”

The fact that we cannot commit the Society to certain courses of action should not be an excuse for the failure to commit ourselves, where right and wrong may be involved. The world's problems are too grave, humanity's needs too desperate, for apathetic non-involvement; misery, ignorance, injustice, poverty, these are *our* concerns because we are dedicated to the proposition that humanity is *one* brotherhood.

Let us not be misled by too easy an interpretation of our First Object, assuming that 'to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood' it is enough that we have joined hands with others of like intent and may henceforth enjoy the security of a nucleus condition which demands little thought and less action. Editorialising on this very subject, a past General Secretary of The Theosophical Society in England, Mr L. H. Leslie-Smith, stated:

“To be a nucleus is a very different thing from establishing world brotherhood. Some sentences in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* may throw light on this. First, 'you ... are unable to understand our ideas upon the Society as a *Universal Brotherhood*'. The Society as a Universal Brotherhood – a body whose members will actually *be* a brotherhood without distinction and therefore universal, excluding none who will help to make the Society that brotherhood. Then it can be a nucleus for a brotherhood of all mankind. As Theosophists we shall have good will towards all, but our real task would seem to lie in being all-inclusive, denying membership of the Society to none who are willing to commit themselves to the practice of brotherhood. The same idea comes out of a second quotation from *The Mahatma Letters*: 'The Chiefs want a "Brotherhood of Humanity", a real Universal Fraternity, started; an institution which will make itself known throughout the world and arrest the attention of the highest minds.' A fraternity, an institution, of people whose attitudes and abilities and mutual relationship shall be so strikingly fraternal that the highest minds perforce take notice of it and it is known throughout the earth. Is it not then desirable to make clear and unequivocal what membership of the TS really involves?"

The phrase, 'to form', with which the First Object begins, can mean, as Mr Leslie-Smith further points out, either 'to exist as' or 'to create'. The first meaning leads to a state of inertia, in which actions become repetitive; the second meaning lends a dynamic quality, to both attitude and behaviour so that we engage ourselves creatively in action that must always be spontaneous and new, in accordance with the needs of the present. Our commitment to the principle of brotherhood is ever tested in the courage we bring to such creative engagement, that refuses to be daunted by any obstacles or defeated by the magnitude of the task that lies before us. The vigour and vitality of the Society arise out of the lives of its members; its impact upon the world, its transformative power, its regenerative force, are all dependent upon what we, its members, bring to this movement and upon the manner in which we act out daily the implications of the principles to which we have given an inner allegiance.

Granting to all the full freedom of thought which we claim for ourselves, preserving the wise neutrality of the Society which permits of divergent views, we may yet examine the practical import of the great ideas and universal principles of the Wisdom, gaining ever new insights into those principles as we seek to bring them to bear upon the problems of our times. Let us not be afraid to chart new directions, to act in a new manner, to speak with new meanings; let us possess the courage of our commitment to a society whose objectives embrace a totality of understanding and so act that all will know that for us, as for the Adept Brothers, "the term 'Universal Brotherhood' is no idle phrase."



As service becomes our habitual attitude to everyone whom we meet we shall gradually find that everyone is profoundly interesting and that the giving of service is the greatest joy in life.

*Annie Besant*



Members of the TOS Group in England



Members of the TOS Group in Kenya

In the truest service the consciousness of self is forgotten – you help because you cannot do other than help.

- N. Sri Ram



Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time, and always start with the person nearest you.

- Mother Teresa

The ideal reward for service is an increased power to love and therefore to serve.

- G.S. Arundale



## The Reason Why

Radha Burnier



*An extract from 'On The Watch Tower' in 'The Theosophist' journal, August 1996. Also reprinted in the TOS journal 'The Service Link'.*

The Theosophical Society imposes no restrictions on the lives of its members; they are free to adopt any lifestyle that suits them. The obligations members take upon themselves, voluntarily of course, are indicated by the Objects of the Society to which they subscribe while enrolling themselves.

A question occasionally arises about the dietary norm adopted at theosophical centres, conferences, summer schools and so forth, where only vegetarian food is made available. Now and again a member remarks that HPB herself was not a vegetarian, implying that Theosophy and vegetarianism are unconnected.

Theosophy, however, is the recognition, followed later by full realisation, of life as one indivisible whole. For the smallest as well as the greatest forms of life, there exists only one form of sustenance and energy, by whatever name it is called. The unitary nature of life is the basis, not only of the First Object of the Society, namely universal brotherhood without any distinctions whatsoever, but also of the other Objects. The heart of every great religion is unity which when lived, is love. All the profounder perceptions in the fields of philosophy and science are also converging towards this central truth. And as each person enters deeply into his or her own consciousness and understands how Nature works, the truth and beauty of the unbreakable whole illumines human consciousness.

Therefore, when arrangements are made for conferences and other events on behalf of the Society, in accordance with the foundational principle of the oneness and sacredness of all life, food that causes the least injury and harm is chosen.

In *The Key to Theosophy* HPB says:

*When the flesh of animals is assimilated by man as food, it imparts to him physiologically, some of the characteristics of the animal it came from. Moreover, occult science teaches and proves this to its students by ocular demonstration, showing also that this 'coarsening' or 'animalising' effect on man is greatest from the flesh of the larger animals, less for birds, still less for fish and other cold-blooded animals, and least of all when he eats only vegetables.*

The enquirer retorts, "Then he had better not eat at all?", to which the answer of the Theosophist is stated by HPB:

*If he could live without eating, of course it would. But as the matter stands, he must eat to live, and so we advise really earnest students to eat such food as will least clog and weight their brains and bodies, and will have the smallest effect in hampering and retarding their inner faculties and powers.*

There is thus good reason why at officially organised gatherings of the Society, the food provided is vegetarian. The minimum harm is done to other creatures; and respect for life – the life which is not 'ours' or 'theirs', but one – is maintained. Plants do not have a nervous system and do not suffer pain in the same way as more evolved creatures which do have it. One day, if some other form of food derived from minerals, or even air, is at hand, that may be preferred at officially organised functions! Oriental traditions suggest this possibility.

All the while, individual members remain free to follow their own course in diet, for a lifestyle based on unity must be the result of intellectual conviction or intuitive realisation and not of dogma.

Conditions were very different in HPB's days. The enormous cruelty of intensive farming and profit-oriented genetic manipulation did not exist then, nor did the vast and urgent ecological issue of expending grain and water on breeding animals as a business. The intellectual reasons against systematic practice of cruelty, ecological imprudence and wrong notions about health care are strong. It is to be hoped that increasingly TS members and others will come to intuitive recognition of the unity of all life as the only sure basis of universally beneficent action.



If you think it is difficult to be vegetarian or vegan, imagine how difficult it is for the animals that you are not vegetarian or vegan.

Not to hurt our humble brethren is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission – to be of service to them wherever they require it.

*Francis of Assisi, 1181-1226  
Quoted in 'The Life'  
by St Bonaventura*



## The Special Nature of the TOS

The question is sometimes asked: *Why should I choose to participate in the TOS as opposed to an already existing charity?* English theosophical lecturer and author, Geoffrey Farthing, who passed away in 2004, would in all likelihood answer, 'Indeed, why should you choose to work through the TOS?' Geoffrey challenged the whole *raison d'être* of the TOS in the light of his convictions about the nature and purpose of the Theosophical Society as Madame Blavatsky and the Mahatmas originally conceived the organisation. He once took up the issue with the International President of the TOS, in response to an 'On The Watch-Tower' article (*The Theosophist*, December 1994) in which Mrs Burnier emphasized the value of the TOS as a vehicle for the realisation of unity.

