



The Theosophical Society

What is it all about

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What is the Theosophical Society?

Where are its Australian centres located?

What is the meaning of the emblem of the Society and its symbols?

What are the benefits of membership?

What is Theosophy?

These questions and more are addressed in the following pages. This booklet is intended for those who want to find out more about the Theosophical Society (the 'TS') and Theosophy; also, for people who are thinking of joining the Society.

What are the Historical Origins of the Theosophical Society?

The Theosophical Society was established in 1875 in New York city by seventeen founding members. Its principal Founders were Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (of Russian birth) (HPB), voted Corresponding Secretary for life, and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (an American), voted President for life. It was formed at a time when spiritualism and scientific materialism were very popular, to help point human beings towards the deeper significance of life beyond the observed psychic and physical worlds.

In 1879, the Headquarters of the Society was transferred to India and *The Theosophist* magazine was founded. Since 1882 the International Headquarters has been located in Adyar, Chennai (formerly Madras) in South India. Today branches of the Theosophical Society exist in about 70 countries throughout the world.

There are also centres of the Society around Australia.

What is the Theosophical Society?

The Theosophical Society was formed to help 'make it known that such a thing as Theosophy exists', to use HPB's words. Theosophy is the spiritual heritage of all humanity which has been in existence from ancient times, and may be thought of as the essence of the great religions and philosophies of the world. Yet HPB noted 'Theosophy is Altruism'. More information about Theosophy appears further on in this booklet. The Theosophical Society may be characterised primarily as a spiritual/religious/philosophical Society.

Members of the Society are united by a common search and aspiration for Truth in their lives, not by a common set of beliefs. Ultimately, such a search is individual, serious and sacred, and the Society seeks to provide an environment in which it can take place. This search may express itself in different ways, such as:

- cultivating increasing awareness of the unity and interdependence of all life

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- putting into practice the tenets of spiritual living
 - open-minded exploration of the Ageless Wisdom teachings, also known as Theosophy, both by Theosophical authors and the wisest authors from antiquity to the present.
 - altruism, or selfless service to others
 - concern for ethical living, harmlessness, and the well-being of the many forms of life on this planet
 - an interest in human self-transformation, immanence and transcendence

The following passage provides an overview of the Theosophical Society and a theosophical approach to existence:

A Theosophical World-View

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, while reserving for each member full freedom to interpret those teachings known as Theosophy, is dedicated to preserving and realising the Ageless Wisdom, which embodies both a world-view and a vision of human self-transformation.

This tradition is founded upon certain fundamental propositions:

The universe and all that exists within it are one interrelated and interdependent whole.

Every existent being—from atom to galaxy—is rooted in the same universal, life-creating Reality. This Reality is all-pervasive, but it can never be summed up in its parts, since it transcends all its expressions. It reveals itself in the purposeful, ordered, and meaningful processes of nature as well as in the deepest recesses of the mind and spirit.

Recognition of the unique value of every living being expresses itself in reverence for life, compassion for all, sympathy with the need of all individuals to find truth for themselves, and respect for all religious traditions. The ways in which these ideals become realities in individual life are both the privileged choice and the responsible act of every human being.

Central to the concern of Theosophy is the desire to promote understanding and brotherhood among people of all races, nationalities, philosophies, and religions. Therefore, all people, whatever their race, creed, sex, caste or colour, are invited to participate equally in the life and work of the Society. The Theosophical Society imposes no dogmas, but points toward the source of unity

beyond all differences. Devotion to truth, love for all living beings, and commitment to a life of active altruism are the marks of the true theosophist.

The Three Objects of the Theosophical Society

- 1 —To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.**
- 2 —To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.**
- 3 —To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in the Human Being.***

*Slightly modified for use in Australia

These Objects had undergone a number of revisions following the formation of the Society before being accepted by a Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society, 1896.

Members of the Society are united by their sympathy with the above Objects. The Society provides an environment which allows for individual differences in approach, without distinctions. Therefore the TS attracts a broad range of members from many cultures, religious backgrounds, and with varied interests. A phrase which was coined by a former International President, Dr

George Arundale, describes this well: 'Together Differently'.

Freedom of Thought

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasise the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership.

No teacher, or writer, from H.P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of

thought. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties.

The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise the right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society, 1924

The above resolution is extremely important and has helped shape the character of the Theosophical Society today. *In fact, it probably makes the Society unique as a spiritual organisation.* It implies that there is no final authority on the study of Theosophy and that members are free to engage in theosophical study as they see fit, within the ambit of the name of our Society and its Three Objects, and while allowing others to do likewise, with a spirit of courtesy and consideration. This resolution points to the fact that personal views expressed in meetings and journals are not official views of the Society.

