

Inner transformation for selfless service

As I have been reading and thinking about the TOS and its founding by Dr Annie Besant one hundred years ago, I have kept coming across a constant message about the purpose of the TOS and its relationship with our lives as theosophists. From the viewpoint of the founder of the TOS, Theosophy is more than an intellectual study; it is a vehicle for spiritual transformation that is reflected in our lives.

Our International Guidelines state that the distinctive, two-fold purpose of the TOS is unselfish service of the needy and suffering and the inner transformation of the server that this requires.

As the service arm of the Theosophical Society, the TOS shares, in the words of H.P. Blavatsky, the 'most holy and most important mission' of Theosophy 'to unite firmly a body of men of all nations in brotherly love and bent on a pure altruistic work, not on a labour with selfish motives.' (HPB's Letter to America, 1888) It draws together like-minded people committed to respecting and serving the One Life in all beings.

The importance of recognising the need for this inner transformation in order to serve selflessly is highlighted by Andrew Harvey in his summary of the philosophy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Harvey, an author of numerous books on religion and mysticism, writes: 'The Dalai Lama's philosophy is in the deepest and widest possible sense a philosophy of peace. The Dalai Lama has understood there will be no future worth living unless everyone now takes personal responsibility for their own inner lives and universal responsibility for the pain and misery in the world. He has understood that none of the major terrible problems that threaten survival of the earth can be solved by merely institutional or political methods. Humankind, to survive, must undergo a massive and unprecedented change of heart, an ordered and passionate spiritual revolution that changes forever our relation to each other and our relation to nature. It is only from such a revolution that the new vision the planet so desperately needs can arise - a vision that sees the connections between every thought and every action, the relation between the obsession with the individual self and its

Our focus: Service to all life

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hunger for false securities and every kind of exploitation.'

In one of his talks, the Dalai Lama explains, 'We all have an innate self-centeredness that inhibits our love for others... 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.'

Let me emphasise that it is within your power, given patience and time, to develop this kind of compassion. Of course, our self-centeredness, our distinctive attachment to the feeling of an independent, self-existent 'I', works fundamentally to inhibit our compassion. Indeed, true

compassion can be experienced only when this type of self-grasping is eliminated... We should begin by removing the greatest hindrances to compassion: anger and hatred... In our concerted effort to develop compassion; we must use all the events of our daily life to transform our thoughts and behaviour.'

Harvey proposes that we need to consider what it means to have compassion for all beings, including the animals, everywhere around the world. We must be determined to act responsibly and compassionately and to be constantly 'mindful' of the choices we make at every moment in our lives.

A meditation

St Clare's words to St Agnes of Prague:

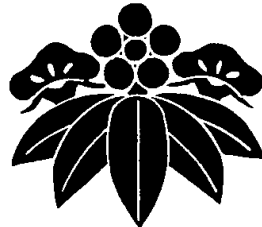
*Place your mind in the mirror of eternity;
Place your soul in the splendour of glory;
Place your heart in the icon of the Substance Divine;
And contemplating, be transformed into the image of the Godhead Itself.*

An affirmation for our planet

ANGELS OF NATURE

*HAIL, devas of the earth and sky!
Come to our aid.
Give fertility to our fields,
Give life to our seeds,
That this, our earth may be fruitful.
Hail, devas of the earth and sky!
Come to our aid.
Share with us the labours of our world
That the divinity within may be set free.*

Geoffrey Hodson



Healing our planet

We have just had another 'wake-up' call with the release of the WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature's *Living Planet Report* released in October 2008.

This biennial assessment of the state of the natural world, paints a bleak picture of Australia.

Our exploitation of the environment is worse than ever, with Australia now boasting the fifth largest ecological footprint per capita in the world. Each Australian uses more land and water per person than residents of the UK, China, Russia or India and it now takes 7.81 hectares to maintain the lifestyle of each Australian. Only the United Arab Emirates, USA, Kuwait and Denmark rated worse.

A country's 'ecological footprint' is the sum of all the cropland, grazing land, forest and fishing grounds required to produce the food, fibre and timber it consumes, to absorb the wastes emitted when it uses energy, and to provide space for its infrastructure. Since people consume resources from all over the world, their footprint includes these resources, regardless of where they are produced on the planet.

Australia's carbon emissions, along with its cropping and grazing practices are the largest contributors to our massive ecological footprint, together accounting for 86 per cent of the total.

The nation's water use is more than the global average and our agricultural industries use more water for production than any other industry sector in the country.