Both this 'Watch-Tower' article and Geoffrey's letter are reproduced here, as an aid in exploring the question. Following these, the international secretary of the TOS offers some thoughts on the matter.

### Radha Burnier from 'On the Watchtower':



The Bodhisattvas take a vow of compassion to save others from pain and suffering. In *The Voice of the Silence*, which advocates the Bodhisattva tradition, the disciple is told:

Shalt thou abstain from action? Not so shall gain thy soul her freedom. To reach Nirvana one must reach Self-Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child.

It should go without saying that the basic work of the Theosophical Society is to help humanity to discover the cause of suffering, which is within the mind, and then learn to become free of that suffering by cleansing the mind. For the mind to cease being the source of problems, it must dissolve the centre that is self which it has created. That self, as Krishnamurti pointed out, can be observed best in relationships and in action. He who abstains from action, as *The Voice of the Silence* clearly indicates, cannot gain freedom, because he has no means of learning about the intricate and subtle ways in which the self operates and is sustained.

For Theosophists who have understood, at least theoretically, that unity is the nature of existence, daily life must be a process of watching how the self intervenes in relations and creates confusion and conflict. As the faculty of self-awareness develops, action becomes purer and more truly helpful because the barrier between the self and the 'other' is breaking down.

Indifference to the suffering of others is a negative form of self-centredness and proof of the absence of self-awareness. Loving action, on the contrary, shows that there is growth in understanding, and a weakening of the selfhood that separates. Loving service increases the power of the mind to know.

The Theosophical Order of Service was founded in 1908 by Annie Besant so that the sum of pain in the world may be reduced to some extent at least, and at the same time help its workers to learn, through their service and the attention they pay to the quality of their work, to purify the mind. The Order of Service has therefore a double purpose. From this point of view, it is not merely the doing of the work which is important, but the manner in which the work is done and the purity of purpose behind it. The motto that Annie Besant chose for the order is: 'A union of those who love in the service of all that suffers.'

There are many deeds of charity which, viewed from outside, appear to be generous and good but, in fact, are very different. Money given to a beggar so that one may be relieved of a nuisance, hardly amounts to an act of philanthropy. The Buddha taught therefore that one pot of food given with love is more valuable than one hundred pots given without love.

Unfortunately not enough members of the Theosophical Society realize that the Order of Service is a wonderful means to the realization of unity. Its work has the potency to ennoble the worker while relieving the distressed. When the Order was founded many groups (then called leagues) came into existence throughout the world. In the course of these many years an enormous amount of work has been done by the Order, but there are also many areas where no awareness of the importance of such work exists. In a few places there has been even positive discouragement, because of a misconception that nothing should distract people from the main work of the TS. But as *Light on the Path* says, the way to Wisdom is not to be sought by one road only. The main work of the TS is and should always be to effect the inner transformation of which mention was made earlier. But the work of giving immediate help to those who need it cannot be neglected. As *The Voice of the Silence* urges:

*Let thy soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun. Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer's eye. But let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed.*

There are numerous ways in which all of us can help to lessen physical pain and deprivation in the world. TOS groups are carrying on a wide range of activities, such as having healing services, providing free medicine and medical care, supporting orphaned children, carrying out animal welfare work, promoting peace circles, helping prisoners, and donating to worthwhile causes....Every one, without exception, can contribute something - time, energy, funds, or at least good will...

### Geoffrey Farthing responds:



Dear Radha,

I read your article 'On the Watch-Tower' in the December 1994 issue of *The Theosophist*. It raises an issue on which there are certainly very diverse opinions. One cannot gainsay all that you have put in your 'Watchtower' remarks, nor much of what Annie Besant said in her article [in *The Theosophist* of March 1908]. However, these remarks only apply to the members of the Theosophical Society and what this membership should inspire in them. They do not justify a separate organisation. Regarding Theosophy and the Theosophical Society as promoting practical

and ethical Theosophy, I quote from a letter of 1888 sent by H.P.B. to the Convention of American Theosophists:

*Many who have never heard of the Society are Theosophists without knowing it themselves; for the essence of Theosophy is the perfect harmonizing of the divine with the human in man, the adjustment of his godlike qualities and aspirations and their sway over the terrestrial or animal passions in him. Kindness, absence of every ill-feeling or selfishness, charity, goodwill to all beings, and perfect justice to others as to one's self, are its chief features. He who teaches Theosophy preaches the gospel of goodwill and the converse of this is true also--he who preaches the gospel of goodwill teaches Theosophy.*

Later in the letter H.P.B. continues:

*Theosophists are of necessity friends of all movements in the world whether intellectual or simply practical, for the amelioration of the condition of mankind. We are the friends of all those who fight against drunkenness, against cruelty to animals, against injustice to women, against corruption in society or in government, although we do not meddle in politics. We are the friends of those who exercise practical charity, who seek to lift a little of the tremendous weight of misery that is crushing down the poor. But, in our quality as Theosophists, we cannot engage in any of these great works in particular. As individuals we may do so but as Theosophists we have a larger, more important, and much more difficult work to do...The function of Theosophists is to open men's hearts and understandings to charity, justice and generosity, attributes which belong specifically to the human kingdom and are natural to man when he has developed the quality of a human being. Theosophy teaches the animal-man to be a human man and, when people have learned to think and feel as truly human beings should feel and think, they will act humanely and works of charity, justice and generosity will be done spontaneously by all.*

This is a very clear statement of the ideals before us as members of the Theosophical Society. Those of us who take our membership seriously must endeavour to work toward these ends.

It should be noticed, however, that whereas they include the widest possible practical philanthropy, the last paragraph indicates much more important business to which the Society through its members must put its hand. It is in this last that the objection to a separate organisation such as the Theosophical Order of Service lies. In its exclusive attention to practical philanthropy this last paragraph is entirely overlooked. There are sections in the World society where the Theosophical Order of Service is so identified with the Theosophical Society that its work has become a substitute for the propagation of Theosophy and its vital message. This is the serious objection to a separate organisation, especially as the original one contains within its practical programme all that is stated as the object of the separate one, i.e. the Theosophical Order of Service.

Many members of the Theosophical Order of Service, whilst obviously fulfilling a charitable need, are really doing the work of countless other charities. There is no specific theosophical element in what they do. Their work in effect becomes a substitute for their working for the Society's proper objects, namely the dissemination of Theosophy and all the benefits that should accrue from it. The Society suffers from many such distractions from its proper function, the Theosophical Order of Service being merely one of them. There are larger and better organized charities for which any member of the Theosophical Society is perfectly at liberty to work. It seems to me, therefore, that there is not only no justification whatever for this separate organisation but that it helps distract attention from the T.S.'s proper function.

### Diana Dunningham Chapotin comments:



In the light of Geoffrey's remarks, can we say that the TOS has a valid role? In an ideal world, one in which we all assimilated Theosophy at all levels of consciousness rather than at a simply intellectual one, we would naturally and spontaneously care for and serve our fellow pilgrims. From this perspective, Geoffrey is quite right: we shouldn't need a separate organisation at all. But practically speaking, the TOS, it may be suggested, has proven its worth over the years. In what ways might this be so?

