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INSIDE

Crossing the Stream

Ritual and the
Human Psyche

The Flight of the Bird

National President's
Annual Report

Q and A:
On Religion Today

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:

The Theosophical Society has its International Headquarters at Adyar, Chennai (formerly Madras), India.

International President: Radha Burnier
International Vice-President: M.P. Singhal
International Secretary: Kusum Satapathy
International Treasurer: T.S. Jambunathan

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:

4th Floor, 484 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW 2000
Phone: +61 02 9264 7056
Fax: +61 02 9264 5857
www.austheos.org.au
email: tshq@austheos.org.au

National President: Linda Oliveira
email: pres@austheos.org.au

National Vice-President: Geoffrey Harrod
email: geoffrey.harrod@gmail.com

National Secretary: Dara Tatray
email: natsec@austheos.org.au

National Treasurer: vacant
email: treasurer@austheos.org.au

Acting Education Coordinator: Pedro Oliveira
email: edcoord@austheos.org.au

State Representatives:
Travis James - SA/NT
email: tajames@ozemail.com.au
Dianne Kynaston - NSW/ACT
George Wester - WA
email: westerconsult@gmail.com
Denise Frost - TAS
email: tstasrep@gmail.com
Geoffrey Harrod - QLD
email: geoffrey.harrod@gmail.com
Kari Torgersen - VIC
email: meltheos@netspace.net.au

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Editor: Linda Oliveira
email: pres@austheos.org.au
Editorial Committee: Janice Scarabottolo,
Olga Gostin, Dianne Kynaston, Patricia Ossenber

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Freedom of Thought

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasise the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none of which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher, or writer, from H.P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of thought. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties.

The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise the right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society (1924)

Freedom of the Society

The Theosophical Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organisation entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title, 'The Theosophical Society'.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organisation.

Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society (1949)

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Contents

From the National President	98	National Calendar of Events	122
Crossing the Stream	99	Results - Election of State Representatives	123
Ritual and the Human Psyche	103	Viewpoint	123
The Flight of the Bird	107	Q and A: On Religion	124
National President's Annual Report	109	Review	125
Annual Membership Analysis	119	Annual Index to <i>T in A</i> , Vol 76	126
2013 Convention Programme	120	News and Notes	127

The Theosophical Society welcomes students or seekers, belonging to any religion or to none, who are in sympathy with its Objects. The motto of the Society is 'There is no Religion higher than Truth'. The word Religion in this statement is a translation of the Sanskrit *dharma*, which among other things means practice; way; virtue; teaching; law; inherent nature; religion; and that which is steadfast or firm. The word Truth in the motto is a translation of the Sanskrit *satya*, meaning among other things, true, real and actual. It derives from the root *sat*, sometimes translated as boundless unconditioned existence.

Theosophy is not defined in the Constitution of the Theosophical Society, or in any official document. It literally means divine wisdom, *theosophia*, but members of the Society are left to discover what it is for themselves, taking as guides whatever religions or philosophies they wish.

The Three Objects of The Theosophical Society

To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity
without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

~
To encourage the study of Comparative Religion,
Philosophy and Science.

~
To investigate unexplained laws of Nature
and the powers latent in the human being.

From the National President



Linda Oliveira



Religion and Ritual

While many people today eschew religion and any associated ritual, religion and religious practice remain of fundamental importance for many. Ritual tends to be an important part of secular life in various ways too. A number of items in this issue deal with various aspects of the religious journey, as well as the question of ritual and the human psyche, and aspects of the impact of religion in the world. The religious scholar Huston Smith maintains that what makes religion relevant depends upon the age in question. In our own day and age he has observed that social ethics have emerged as a new human responsibility, and that ‘if religion defaults on this responsibility it will lose the relevance it has thus far managed to retain’ (*Beyond the Postmodern Mind*). He qualifies this though, by explaining: ‘Not that religion should be converted into social action’. Rather, his view is that it should engage society in a specific way. Similarly, we might muse upon ways in which the TS could engage members of the wider society.