A resolution by the General Council of the Theosophical Society on 'FREEDOM OF THE SOCIETY':

Freedom of The Society

The Theosophical Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organisation entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title, The Theosophical Society.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organisation.

Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society, 1949

This statement affirms the independence and neutrality of the TS. Before we proceed any further, it is also useful

to consider what the Society is *not*. It is not a so-called 'New Age' organisation, although it is sometimes referred to as the 'mother' of the New Age movement. It is not a yoga organisation, an organisation to promote any one spiritual teacher, nor an organisation to promote psychic development. Yet individually members are free to study any and all of these things. The diverse views of members help to keep the TS a vibrant and living body. Also, it is not an activist organisation, nor a political organisation. For those who are interested in activist pursuits and involvement in specific areas of community service, an allied organisation exists known as The Theosophical Order of Service ('TOS'). Many members of the Theosophical Society, as well as non-members, choose to take part in its activities.

The Theosophical Society therefore has its own unique purpose, independent of other organisations, and was formed to help make known the existence of Theosophy.

Our Mission Statement

To serve humanity by cultivating an ever-deepening understanding and realisation of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual Self-transformation, and the Unity of all Life

What is Theosophy?

The core principles of Theosophy have been restated in different ways by great sages throughout history. They

are offered by the TS for study and consideration, also being present in teachings such as those of ancient India and China, the Egyptian Thoth or the Greek Hermes, the neo-Platonists, and Gnostics of the early Christian era.

The word itself comes from the Greek *theosophia* meaning 'Divine Wisdom', though HPB says it may also mean 'the wisdom of the Gods'. Divine Wisdom is a high state of consciousness; and Theosophical teachings, when assimilated, can help one ascend towards such a state. If you ask members of the Theosophical Society, 'What is Theosophy?', a variety of answers will be given. Some will say that it is a world-view which gives meaning and purpose to life. Others will say it is a spiritual philosophy which has been with us since time immemorial. Still others will stress that it is a way of life, a path that leads to peace and understanding through selfless service. Theosophy is all these and more.

Hence, Theosophy has been called by different names such as the Ancient or Ageless Wisdom, the Wisdom Religion, the Wisdom Tradition, the Perennial Wisdom and the Perennial Philosophy.

Why is Theosophy important? Because its teachings are perennially relevant to human problems, broad yet deep, challenging and comprehensive, yet understanding of our many differences, presenting a holistic world-view which emphasises the unity and interconnectedness of all life – the basic oneness of all peoples and species of

life on Earth. They point to the spark in each of us which emanates from one Source.

Madame Blavatsky, who re-presented Theosophy in its modern form in the late nineteenth century, drew together teachings from sources which included Plato, Confucius, the Vedas, Gautama Buddha, Jesus, Pythagoras and many ancient seers, scientists and other contemporary thinkers of her day, including her own spiritual teachers, several of whom were the inner founders of the TS. Her teachings weave a tapestry which depicts the Cosmos as permeated with Spirit and Intelligence and divinely guided from within.

She portrayed human beings as both earthly and divine, with vast potential still to be unfolded throughout immense future cycles of evolution. She also described the human being as sevenfold, with a capacity to develop increasingly higher expressions of sensitivity, concrete and abstract thought, intuitive insight, compassion, realisation of unity and Spiritual Will. She spoke of three interblended and unfolding evolutions, spiritual, mental and physical. Furthermore, she described superphysical planes, dimensions or fields around and within us, from which intelligences and energies play upon us and all of Nature.

Theosophical teachings throughout history have explained life's seeming inequalities as consequences of Karma, the Law of Balance and Harmony. It is a Law of

Causation, cause and effect, 'as you sow so shall you reap'. The name of the ancient Greek Goddess *Nemesis* was derived from *némein* "to give what is due". This Law, or reharmonising process, like a mirror gives us feedback on our actions and provides learning experiences. It expands our perspective to the possibility of many lifetimes through which we grow toward spiritual wisdom and maturity. HPB stated suffering is the cause of knowledge.

But perhaps most importantly, a way of life is implicit in Theosophy. It implies a deep regard for all life, and actions based on an increasing realisation of our oneness with all others, and living in harmony with all forms of life. Growing ecological awareness today is one aspect of this. Theosophical teachings also imply a way of living which allows our greatest human qualities to unfold such as intuition, understanding, insight, love, compassion, creativity and the ancient virtues of fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice.