According to this report, water use is escalating because of a growing demand for water-intensive products such as meat, dairy products, sugar and cotton. For instance, the global water use for producing cotton is equivalent to 120 litres of water per person per day; the average person uses 70 grams of sugar per day (mostly in manufactured foods), equivalent to 100 litres of water; and meat, milk, leather and other livestock products account for 23 per cent of global water use in agriculture, equivalent to more than 1,150 litres of water per person per day.

According to this report, over all, Humanity's ecological footprint has now exceeded the Earth's capacity to regenerate by about 30 percent. However, the report ends optimistically: *'The human species is remarkably adept at both creating and solving problems. A sustainable world is not an unachievable goal: the solutions are there before us and within our grasp given the personal and political commitment of individuals.'*

So what can we do?

Our individual actions on a number of fronts can make a difference if we are prepared to reassess our lifestyles. We can recycle, reuse and exchange items as much as possible. We can shop wisely, buying local produce and products; buying for needs rather than wants; using energy efficient transport; choosing alternatives that require less water in their production; and choosing energy and water efficient household equipment. We can monitor and reduce our everyday energy and water use in our homes and work places.



The Brisbane TOS Group has developed a brochure giving a range of suggestions for reducing our personal footprints on our planet. It is available on our TOS webpages.

Can our eating choices affect our ecological footprint?

The answer appears to be a resounding 'yes! The Living Planet Report mentioned earlier identifies live-stock production as being a major contributor to our ecological footprint, in terms of water use. But recent studies have identified livestock as also contributing significantly to global warming. A 2006 report, *Livestock's Long Shadow*, published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, states that the livestock sector generates 18 per cent more greenhouse gas emissions, as measured in CO2 equivalent, than the burning of fossil fuels for transport.

Additionally, more than a third of human activity related methane (a potent greenhouse gas that raises global temperature) results from livestock activity, such as agriculture involving cattle, chickens, pigs and sheep.

The methane produced by Australia's cattle and sheep has more impact than the emissions from all coal-fired power stations in Australia. (Australian Greenhouse Office: *National Greenhouse Gas Inventory*, 2003) Methane is 20-25 times more potent than CO2 at trapping heat inside Earth's atmosphere, however it breaks down much more quickly (7-10 years v's 200 years). This means, cutting CO2 emissions will have no effect on global warming for decades, but reducing methane will have an immediate effect.

So yes, if we reduce or cut out our intake of meat, eggs and dairy products we will reduce the associated water usage and production of methane and carbon dioxide. As well as helping our planet, cutting back on animal based foods also has health benefits and of course, is consistent with a concern for the welfare of animals.

For more information and references go to: <http://www.vegetarianweek.com.au>

Are you looking for ideas to reduce the animal foods in your diet?

The Sanitarium website has a sample reduced meat menu for a week and also a vegetarian menu. Go to <http://www.sanitarium.com.au>

They also have a 'recipe of the week' service. Email subscribers receive a scrumptious vegetarian recipe that's easy to whip up. The email also contains a nutrition profile and useful cooking tips.

Plan to celebrate Earth Hour 2009

Earth Hour is all about the small changes that everyone is capable of making in their lives and building the Earth Hour ethos into each day's living. Turning the lights off, represents turning the lights on in your mind, and consciously reducing greenhouse emissions. Imagine the result if everyone around the globe switched off their lights for one hour?

Show the world you care with one simple action. Plan to join in individually, as a family or with friends on **Saturday 28 March 2009 at 8.30 pm.**

Centennial celebrations around Australia

In Australia, we have celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the TOS by Dr Annie Besant in a wide variety of ways. Many thanks are given to the TOS Groups that sent in information and photographs of their celebrations, which are shared below in alphabetical order.

In February 2008, TOS and TS members in **Brisbane** celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the TOS with an afternoon tea. Long term TOS members were honoured and the TOS President, Lynette Muller, spoke about Annie Besant, the formation of the TOS and its work today.



Members and friends of the TOS Brisbane also participated in three craft workshops to support a Centennial project. This was an opportunity to have fun, meet old and new friends, learn about the work of the TOS and contribute to funding a literacy home-school in Pakistan.



On a crisp sunny May afternoon, TS and TOS members in **Canberra** celebrated the centenary of the TOS with a workshop on meditation, led by teacher, Birthe Ross. The entry fee and generous contributions by participants were donated to the TOS literacy home-schools project in Pakistan.



TS member, Birthe Ross, the meditation teacher, is in the centre with Tony Fearnside to the right and Karyn Fearnside and Peter Fokker, President of Canberra TS, to the left.

