

THE TOS AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY



What is the Relationship between the TOS and the Theosophical Society?

For over one hundred years, the TOS has made a significant contribution to the community outreach of the Theosophical Society. It considers its collaboration with the TS and all Theosophical groups to be an honour and has received funding from the Society for some of its theosophically-oriented educational work with the young.

“The Theosophical Order of Service was founded by 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 of 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”.¹

Annie Besant was prompted to form the TOS because members of the TS wanted to do practical work to actively promote the first object of the Society. She ordered it to be called “The Theosophical Society Order of Service” and the motto chosen was ‘**A Union of Those who Love in the Service of All that Suffers**’.

TOS groups are organised by members of the TS and they operate from within and not separate from the Society, though not all members of the TOS are members of the TS. In around half a dozen countries, the TOS has become a legally registered body mostly because of the extensive nature of the community work they are engaged in. Whether formally registered or not, all groups operate rather like autonomous community outreach arms of the TS.

The TOS has a harmonious working relationship with the TS and it provides a place where social action as spiritual practice is valued and actively nurtured. Though not present in all the countries where the TS is active, the TOS continues to grow and provides a focal point where members and friends may work along self-selected lines of service. 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.

Throughout the world, all TOS activities are supported and supervised by the International Secretary of the TOS who reports regularly to the International President of the TOS (ex officio International President of the *Theosophical Society*).

¹ Radha Burner, former International President of the Theosophical Order of Service.