

Why Be a Member of the Theosophical Society?

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Membership of the Theosophical Society is open to those who are in sympathy with its Objects, agree to abide by its Rules and pay the necessary fee. The TS does not ask any applicant what his or her beliefs are, if they are affiliated to any particular religion or organization, or what lifestyle they have. Not being an ideological body the TS leaves its members completely free in their search for Truth while reminding them that their views on any matter are not binding on any other member of the Society.

However, as one becomes more involved in the TS work one may realize that there are deeper aspects connected with the membership of this organization. For example, when one studies aspects of the history of the Society one can establish for oneself that the Theosophical Society was not the brainchild of Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky. The real impulse to form such a body came from the Adept Teachers who wanted to allow a new cycle of interest in the Wisdom Teachings to take place in the world. The Theosophical Society, therefore, has been connected with them and their work from its very inception.

So, while upholding the policy of Freedom of Thought which is part of the very fabric of the TS, it may be important to consider the views about its membership expressed by one of those Adepts associated with the Society from its beginnings.

In 1884 the London Lodge of the TS was in turmoil. Sharp differences of opinion had been formed and the Lodge was moving towards a major split between the group led by Dr Anna Kingsford, which was interested in the study of Esoteric Christianity, and the one led by Alfred Percy Sinnett which expressed a preference for studying Esoteric Buddhism. To give an idea of the relevance of the London Lodge at that time, one of the Mahatmas wrote: “The L.L. is but a brilliant—most likely the most brilliant—orb in the theosophical sky...”

In that year, Francesca Arundale, who was the Treasurer of the London Lodge at that time, received at Elberfeld, Germany, a letter from Master K.H. The text of the letter can be seen in *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series (Letter 4), edited by C. Jinarajadasa. In this letter the Master offers his views about the deeper aspects involved in the membership of the TS. They

are worthy of reflection by those who aspire to serve the Society in any capacity:

Think you truth has been shown to you for your sole advantage? That we have broken the silence of centuries for the profit of a handful of dreamers only? The converging lines of your karma have drawn each and all of you into this Society as to a common focus, that you may each help to work out the results of your interrupted beginnings in the last birth. None of you can be so blind as to suppose that this is your first dealing with Theosophy? You surely must realize that this would be the same as to say that effects came without causes. Know then that it depends now upon each of you whether you shall henceforth struggle alone after spiritual wisdom thro' this and the next incarnate life, or, in company of your present associates and greatly helped by the mutual sympathy and aspiration. Blessing to all—deserving them.

K.H.

Let us examine this quote carefully. For easy reference specific passages are shown in italics.

Think you truth has been shown to you for your sole advantage? That we have broken the silence of centuries for the profit of a handful of dreamers only?

The benefit of the dissemination of Theosophical teachings was never intended to be confined to the members of the TS alone. According to their own letters, the Masters never wanted it to be like a 'club' or 'institute' in which only the select few can go to and participate. Because the idea to form the TS came from the Adept Teachers themselves, the spirit of Altruism – of which they are complete expressions – is part of the very heart and soul of this organization. The Theosophical Society exists to help alleviating the world's heavy karmic burden by the spreading far and wide of the regenerating light of Theosophy through selfless and noble initiatives. As HPB suggested in *The Key to Theosophy*, the Society is meant to be the vehicle of Divine Wisdom in the world and through it more and more of its beneficent influence can reach suffering humanity.

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The word *karma* means 'action' and in Theosophical literature it refers to that universal law of Harmony and Equilibrium that sustains the universe as a whole. Every action establishes connections. The more focused the action is,

the more enduring is the connection. Action and connection imply responsibility. Annie Besant once remarked that when a particular convict was executed because of a violent crime, the only persons who were not responsible for his death were those who had never harboured any violent thoughts and feelings. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all responsible for the condition of the world through our actions, thoughts and feelings.

Interest in Wisdom and Truth can generate a strong soul connection that endures for many lifetimes. Although none of the principles in Theosophical literature has been made official in the TS, they are presented for consideration as facts in nature. Dr Ian Stevenson, the leading researcher in the world in reincarnation and memories of past lives, stated that his many case studies of children who remember their past lives do not *prove* that reincarnation is a fact. But they show, he suggested, that reincarnation is the best explanation so far.

By attracting individuals interested in the Wisdom Teachings the Theosophical Society provides an opportunity for them to put those teachings into practice. This may be the reason why the TS was regarded by the Adepts in its early days as a “training ground”. Learning to cooperate in spite of differences of opinion is one of the main tests on the way to make universal brotherhood a reality in our lives. Every person we meet and have to work with becomes our teacher. And the Society offers plenty of opportunities for us to learn how to make every relationship meaningful.

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Among those who join the TS there are many who feel that this is not their first connection with Theosophical work. If our interest in the Wisdom Teachings is serious and enduring it may indicate an ‘old’ connection being made alive again in this birth, in this lifetime. Theosophy teaches that whatever is learned by the soul which is of enduring value and significance is assimilated into that deeper nature within us and is thus never forgotten. Therefore, wherever one is born from life to life, whatever be the circumstances, if one’s interest is genuine one will always ‘find’ Theosophy again and continue to assimilate it and work for its wider dissemination. This is so because that is the logic behind the vast evolutionary process, which was expressed by Plato in his maxim: “to know is to remember”.

Know then that it depends now upon each of you whether you shall henceforth struggle alone after spiritual wisdom thro' this and the next incarnate life, or, in company of your present associates and greatly helped by the mutual sympathy and aspiration.

The ordinary mind is fragmented and torn by conflicts. It is constantly pulled in different directions by many contradictory desires. As a result, its condition is one of isolation. Learning about the deeper aspects of life becomes practically impossible for such a mind as its vision is clouded and its understanding is darkened by self-interest in its many forms. Theosophical work, on the other hand, offers real opportunities for us to come nearer to the Wisdom by providing us with many possibilities of shared work for the TS and what it stands for.

The Master in the above quote mentions two sources of help in our work for the Society: “mutual sympathy and aspiration”. When we regard every fellow member with sympathy, because we see in him or her a worker for the cause, and aspire to serve each time more selflessly, we are indeed helping to strengthen and energize the TS as a body for mutual sympathy and aspiration are qualities that belong to the spiritual nature, a nature which is suffused with blessedness, energy and a profound sense of unity of purpose.

Blessing to all—deserving them.

In a very short sentence the Master has made it very clear that we must live in such a way as to deserve their blessings. Because their energy is totally consecrated to help the ‘Great Orphan’ – suffering humanity, it cannot be squandered by being directed to selfish and self-centred individuals. The same short sentence also implies that as long as the TS counts in its ranks with really deserving members – unselfish, sympathetic, dedicated – the influence and blessing of the Adept Teachers will be upon it, guiding and energizing it, today and in the distant future. The Theosophical Society has a splendid work to do – a unique work: to help the world realize that universal brotherhood is the central need of humanity. To participate in such a work is indeed a great privilege.

Earlier in the same letter quoted above, the Master K.H. made another important remark. Let his words speak for themselves:

The pendulum has swung from the extreme of blind faith towards the extreme materialistic skepticism, and nothing can stop it save Theosophy. Is not this a thing worth working for, to save those nations from the doom their ignorance is preparing for them?