



## Issue 27 – August 2013 International TOS conference report

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Dear fellow-members of the TS and TOS around the world,

The least that can be said of the international TOS conference held in late July at Olcott, the National Centre of the Theosophical Society in America, was that it was vibrant! This issue of our e-newsletter brings you a photographic report, along with a surprise.

A societal problem that emerged spontaneously at the conference as one of great concern was that of discrimination and violence against women. After seeing the PowerPoint account of the amazing multifaceted work carried out by Dr Deepa Padhi, President of the Mahabharat group of the TOS in Odisha (Orissa) State in India, a number of members suggested that we highlight it on our website, providing information on how to support her. So here we are. You will love reading of Deepa's latest initiatives that appear as our [Featured Project](#) here.

+ [Opening the TOS conference](#)

A very important document for understanding and administering the work of the TOS was released at the conference – the [Principles of Organisation for the TOS](#). It is also available on our website. If you want to understand how the TOS is currently structured, what its vision and aims are or what its relationship is with the Theosophical Society, this document will be of value as a reference. If you need a set of sample rules for local and national groups, you'll find them there. If you are needing succinct statements about the TOS and its work, feel free to copy them.

+ [Our talks, workshops and discussions](#)

We also draw your attention to our beautifully designed [TOS International Handbook](#) just released and available as a pdf file. It contains not only the Principles of Organisation document but many useful and inspiring resources. Don't miss, for example, the article on Page 39 entitled *Serving in our communities*. It provides a host of ideas for service work in our own communities and advice on how to get started. Ideas are listed by theme: animal concerns, environment, healing and well-being, peace, social welfare and justice.

+ [Joyful outreach](#)

The short talk delivered at our TOS conference by Birendra Bhattacharyya, National Director of the TOS in India, appears on the website as our [Featured Article](#). It is entitled *Service as Sacred Labour*. Possibly the most touching part of our brother Birendra's talk was the ten minutes of ad libbed words he shared about the inspiring effect his mother's courage had on his life. We will try to bring these to you in a later issue.

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So now take a few minutes to enjoy [this photographic souvenir of a special event](#) in the TOS calendar and journey with us to the headquarters of the TS in America, situated in the city of Wheaton, Illinois, close to Chicago. You can access the souvenir through the link above or through the list of topics on the side bar of this page.

Remember that the newsletter is designed to be read while you are connected to the internet.

Please also consider sending photographs of your TOS activities and news items that might be of interest to fellow TOS members. We would welcome your contributions by email to the editors at [carolyn.tosinternational@gmail.com](mailto:carolyn.tosinternational@gmail.com).

With best wishes in putting theosophical principles into action,

*Carolyn, Diana and Geoffrey*



*Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.*

Mattie Stepanek

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## A warm welcome to the Olcott estate

What a stimulating and enjoyable three days we had together at the National Centre of the TS in America! The efficiency and helpfulness of Tim Boyd, his warm-hearted wife Lily and the entire staff were unbelievable! Getting to know them was one of the highlights for us all and we are deeply grateful for their friendship.



## The Olcott grounds

Another highlight was the beauty of the setting itself so let's take a walk around the Olcott estate together.





### ***Planting a memorial tree***

One of the first activities on our TOS program was the planting of a tree in memory of Col. Henry Steel Olcott, the first International President of the Theosophical Society. Col. Olcott was a veteran of the American Civil War and Nancy Secret, the President of the TOS in America, organised the tree planting as part of the *Trees for Vets* program supported by the American TOS.



Nancy Secret addressing participants, watched by special guests, Mahendra Singhal, International Vice-President of the TS and his wife, Shashi; Birendra Bhattacharyya, President of the TOS in India; Tim Boyd, President of the TS in America; and Diana Dunningham Chapotin, International Secretary of the TOS.



Onlookers were invited to place papers with their blessings of the tree into the hole. The memorial tree, an Autumn Blaze maple, is the sapling on the right-hand side. It is already looking happy in its new environment and will turn a glorious, burnished red in autumn.



### ***Exploring the public rooms at Olcott***

Visitors enjoyed their tour of the interior of the Main Building, conducted by one of the Olcott staff, Janet Kerschner (in blue, below).