The principal object of the TS is not the dissemination of Theosophy, (although it can readily be conceded that the TS's main activity today is an educational one); in fact its principal object is to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood which is essentially a *spiritual* task requiring inner transformation. No one disputes that an important duty of Theosophists is to popularize a knowledge of Theosophy, but

that is done as much by who we are as by what we know. Is it possible that the TS has developed a rather overactive lower mental body over the decades? The TOS, with its emphasis on practical Theosophy, has perhaps helped keep a balance.

Further, the TOS acts as a forum where members may air their views on affairs of public interest and undertake action without engaging the TS as an organisation. One of the reasons Annie Besant formed the TOS was because of the controversy surrounding the TS as a result of the activism of its members, especially the leaders. Some members felt more comfortable with an independent organisational focus for their efforts. The TOS is useful then in providing the support a group offers, whilst preserving the TS's neutrality and members' freedom of thought.

What is the actual nature of TOS work as it is carried out today? The international secretary's job is to keep in touch with groups all over the world. Information coming in would indicate that the TOS does not act exactly like any other charitable organisation, nor does it give its attention 'exclusively to practical philanthropy'. Members consider their work to have a spiritual dimension. According to what they themselves say, the teachings of unity, cyclical occurrences, polarity, karma, etc. make a significant difference in the way they serve. As they comfort the bereaved, care for the elderly, offer advice to parents in difficulty with their children, demonstrate against nuclear weapons, set up recycling systems, run schools, participate in healing groups, work in The Round Table, denounce cruelty in factory farming, and much more, they generally feel themselves to be participating in a transformative process. Ask them where the Theosophy is in what they are doing and they will almost always reply that it is at the heart of it. TOS-published reports, correspondence and interviews tend to bear this out, don't they? As far as international TOS officers know, there are no sections in the World society 'where the TOS is so identified with the TS that its work has become a substitute for the propagation of Theosophy and its vital message'. In fact TOS activity has in many places generated a lot of goodwill on the part of the public toward the Theosophical Society and drawn people to examine theosophical teachings of which they might never otherwise have heard.

Wherever separate organisations are set up, conflict is a danger, of course. There are areas in the theosophical world where the TOS is resisted, either because it is seen as a distraction from the real work, as Geoffrey indicates, or because it is thought to draw workers away from the TS branches. But there are many people working in the TOS who simply aren't attracted to branch meetings. They feel unsuited to lecture-giving or to intellectual study and yet they grasp the broad picture of spiritual evolution and one human family and work happily for the TOS. They *choose* to work in the TOS, even while working for Amnesty International, the Red Cross, a local animal shelter, etc.

There is no reason why TOS groups cannot act in partnership with the Lodge. This is how the TOS operates in some countries. In support of the United Nations' Year of the Family, Year of Tolerance, etc., the TS and TOS sometimes collaborate in seminars, exploring these themes from a theosophical

perspective. The TOS can help to fill the Lodge's monthly programmes, rather than 'taking workers away'. The TOS's publications are addressed not just to TOS members but to Theosophists and friends of the theosophical movement throughout the world as well. They provide material for discussion in TS branches as well as ideas for individual and group action.

The principal role of the TOS is undoubtedly that of helping students of the perennial wisdom make what they glean a force for change in their lives and in contemporary society. 'Theosophy', said one of the Mahatmas, 'should not represent merely a collection of moral verities, a bundle of metaphysical ethics, epitomized in theoretical dissertations. Theosophy *must be made practical*: and it has, therefore, to be disencumbered of useless digressions, in the sense of desultory orations and fine talk'. Surely the TOS finds a place in this work?

***We are the friends of those who exercise practical charity, who seek to lift a little of the tremendous weight of misery that is crushing down the poor.***

**--H. P. Blavatsky**



What you are the world is.  
And without your transformation,  
there can be no transformation of  
the world.

*J. Krishnamurti*

If you want to make peace, you don't  
talk to your friends.  
You talk to your enemies.

*Moshe Dayan*





Members of the TOS Group in Spain



TOS Group, Auckland, New Zealand



No soul that aspires can ever fail to rise; no heart that loves can ever be abandoned. Difficulties exist only that in overcoming them we may grow strong, and they only who have suffered are able to save.  
- Annie Besant

A successful team is a group of many hands but of one mind and heart.



## The Theosophy of Service



*An excerpt from a talk by Dorothy Bell for the Theosophical Order of Service session at the International Convention of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, India, December 2010*

Across this planet, in the name of the Theosophical Order of Service, many different activities are taking place, and they can be put down, one by one, in a long list. But these are only the outer manifestations of an inner response, an inner impulse from the divinity within to give a helping hand. And we can acknowledge that somewhere across the Earth planet, the light of compassion is being expressed outwardly into the physical plane and that something positive **is** being done in a practical way to serve humanity in these darkest and most corrupt times in the age of Kali Yuga.

If you could imagine us looking down upon the Earth from some distant platform in space, we see the Earth slowly turning on its axis – once a magnificent blue pearl shining in space – now being engulfed by dark clouds of negativity – of fear, anger and hatred, despair, jealousy, greed and ambition; dark clouds covering the Earth and rising upwards into the atmosphere. But if we strain our eyes we can just manage to see some faint flickering lights dotted around the planet. These are the open hearts and minds expressed in true sister-brotherhood without distinction, without prejudice, and, just as important, without investment in the action, without the desire for gain, power, status, recognition or reward – just trying to help someone because that is what is to be done. It is that simple.

No judgement, no prejudice, no investment in the outcome – open hearts freely giving and in so doing, working with the great universal law of *Harmonious Response or inaction in action, action in inaction* – in the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

These acts of kindness are not random but reflect a general attitude – an attitude generated by that original impulse upon which the Theosophical Society was built to stand for Life and Light, for Unity and Harmony and for Sister-Brotherhood.

As we well know, the opposite to Life is not death, but darkness, separation, fragmentation and confusion – those very destructive forces which challenge humanity and the Earth today.

I am reminded of the powerful teaching that Annie Besant, the founder of the Theosophical Order of Service, expressed in '*The Law of Duty*' on the fundamental idea of Unity – and she defined it in terms of spirituality.

She asked, "*What then is the Spiritual?*" and answered, "*It is alone the life of the Consciousness which recognises Unity, which sees one Self in everything and everything in the Self... and sees the One and Eternal within each changing form... Even to see the Self everywhere alone is Wisdom. All outside that is ignorance; all outside that is unspiritual.*"

This goes beyond the comfortable chair of intellectual reflection – this is referring to unveiled spiritual perception, and it is operational – it is a way of seeing, a way of thinking and being – with the inner vision that comes from an understanding of the fundamental ideas of the Ancient Wisdom teachings and of the Supreme duty of all aspirants to the Path of Service. If we are blinded by matter and by form – darkness, separateness, fragmentation and confusion will prevail.

In her final address in 1931, in Headquarters Hall at Adyar, Annie Besant gave more guidance – as she was inclined to do – "*never mind a man's speech, it is his actions that matter,*" she said, "*it is no good to talk theosophy unless we live what we talk... Give the God in you a chance. ...and so we shall learn to love, which is the lesson we have to learn while we are here. It is just because the world is imperfect we CAN learn to help.*"

And thus we have the TOS motto and mission: *to form a union of those who love in the service of all that suffers.*

Many TS and TOS workers are still inspired by Annie Besant's life, work and teachings. They are learning to love, to be who they truly are, to be compassion on the path of service, on the journey from egoism to altruism – through learning to help others.