It was mentioned that Madame Blavatsky gave the world Theosophy in its modern form. Just as Theosophy has been taught by many before her, since her death in 1891 others have explored and interpreted Theosophical teachings in their own way. Members of the Theosophical Society and members of the public attending lectures or seminars are encouraged to question, ponder and consider ideas put forward by

various theosophical presenters. The Theosophical Society as a body does not claim to have conclusive answers to life's deeper purpose, but does provide an environment for free enquiry and exploration into the Theosophical tradition in which people may find their own answers to suit their present state.

A Balanced Approach: It is sometimes said that we need to balance our lives through *study, meditation and service*. Too much of any of these can create an imbalance. A Theosophical way of life implies one in which basic principles of the Wisdom Tradition are studied in an open-minded way, absorbed in moments of quiet, put into practice and tested by experience.

Not a Religion, Not a Dogma, Not a Sect: Theosophy is not a religion, although its fundamental concepts are found in the major world religions. It has been said that in one sense Theosophy is religion itself, or the essence of true religion, as already mentioned. Theosophical teachings are not compatible with dogmatism or sectarianism, or other forms of enforced and unquestioned beliefs, as they are based on the free individual exploration of universal principles.

Shallows and Depths: The basics of Theosophy are reasonable and easy to grasp, but there are also depths that can challenge us, providing a lifetime of study for those inclined to seriously pursue these teachings. The TS can help in its literature and meetings to point the way

to Theosophy as we would point to the stars. And the inner light in its turn may reveal the spiritual path, leading to the unfoldment of our highest spiritual potential.

What is The Meaning of the Emblem of The Theosophical Society?

The emblem of the Theosophical Society is composed of a number of symbols, all of which have been used from ancient times in many cultures to express profound spiritual and philosophical concepts about humanity and the universe. They may be found in a variety of forms in the great religions of the world and their universality is further shown by their appearance in widely separated cultures.

Each symbol, studied separately, results in a richness of understanding, but none of them can be interpreted with a narrow precision. Taken together as in the Society's emblem they represent a unity of meaning, suggesting a vast evolutionary scheme embracing the whole of nature, physical and spiritual. Study and contemplation of the emblem as well as its several component symbols will lead the serious student to an awareness of some of the deepest mysteries of existence. A few brief suggestions may be helpful to the enquirer looking at the emblem for the first time.

The serpent is the timeless symbol of the highest spiritual Wisdom. Swallowing its tail, it is a symbol of regeneration. It is the selfborn, the circle of infinite wisdom, life and immortality. The circle itself is an ancient symbol of eternity and also represents the Absolute (the circle representing the limits of the human mind), the unmanifested universe containing the potentials of all form.

The interlaced triangles, one (lighter) pointing upwards and the other (darker) pointing downwards, symbolise the descent of spirit into matter and its re-emergence from the confining limits of form. They also suggest the constant conflict between the light and dark forces in nature, yang and yin, positive and negative, as well as the inseparable unity of spirit and matter. When depicted within the circle of the serpent, the figure represents the universe and the manifestation of Deity in time and space. The three lines and three points of the upward pointing triangle may remind us of the triple aspects of spirit: bliss, consciousness and existence. And, of the downward pointing triangle, the three aspects of matter: inertia, rhythm and mobility. The centre point or whole represents the seventh aspect.

In the centre of the emblem is the ankh or Crux Ansata, an ancient Egyptian symbol of resurrection. It is composed of the Tau or T- shaped cross surmounted by a small circle and is often seen in Egyptian statuary and

in wall and tomb paintings, where it is depicted as being held in the hand. The Tau symbolises matter or the world of form; the small circle above it represents spirit or life. With the circle marking the position of the head, it represents the mystic cube unfolded to form the Latin cross, symbol of spirit descended into matter and crucified thereon, but risen from death and resting triumphant on the arms of the conquered slayer. So it may be said that the figure of the interlaced triangles enclosing the ankh represents the human triumphant and the divine triumphant in the human. As the cross of life, the ankh then becomes a symbol of resurrection and immortality.

The swastika is a very ancient symbol. Placed in the emblem at the head of the serpent, it is one of the numerous forms in which the symbol of the cross is found. It is the fiery cross, with arms of whirling flame revolving clockwise to represent the tremendous energies of nature incessantly creating and dissolving the forms through which the evolutionary process takes place. In ancient religions which recognise three aspects of Deity, the swastika is associated with the Third Person of the Trinity, who is at once the Creator and the Destroyer: Shiva in Hinduism and the Holy Ghost in Christianity. Applied to humanity, the figure may show the human as the link between heaven and earth, one 'hand' pointing toward heaven or spirit and the other toward earth or matter.