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## Opening the TOS conference



In their message of welcome, the conference convenors affirmed their belief that the conference was providing a special opportunity to help the TOS take another step forward. “We are blessed,” they said, “with a beautiful setting and kind and efficient staff members and volunteers to look after our needs. Our hope is that every single person registered for the conference will go away more inspired than ever by the exciting potential of the TOS as a vehicle for helping the TS in its great work. Our hope is that each will leave with a greater sense of connection with the infinite spiritual energy available within for selfless service without.”

In her formal opening words, the President of the TOS in America, Nancy Secrest, said: “I feel blessed to be involved with the TOS and especially blessed to be involved at this time and in this place. I have a strong feeling that what we do here this week, the vision and ideas we develop, and the decisions we make, will place the TOS in a firmer position to help others than it has been for many decades. That’s because I know that everyone here is a worker and passionate about alleviating suffering in the world. We care—that’s why we’re here.

Most of us have been together for five days now attending the Summer National Convention of the TS in this country. We’ve begun to get acquainted, to learn about each other, each other’s cultures, and the work our TOS sections are doing in our local and national areas. Now we are about to get down to specifics, to discover and define more deeply what the TOS is, what we want it to become and how to achieve our goals. I hope that in the next four days we form firmer bonds of brother-hood and sister-hood that will link us even more closely together in the service of all that suffers.”



You can read the [full text](#) of Nancy’s address here.



Maria Parisen led our opening invocation:

*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 link ourselves with all those working with us throughout the world. We give thanks especially to the Theosophical Society, whose objectives have inspired us. Together we reaffirm our intention to realise how service informed by a spiritual vision will ultimately benefit all sentient beings. May we be together here in harmony, as we re-dedicate ourselves to the ideals of the International Theosophical Order of Service.*

We were honoured by the presence of the International Vice-President of the TS, Brother Mahendra P. Singhal and his cheerful and friendly wife, Shashi.

In his keynote address, Brother Mahendra reminded us that every act of selfless service performed joyously is a beautiful event. "Let us try to build the TOS as a vibrant service institution that will channel great love," he said.

"A group of engaged people should be assembled for innovating TOS operations with a yearly program and budget. We should aim at serving mindfully, joyfully, selflessly and with excellence and energy in order to be the best service providers possible," he advised.



Our International President of the TOS wrote:

*I send warm greetings to the workers gathered at Olcott for the international TOS Conference.*

*The TOS has an important role to play in helping the TS make our theosophical teachings known in the world and in bringing about individual and societal regeneration. I look forward to a report on the activities and deliberations of the conference. May the TOS continue to grow.*

*I appreciate the long-term service carried out in the field by many of you and even if I don't have the time to write to you all individually, my affectionate good wishes are with you always.*

*With love, Radha*



Some of our long-time TOS workers were unable to attend but sent their heartfelt greetings. Among these were Lorraine Christensen, the Director of the TOS in Canada, and her husband, Henning. You can read Lorraine's message [here](#).

Another TOS supporter who is very dear to us, Joy Mills, sent us her greetings, which you can read [here](#).



*Lorraine and Henning Christensen*



*Joy Mills*

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## Our talks, workshops and discussions

### The talks

The principal theme of this working conference was “The TOS into the Future”. To set the direction and tone for our discussions, Vic Hao Chin, Jr delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the topic “The TOS 100 Years from Now” and Maria Parisen addressed us on “Creative Meditation: Balancing Inner and Outer Action.”



Three short talks were given on the topic “Service as Sacred Labour” by Birendra L. Bhattacharyya (India), Cynthia Trasi (England) and Dorothy Bell (Australia). Our speakers are shown in order below.

Birendra’s talk has been added to our website as a Featured Article and Cynthia’s and Dorothy’s talks will be added in due course.



### The workshops



During the conference, TOS workers had the opportunity to participate in two workshops, choosing from four topics: *Serving with the eyes of spirit*, *Tapping the amazing potential of volunteers*, *Deep Listening* and *Service and the Spiritual Life*.

All workshops were thoroughly enjoyed and for some participants were highlights of the conference.

Here are photographs of some of the workshops.



### **The discussions**

One of the main items of work during the conference was the joint development of a Plan of Action for the TOS for the next five years – 2014-2018.