So, in what areas of service are the lights of altruism shining? There are patterns of activities – for example, helping the homeless, those who need refuge from perhaps the violence and persecution in their own homes, neighbourhoods or countries; helping those being discriminated against and neglected, the orphans and the aged, those oppressed in poverty and ignorance; helping those whose economic or religious support systems have been destroyed or taken away by others or by natural disasters; helping the environment and the animal kingdom to survive; helping those who need medical assistance to combat disease and physical disadvantage; and helping those who are the future of the human life wave, through providing educational opportunity.

Through their altruistic service they invoke the Law of Sacrifice and reflect Annie Besant's words... "*the essence of leading a divine life is giving.*" These are the unnamed and unheralded individuals and bands of brothers and sisters who are trying to live the TOS motto – and, with many others, they are forming, unconsciously, an underground spiritual movement, a worldwide inner union of those who love in the service of all that suffers.



Love is a form of seeing.

*Annie Besant*

We have to learn to give with our hearts. When we help from the very soul of ourselves, there can be no consciousness of a helper separate from the one who is being helped.

*N. Sri Ram*



## There is Wisdom in Action

**Carolyn Harrod**



In this world of manifestation, we cannot avoid action. Every thought and feeling, every choice to speak or remain silent, to walk away or become involved, to meditate or try to influence political decisions, is an action. The question for ourselves is: Are they choices imbued by the attributes of our spiritual transformation into 'knowers of wisdom' and therefore choices that will benefit humanity and all life?

From the first days of the Theosophical Society, members have been reminded of the importance of both our inner work related to our spiritual development and transformation, and our outer work in service to all life.

HPB saw these two aspects of theosophical work as being of equal importance. In one of her essays in *Collected Writings, Vol. 11*, she writes this about the inner work we must do:

*One of the fundamental laws is, that ordinary morality is insufficient to deliver one from rebirth; one has to practise the six Paramitas or cardinal virtues for it: 1. Charity. 2. Chastity. 3. Patience. 4. Industry. 5. Meditation. 6. Ingenuousness (or openness of heart, sincerity). And how can a hermit practise charity or industry if he runs away from man?*

*World Improvement or World Deliverance*

HPB leaves us in no doubt as to the importance of our work in the outer world. In her editorial in *Lucifer* in November 1887, she writes:

*He who does not practise altruism; he who is not prepared to share his last morsel with a weaker or a poorer than himself; he who neglects to help his brother man, of whatever race, nation, or creed, whenever and wherever he meets suffering, and who turns a deaf ear to the cry of human misery; he who hears an innocent person slandered, whether a brother Theosophist or not, and does not undertake his defence as he would undertake his own – is no Theosophist (no seeker of Divine Wisdom).*

A similar message was given to us in the famous Jubilee Address of 1925, attributed to one of the Great Ones:

*You cannot truly be students of the Divine Wisdom, save as you are active in the service of the Divine Life. Where trouble is, where suffering is, where ignorance is, where quarrel is, where injustice is, where tyranny is, where oppression is, where cruelty is – there must we find the earnest members of Our Society.*

This is a call to the service of all life, but it is service of a particular quality. It is action that flows naturally from a nature in which wisdom-compassion is awakened.

Daily life in our society provides us with multiple opportunities to be of service and these opportunities are on a variety of levels. We are encouraged to contribute to international campaigns related to human rights, disaster relief and animal welfare. Many of the problems brought to our attention cause us to feel distressed over the misfortunes that befall groups and individuals or the treatment of the people or animals involved and we take up our pens to write to politicians and to contribute donations for programs aimed at relieving suffering. For some individuals, their feelings and beliefs are so strong that they move to the country in question so that they can directly aid those in need.

At the level of our local communities, there seems to be an increasing number of avenues for us to be of service to others. Again, this service can consist of giving moral support, donations or hands-on help to groups engaged in direct action, including of course the TOS itself. Or we can serve others on an individual basis by giving our time to volunteering in animal shelters, providing companionship to lonely residents of aged care facilities, tutoring and befriending refugees in our community, mentoring young people, working on local environmental projects,

painting rooms in refuges for homeless women so that they have pleasant surroundings... the list could go on and on.

Our own families, work places and circle of friends also provide constant avenues for service. The unasked for act of kindness, the decision to put someone else's needs ahead of our own convenience, the silent eye contact and smile, the willingness to work alongside someone to assist them towards their goal, giving time to a relationship, can all be acts of service.

It is unlikely that anyone would deny that these examples of action were positive and the sort of behaviour that should be encouraged. But are they necessarily actions that flow from the wisdom of spiritual transformation? No, they aren't.

Our motivations behind our actions are most important. If we act from a position of viewing ourselves as superior and the recipient of our act of service as inferior, then the recipient may feel resentment, discomfort, embarrassment or some other emotion tinged with negativity. If we feel coerced into providing a service, then the relationships involved in the service are unlikely to be positive. When we are attached to the outcomes of our service, our relationships can be affected. There may be anxiety on our part about our image, or about getting a particular outcome; we may be wanting to control the recipients of our service to act in a particular way, and if they don't live up to our expectations we can resent them and feel unappreciated and let down. This can result in our putting up barriers that strengthen the sense of 'them' and 'us' or 'me', rather than reducing the barriers to allow a feeling of 'we-ness', fellowship or oneness to flourish.

Our act of service may, on the other hand, result in the recipient feeling less weighed down by circumstances and events, feeling more optimistic or less angry or alienated, more positively connected with other people, aware that someone is interested in them and cares about them. Even then, our actions may still subconsciously be selfishly motivated because we have a sense of separation from the other person. Our actions do not yet spring from the well of wisdom-compassion brought forth from our inner transformation. In Letter 2 of *The Mahatma Letters*, we find this advice: *the highest aspirations for the welfare of humanity become tainted with selfishness if, in the mind of the philanthropist, there lurks the shadow of desire for self benefit, even when this exists unconsciously to himself.*

Action arises in the mind and is given power by our emotions. To alter conditioned, habitual action, we need to develop self-awareness. This can be achieved through contemplation and meditational practices that include self-reflection and observation of our actions and thoughts. Meditation itself can be an act of service. It contributes to our own sense of peace and sense of the oneness of all life and this in turn influences our relationships with others. The Dalai Lama suggests that we activate the centre of love within ourselves and focus it outwards in ever-widening circles so that love and compassion enfolds friends, unknown people, non-human life and eventually those whom we might have once categorised as the opposition or enemies.

Action motivated by love and compassion is our aim. Compassion arises from a deep acknowledgment of oneness – there is no 'other'; we share the same pain, the same happiness. Compassion leads to a strong commitment to acting for the welfare of all. This is unbiased service toward all beings, without reference to their values, beliefs, habits or relationship to ourselves. Compassion arises from our expanded circle of love that enables us to be a friend to all sentient beings. Compassion enables us to act selflessly, without attachment.

Three profound little books familiar to most members of the Theosophical Society set out the task needed for our inner transformation – *The Voice of the Silence*, by HPB, Mabel Collins's *Light on the Path* and *At the Feet of the Master* by Alcyone or Krishnamurti. Each of these texts is said to reflect the Wisdom Teaching and to be inspired by the Great Ones.

*At the Feet of the Master* sets out four qualifications that we must work towards to enter the Path – discrimination, desirelessness, good conduct (incorporating self control of mind and action, tolerance, cheerfulness, one-pointedness and confidence) and Love.