Benefits of TS Membership

A question was raised not long ago about the benefits of TS membership. It is useful to give a little attention to this subject periodically. Also, it is timely given that membership issues are currently being discussed by the National Council. Let us begin with tangible benefits of belonging to this organisation. Members have the opportunity to attend our annual Conventions and annual Schools of Theosophy which are organised by the National Headquarters. These events are organised specially to help bring members together and enhance the cross-fertilisation of insights and views. Some

scholarships are available for both. The substantial work that is involved in organising these is well worth the effort; brotherhood is best achieved in the company of others, rather than through electronic interactions – although electronic media will need to be utilised by us ever more in the coming years. Members may also attend international Conventions of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, India, as well as regional Indo-Pacific conferences, which give a more global perspective on the TS and the opportunity to meet members from different countries. All members receive four issues of *Theosophy in Australia* each year. Various Lodges and Branches hold special meetings for members and local Lodge/Branch bookshops may give discounts to members.

However, TS membership is not simply about receiving. Membership, whether one is a National Member or else attached to a Lodge/Branch or Certified Group, provides various opportunities to give service to the Society. From time to time I have heard members say that they have felt deeply gratified by giving back something to the TS, perhaps after many years of membership. Then again, genuine satisfaction may be derived from being part of an organisation which is humanitarian in the deepest sense and which can be justly proud of its 137 years of existence.

The ideals for which our Society stands are extremely well worth supporting for they address profound needs of the human being; its concerns encompass those things which give depth and meaning to life. That said, does serious spiritual enquiry have a place in a world which is full of quick fixes? What do we, as a Society, stand for? How should we engage with the world today? Comments are invited.

Crossing the Stream - Spiritual Crossroads in the Western Tradition

Mervyn Haines



Whether we follow a religious tradition or not, if we consistently embrace some form of spiritual endeavour we may come to points in our lives which can be described as spiritual crossroads – places of introspection and decision, sometimes dark places of doubt or confusion. These can seem like very personal experiences to us, but if we look at the life stories of the great religious figures of history we will find that they too have had these moments.

Paths to Water

In the Judeo-Christian tradition the spiritual journey is often portrayed as a path, an image which may be taken from the dry dusty walkways which criss-cross the arid margins of the Middle East where this tradition originated.

In this landscape it is the wells or the crossing places of streams and rivers that are the meeting points of the paths; places of rest and refreshment, of gathering and community. So in the ancient literature these places have become the symbolic places of self-examination and decision. At these defining points the journey of the pilgrim often cannot continue until some form of inner testing and regeneration has taken place, a preparation for the way ahead.

We can see this principle portrayed in one of the stories from the Jewish Torah – a small part of the life of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob:

Jacob has cheated his elder brother Esau out of his rightful inheritance and has fled into exile to escape Esau's vengeance. After several years of successful living in another land he is reluctantly returning to his family home where he expects to face the wrath of his brother. ¹

He crosses the stream that marks the boundary of his father's land and that night, too afraid to continue, he sends his companions on ahead, staying behind alone.

In the darkness a man appears – Jacob accosts him and the two wrestle all night. Jacob is injured but refuses to release his grip. Eventually the morning comes and in the half-light he recognises his adversary not as a man, but as a god. ² From this time on Jacob will walk with a limp, but he will be known by a name that means 'he has prevailed with God' – Isra'el. ³

In this story the opponent with whom Jacob wrestles is portrayed as a real person, but can be seen as a personification of the fears and passions of Jacob himself. By the end of the struggle this fearful self is transformed by the dawning light into a god-like higher being – Jacob's true Self.

We have inherited this story in our language when we speak of struggling with our conscience or wrestling with our fears. It comes from what we know as the book of Genesis – the collection of writings that tell the origins of the nation of Israel, originally written in the ancient Hebrew language.

Hebrew Thought

Hebrew comes quite early in the development of Near Eastern languages and Hebrew thought is different to the Greek pattern of thought that we have inherited in the West. The Greek language is the source of our abstract concepts like anger, compassion, grace, et cetera. The ancient Hebrew language has no words for these abstracts – all concepts are expressed in concrete form, depicted as tangible things; things that can be experienced with the senses.

