

WHAT SHOULD THEOSOPHICAL GROUPS STUDY?

PART TWO

By John Algeo

In the April 2007 *Theosophist*, a question was raised about what Theosophical groups should study, and a response was offered in general terms. Since then, feedback has been received saying that those general guidelines are helpful, but those who are responsible for programming in their branches and study centers would like to have more specific suggestions about exactly what teachings they should be disseminating and that it would be good to have a list.

No Theosophist can tell others exactly what teachings they “should” be disseminating. But we can talk about what aspects of Theosophy we “might” be making better known among both inquirers and ourselves.

Lists of such possible subjects have very often been drawn up. For example, quite recently, the international Secretary, Miss Mary Anderson, offered such a list in a paper published in the same April 2007 *Theosophist* under the title “Jacob’s Ladder.” Reading that article, one will get a good list of basic Theosophical subjects. That list offers a number of topics, such as “creation” or the outpouring of the universe, evolution, the kingdoms of Nature, reincarnation, the human constitution, human progress, the spiritual path, and divine omnipresence.

Perusing the chapter titles of any good introductory book on Theosophy will also suggest an array of such subjects.

The Society’s international website has a page on Fundamentals of Theosophy (<http://www.ts-adyar.org/theosophy.html>). It lists six main tenets: universal and individual consciousness, human immortality, reincarnation, karma, universal brotherhood, and God’s plan of evolution. Each topic has a thumbnail sketch setting forth its essentials in simple language.

Another way to get an idea about specific teachings to present in a Theosophical group is to look at the list of publications by the Theosophical Publishing Houses. Of course, not all books produced by TPH are equally suitable as subjects for presentations in a Theosophical group because some are highly specialized or technical. But looking at the lists as a whole can call up a wide range of subjects that any group might focus on in making Theosophy more widely known.

Since a list was asked for, below are some basic ideas that can be found in Theosophical literature and that many Theosophists would regard as not either definitive or limiting, but representative:

1. The fundamental oneness of all humanity, and indeed of all life, and all existence.
2. The value of multiple approaches to Truth: scientific, philosophical, and religious.
3. The value of various cultures throughout human history as they express different and complementary approaches to life.
4. The existence of mysteries in the universe and in the human being that are beyond the scope of any of our systems of thought to comprehend fully.
5. The ability of human beings to use reason and imagination to grapple with both the mysteries and problems of life.
6. The recognition of correspondences throughout the cosmos, by which we can infer things we have not directly experienced—a recognition known as the Great Hermetic Axiom.
7. The right and responsibility of all individuals to discover truth for themselves.
8. The reality of an absolute Truth, which can be expressed only in relative terms in this “māyāvic” or relative world.
9. The obligation each of us has to respect approaches to Truth other than our own.
10. The transcendence of ultimate Reality beyond all human conception, but nevertheless the ability of humans to experience it directly.
11. The triplicity of ultimate Reality as intertwined consciousness, matter, and energy.
12. The presence of life and consciousness in all material forms throughout the universe, in graded ranks or “kingdoms.”
13. The progressive and cyclical evolution through the ages of consciousness and intelligence, in addition to that of bodily forms.
14. The progressive development through time of separate beings towards a realization of their spiritual unity and wholeness.
15. The obligation each person has to promote the general welfare of all—of other human beings (without regard to race, sex, or ethnicity) and also of animals and the natural world.

16. Reincarnation—the successive re-embodiments of our core consciousness—so that life and death are recurring experiences in our development.
17. Karma—the principle of harmony, balance, equilibrium—maintaining order in the universe in an impersonal way.
18. Harmlessness and helpfulness—the principle that we should deal with others as we would like them to deal with us.
19. The existence of multiple worlds or “planes” beyond the physical or of dimensions other than space-time, in all of which we function simultaneously.
20. The sevenfold complexity of the human constitution, aspects of which function in those multiple worlds or dimensions of existence.
21. The presence at the core of our being of a spark of the ultimate or divine reality.
22. The existence of beings who have achieved enlightenment and have dedicated themselves to helping others to that same achievement—the great teachers of humanity.
23. The existence of an ancient body of timeless teachings, a way of looking at the world—the Wisdom Tradition—that can be found in various forms in all the cultures of the world.
24. The responsibility of all persons for their own actions and reactions, and thus their ability to be victors, not victims.
25. The power of our thought to affect ourselves, our surroundings, and others, and therefore our responsibility to use that power well.
26. The presence of order, purpose, and meaning in the world, whose development follows an intelligible plan.
27. The reality of a purpose and meaning in the life of each individual, to the discovery of which we are each called by our own inner natures.
28. The possibility of our actively participating in the progressive evolution of the universe.
29. The ultimate perfection of human nature, society, and the environment, which we are called to work towards.
30. The duty of everyone to practise altruism—a concern to help others achieve their own inherent ultimate perfection.
31. The existence of a “Path” or way of hastening our own individual evolution, available to all who seek it out.

32. Our character as the product of our past and the call of our future—of both what we were and what we will become, so that by our every action we recreate ourselves.
33. Our ability through the exercise of free will to optimize the consequences of our past and to choose our path to the future.
34. A recognition that social problems of war, overpopulation, exploitation, prejudice, oppression, greed, and hate are the symptoms of a disease, which is the illusion that we can help ourselves at the expense of others, and the cure for which is a recognition that we are one with each other and with all life in the universe.
35. The assurance which Krishna gave to Prince Arjuna and Christ gave to Dame Julian of Norwich that ultimately all shall be well, and the confidence to live purposefully by that assurance.
36. The commitment to a life of collective responsibility as members of a core of workers dedicated to furthering the realization of that ultimate purpose.

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