

# You, Theosophy, and the Society <sup>1</sup>

By George Arundale

It is of the highest importance to realize that Theosophy is in no way dictatorial. It does not lay down the law, or any law. It does not require an individual to subscribe to certain principles on the ground that their acceptance is essential for right living.

Theosophy is not authority. It is a statement as to the nature of the Science of Life, and only a partial statement at that. You may call it, if you like, a revelation, for it primarily comes from Those who are wiser than humanity. It largely represents that which humanity has yet to begin to learn. But the revelation does not claim to be an infallible doctrine, a Word that must be believed if salvation is to be achieved. It is a picture. And those who look upon it are obviously free to like or to dislike either any part or, for that matter, the whole.

If Theosophy is concerned at all with God, it is concerned with the God within each individual rather than with any extraneous God, anthropomorphic in appearance as every such God must necessarily be. Yet Theosophy knows God as an inner Reality, formless and indescribable to humanity. By no means is Theosophy Godless, for the God-Principle is one of the most wonderful and universal facts of Life.

Theosophy scientifically and impersonally describes, as far as description is possible, the nature of the evolutionary process in which we all live and move and have our being. It describes the past. It explains the present. It draws a picture of the future. And it leaves each one of us entirely free to make use of so much of the description as suits us, leaving alone that which at present has for us no meaning.

Theosophy does not say: *Thou shalt*.

Theosophy does not say: *Thou shalt not*.

Theosophy says, "*Look . . . consider . . . weigh . . . determine . . .*"

A member of The Theosophical Society is in general sympathy with The Society's Three Objects. He is in general sympathy with the principle of universal brotherhood. He is in general sympathy with the desirability of studying the great religions, philosophies, and sciences of the world in a spirit of open-minded inquiry. He is in general sympathy with the idea that there is infinitely more to be known about life than is so far known, and that a venturing forth in search of knowledge is highly desirable.

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But the mode of expressing such sympathy and the way a member lives is very much his or her own concern.

People have very erroneous conceptions as to what it is that characterizes a member of the Theosophical Society:

- Many think that membership entails giving up one's religion for some other belief-system.
- Many think that one must become a vegetarian, a non-smoker, and an abstainer from alcohol, in order to qualify for membership.
- Many think that members of the Theosophical Society are all pacifists, and would be conscientious objectors were there to be war.
- Many think that no one can become a member of the Theosophical Society who is not prepared to accept some form of authority—whether of an individual, a Master, or of some unusual form of religion, such as the Liberal Catholic Church.
- Many think that members of the Theosophical Society are required to subscribe to some form of political ideology, that they must be opposed to all forms of nationalism, or that they must be exclusively inter- or super-nationalists.
- Many think that the Theosophical Society has particularly close affinities with some specific scheme of economic reform, or of humane reform, or with some bizarre and fantastic ideas about ghosts, or about the return of human souls to animal forms, or about psychic phenomena.

“Oh! You are a member of the Theosophical Society? How interesting. Do please tell me all about ghosts, and how physical articles may be made to go invisibly from one place to another, and whether you can show me a Mahatma some time. And it is true that you believe we may become animals again? And do you really believe in reincarnation?”

A member of The Theosophical Society is often regarded as an eccentric, and sometimes, it must be admitted, with justification. Far from being an eccentric, however, a member is—or should be—a trifle more sensible than most people in the world, because he/she has a scientific conception of life, which stands all commonsense tests as to reasonableness. Science may not be able to say that its physical experimentations substantiate every detail of the Theosophical picture. Religion may not be able to place its hallmark upon much that Theosophy declares to be true. Philosophy may have no experience to offer comparable with the vistas disclosed by Theosophy. The ordinary everyday individual, leading the ordinary everyday

conventional life, may be quite unable to fit into his *vade mecum* what he, and the scientists, and the followers of a religion, and the philosophers, may dismiss as extravagances without the warrant of normal experience.

Yet science, religion, philosophy, and the average individual, notwithstanding, a member of the Theosophical Society with her three sympathies, and her own personal understanding of the Theosophical picture of life, has something the world as a whole does not yet possess. It may be little. It may suffer by comparison with some of the grandeurs of the world's great discoveries. It may not be susceptible of what is called "proof," that is to say, it may be unable to find expression in conventional terms, in language and form acceptable to proof-addicts, to satisfy those who regard the mind and its existing frontiers as the final arbiters of truth.

Arraigned at the bar of the narrow present, Theosophy may be condemned, and members of the Theosophical Society mulcted in the costs of opprobrium and ridicule. But at the bar of the future both will be justified. From the court of the present, appeal ever lies to the court of the future, and not infrequently the judgments of the earlier court are reversed.