For example, the word for anger in Hebrew is literally ‘nose’ – a picture word which presents the image of the flaring of the nostrils and hard breathing that accompanies anger. We still talk about our heart as the centre of our feelings, but for the Hebrews it was the word for ‘kidneys’ which was used to indicate the seat of emotion and conscience, whilst the word ‘heart’ was reserved for the mind, the rational intellect.⁴

So there is no such thing as a ‘literal’ translation of the original Hebrew text into meaningful English. As an example, part of one of the songs of praise to God – Psalm 103 – is commonly translated:

‘The LORD (YHWH) is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.’⁵

A more literal translation from ancient Hebrew would read something like: ‘The One Who Is has bowels and walls like a tent; he has a long nose and is very good at bowing down.’

Time and Duration

There are many differences between Hebrew and Greek but one major difference, which can be illustrated using the story of Jacob, is the way that the ancient Hebrews thought of time.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky distinguishes between time and what she terms *duration*.⁶ Describing conditions prior to manifestation, the Stanzas of Dzyan tell us that: ‘TIME WAS NOT, FOR IT LAY ASLEEP IN THE INFINITE BOSOM OF DURATION.’⁷ [I, 2]

In our usual state of consciousness duration appears to our senses as linear and sequential – we exist in the present which passes in an instant and becomes the past. We call this subjective experience time. An analogy would be the well-known example of a tree falling in the forest – does it make a sound if no-one is there to hear it? Again, from the Stanzas: ‘WHERE WAS SILENCE, WHERE THE EARS TO HEAR IT? NO, THERE WAS NEITHER SILENCE NOR SOUND.’⁸ [II,2]

Without the involved observer, there is neither silence nor sound nor time – all exist only as our subjective experiences. Time, like sound, is synonymous with life and living.

Hebrew Time

The ancient Hebrews experienced events in time as qualitative, not chronological. Events were ordered not by their position on a linear framework, but by their significance in the life of the individual and the nation. So events that to us may appear widely separated chronologically can, if their content is similar, be regarded as contemporaneous.

The Exodus from Egypt, regarded as one of the great saving acts of God for the Jewish nation (and another water-crossing story), is not seen just as a past but as a present and future event. When the story of the Exodus is recalled by Jews every Sabbath Eve, it is not just a retelling of the story, but a present experience of it. Similarly, the struggle of Jacob is not just an ancient story but a present reality which can be experienced in the life of the hearer.

In Hebrew there is no general word for the abstract concept ‘time’, no familiar verb tenses of past, present or future. In our story of Jacob, he crossed the stream but he is also crossing the

stream and will continue to cross the stream. In other stories, the children of Jacob, the people of Israel, will cross the Sea as they play out the events of the Exodus, and a new generation will cross the Jordan as they enter into Canaan – and their struggles with their consciences and their faith will continue as part of their life as a nation. And so the cycles continue.

Christianity arose initially as several different sects within Judaism but the version that survived was popularised by the Greek-educated Pharisee Paul whose mission was to present his Messianic view of the Jewish prophet Jesus to a Greek audience. Partly because of his success, the new religion of Christianity became progressively alienated from its Jewish roots. However, it is important to remember that both Paul and Jesus were Jewish, as were the early gospel writers. So the fundamentals of Hebrew thought form the foundation of their writing.

In their stories, the struggle of the representative individual and the transformation of the inner self find expression again in the re-telling of the ancient Hebrew stories in new ways. Like Jacob and the children of Israel, Jesus too will pass through the waters (of the Jordan in baptism) and immediately be driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested.⁹

Time in Eternity

As these religious texts move between different cultures, words can lose their original meaning. One of these words that have subtly changed meaning is *eternity* or *eternal*, which we have come to think of as elongated time. The Hebrew word that is translated as ‘for ever’, this modern view of eternity, is *owlam*.¹⁰

Hebrew words can have different meanings depending on their context so although *owlam* is usually translated as ‘forever’ or ‘everlasting’, in some instances it is translated as ‘old’ or ‘ancient’. Its literal or primary meaning is ‘concealed’ or ‘hidden’ and it describes the vanishing-point of time and space in all dimensions, beyond which nothing can be known by our senses.