Above the emblem, in Sanskrit characters, is the sacred word Aum or Om, which in the Hindu tradition is a word of profound significance and evokes deep reverence. It may be said to stand for the creative Word or Logos, the unutterable Reality which is the source of all existence. We are reminded of the statement: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

Motto: 'There Is No Religion Higher Than Truth

Around the emblem appears the MOTTO of the Theosophical Society. Truth is the quest of every theosophist, whatever his or her faith, if any. Every great religion reflects in some measure the light of the one eternal and spiritual wisdom. Each points a way toward the realisation of Truth.

The whole emblem speaks to an inner perception, to the intuition and to the heart, calling forth the divine in each individual who contemplates it. In its totality, it represents a synthesis of great cosmic principles operating through involutory and evolutionary cycles, bringing us all, in the fullness of time, to the realisation of our divine nature.

What Subjects are Explored at Meetings of The Theosophical Society?

Enquirers are welcome to attend public meetings of the Theosophical Society around Australia. We enquire into

a broad range of subjects which fall within the scope of the Society's three Objects and its Mission Statement. They include areas such as ethical living, modern science, reincarnation, karma, the human constitution, after-death states, the spiritual Path, the Oneness of all life, teachings from various religious and philosophical traditions, meditation and practical aspects of spiritual living, to name a few.

Although speakers from outside groups may be invited to give presentations at TS centres on various topics, it is important to remember that the Theosophical Society is independent. As already mentioned, no speaker at a meeting of the TS speaks officially on behalf of the Society. More importantly, politeness to non-member presenters should not diminish the search for truth by preventing members from kindly inquiring into the ideas presented.

How is the World-Wide Theosophical Society Organised?

As mentioned previously the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society is located in Adyar, Chennai, India. The office of the International President is located there.

The Society's international governing body is called the General Council; this meets at least once a year.

There are a number of aspects to the organisation of this international Society:

Lodges, Branches and Sections

Seven or more members may form a Lodge (sometimes called a Branch) with the agreement of the International President. Seven or more chartered Lodges/Branches in areas which are territorially adjacent can apply to form what is known as a Section.

The Theosophical Society in Australia is also known as the Australian Section.

Every Section elects a leader, usually called a General Secretary. In the Australian Section the holder of this office is called the National President.

Federations

Several international Federations have been formed which are important bodies that strengthen the bonds between the theosophical centres in their regions and help further the work of the TS. These Federations do not span the whole of the world-wide Theosophical Society but include many Sections. They exist in Europe, America, the Indo-Pacific region and Africa. The Australian Section is part of the Indo-Pacific Federation, which has meetings every three years in different countries in our region.

An International Directory appears in the international theosophical journal, The Theosophist, and on our national website. It includes all Sections and Federations.

Administration of The Theosophical Society in Australia

The Australian Section includes Lodges, Branches and various formal and informal Groups. Most members belong to such centres but there are also 'National Members' who are attached directly to the National Headquarters, which is located in Sydney.

The governing body of The Theosophical Society in Australia is called the National Council. The National Council consists of the National President, the National Secretary, the National Treasurer and one democratically elected State Representative from each of the six Electoral States within the Australian Section. The National President is elected by the Australian members for a three year term of office and may be elected for up to three consecutive terms.

The State Representatives elected in each State represent the Lodges (Branches), Groups and National Members in that State in all meetings and affairs of the National Council. They liaise with all Lodges (Branches), Groups and National Members in their Electoral State, representing their views to the National Council and to National Society Officers, as required. As well, they receive and deal with representations from individual

Members within their Electoral State, and refer the representations when requested or deemed necessary.

The Section also has an Executive Committee which carries out the ongoing administrative and business work of the National Society. The Executive Committee consists of the National President, the National Treasurer, the National Secretary and five members appointed annually by the National Council. The Committee normally meets every two months.

Annual Business Meeting

The Australian Section holds its annual Convention Business Meeting in January each year during the national Convention. Approval of reports, results of ballots, motions to change the Rules, financial and other matters are dealt with. The meeting also provides an opportunity for members to present points of view on various matters and raise any issues of concern.

Benefits of Membership of The Theosophical Society

We are a membership organisation and our members are greatly valued. The Theosophical Society welcomes as members all who are in sympathy with its Three Objects, which were listed previously.

