

# Introduction to the Theosophical Society

## Vision - Mission - Ethics

### The Theosophical Society in America:

- has a vision of wholeness that inspires a fellowship united in study, meditation, and service.
- encourages open-minded inquiry into world religions, philosophy, science, and the arts in order to understand the wisdom of the ages, respect the unity of all life, and help people explore spiritual self-transformation.
- holds that our every action, feeling, and thought affects all other beings and that each of us is capable of and responsible for contributing to the benefit of the whole.

Not only does the Society have a vision of union with one another, and a mission of exploration, but also an ethic of putting these high ideals into action.

We invite you to explore with us and join us in the great adventure.

Theosophical Society is a nonsectarian, undogmatic, worldwide organization devoted to human solidarity, cultural understanding, and self-development. It seeks to bring people together; to reconcile the religions, philosophies, and sciences of both East and West; and to increase awareness of the inner reality inherent in every human being.

### History of the Theosophical Society

Organized in New York City in 1875, the Society's principal founders were Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the first Russian woman to be naturalized as an American citizen, and Henry Steel Olcott, a prominent lawyer and journalist who became the first President of the Society. Madame Blavatsky was a Russian of noble birth, whose mother was a social novelist and whose grandmother was an accomplished amateur scientist. As a young woman, she traveled all over the world in search of wisdom about the nature of life and the reason for human existence. Eventually, Blavatsky brought the spiritual wisdoms of the East and of ancient Western mysteries to the modern West, where they were virtually unknown. Her writings became the first exposition of modern Theosophy.

Colonel Olcott was a veteran of the Civil War, during which he had been a special investigator into corruption in the armed services and after which he was a member of the commission appointed to investigate the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. He was also an internationally renowned agricultural authority. Olcott related the timeless wisdom of Theosophy to the cultures of both East and West, applied it to everyday life, and built the Society into an international organization.

Associated with these two were William Quan Judge, a young New York attorney, and a number of other individuals interested in the philosophy expounded by Madame Blavatsky. The latter included General Abner Doubleday, the legendary founder of baseball, and later the inventor Thomas Alva Edison.

In 1879, the principal founders, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, moved to India, where the Society spread rapidly. In 1882, they established the Society's international headquarters in Adyar, a suburb of Madras (recently renamed Chennai), where it has since remained. They also visited Sri Lanka, where Olcott was so active in promoting social welfare among oppressed Buddhists that even now he is a national hero of that land. Today the Society has members in almost seventy countries around the world.

The administrative center of the Section in the United States (called "Olcott" in honor of the President-Founder) is located in Wheaton, Illinois. Approximately 130 local branches and study centers in major cities of the country carry on active Theosophical work. A considerable number of members-at-large are affiliated directly with the national center.

### **The Objects and Philosophy of the Society**

The Theosophical Society is nonsectarian, nonpolitical, and nondogmatic. Its three declared objects are:

- To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color.
- To encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science.
- To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.

The Theosophical Society is composed of individuals united by their approval of its objects, by their dedication to promoting brotherhood, and by their efforts to foster religious and racial understanding. Their bond of union is a common search and aspiration for truth. They hold that truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by service, and not imposed by authority as a dogma.

Theosophists consider that belief should be the result of individual study, experience, and insight, rather than mere acceptance of traditional ideas, and that it should rest

on knowledge, not on assertion. They see each religion as an expression of Divine Wisdom, adapted to the needs of a particular time and place, and they prefer the study of various religions to their condemnation, their practice to proselytism. Peace is their watchword, as truth is their aim.

Theosophy offers a philosophy that sees the whole universe as alive and interrelated. It affirms an intelligent order and system guiding the cyclical evolution of all life. It recognizes a purpose for existence in the goal toward which the entire cosmos is progressing. It puts death in its rightful place as a recurring incident in an endless life, opening the gateway to a fuller and more radiant existence. It holds that our body, emotions, mind, and intuition are all aspects of our inner nature and that right living is the result of balance and harmony within ourselves and with the world around us.

The Theosophical Society maintains the right of individual freedom of thought for every member. Those who join the Society are not asked to give up the teachings of their own faiths. No doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, is in any way binding on any member of the Society, and no teacher or writer has authority to impose opinions on others. All members are urged to defend and act upon these fundamental principles and also fearlessly to exercise their own right of liberty of thought and of expression within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

The Society claims no monopoly on the Wisdom Tradition called Theosophy, for it cannot be limited. Fellows of the Society seek to understand this Wisdom ever more fully. All in sympathy with the objects of the Society are welcomed as members.

### **Some Principles of Theosophy**

Some of the basic ideas Theosophy offers for consideration are these:

- One Life pervades and sustains the universe.
- The universe is the manifestation of an eternal, boundless and immutable Reality beyond the range of human understanding.
- Matter and consciousness (or spirit) are the two polar aspects of that ultimate Reality, from whose interplay proceed innumerable universes in an endless cycle of manifestation and dissolution.
- An intelligence that is both immanent and transcendent is the basis of all laws of nature. "Deity is Law," said H. P. Blavatsky.
- The visible universe is only its densest part; the whole universe contains also invisible worlds of exceedingly tenuous matter interpenetrating the physical.

- The entire system of the universe, visible and invisible, is the scene of a great scheme of evolution, in which life moves to ever more expressive form, more responsive awareness, and more unified consciousness.
- The human consciousness (also called spirit or soul) is in essence identical with the one supreme Reality, which Ralph Waldo Emerson called the "Oversoul," including each of our particular beings and uniting us with one another.
- The gradual unfolding of this latent divine Reality within us takes place by the process of reincarnation, which is an aspect of the cyclic law seen everywhere in nature, by periods of activity alternating with periods of rest and assimilation.
- As Saint Paul says, whatever we sow, we will inevitably reap. This is the law of karma, by which we weave our own destiny through the ages. It is the great hope for humanity, for it gives us the opportunity to create our future by what we do in the present.
- The human pilgrimage takes us from our source in the One through experience of the many, back to union with the One Divine Reality. Our goal is thus to complete the cosmic cycle of manifestation with full conscious realization of ourselves, no longer polarized between consciousness and matter or divided into self and other, but unified within and united with all other beings through our common Source. This realization is enlightenment.