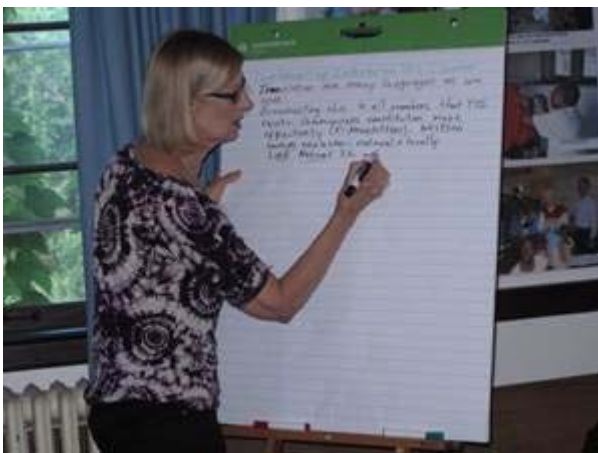
This work was undertaken in three plenary sessions. The first session consisted of a report on progress in implementing the existing 2008-2013 Plan of Action.

In the second plenary session, participants worked in small groups to share ideas and plan actions for the next five years.



The third plenary session provided TOS workers with the opportunity to discuss the ideas generated in session two with fellow members from their own country. They collectively identified priority actions for their country and planned strategies to implement them during the next five years. Where there was only one representative from a country, the person planned individually.

The intensity and energy of these discussions were a clear indicator of the commitment of those involved. We look forward to seeing the fruits of these planning sessions over the coming years.





*TOS workers from India*



*TOS workers from the UK*



*TOS workers from Hungary*



*TOS workers from Tanzania*



*TOS workers from the USA*



*TOS workers from Australia*



*TOS worker from Kenya*



*TOS worker from the Philippines*



*TOS worker from Canada with Diana*

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## Joyful outreach

### Healing ritual



Coordinator of the TOS healing network, Diane Eisenberg, who conducts the ritual at Olcott every Wednesday, invited us to attend a meeting during our stay. Here we see Olcott regulars at one of their weekly meetings.

A truly beautiful brochure offering the services of the American healing network has just been produced. It explains the services offered and invites TOS members and friends from anywhere in the world to write in for help for themselves or others. You can [read the brochure](#) on our website.



The National Director of the TOS in Canada and her faithful TOS supporter Henning could not be with us for the conference for health reasons. Read Lorraine's moving [message](#) about the help the TOS's healing network has brought them.

### Links of love

During refreshment time one evening, participants signed cards to dear absent TOS members and friends. Here we see people enjoying recording loving thoughts on the series of cards beautifully designed and brought by Susan Bayliss who joined us from England.







### ***Locks of love***

From “Links of Love” to “Locks of Love”! Quite a number of American TOS members have grown their hair and donated it for wigs for people who have lost their own hair through illness of one kind or another. At our conference, the President of the TOS, Nancy Secret, joined the donors when she had her long hair cut off by Olcott staff member and amateur stylist, Juliana Cesano. We clapped her heartily.



### ***Teddies for tragedy***

Teddies for tragedy is a project well known to most of us now since so many TOS members and friends participate in it by knitting teddies to provide comfort for children affected by war, natural disaster or illness. At the conference we noted the official thanks recently presented by the International Aid Trust to the TOS in England for reaching the 12,000 mark. (Yes, that is 12,000 teddies knitted!)

Those representing the TOS in Italy and France at the conference brought two suitcases full of teddies for members from Kenya and Tanzania to take home with them for delivery to children in need.



### **Our TOS Bazaar**

Participants from the USA, Tanzania, Kenya, India, New Zealand, England and France spontaneously donated gifts for sale. Over US\$1,300 was raised for our TOS projects at the 'bazaar'.





### *...And two auctions*

A much more rapid way of raising funds than sales in the 'bazaar' was demonstrated with skill and high humour by Tim Boyd and David Bland. In a lively atmosphere and heart-warming generosity, members bid on items signed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Approximately \$1,100 was raised in 15 minutes!



Shortly after, some of the women present decided to show Tim and David how to raise money even more rapidly by auctioning off Tim and David themselves.







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## Swapping stories about our activities

### *Chats about our posters*

A number of groups brought posters about their local and national TOS activities and had an opportunity to chat about them. Meeting each other and exchanging experiences was the highlight of the conference for many. They found it thrilling to start or deepen friendships and to pick up fresh ideas from each other for local application. Some also realised that they are not alone in facing certain issues and challenges.