Desirelessness embodies the idea of non-attachment – of letting go of our attachment to and dependence on things, events and people as our motivation for action in the physical, emotional and lower mental worlds. Non-attachment and desirelessness do not imply inaction. As *The Voice of the Silence* advises us:

*Sow kindly acts and thou shalt reap their fruition. Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin. (135)*

*Shalt thou abstain from action? Not so shall gain thy soul her freedom. To reach Nirvana one must reach self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is of loving deeds the child. (136)*

So the Masters, the Great Ones, give us guidance for both our inner work of self-transformation and our outer work of service in the world.

*At the Feet of the Master* describes the characteristics of service taken up by those on the path of spiritual unfoldment:

*They who are on the path exist not for themselves, but for others; they have forgotten themselves in order that they may serve others... they are a living plume of fire, raying out upon the world the divine love that fills their hearts.*

*The wisdom which enables you to help, the will which directs the wisdom, the love that inspires the will – these are your qualifications.*

Fully realising the unity of all life gives rise naturally to the transformation of our outward behaviour. Turning to the guidance in *Light on the Path*, we are advised to kill out all sense of separateness. This includes the separation inherent in the dichotomy of good and evil. We are then counselled:

*But if you allow the idea of separateness from any evil thing or person to grow up within you, by so doing you create karma which will bind you to that thing or person till your soul recognises that it cannot be isolated.*

In *At the Feet of the Master* we are advised to fill our beings with Love so that there is no sense of separation from the Divine and therefore no separation from all life. – *Of all the qualifications, Love is the most important. In daily life this means two things – first, that you shall be careful to do no harm to any living thing; second, that you shall always be watching for an opportunity to help.*

The importance of recognising the need for this inner transformation in order to serve selflessly is highlighted in the philosophy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. “There will be no future worth living,” he writes, “unless everyone now takes personal responsibility for their own inner lives and universal responsibility for the pain and misery in the world. None of the major terrible problems that threaten survival of the earth can be solved by merely institutional or political methods. Humankind, to survive, must undergo a massive and unprecedented change of heart, an ordered and passionate spiritual revolution that changes forever our relation to each other and our relation to nature. It is only from such a revolution that the new vision the planet so desperately needs can arise – a vision that sees the connections between every thought and every action, the relation between the obsession with the individual self and its hunger for false securities and every kind of exploitation.”

In this article, it has been proposed that *There is Wisdom in Action* insofar as our inner transformation is reflected in the outer transformation of our actions. The two go hand in hand as we see in HPB’s description of the spiritual journey on which we are embarked:

*A clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect, an unveiled spiritual perception, a brotherliness for all, a readiness to give and receive advice and instruction, a courageous endurance of personal injustice, a brave declaration of principles, a valiant defence of those who are unjustly attacked, and a constant eye to the ideal of human progression and perfection which the Sacred Science depicts – these are the golden stairs up the steps of which the learner may climb to the Temple of Divine Wisdom.*

## Invocations

### Invocation for the TOS

*Maria Parisen*

May the Powers of Love bless this Order of Service, that in their compassion and wisdom we may bring comfort, freedom and peace to all in need. We rededicate ourselves to the highest good of all beings.



### O Powers of Love!

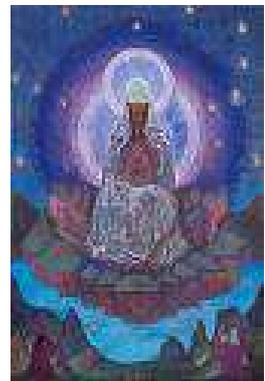
*An invocation by George S. Arundale*

O Powers of Love! We pledge to you our faithfulness, knowing that only love can redeem the world.

We invoke your blessing on all who strive to serve you.

We invoke your blessing on all who have to endure suffering, that they may discover their enfoldment in your love even in the midst of their affliction.

We invoke your blessing on all who inflict suffering that they may be moved to return to you and serve you.



### A Dedication for Selfless Service

*Annie Besant*

We give ourselves without reserve, seeking nothing, asking nothing, hoping nothing for the separated self; content to be in the light or in the dark, to be active or passive, to work or to wait, to speak or to be silent, to take praise or reproach, to feel sorrow or joy – our only wish to be what They need as instruments in Their mighty work, to fill whatever post is vacant in Their household.



### Invocation for Harmony

May the Forces of Light bring illumination to humankind.

May the Spirit of Peace be spread abroad.

May the Law of Harmony prevail.

May people of goodwill everywhere meet in a spirit of cooperation.

So let it be and help us to do our part.



## Meditation for World Peace

O God of many names,  
Lover of all nations,  
We pray for peace  
In our hearts  
In our homes  
In our nations  
In our world.  
The peace of Your Will  
The peace of our need.



## Prayer for World Peace

Lord, we pray for the power to be gentle; the strength to be forgiving; the patience to be understanding; and the endurance to accept the consequences of holding to what we believe to be right.

We put our trust in the power of good to overcome evil and the power of love to overcome hatred.

We pray for the vision to see and the faith to believe in a world emancipated from violence, a new world where fear shall no longer lead human beings to commit injustice, nor selfishness make them bring suffering to others.

Help us to devote our whole life and thought and energy to the task of making peace, praying always for the inspiration and the power to fulfill the destiny for which we and all humans were created.



## Affirmation of Compassion

*Dalai Lama*

This is my religion, my faith.  
Our own heart, our own mind is the temple.  
The doctrine is compassion.  
Love for others and respect for their rights and dignity are our needs.  
May I become at all times, both now and forever, a protector for the helpless, guide for the lost ones, ship for those to cross oceans and bridge to cross rivers, a sanctuary for those who need shelter, and a servant to all in need.



## Invocation for Service

Spirit of the Most High, breathe into us visions of how we may best serve our fellow humans in the coming years. Teach us the meaning of intelligent, selfless service and give us the love in our hearts towards our fellow pilgrims that will bring more peace and harmony, health and happiness to each one we contact and to all, everywhere.



## Invocation for Peace

Oh Universal Spirit, may the strengthening force of Thy Life vibrate through this channel;

The hidden Light of Thy Wisdom shine through this channel;

The healing power of Thy Love pour through this channel;

That Peace and the understanding that all are One may grow in the hearts of humanity.



## Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.



## A meditation

*St Clare's words to St Agnes of Prague:*

Place your mind in the mirror of eternity;  
Place your soul in the splendour of glory;  
Place your heart in the icon of the Substance Divine;  
And contemplating, be transformed  
into the image of the Godhead Itself.



## A Hindu Prayer for Peace

O God, lead us from the unreal to the Real.  
O God lead us from darkness to light.  
O God, lead us from death to immortality.  
Shanti, Shanti, Shanti unto all.

O Lord God almighty,  
May there be peace in celestial regions.  
May there be peace on earth.  
May the waters be appeasing.  
May herbs be wholesome, and  
May trees and plants bring peace to all.  
May all beneficent beings bring peace to us.  
May your Vedic Law propagate peace all through the world.  
May all things be a source of peace to us.  
And may your peace itself bestow peace on all, and  
May that peace come to me also.



## A Hindu Prayer for the Unity of All Life

May the winds, the oceans, the herbs, and night and days, the mother earth, the father heaven, all vegetation, the sun, be all sweet to us.

