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FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

A fine line is crossed when we begin by trying to help someone and end up trying to control them. What starts as an act of kindness ends up as an imposition of will. Since this is not an uncommon human failing, members of the Theosophical Society are reminded that we should respect a person's freedom to think and make their own choices.

In 1924, the General Council of the Theosophical Society adopted The Freedom of Thought Resolution, which states: "No teacher, or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky downwards, has any authority to impose his teachings or opinions on members." Commenting in the 1987 fall issue of *The American Theosophist*, then President Dorothy Abbenhouse noted: "Members of the Society are free to think, to believe, to work for any truth they find valid; at the same time each must respect the freedom of all other members to find their own truths."

With human nature being what it is, this approach goes against the grain for some people.

Sharing theosophical ideas with people is one thing. Imposing those ideas is something else. For instance: *Theosophy has made a great difference in my life. Therefore I want to make you a beneficiary of my infallible wisdom.* That may be a bit of an overstatement, but perhaps not by much. A sincere desire to help can sometimes morph into a subtle desire to exert control over the recipient of our beneficence.

The New York literary critic Lionel Trilling once said, "Some paradox of our nature leads us, when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion." It is indeed a slippery slope when a desire to alleviate suffering ends up causing misery on an even greater scale.

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