

# Australian T.O.S. Links

April 2008

As I reflect on the vision behind the founding of the TOS one hundred years ago, I am aware of the importance of the values that motivate our actions. Our decisions need to be based on deep respect for all life. That value will govern our relationships within our families and our global community. It will influence our decisions in relationship to animals and the ecology of our planet. This value springs from our spiritual centre and is nurtured through our spiritual practices. It leads in both small and great ways to peaceful living.

This first newsletter for 2008 chiefly reports on national and international organisational activities. It also includes an extract of a talk by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on peaceful living. This theme of peaceful living will be continued in the August newsletter so if you have practical suggestions or comments on this topic, your contribution would be welcomed.

## Celebrating our 100th anniversary

Around the world, celebrations are in full swing to commemorate the founding of the TOS in February 1908. The anniversary logo that I'll be using on our national newsletter throughout the year was created by members of the TOS in Brazil.

When she founded the TOS, Dr Annie Besant set its direction in this explanation, "It is to make our profession of brotherhood a real and practical one. Our ideal should inspire our minds, hearts and hands to endeavour to carry useful and efficient service to all around us, human and non-human. We should all be anxious to relieve pain, suffering and cruelty and remove ugliness in every form."

Dr Besant was International President of the Theosophical Society at the time and, inspired by the teachings of the Masters of the Wisdom, she announced the formation of the TOS in the Supplement to the Theosophist. Members of the Theosophical Society were encouraged to form 'leagues' to pursue issues of common interest in their communities.

Examples of these early leagues were:

- *The League for the abolition of child parentage (India, 1908)*

## Our focus service area: World Peace

### What's in this newsletter

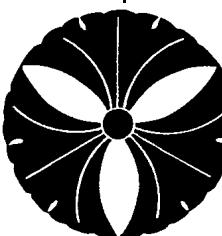
- Celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Convention 2008
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- *The League for the child problem (Britain, 1908)*
- *The National slum & prison improvement league (USA, 1909)*
- *The anti-vivisection league (New York, 1910).*

Between 1924 and 1925, a new structure for an international TOS organisation evolved. It now had an International Secretary and National secretaries in each active country. The activities of the organisation were coordinated and classified in 'departments': social service, animal welfare, world peace, back to nature, healing and arts and crafts.

Today the TOS remains an international organisation, active in most countries where the TS is represented. The International TOS President is the International President of the TS and is

supported by the TOS International Secretary, currently Diana Dunningham Chapotin. Each country is autonomous and organised to meet the needs of its own communities. The focus areas today are similar to those 'departments' described in 1925. In Australia, the service work chosen by our groups is principally related to five focus areas: social service, animal welfare, world peace, healing and environment. Nowadays, members of the TOS need not be members of the TS.



To celebrate the Centennial of the Theosophical Order of Service, Dorothy Bell, from the Mornington Peninsula TOS group, has compiled a collection of Dr Besant's writing on *Service, Duty and Sacrifice ... by which fullness of life is made possible*. It is available on our national TOS web-pages and a copy has also been emailed to local TOS groups.

We produced an anniversary leaflet and bookmark about our TOS work for this year's TS convention in Adelaide. You can download a copy from our national TOS web-pages.

## Convention 2008

*Perennial Wisdom in Action* was the topic of the convention session organised by the TOS. Our panel of three speakers approached the topic from different perspectives, each in a practical and thought-provoking way. Geoff Boyce spoke on *Practical aspects of the multi-faith dialogue*, Thich Thong Phap spoke about

*Engaged Buddhism* and Dilip Chirmuley talked about *The idea of service in Hinduism*.

Congratulations and thanks go to Tad Philips and the Adelaide TOS Group for organising this excellent session. Conference attendees very much appreciated this opportunity to learn about how different religious traditions are involved in spiritually motivated service activities.

A CD-ROM of the session is being provided to each TOS Group and is available to national members by contacting me. Please note that my mail address has changed for 2008. Please refer to *Contact details* below.