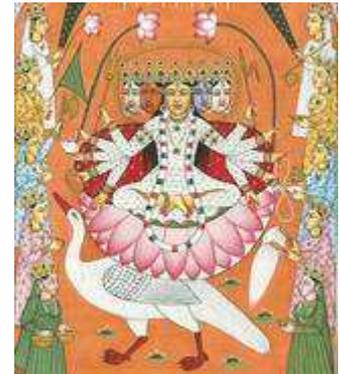
Let us follow the path of goodness for all times, like the sun and the moon moving eternally in the sky.

Let us be charitable to one another. Let us not kill or be violent with one another.

Let us know and appreciate the points of view of others. And let us unite.

May the God who is friendly, benevolent, all-encompassing, measurer of everything, the sovereign, the lord of speech, may He shower His blessings on us....

Oh Lord, remove my indiscretion and arrogance, control my mind. Put an end to the snare of endless desires. Broaden the sphere of compassion and help me to cross the ocean of existence.



## A Moslem Prayer for Peace in the World

*Hazrat Inayat Khan*

O You, the almighty Sun, whose light clears away all clouds,  
We take refuge in You, king of all men, God of all deities, Lord of all angels.

We pray You, dispel the mist of illusion from the hearts of the nations  
and lift their lives by Your all-sufficient power.

Pour upon them Your limitless love, Your ever-shining light, Your  
everlasting life, Your heavenly joy and Your perfect peace.



## Divine Life Visualisation

The following technique, designed by Geoffrey Hodson, is described in *The Essence of Healing*, edited by Karen Shultz.



It is a personal or group healing meditation designed to restore the harmonious flow of the Divine Life through one's whole nature. This Life, which is the vital energy of the Universe, is present everywhere in abundance.

Its steady and continuous flow through us maintains perfect health and strength. Illness is a sign that through lack of inner harmony, we are temporarily shut off from this universal supply of healing force. When we attain a state of spiritual, mental, emotional and physical harmony and accord, the Divine healing and vitalising power will flow freely through us, and we shall be whole.

To achieve this flow of spiritual energy, visualise the Divine Life as being everywhere present and as filling the upper air with its radiant and golden glow. Reach up towards it with all the power of your thought and will, aspiring ardently to become one with it, to embody it within yourself, so that it may flow freely through you, in the helping of the world.

Then you may dwell in thought upon the One as the Source of all power and life. Seek to realise Its presence and to lose yourself Therein. You may think of yourself as a chalice into which the Divine Life is poured, and as you aspire to at-one-ness with the Divine Life, the cup will increase in size, growing ever higher, into the inner worlds, where dwells the Healing Life.

Then think of the Divine Life in all its glowing splendour, as pouring down upon and into you in a torrent of vital force, filling the cup to overflowing and flooding your whole nature with its power. After dwelling for a time in silent realisation, this power may be directed outwards through your heart to heal the sorrows and sufferings of the world.

This meditation may safely be performed regularly, day by day, even many times a day, preferably at early morning, midday, and before retiring.

Gradually an automatic flow of healing life will be established in you, the aspirant, and you will then bear about with you, wherever you go, a healing and uplifting power of incalculable value to the world. Thus, as you tread your upward Path, you may heal and bless your fellow-beings.

Love alone can unite living beings so as to complete and fulfill them ...

For it alone joins them by what is deepest in themselves.

All we need is to imagine our ability to love developing until it embraces the totality of men and of the earth.

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*





Members of the TOS Group in Pakistan



*There is no need for temples;  
no need for complicated  
philosophy. Our own brain,  
our own heart is our temple;  
the philosophy is kindness.  
- The Dalai Lama*



## Serving in our communities

When Dr Besant formed the TOS, her intention was that it would provide an avenue through which TS members could apply their theosophical principles within their own communities. She wrote in the March 1908 edition of *The Theosophist*:

*The T.S. Order of Service aims at making Theosophy practical in order that the sum of human misery within and around the areas of every branch of our Society may be visibly diminished. It will seek to model the conceptions arrived at by theosophical study, for their adaptation into useful forms of daily life ... and it offers a common work to all who are willing to act on these principles.*

Many of us in western countries put considerable effort into raising funds for educational and social welfare projects run by TOS groups in Asia and Africa. We do this because we see the vast needs in these countries and want to help alleviate suffering. Our donations definitely help these TOS groups extend the services they provide in their countries, so this is service work that we need to continue. At the same time, Annie Besant's words challenge us to look more closely at our own communities and to identify opportunities on our own doorsteps for putting Theosophy into action.

### So how might we go about doing this?

- One possible starting point is for your TOS group to talk about the various areas in which theosophical principles can be readily applied – education, social welfare and justice, healing, peace, animal concerns and the environment. Choose an area about which you are collectively interested. Feeling that you really want to make a difference in an area is vital to gaining commitment and to people's willingness to set aside time for action.  
If you have two areas in which different people want to work, then form two action groups. They are not competing with each other so it will often work well to discuss plans for the two areas as an entire group, since this expands the range of ideas generated.
- When you have decided on a focus area, brainstorm issues in your community that are related to that area.
- Identify one or two of these issues about which your group could do something to help. List all your ideas about ways of helping. Now look at your list and underline the ideas that you could realistically put into action given the number of people available and willing to work on this project, the time members can reasonably give to the project, and the amount of funding that you would need to raise. Don't delete ideas from your list, because over time you may find that ideas that were not practicable in the beginning can become achievable.
- Identify potential partnerships with other organisations working on similar focus areas.
- Now comes the exciting part of your planning. Decide which idea/s you are going to begin with. Talk about the things you need to do to put that idea into action. Write down these smaller activities, preferably in the order in which they will need to be done. Ask for volunteers to do each smaller activity and write their names beside it.
- It is a good idea to ask for a volunteer to coordinate the project. Provide members with a record of what is being done and who is responsible.
- Include your community project on the agenda of each meeting, review progress, discuss ideas to get around problems, promote your project amongst other TS members and plan further developments. Remember to celebrate your achievements!

### Serving in our communities by partnering with other groups

Partnering with established community organisations makes good sense for small groups like ours, provided that their aims and ways of working are consistent with the values that underpin the TOS. We need to be confident that their funding comes from ethical sources, that they act in ways that are respectful of other people's rights and that the services they offer are not conditional upon taking up a particular set of beliefs.

Frequently, established groups have already created networks to identify current areas of need and sources of funding and to coordinate action. They have developed communication strategies at a political level and they have often formed coalitions with other groups with similar aims and are open

to further partnerships. At the local level of social welfare, their size has usually enabled them to set up refuges, kitchens, etc.

When you partner with other organisations make sure to let them know that you are working with them as a group of TOS volunteers.

So let's look at some possible partnerships related to areas of service that resonate with the aims of the TOS.



### **United Nations related activities**

The United Nations was built on spiritual principles and universal values such as peace, human rights, human dignity and worth, justice, respect, good neighbourliness, freedom, respect for nature and shared responsibility. TOS groups will therefore find that many UN designated International Days provide opportunities for promoting the theosophical principles underpinning TOS work as well as networking with similar community groups in supporting relevant UN activities.

The following are a few of the UN designated days that might be relevant to your group.