This may be saying that our world of the senses and memory only exists within the boundaries of the knowable, like an ark of personality floating in an all-encompassing vastness that is the Eternal. To name the vanishing points of time and space is not to name the unknowable beyond but to define all that which can be known within those limits – the entire content of our experience, self-contained but existing within THAT unknowable.

So when we read the early Christian writings and see the term ‘eternal life’¹¹, we should not think of this as describing some hoped for future existence but rather see it as indicative of the *enlightened* life – a life lived in awareness of our existence within THAT, the ultimately unknowable which can yet be partly known in our living.

Living in the Presence

Eternal living is not an escape from a painful past or uncertain future; it does not mean that we in some way avoid the challenges of life. Rather it is an invitation to be fully human, aware of and embracing all the struggles, joys, pains and hopes that this entails. This is not just living ‘in



the present' but living in the Presence – a sharing of the nature of the Divine in manifestation – an identity with the past, present and future of all that is. It is the very inclusiveness of such a condition that makes it so challenging.

The Presence of the Divine is the innate and inescapable essence of our existence, a truth realised by all religions in every age. When St. Paul described the Divine as that in which 'we live, and move, and have our being'¹² he was quoting the Greek poet Epimenides, who had lived six hundred years earlier in a quite different religious environment¹³. The way we live and move depends on us – we can choose to be swept about unknowingly in the maelstrom of existence, or by becoming aware of and *attending* to the Presence, we can take our place as co-workers within the Process of the Divine.

The story of Jacob is a projection from the mind of one ancient culture of a universal truth; the origin of these stories is the root of all religion, the Divine Consciousness that blazes deep within us. It is the Soul's intuition of its existence in Eternity that casts the shadows that we call 'religions', and these shadows exist in order that we may *know that there is a Light*.¹⁴

So when we come to the crossroads of our lives it is helpful to remember that although we walk in the shadows we are accompanied by a vast crowd of those who share our journey and an even greater crowd of those who have gone before.

Two thousand six hundred years ago, the Hebrew writer who chronicled the life of Jeremiah had this advice for his people: 'Thus says the LORD: Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient (eternal, hidden, [owlam]) paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.'¹⁵

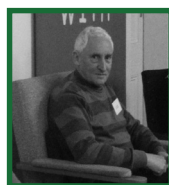
Further Reading:

1. 'The Bible Idea of Time: How Archaic Hebrew Thought Is Constructed Differently than Our Thought Today' by Kerry A. Shirts. <http://www2.ida.net/graphics/shirtail/archaic.htm>
2. 'Jewish Time' by Ole J. Thienhaus, copyright 1999, American Jewish Congress http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0411/

- is_4_48/ai_59120280/pg_6/?tag=content;coll
3. *The Hebrew Mind vs. the Western Mind* by Brian Knowles http://www.godward.org/Hebrew%20Roots/hebrew_mind_vs_the_western_mind.htm
4. Blavatsky, H.P., *The Secret Doctrine* Vol 1, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, 1987, p.37 on time and Universal Mind.
5. Blavatsky, H.P., *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society*, (commentary on *The Secret Doctrine*), Meeting 1, Q&A on Slokas 1 and 2.