The Annual General Meeting of the TOS in Australia was well attended and as usual provided an ideal opportunity for planning for 2008 and for sharing ideas through the reports from TOS groups throughout the country. My annual report is available through the President or coordinator of your local TOS Group.

Edward Sinclair, of the Melbourne TOS Group, is National Treasurer and Lynette Muller, of the Brisbane TOS Group, is National Secretary. Each local TOS Group is again invited to nominate a member to be their representative in the national executive group. This group meets by email to work on national initiatives and enhance national communication and discussion.

### New National TOS contact details

During 2008 I will be living in Italy, so contact details for the National TOS have changed. The following are those agreed to at the Annual General Meeting.

#### Contact for donations

Mr Edward Sinclair  
National TOS Treasurer  
c/- The Melbourne Theosophical Society  
126 Russell Street,  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Please send donations to the National Projects and other activities of international TOS groups to the National Treasurer. Cheques need to be made out to the Theosophical Order of Service in Australia.

#### Contact for newsletter

Ms Carolyn Harrod  
Via della Repubblica 19  
Pucciarelli  
06061 Castiglione del Lago (Pg)  
Umbria ITALY  
cdharrod@cad-assist.com

### Focus of national activities in 2008

The AGM also enabled TOS members from around the country to discuss national projects and operations. Several actions were identified to support local groups:

- Revising and publishing a brochure on the work of the TOS in Australia.
- Revising the national constitution to reflect the current relationship between the national TOS and local TOS groups and provide guidance on current issues.
- Publicising ways of helping the environment, via our web-pages.

Local groups will have an opportunity to contribute to these activities through their nominee on the National Executive.

Ways of commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the TOS were also discussed. Suggestions included publishing a glossy brochure on the TOS, compiling a book on the history of the TOS in Australia, producing a screenprinted bag for sale and making a significant anniversary donation to the Adyar TOS for a specific project. These ideas will also be discussed on the National Executive.

The national newsletter will continue to be used as a major vehicle for sharing ideas between TOS groups. It will be available by email to all TOS & TS members across Australia. To register to receive your email copy, contact: cdharrod@cad-assist.com

### Change to national projects

At the AGM it was decided to have two major national projects in 2008 to which donations are directed:

- Continuing the financial support for the TS orphanage in Brazil; and
- Raising multiples of \$1000 to continue running 'home schools' in Pakistan for children who would otherwise not have access to literacy teaching.

We have, however, now been told by the Director of the Brazilian orphanage, Mrs Zeneida Cereja da Silva, that even with donations from TOS groups such as ours, it has become impossible to adequately fund the orphanage. Regrettably, the orphanage has now been closed and the children relocated to another orphanage that provides care in home-like settings. Zeneida has told us that all the children are living together in the same house within the "Aldeias SOS" complex in Brasilia and that she continues to have close contact with them. The Aldeias SOS group is well known in Brazil for their seriousness and integrity in dealing with poor children. Zeneida has confirmed that the orphanage in Brazil should no longer be supported by our Australian TOS groups.

Our other national project progresses strongly, with eight home-literacy schools now operating as a result of Australian TOS donations. All the Australian sponsored schools have between 20 to 30 children attending. Our challenge for 2008 is to send \$8000 during the year to the Pakistan TOS group to keep these schools operating. For details about the home-literacy schools, visit [www.tospakistan.com](http://www.tospakistan.com)

I have been in contact with Kiran Shah, of the TOS in Kenya, about the viability of the Australian TOS supporting their work with Kenyan refugees. This may

be a suitable replacement project for the Brazilian orphanage. I'll be in touch with local TOS groups as I get more information.

## International TOS activities

Last year we contributed to planning the direction of the International TOS through our local groups' responses to a survey. Dorothy Bell has worked with Diana Dunningham Chapotin, our International Secretary, to compile a summary of the responses from TOS groups around the world. I have emailed the full summary report to each local TOS group and a brief extract appears below. This report will be used in developing an international action plan during 2008.

### Summary of responses to the Vision Statements

The returns revealed a range of preferences for the Vision Statement options; for some, combinations of options; for some, a set of ingredients of a Vision and some wrote their own from the statements.