If you choose to join the TS you will not be asked to accept any particular teachings or to surrender any of your existing beliefs. You may belong to any religious tradition, or to none at all. This is in keeping with the

Society's policy on Freedom of Thought which appeared earlier in this booklet.

If your application to become a member of a Lodge or Branch, or else a National Member, is accepted, you automatically become a member of The Theosophical Society in Australia as well as our world-wide Society.

Activities and Publications Available to Members of The Theosophical Society

- Meetings, talks, discussions, seminars and workshops for members are held in various TS centres. There are also study groups and other specialised activities.
- A number of centres in Australia and throughout the world have libraries and bookshops. Lodges and Branches normally include library membership with their membership dues.
- Annual Conventions for members are a highlight of the Australian TS calendar, held during January at university colleges in different states each year. Experience a week of quality time with other members, interesting talks, workshops, outings and cultural programmes.
- An annual international Convention for TS members is held at the International Headquarters in India.

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- A World Congress for members takes place in different countries, normally every seven years.
 - A triennial Conference for TS members is held in rotation around various countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - The TS has a national Education and Retreat Centre at Springbrook in south-eastern Queensland, less than an hour's drive from the Gold Coast. In simple, comfortable rooms, members enjoy schools of Theosophy, seminars and retreats in a secluded and serene mountain setting.
 - Some members' events are also held at a second national centre located in New South Wales at Canyonleigh, about half way between Sydney and Canberra.
 - Members in or visiting Perth can attend events or else have personal retreats at the Mt. Helena centre in the Hills district, east of Perth.
 - A magazine for Australian members is published quarterly.
 - Various TS centres around the country send regular newsletters to their members.

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- Members can visit and conduct research at The Campbell Theosophical Research Library at the National Headquarters, Sydney, by appointment.
 - Members can view the dedicated members' access area of the Section's website containing magazines, videos and more. See: <https://theosophicalsociety.org.au>
 - International contacts are important. Watch out for any members' only presentations by visiting lecturers from overseas, who normally tour annually. And if you travel overseas you will be made welcome wherever the Society has a presence.

Membership of the Theosophical Society can therefore provide access to various events, publications and facilities.

If you are undecided about becoming a member of the Society, it is suggested that you join a theosophical library if there is one nearby, or attend a few meetings and get to know some of the members. Some Lodges/Branches require two sponsors for membership applications. Membership fees vary depending on the Branch you wish to join. There is also an initial joining fee of \$5.

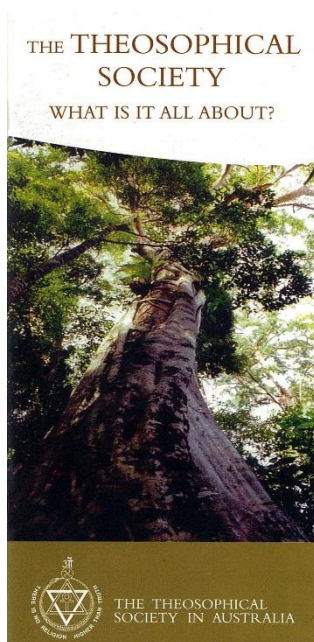
In areas not close to a local Lodge or Branch it is possible to join as a National Member, with postal access to the

Media Library and the National Members lending library at the Australian Headquarters.

An application form for membership may be obtained from your nearest Lodge or Branch, from the Australian TS Headquarters, or from the national website.

Apart from all of these benefits, and perhaps more importantly, many people appreciate the value of joining a society which stands for unity rather than division, free exploration of Divine Wisdom with like-minded people, and a society which holds a special regard for the Sacred in an essentially materialistic world. As can be seen, there are many opportunities to engage with other members.

Although unable to be active, some people maintain their membership as an affirmation of, or personal commitment to, the ideals and Objects of the Society.



The Theosophical Order of Service T O S

For Those Who Are Interested in Practical Community Activities

It was mentioned previously that the Theosophical Society does not involve itself in political or activist pursuits. The Theosophical Order of Service ('TOS') was therefore founded by a former International President of the Society, Dr Annie Besant, in 1908. The TOS provides an opportunity for members and non-members to participate 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'. Defining itself as 'a union of all who love in the service of all who suffer', the TOS offers a framework in which the individual may demonstrate practical and humanitarian action in a theosophical spirit, and acts as a forum where members may air their views on affairs of public interest.

The TOS is active in various countries throughout the world and in many of the Lodges/Branches of The Theosophical Society in Australia, but is organised independently from the Society. It includes seven streams of service: information service, social service, citizenship, world peace, animal welfare, healing and the arts.

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