

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.