

# THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

## & Its Objectives

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY is a worldwide association dedicated to practical realization of the oneness of all life and to independent spiritual search. It was founded in New York City in 1875 by Helena P. Blavatsky, Henry S. Olcott, William Q. Judge, and others. Blavatsky (1831–1891) is the primary force behind the modern theosophical movement. Her works and those of her teachers express the principal concepts of its philosophy. A Russian by birth, she traveled for twenty years in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and the Near East studying mystical traditions. More about her life and work can be found in such biographies as *HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* by Sylvia Cranston (Path Publishing House) and *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement* by Charles J. Ryan (Theosophical University Press).

The Theosophical Society has several objectives. First, to demonstrate that the oneness of all life is a fact in nature, and to form a nucleus of a universal brotherhood. This, according to Blavatsky, is because:

(a) All men have spiritually and physically the same origin, which is the fundamental teaching of Theosophy. (b) As mankind is essentially of one and the same essence, and that essence is one — infinite, uncreate, and eternal, whether we call it God or Nature — nothing, therefore, can affect one nation or one man without affecting all other nations and all other men. This is as certain and as obvious as that

a stone thrown into a pond will, sooner or later, set in motion every single drop of water therein. — *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 41

To help promote better understanding among all people and recognition of the essential unity of life, another objective encourages the study of ancient and modern religions, sciences, and philosophies:



Helena P. Blavatsky

It is only by studying the various great religions and philosophies of humanity, by comparing them dispassionately and with an unbiassed mind, that men can hope to arrive at the truth. It is especially by finding out and noting their various points of agreement that we may achieve this result. For no sooner do we arrive — either by study, or by being taught by someone who knows — at their inner meaning, than we find, almost in every case, that it expresses some great truth in Nature. — *Ibid.*, 59

Further objectives encourage investigating and sharing these natural truths — the spiritual, psychological, and material laws and powers found in the cosmos and in the human being. Each person, being a portion of the whole, contains, latent or expressed, all the qualities and attributes of the cosmos. Thus, to know oneself fully is to understand the universe and everything in it. Theosophical literature, however, cautions against deliberately seeking psychic powers, by-products of evolution which will in time arise naturally. Cultivating such powers distracts from the deeper goals of human growth and can lead to imbalances in development and consciousness.

The primary purpose of the Theosophical Society is to encourage altruism and compassion. Beyond supporting this objective, those wishing to join need not accept any particular beliefs, and members may belong to any religion or to none. While members may pursue whatever activities they wish, the Society itself is unsectarian and nonpolitical, open to all people regardless of race, nationality, class, creed, or gender. Its endeavor is to aid humanity rather than promote or strengthen the self-interests of its members.

What is a theosophist? In addressing this question, Blavatsky held that “the very root idea of the Society is free and fearless investigation.” To be a theosophist, she continued:

one need not necessarily recognize the existence of any special God or a deity. One need but worship the spirit of living nature, and try to identify oneself with it. . . . Be what he may, once that a student abandons the old and trodden highway of routine, and enters upon the solitary path of independent thought — Godward — he is a Theosophist; an original thinker, a seeker after the eternal truth with “an inspiration of his own” to solve the universal problems.

— *The Theosophist*, October 1879, p. 6

## Basic Ideas of Theosophy

The word theosophy has been used in the West for about 2,000 years to indicate knowledge of divine things or knowledge derived from insight and experience as well as intellectual study. It comes from the Greek *theos* (god, divinity) and *sophia* (wisdom). While the modern theosophical movement can be traced back to Blavatsky and her teachers, it is part of a spiritual movement as old as thinking humanity. Its philosophy is a contemporary presentation of the perennial wisdom underlying the world’s religions, sciences, and philosophies. These concepts are not dogmas nor is there a creed to summarize its principles; students accept only those ideas that have value for them. Theosophical books are considered neither as revelation nor final authority.

Reincarnation and karma are the most widely known ideas popularized in the West by theosophists. Although considered Oriental, reincarnation is a concept found in cultures worldwide, and is present in Platonic, Jewish, Hermetic, and early Christian thought. Together, reincarnation and karma shed light on each person’s character and circumstances. People are responsible for their own lives, and no one else — divine or human — can take away or neutralize the results of any of our actions. We are each the product of our accumulated past and evolve spiritually through self-directed and self-devised efforts over a series of lives.

The basic theosophical idea is the essential oneness of all beings. Life is everywhere throughout the cosmos because all originates from



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the same unknowable divine source. Consequently, everything — from the subatomic to plants, animals, and humans, planets, stars, and galaxies — is alive and evolving. Each is divine at its root and expresses itself through spiritual, intellectual, psychological, ethereal, and material ranges of consciousness and substance, depending on its level of development. Evolution consists of an emerging self-expression which differentiates into material forms, then develops conscious and spiritual aspects on its return over cosmic time periods to the divine source. The life of the individual, of humanity, and of the entire earth is part of this cosmic process.