## Four talks during the Theosophical Society Convention

Opportunities were provided for sharing information about the work of the TOS during the Summer National Convention of the TS in America that immediately preceded our conference.

The International Secretary presented a round-up of TOS action around the world to update the members present on our numerous projects. She emphasised the close historic links between the TS and TOS, pointing out that the original name given to the TOS by Dr Annie Besant was the Theosophical Society Order of Service.

She also clearly explained the specific nature of theosophical service, distinguishing it from other charitable organisations such as the Red Cross. She described how, for the early members of the TS, TS life and activist life were part of an indivisible whole. Action in the community was seen as an ethical imperative arising naturally from the theosophical philosophy.



Diana's presentation was preceded by three short talks by TOS workers leading projects in their countries. Participants were inspired by the talks and the accompanying pictures of local service work.

For more information about Usha's and Deepa's projects, check out the International TOS website: <http://international.theoservice.org>



Patrizia Calvi spoke on the theme : "The Gift of Service".



Usha Shah spoke on "Empower a woman and we empower the universe!"



Dr Deepa Padhi spoke on "Look within to reach out."

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### Conference highlights and cherished memories

When members reflected on the conference and identified the things that were highlights for them, there were several common themes. Many people commented on:

- the beautiful atmosphere at Olcott
- the joy of meeting and being inspired by fellow TOS workers
- the high quality of the program and organisation of the conference
- the benefits of sharing ideas and learning from each other.

So here, we bring you a random collection of comments and photographs that reflect some of those highlights and that will continue as cherished memories for those TOS workers fortunate in being able to participate in the Third International TOS Conference.



*What were the highlights for me?  
Exciting spiritual fellowship, knowledge of theosophy and TOS work happening worldwide. An energetic enthusiasm to carry forward the urge to service.*

*My cherished memory is of the very dear friends I have made - beautiful souls whose light will guide me into my future with the TOS.*



*What will I remember?  
The love I could read in the people around me.  
Universal brotherhood in action!*



Just one cherished memory! No chance: Loving harmony, meeting new and old friends, shared purpose and fellowship. The beauty of the people and the place. True theosophy in action.

My highlight – Our batteries are charged for more vigorous service work

What was a highlight for me?

The positive spiritual messages and clear communication from the various speakers to motivate us into action whilst questioning our ethical motives as to how and why we are working together to bring about a positive outcome and direction in our endeavours.



The enthusiasm.



The highlight for me was meeting different TOS workers and listening to their stories about their various projects, the people supporting them and their achievements and projects going forward.

Recharged batteries in our duties in the TOS in our country.



What were the highlights for me ?

The organising capabilities of the team for such an international event.

Enjoyable and very high standards to motivate us throughout, with impeccable organisation and skill!

The workshops and brainstorming which cemented our combined ideas so that we can transform them into physical results, channelling our funds where they are most needed locally and internationally.



When I saw our posters on the wall I felt "really we are members of the International TOS."



My most cherished memory is of the shared laughter and work through shared stories.

My cherished memory is sitting by the lake watching frogs, dragonflies and a blue heron with beautiful trees and a gentle breeze.



Progress of TOS work at International level is really praiseworthy and we shall take the memory with us.

What was a highlight for me?  
I felt here the quality of spiritual service work.



Everything was a highlight, but especially the beautiful Olcott, its friendly workers that made us feel good in all events, occasions and places.





My cherished memory is of the vivacity, unity and brotherhood throughout.

What was a highlight for me?

There was a lot of work to be done and serious information to be shared, but it was done 'joyfully' and with a sense of humour.



A highlight for me?  
Hearing about what other groups in other countries are doing.



What were the highlights for me?  
Planning, programme just right. There was time for networking and brotherhood.





*My cherished memory -  
Discovery of the estate of Olcott itself is  
wonderful.*



*For me, a highlight was having the opportunity to  
flesh out what service in a theosophical spirit really  
means.*

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And now we invite you to enjoy a two-minute video showing the participants outside under the trees posing to send you their greetings. We hope you will enjoy this little surprise that the audio-visual department staff of the TS in America were kind enough to prepare for us. [View video](#)