- January 2: World March for Peace and Non-violence**
- February 20: World Day of Social Justice**
- March 8: International Women's Day**
- March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**
- June 5: World Environment Day**
- June 12: World Day against Child Labour**
- June 20: World Refugee Day**
- June 26: International Day Against Drug Abuse**
- August 9: International Day of the World's Indigenous People**
- August 17-23: World Water Week**
- September 8: International Literacy Day**
- September 10: World Suicide Prevention Day**
- September 21: International Day of Peace**
- September 28: World Heart Day**
- October 1: International Day of Older Persons**
- October 2: International Day of Non-Violence (Gandhi's birthday)**
- October 9: World Sight Day**
- October 10: World Mental Health Day**
- October 17: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty**
- October 24: United Nations Day**
- November 20: Universal Children's Day**
- November 25: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**
- December 1: World AIDS Day**
- December 3: International Day of Disabled Persons**
- December 10: Human Rights Day**

### **Animal welfare**



Many organisations work in this area at national or international level and are an excellent source of information on current campaigns and projects to educate the community. Sadly, there are many issues that require attention such as factory farming, animal testing, live animal export, the fur trade, slaughtering practices, poaching and the use of animal parts in traditional medicines.

Some organisations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals ([www.peta.org](http://www.peta.org)) and Animals Australia ([www.animalsaustralia.org](http://www.animalsaustralia.org)), not only have campaign information on their websites but also offer information on vegetarianism and living a cruelty free lifestyle.

We also, of course, have our local animal refuges that are always looking for supporters and hands-on volunteers.



### Environment

Major environmental organisations like World Wildlife Fund ([www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org)) have news, scientific information, updates on government policies and information about campaigns and email petitions. They also have interactive tools that enable you, for instance, to calculate your environmental footprint.

Each year, hundreds of millions of people, businesses and governments around the world unite to support the largest environmental event in history – **Earth Hour**. Encourage your friends to join you in switching off the lights at 8:30 p.m. on the last Saturday of March each year and show your support for a more sustainable planet.

Don't forget partnership possibilities with your local Council and community environmental groups with an interest in such things as tree-planting and caring for waterway and coastal areas.



### Healing and well-being

In this handbook you'll find a healing meditation designed to restore the harmonious flow of Divine Life through one's whole nature. It was designed by Geoffrey Hodson and can be used by groups or individuals.

Have you ever considered promoting the benefits for children of relaxed mindfulness or offering workshops for members' families on this topic?

Experts at Duke University, in Durham, NC, USA, recommend mindfulness, which is a technique borrowed from meditation, to help children deal with the many academic and social pressures in their lives. You'll find some of their suggestions in the *For Members* section of our website.



### Peace ideas

You'll find a range of ideas for promoting peace or celebrating the International Day of Peace on our website in the *For Members* section. These include beautiful peace prayers for the world, suggestions about personal action to promote peace, a guide to starting a Peace Club, information about participating in the Pinwheels for Peace Project and ideas for planning your own Peace Day event.

For ideas on activities that you could organise, check out associated websites such as:

- *Pinwheels for Peace* at <http://www.pinwheelsforpeace.com>
- *UN Peace Day* at <http://peaceoneday.org/> and <http://www.internationaldayofpeace.org/>



Peace Day, on 21 September each year, is not just about stopping wars. It is also an opportunity to promote harmony and peace within our families and communities. Look out for peace events that you and your TOS group can support within your community.



### Social welfare and justice

Many partnership possibilities connected with social welfare and justice will involve us in volunteer activities. Volunteers are regarded as playing a crucial role in the well-being of most communities. Indeed, in some countries, statistics show that volunteers contribute over 800 million hours annually. But it's not just the time we contribute that is valuable. Frequently, the human contact, our interest and friendship are even more important.

Many organisations working in the community and social services sector have websites that provide information about volunteer opportunities. You may also know of local groups that provide support to people with disabilities or health issues, run soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless and victims of domestic violence, mentor students from disadvantaged backgrounds, conduct parenting programs or provide support to refugees, etc. Groups like these welcome volunteers and often provide training.

If you are interested in joining campaigns about social welfare and justice issues, websites such as Avaaz ([www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org)) and Amnesty International ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)) will enable you to keep in touch with current issues.

***When you volunteer to clean the kitchen or scrub the pots, if you practise as a bodhisattva, you will have great joy and happiness while doing so. But if you have the feeling, "I am doing a lot, and others are not contributing their fair share," you will suffer, because your practice is based on form.***

**Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love***

TOS activities below: a healing circle in the USA, tree planting in Kenya, educating needy children in Pakistan and providing veterinary care in India.



## Fundraising ideas that work

A great deal of our service work requires us to provide material resources as well as our time, energy and commitment. Consequently, we are often searching for new, easy and enjoyable fundraising ideas.

You'll find a collection of great ideas on our website in the *For Members* section, including the ideas below.

### Hold a 'Bring and buy' sale of fresh food and produce

As the name implies, members bring donated items for sale and they and others buy from the sale table. This activity works very well if you have TOS members with gardens or who are willing to cook.

Items might include:

- fruit, vegetables, bunches of herbs, bunches of flowers, small plant-pots of herbs, bulbs and seedlings
- bottles of preserves, jam, marmalade and conserves, chutneys, pickles, tapenade, marinated vegetables and spice mixes
- biscuits and cookies, shortbread, slices, pikelets, crêpes and cakes
- sweets and chocolates.

The 'Bring and buy' sale needs to be planned several months ahead, and if members have the energy it could be held three or four times a year. You will need to decide on the TOS project to benefit from the money raised and the date of the sale, preferably at a meeting or event which will have a good attendance. Invite members to contribute donations of cooking or produce from their gardens and draw up an overview of what is likely to be available for sale.

In the week of the sale, confirm with members that they are still able to contribute the items they had nominated. Ask for volunteers to set up the sale table, price items (sometimes members are happy to put prices on their items before bringing them) and serve customers. Make sure that you have a collection of coins and low denomination notes for giving change.

Arrange your donations of fresh food and produce invitingly on tables. Prominently display your posters about how the TOS is using the funds raised and be prepared to talk to customers about the project. Enjoy selling all these wonderful fresh treats!

After the 'Bring and buy' sale, send a thank-you email or note to everyone who donated items, congratulating them on the outcome of the sale. Remember also to announce at the next TS meeting how much was raised for your nominated project and thank everyone who supported the activity by buying items.



*In France, home-made jam seems to sell particularly well and so do fresh fruit pies served with tea and coffee on the spot. Plants and flowers are also popular.*

## Collect a jar of coins

The favourite fundraiser of one TOS group is their “five cent jar”. All you’ll need for this idea is a large glass jar which you could decorate with stickers. Then decide what coins you’ll collect. The TOS group that contributed this idea chose to collect the smallest coin in their country’s currency, but these small donations add up to a very useful amount over a year.

Display the jar prominently on the TOS table at all TOS meetings and TS public meetings, study groups, yoga and meditation groups with a sign inviting donations.

Bank the donated coins frequently as the jar becomes half full. After each banking, report on how that donation will be used. For example, this TOS group recently reported that the 5c. pieces banked had been enough to restore sight to two people in India through the SEE project of the TOS in Chennai. Providing this information has a real impact on people’s willingness to save and contribute coins.



It is also worthwhile to ask members who attend other groups or who work in an office or school to encourage colleagues to save coins and donate them every so often.

You’ll be delighted with the success of this very simple, effortless and worthwhile fundraising strategy.

*Left, Joyce Tozer, the Coordinator of the Sunshine Coast TOS Group in Australia, with the jar for collecting 5c. coins.*

## Hold a ‘Trash and treasure’ sale

The expression, “What is one person’s trash is another person’s treasure” is the basis for this idea.