Because we are fundamentally one, altruism and compassion are expressions in human life of cosmic and planetary realities. Humanity is more closely joined inwardly than physically, and our thoughts and feelings have a potent impact on others. By trying to live in harmony with our inner divinity as best we can, we not only benefit our immediate surroundings but also humanity as a whole. The ideal is to put the welfare of humanity and all that lives ahead of one's own self-interest and enlightenment.

As beings rooted in divinity, we each have the ability to discover reality for ourselves. To progress we must learn to judge what is true and false, real and illusory; we do not grow by blindly following the

dictates of authority, however high. G. de Purucker compares the theosophical student to a scientific researcher, and adds:

Have we not been told again and again that we must consult our consciences before we accept anything? In order to do that, we have to think; we also know that even if in doing so we should, *through our own blindness or incapacity*, reject a truth offered to us, we shall nevertheless have done aright, because we have been faithful to ourselves and to our consciences, . . . the inner man understands, and the truth in time will dawn in faithful hearts.

— *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, p. 289

In following our own spiritual instincts and intuitions, we awaken our latent potentials. For this reason, it is harmful to force others to adopt what we believe is the “proper” avenue of thought; each must follow his or her unique path of unfoldment.

## The Theosophical Society: Past and Present

In 1877, two years after forming the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky published her first major work, *Isis Unveiled* — two volumes showing the universality of theosophic ideas in ancient and modern religions, and their basis in nature. The following year Blavatsky and Olcott left America for India, where they worked for recognition of the value of Oriental religions and philosophies, especially among the educated classes who were rejecting their own traditions in the face of modern Western materialistic education. They also sought to expose religious superstition and dogmatism. At the same time, Blavatsky encouraged the study of Western mystical traditions such as Gnosticism, Kabbalah, Freemasonry, and Rosicrucianism.

In 1885 Blavatsky moved to Europe, finally settling in London two years later. There, in 1888, she published her masterwork, *The Secret Doctrine*, which presents a comprehensive view of cosmic and human evolution, bringing together mythic, religious, and scientific material from many cultures to illustrate the universality of theosophy’s basic concepts. In response to questions from inquirers, she issued *The Key to Theosophy* and, for those seeking to practice theosophy’s altruistic ideals, *The Voice of the Silence*, aphorisms embodying the heart of

Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching. Blavatsky also founded and edited the magazine *Lucifer* (“lightbearer”) and before her death in 1891 revitalized the theosophical work in the West.



Theosophical Library Center

Over the last hundred years, the modern theosophical movement has divided into several separate organizations, each of which seeks to fulfill the Society’s objectives in its own way and with its own emphasis. A few years after Blavatsky’s death, the Society split into two organizations: the Society following H. S. Olcott and Annie Besant which retains its international headquarters at Adyar, Chennai (Madras), India; and the Society following W. Q. Judge, with international headquarters first at New York City, then in California — successively at Point Loma, Covina, and since 1950 near Pasadena. In 1909 a group spearheaded by Robert Crosbie formed another theosophical organization, the United Lodge of Theosophists, based in Los Angeles, California.

The Theosophical Society at Pasadena, California, pursues its original program under its leader, Randell C. Grubb. Toward this end the headquarters and its national sections sponsor library centers, public discussions, and study groups. They also offer a series of correspondence courses for those wishing a more structured approach to theosophic studies. The Society’s publishing facility, Theosophical University Press with its overseas agencies, features theosophic classics

such as those listed below. Full text of most TUP titles are also available online without charge.

Further information may be obtained regarding theosophy, membership, programs, and publications of the Society by writing to:

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POST OFFICE BOX C  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91109-7107  
USA

Telephone: (626) 797-7817 Email: [tstec@theosociety.org](mailto:tstec@theosociety.org)  
[www.theosociety.org](http://www.theosociety.org)

## Selected Titles from Theosophical University Press

*Complete catalog on request*

H. P. Blavatsky

*The Secret Doctrine (2 volumes)*  
*An Invitation to the Secret Doctrine*  
*Isis Unveiled (2 volumes)*  
*The Key to Theosophy*  
*The Voice of the Silence*  
*Secret Doctrine Commentary*  
*H. P. Blavatsky to the American*  
*Conventions: 1888–1891*

A. Trevor Barker, ed.

*The Mahatma Letters to A. P.*  
*Sinnett*

William Q. Judge

*The Ocean of Theosophy*  
*Letters That Have Helped Me*

James A. Long

*Expanding Horizons*

Grace F. Knoche

*To Light a Thousand Lamps*  
*The Mystery Schools*  
*Theosophy in the Qabbālāh*

G. de Purucker

*Fundamentals of the Esoteric*  
*Philosophy*  
*The Path of Compassion*  
*Fountain-Source of Occultism*  
*Occult Glossary*  
*Man in Evolution*  
*The Esoteric Tradition*  
*Wind of the Spirit*

Katherine Tingley

*Theosophy: The Path of the Mystic*  
*The Gods Await*