Earlier this year four members of the **Hobart** TOS gave a presentation to a Public Meeting of the Theosophical Society in Hobart on the Theosophical Order of Service for the 100th Anniversary. They talked about the history, aims and activities of the TOS in Australia and other countries and the activities of their local Hobart group. Their longest serving member, Joan Davis, talked about her many years of service on various projects. Each member gave their personal perspective on how they hoped to be of service through the TOS Group and individually. Their aim was to increase the awareness of members of the Theosophical Society and the public about the activities of the TOS and perhaps encourage others to join.

A TOS variety night in September marked the Centennial in **Perth**.

Members and friends came dressed as their favourite character.



The group staged a play and demonstrations of ball room dancing and Tai Chi,

followed by a raffle and a sumptuous supper. This fun-filled night finished off with entertainment from a very professional singer and then dancing.

The TOS Group on the **Sunshine Coast**, celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the TOS with a day of sharing approaches to meditation from various religious traditions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sufism and Christianity. The program was co-ordinated by Michael and Falu Ayres and the range of inspiring speakers was enjoyed by the large group who attended.



In **Sydney**, the TOS Group celebrated the Centenary of the TOS with an afternoon tea in February and a special lecture on the life of Dr Annie Besant in July.

TOS sessions at the TS in Australia Convention 2009

The TOS has two sessions at the TS in Australia convention in January 2009.

- Tuesday 20 January at 2.00 pm – a panel presentation by members of the Perth TOS, *Transformation in Society*. This is a public meeting.
- Thursday 22 January at 2.00 pm – *National TOS Annual General Meeting and planning session*

The convention is being held at Trinity College, Perth. If you live in Perth, please invite your friends to join us for the Tuesday panel presentation. See you there!

National update

The National Council has been working on two major tasks this year. We have been updating a brochure about the TOS that can be used by all TOS groups. This brochure will be available early in 2009. The other major activity has been the revision of the National TOS Constitution. The timeline and process for this revision is below:

October 2008 – January 2009

The National Council considers what revisions are needed to make our National Constitution work for us both nationally and for our work at a local level, as well as being consistent with the International TOS Guidelines.

February – July 2009

Input is gathered from local TOS groups and members on the revised Constitution resulting from the National Council's deliberations.

August – October 2009

The National Council considers the input from local TOS groups and members and finalises the revised Constitution in readiness to have it voted on at the National TOS AGM.

November – December 2009

Notification of changes to the National Constitution go to TOS members.

January 1010

Motion at AGM of the TOS in Australia re changes to the Constitution.

We look forward to having your input into this revision process.

International TOS activities

During this year the International Plan of Action for 2008-2013 has been completed and progress has been made on a number of the proposed actions. The International TOS website has been launched and the first e-newsletter, called *in-touch.online*, has been emailed to an extensive list of recipients. This is an on-line newsletter designed to help TOS and TS members keep in touch with what is happening in the TOS internationally – getting to know TOS members outside their own country, sharing in celebrations, being inspired by stories of service around the globe, exchanging ideas about ways of putting Theosophy into action and keeping up to date with organisational developments. If you have not received an emailed copy of *in-touch.online* and would like to be put on the



email list, send a blank message to tos.intouch@gmail.com with 'Subscribe TOS e-newsletter' in the subject line.

Work has also started in two other Action areas. A small international team is well underway with the development of International Guidelines for the operation of the TOS and another group of TOS members from around the world have volunteered to develop resources that will be made available through a 'TOS Members' section on the International website.

If you are interested in contributing to the support material or skills development programs, please contact Carolyn Harrod by email or postal mail at the address in National TOS contacts.

What's new on our Australian TOS web-pages

We have several new postings on our web-pages:

- Link to WWF's *Living Planet Report*.
- Link to Earth Hour 2009 information.
- Link to Vegetarian Week report.
- Link to *Recipe of the Week* from Sanitarium.
- Link to Animals Australia's update on 'live animal export'.

Visit our pages at www.austheos.org.au/tos/ and you'll find links to this new material in the left hand column.

A thought to share

Peace on earth will come from making peace inside yourself

And bringing it with you into the world.

Stephen C. Paul

National TOS contacts

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 and national enquiries

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The national newsletter is published three times a year – April, August and December. It is available by email to all TOS & TS members across Australia. To register to receive your email copy, contact: tos.australia@gmail.com

Geoff's and my year in Italy is drawing to a close and I'm looking forward to meeting up with some of our TOS family at the TS Convention in Perth.

I wish you peace, harmony and spiritual fulfilment, and a New Year filled with happiness and wonderful experiences.

*Yours in service
Carolyn*