Above all, be it understood that a Theosophist is free as are few members of the various faiths of the world. He is free from narrow dogmatism, from subservience to unreasoning authority, from fearsome orthodoxy, from everything that is artificial, blind, or savoring of crowds and conventions. He is free from the restrictions these impose, even though for one reason or another they may perchance choose temporarily to dwell within their restraining circles.

Take any individual member of The Theosophical Society, and it is impossible to predicate of that member anything save a sympathy with brotherhood, a sympathy with the need to understand and to draw together the religions of the world, a sympathy with the search for truth.

- Is she a member of some creed? Maybe, maybe not.
- Is he a vegetarian? Maybe, maybe not.
- Is she a non-smoker? Maybe, maybe not.
- Is she an abstainer from alcohol? Maybe, maybe not.
- Is he a pacifist? Maybe, maybe not.
- Does she believe in reincarnation, in the existence of Masters, in the various teachings known under the name of Theosophy? Who knows?

The Society is not in the least degree concerned with any specific ingredients of an individual's outlook upon life. It is only concerned to ask that he has three sympathies,

not even three objectives which he should be pursuing.

It is the glory of the Society that birds of infinitely divergent plumages flock together in the name of a common brotherhood, live together in a spirit of solidarity, understanding, and mutual appreciation, and yet may radically disagree with one another on innumerable apparently vital matters. Each one of us needs other people's differences to make his own more true. In the Theosophical Society differences abound, partly for this very purpose; for in every difference there is truth, even though, blinded by our own differences, we are unable to perceive it.

- Some may be vivisectionists, others anti-vivisectionists.
- Some will be vegetarians, others non-vegetarian.
- Some may be conscientious objectors so far as war is concerned, while others may have no such scruples.
- Some will be ardent followers of a particular Theosophical leader; others may repudiate all idea of leadership and exalt the superiority of abstract principles.
- Some will be convinced ceremonialists, some no less convinced anti-ceremonialists.
- Some will regard the science of Theosophy as the supreme *raison d'etre* of the Theosophical Society, others may be no less sure that the advocacy and practice of universal brotherhood—apart altogether from Theosophical teachings—is the Society's sole but entirely adequate justification for existence.

Members of the Theosophical Society are not cut from one pattern alone, are not cast in a single mold, are not subject to a single creed. God forbid they should be!

Each is free. Yet is each lifted by virtue of membership to participate in that spirit of solidarity—of real understanding and friendship—which alone can bring about peace and happiness.

The object of The Theosophical Society is not mass production of a single type, but the enrichment of the whole by the diversities of the many. The Society welcomes differences, is eager to collect them, is happy that they should freely express themselves in all purity and strength. But it does ask that within the Society these differences, however radical, be pursued with courtesy and graciousness, with generosity and understanding, and most importantly, with a noble recognition of the value to every other member of the difference, which to him is no less dear and true.

Such differences between members of the Theosophical Society matter little. The modes of holding them matter infinitely. No one is *absolutely* right. Everyone is *relatively* right—relative to his evolutionary stature and monadic uniqueness. And everyone is, to a degree, in possession of the “right,” which he needs where he is. Each one of us needs to be at work making our own individual “right” as true and as beautiful as he can, conscious that such is the duty of all.

Membership in the Theosophical Society helps us to do this in a wonderful way, for in the light of our membership we begin to perceive that everyone is, in fact, shining with his own “rightness,” however different from, or apparently antagonistic to, our own “rightness” it may externally appear.

Thus is it that entry into the Theosophical Society is entry into freedom; entry into a wonderfully constructive and heartening comradeship, entry into a world of mutual understanding and adventurous purpose. There are no lines within which the member is constrained to live save those he chooses to draw himself. There is no picture of life she is expected to admire and copy. They are not bidden to worship at any altars, nor to prostrate before any persons, nor even to hold that in Theosophy alone is truth.

A member joins a happy band of people who are at last beginning to learn how to live effectively and joyously, how to take all possible advantage of every circumstance that either afflicts or heartens them, to have unbounded yet wise confidence in themselves and their future while adequately conscious of their existing limitations, as also no less of those which may yet have to appear above the horizon of their unfolding lives.

He/she joins a happy band of people who are beginning to loose all fear, all depression, all sense of despair and of the futility of life, all discouragement, all lasting sorrow, all sense of irretrievable failure.

He/she joins a happy band of people who are learning to make enthusiasm, courage, truth, adventure, and peace dominant qualities in their lives.

In the Theosophical Society there are no inquisitors, no arbiters of spiritual fashions, no dictators, and no judges.

The Theosophical Society is an organization of friendly people. Every person who wishes to be friendly to all without distinction of creed or class or race or nation, who has no desire to impose his particular convictions upon others, but rather to appreciate them and their convictions, is most heartily welcome to membership.

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