- Statements 1 and 3 were most supported.

#### Sample statement 1:

*The Theosophical Order of Service is a global organisation made up of individuals united in living the theosophical life that recognises and respects the one Life at all levels of existence. They are committed to serve that Life in altruistic action and to work on the personal transformation required to do so. They work with others locally or internationally, choosing lines of service that reflect their skills and interests. They respect the right of all to be on this planet and to undertake their journeys in whatever way they choose.*

#### Sample statement 3:

*The Theosophical Order of Service is a dynamic partner of the Theosophical Society, demonstrating how social action fits into spiritual practice. It is composed of individuals who recognize and respect the One Life in all beings and whose service is rooted in theosophical principles. Members of the Theosophical Society value the Theosophical Order of Service as an avenue for the expression of their commitment to the ideal of universal brotherhood and planetary peace.*

- the overall impression was that people liked some combinations and others felt that they all complemented one another - or one respondent said they were all too weak.
- The Australian Report identified the key ingredients of a Vision Statement – One Life; work on personal transformation; respect for rights of all; TOS as service arm of the TS; ideal of universal brotherhood and planetary peace; direct hands-on work to make a difference.

**Conclusion:** The benefit of our responding to Vision options resulted in our having to take stock and think about the TOS and what it stands for. THAT is the harvest – people all around the world being challenged to think about the highest purpose of their organization. In a sense it doesn't matter about the final wording – it's the concepts behind the words that matter, and the infusion of spirit that went into the exercise can be felt.

The consensus that has been arrived at is to be celebrated, and the process of consultation through all its phases gives reassurance to the decision-making, that the direction is appropriate, and that the quality of the material to be produced will be better as a result of this consultation.



**Recommendation:** that whatever is written as a vision into the Guidelines or Plan for Action – either as one whole statement, as a set of complementary statements or as principles dispersed throughout the document – embraces the common principles and values that have been identified by TOS members from around the world.

### Summary of responses to the needs of the International TOS

**Conclusion:** As a result of the Olcott TOS Conference and grassroots questionnaire "additions", the list of Needs has become a mixture of small single items and what may be described as substantive policy issues. There was overwhelming support for Guidelines [or another name], and for improving the TS/TOS relationship with careful forethought. So there is a little message to tread softly.

**Support for programs and materials** was strong and quite a few interesting ideas were put forward. The use of the Internet and getting things translated into home languages are two items that need to be further developed when contemplating the distribution of support materials once they are developed. Some saw support on management materials as too heavy.

**Increasing TOS International personpower** was strongly supported – but with attention paid to perceived competition for resources available to TS. Some respondents rightly pointed out, co-option of people has always been in the power of the International Secretary.

#### Recommendation:

- That the "Needs" ideas and suggestions that have come from this and the other surveys be used as reference points in future planning and development of materials and strategies.
- That the suggested Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats from the original SWOT analysis be reviewed so as to pick up any suggestions or issues that have been sidelined.

## What's new on our Australian TOS web-pages

We have several new postings on our web-pages:

- A collection of Dr Besant's writing on *Service, Duty and Sacrifice ... by which fullness of life is made possible*, compiled by Dorothy Bell. It has also been emailed to local TOS groups.
  - An Anniversary leaflet and bookmark on the work of the TOS in Australia.
  - An update on Australia's live animal export and an invitation to write to our Prime Minister, as part of *Animals Australia's* action.
  - Information on the human rights issues in Tibet and an invitation to show your support for Tibet, the Dalai Lama and the long-suffering Tibetan people by signing an international petition.
  - Link to the TOS in the USA's Tibetan orphanage project.
  - Link to the Golden Link School in the Philippines.
- Visit our pages at [www.austheos.org.au/tos/](http://www.austheos.org.au/tos/) and you'll find links to this new material in the left hand column.

## **Peaceful living**

### **His Holiness the Dalai Lama Reflects on Working Toward Peace**

Today's world requires us to accept the oneness of humanity. In the past, isolated communities could afford to think of one another as fundamentally separate. Some could even exist in total isolation. But nowadays, whatever happens in one region eventually affects many other areas. Within the context of our new interdependence, self-interest clearly lies in considering the interest of others.