You will need to plan your ‘Trash and treasure’ sale a few months ahead. You will need to decide on a suitable date when a large number of people are likely to be attending a TS or TOS meeting or other event. As well, invite members and their friends to go through their belongings, looking for items which they no longer use, but which are in good condition and that they would be willing to donate to the sale. Remember to tell them how your TOS group will use the money raised through the sale. You will also need to organise a collection point and boxes into which members can put their donated items.

Several weeks before the sale, start advertising it at meetings through posters and announcements. Draw up a roster of helpers and allocate roles. It is often efficient to have only one person receiving money. Arrange for this person to have a collection of coins and small denomination notes for giving change.

On the day of the sale, arrange items invitingly on tables. You might consider placing similar items together e.g. jewellery, kitchen items, china, photo frames, ornaments. You might have a collection of ‘odds and ends’ in a box labelled “A silver coin each”. Put price stickers on items so that it is easy for customers to make decisions about buying.

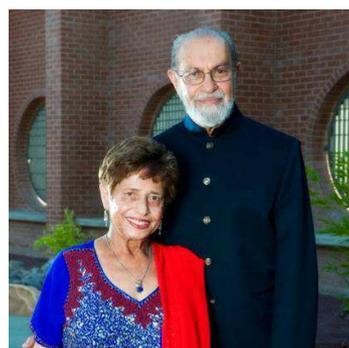


Prominently display posters announcing how your TOS group will use the funds raised from the sale. Put on your smile and happiest disposition and get ready to have fun as you sell an extraordinary collection of items.

## Invite donations instead of presents

If you are celebrating a birthday, anniversary, retirement or other event, consider inviting guests to make a donation to one of your favourite TOS projects instead of giving you a gift.

You could nominate several projects from which to choose and provide guests with information about each. While some guests may write cheques in your name, you'll need to also provide details for those wishing to write cheques to the TOS.



*The photograph to the right shows Dinshaw and Hutoxy Contractor, who requested donations instead of gifts when they celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.*

## Hold a book table sale

Another popular idea is holding a regular book sale at TS members' meetings and public meetings. The books can come from various sources. Invite members to donate books from their personal collections and consider approaching the TS for help. For instance, when the TS library reviews its collection, unneeded books and magazines could be provided to the TOS for sale. The TS bookshop might also be willing to donate unneeded books.

You'll need to invite contributions about a month before the book table sale and organise a box in which contributions can be left. You'll also need to organise storage for unsold books that are kept for future sales.

Price the books and magazines reasonably to attract buyers and display them in categories on large tables. You could group them by topic, author or price. When you ask for volunteers to help at the sale table, it's a good idea to ask them to be ready for customers half an hour before the meeting. You may find that bargain hunters arrive quite early so that they have time to look through the collection of books for sale.



## Publish a booklet for sale

Have you ever considered publishing a booklet? Possibly not, but it is easier to do than you might think and it could be an on-going fundraiser for your group. Consider the interests of members of your TOS group and use these as a starting point for publishing ideas. You could, for instance, compile a collection of:

- recipes for favourite treats brought to meetings or sold at fundraising events
- handcraft ideas and patterns
- poems and inspirational stories or favourite quotations for reflection
- favourite meditations
- notes and commentaries for a TS study group.

You will need to form a team of people to undertake the project – contributors of material, an editor, a desk-top publisher, possibly an illustrator and a project coordinator. Depending on their skills and available time, some of these roles could be held by the one person.

Once the booklet is printed, you will need to decide on its sale price, considering how much profit you want to earn after paying the cost of publication. You will also need to consider how you will publicise it and where you will sell it.



Members of the TOS Group in Australia



Members of the TOS Group in Toronto, Canada



Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?  
- Martin Luther King, Jr



## What is the TOS?

The Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) is a world-wide organisation based on recognition of the unity of all life and aimed at reducing suffering and injustice at all levels – human, animal and environmental.

The TOS was founded in 1908 by Dr Annie Besant, then International President of the Theosophical Society, to provide an opportunity for participation in activities which promote the first Object of the Theosophical Society: 'to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.'



The TOS is a separate organisation from the Theosophical Society but is closely linked with it. Study, meditation and service are the three components of theosophical living. The TOS provides a framework in which theosophical principles can be applied in daily life and to issues of contemporary concern.

The distinctive, two-fold purpose of the TOS is selfless service to the needy and suffering and the inner transformation of the server that this requires. Dr Besant summarised the mission of the TOS in its motto: ***A union of those who love in the service of all that suffers.***

Today there are many active TOS groups around the world, united in their ideal of selfless service.

The TOS is a non-profit organisation whose members are its greatest resource. They work as unpaid volunteers and donations are used for service projects, not for administration.

## What does the TOS do?

TOS groups around the world work in a variety of areas including peace, social welfare, education, healing, animal welfare and the environment.

Members may work on individually selected activities or on group projects, sometimes in partnership with other groups.

While most service work is carried out in local communities, members also contribute to regional or national projects. Some TOS groups also raise funds for major, long-term projects organised by TOS groups in other countries.

The aim of TOS members is altruistic service that springs from their inner spiritual work. It is service with no intention of benefit to themselves or to their own agenda.

**There can be no greater purpose in life than to serve – service to the One in many forms.**

**It must not be so-called, limited service, but real service, which is direct and sincere, in which the consciousness of self is forgotten.**

***N. Sri Ram***



*A village meeting organised by the TOS in Kenya to manage their new water bore*

## Examples of TOS projects

TOS members are involved in a wide range of service activities to help people living in poverty improve their lives, to help animals, and to promote a wider world view. These projects include:

- providing vocational training programs for rural women
- funding and supporting childcare centres and orphanages
- establishing and funding schools
- providing educational scholarships
- providing medical and dental healthcare
- providing mobility aids, spectacles and hearing aids
- working with a village to put in a water bore and establish orchards and crops
- holding meditations for World Peace and healing
- providing blankets, clothing and food in emergencies
- promoting non-violence
- funding and supporting veterinary care and animal shelters
- conducting talks and seminars to raise awareness of environmental, health, animal welfare and social issues
- campaigning on contemporary issues.



*Students of the Golden Link College run by the TOS in the Philippines*

## Membership

The TOS welcomes all who are in sympathy with its aims and wish to put into practice the concept of the Universal Oneness of all life.

You do not need to be a member of the Theosophical Society to join the TOS or participate in its work. We welcome any contribution to our work – time, energy, money and expertise.



*Participants at an International TOS gathering*



*The toy-room in a childcare centre in Latvia supported by the Swedish TOS*

**Please join us in putting  
theosophy into action**

**You are invited to contact  
your local TOS group and  
work with us for peace,  
planet sustainability,  
compassion and harmony.**

**For contact details in your  
country, please go to the  
list on the home page of the  
international website:**

<http://international.theoservice.org>

**To learn more about us and  
what we do, visit our  
international website at:**

<http://international.theoservice.org/>



**The Theosophical Order of  
Service**

**Do you care about:**

- ✦ **peace**
- ✦ **justice**
- ✦ **the welfare of people and animals**
- ✦ **the environment**
- ✦ **healing?**

**The TOS invites you to join its members who are working to make a difference in these areas.**



# ***The Theosophical Order of Service***

Are you interested in putting theosophy into action?



Do you care about:

- peace
- justice
- the welfare of people and animals
- the environment
- healing?



The Theosophical Order of Service is active in many countries throughout the world.

*The TOS invites you to join its members who are working to make a difference.*

Contact your local TOS group or to learn more about us and what we do, visit our international website at <http://international.theoservice.org/>