Many of the world's problems and conflicts arise because we have lost sight of the basic humanity that binds us all together as a human family. We tend to forget that despite the diversity of race, religion, ideology, and so forth, people are equal in their basic wish for peace and happiness.

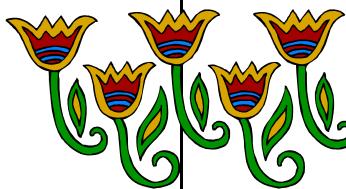
Nearly all of us receive our first lessons in peaceful living from our mothers, because the need for love lies at the very foundation of human existence. From the earliest stages of our growth, we are completely dependent upon our mother's care and it is very important for us that she express her love. If children do not receive proper affection, in later life they will often find it hard to love others. Peaceful living is about trusting those on whom we depend and caring for those who depend on us.

I believe that the very purpose of life is to be happy. From the very core of our being, we desire contentment. In my own limited experience I have found that the more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being. Cultivating a close, warmhearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. It helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the principal source of success in life. Since we are not solely material creatures, it is a mistake to place all our hopes for happiness on external development alone. The key is to develop inner peace.

Actions and events depend heavily on motivation. From my Buddhist viewpoint all things originate in the mind. If we develop a good heart, then whether the field of our occupation is science, agriculture, or politics, since the motivation is so very important, the result will be more beneficial. With proper motivation these activities can help humanity; without it they go the other way. This is why the compassionate mind is so very important for humankind.

When you recognize that all beings are equal and like yourself in both their desire for happiness and their right to obtain it, you automatically feel empathy and closeness for them. You develop a feeling of responsibility for others: the wish to help them actively overcome their problems. True compassion is not just an emotional response but a firm commitment founded on reason. Therefore, a truly compassionate attitude towards others does not change even if they behave negatively.

I believe that we must consciously develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. We must learn to work



not just for our own individual self, family, or nation, but for the benefit of all humankind. Universal responsibility is the best foundation both for our personal happiness and for world peace, the equitable use of our natural resources, and, through a concern for future generations, the proper care for the environment. . . .

A new way of thinking has become the necessary condition for responsible living and acting. If we maintain obsolete values and beliefs, a fragmented consciousness, and a self-centered spirit, we will continue to hold to outdated goals and behaviors. Such an attitude by a large number of people would block the entire transition to an interdependent yet peaceful and cooperative global society.

In human societies there will always be differences of views and interests. But the reality today is that we are all interdependent and have to coexist on this small planet. Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences and clashes of interests, whether between individuals or nations, is through dialogue. The promotion of a culture of dialogue and nonviolence for the future of humankind is thus an important task of the international community. It is not enough for governments to endorse the principle of nonviolence or hold it high without any appropriate action to promote it.

It is also natural that we should face obstacles in pursuit of our goals. But if we remain passive, making no effort to solve the problems we meet, conflicts will arise and hindrances will grow. Transforming these obstacles into opportunities for positive growth is a challenge to our human ingenuity. To achieve this requires patience, compassion, and the use of our intelligence.

## **Social service activities to support**

If you or your TOS group are looking for another international TOS project to support you may be interested in one of the following.

### **Library books for the Golden Link School in the Philippines**

Children's books in English are not easily acquired in the Philippines, so the Golden Link School would very much appreciate donations of library books for children from preschool to secondary school age.

### **Donations to fund a school in Tibet**

Following a pilgrimage to Tibet, the TOS in the USA has initiated a project to raise funds for building work in two Tibetan orphanages and to sponsor orphans. For more information, contact me (details provided earlier), or visit our Australian TOS web-pages.

## **A thought to share**

*"The spiritual man must lead a higher life than the life of altruism. He must lead the life of self-identification with all that lives and moves. There is no "other" in this world; we are all one. Each is a separate form, but one Spirit moves and lives in all."* Dr Annie Besant

With best wishes for the coming months,

***Yours in service  
Carolyn***