Endnotes:

1. Paraphrased from Genesis, chapter 27.
2. *elohiyim*.
3. Paraphrased from Genesis, chapter 32.
4. e.g. Psalm 26:2, Jer 11:20.
5. Psalm 103:8, ESV, 2011.
6. For a discussion with HPB on this, see *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*, Theosophical University Press, Covina, California, 1946, Meeting 1, vol. 1, Stanza 1, Sloka 2.
7. *The Voice of the Silence and other Chosen Fragments*, The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, 1987, p. 83.
8. *ibid.*, p. 85.
9. Matt 3:13, Mark 1:9, Luke 3:21
10. cf. *The Secret Doctrine* Vol. 1, H.P. Blavatsky, p.336, footnote.
11. The Greek word used to translate the Hebrew *owlam* is *aeon*, a word which, although it has its origin in the concept of duration, by the first century CE was commonly understood as referring to a limited, albeit a very long, period of time, similar to the Sanskrit *kalpa*.
- 12 Acts 17:28.
13. *Cretica* by Epimenides of Knossos sixth century BCE.
14. Pagan and Christian Creeds by Edward Carpenter, epub #1561 Project Gutenberg, pp. 173, 175.
15. Jeremiah 6:16, ESV, 2011.



Mervyn Haines is a past President of Hobart Branch.

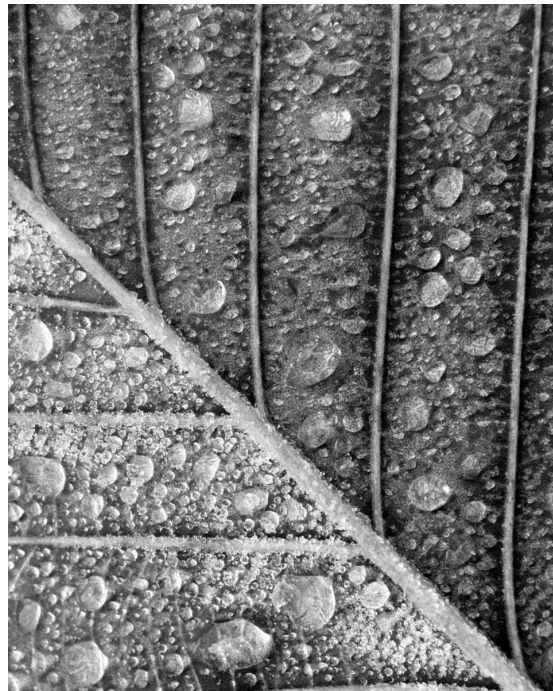
Ritual and the Human Psyche

Olga Gostin

This article comes in two parts. In the first I outline three very different examples of ritual that I experienced in the course of my social anthropological fieldwork in Papua in the mid-1960s, in the Soviet Union in 1968-9, and in Adelaide in the late 1990s. In the second I analyse the ritual context in each instance and reflect on the nature of ritual and why it forms such an integral part of human interaction.

In 1963 I began my anthropological fieldwork among the Kuni of Papua. Numbering about 2500 people, the Kuni lived in small extended-family groups in small mountain villages perched on ridge-tops in the foothills of the Owen Stanley Ranges. Their first contact with Europeans was with Roman Catholic missionaries of the Sacred Heart in 1901. The tribe was declared fully converted by 1938 and during World War II, the Kuni contributed to the wartime effort as members of the renowned 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels' who supported Allied forces in their fight against the Japanese invasion of Papua New Guinea. After the War, Kuni men gravitated to Port Moresby where they established an excellent reputation as reliable gardeners and 'houseboys'. It soon became a rite of passage that young men would leave their mountainous homelands to seek work in Port Moresby, returning only sporadically and temporarily to their ancestral villages.

The effect of this demographic shift became increasingly negative on the population left behind: the elderly, women and children. Many tasks now fell on women who were unable to sustain the pace. Malnutrition and social dislocation set in. By early 1963 the situation



was dire enough for the resident missionary, Father Albert Boell, to leave the mountainous homelands and relocate in a more accessible area called Bakoiudu, still in Kuni territory, where he established a rubber plantation. The idea was to arrest the exodus of young men to town. By the time I arrived in August 1963 to study the impact of cash cropping and resettlement on the Kuni, there were about fifteen hundred people relocated at Bakoiudu within a 20-minute walking radius of the new mission station; another four hundred had refused to resettle and five hundred, mostly men, lived in Port Moresby. During two years of fieldwork, I was able to meet all three categories of settlers and non-settlers, learned their language and engaged in their everyday lives, recording changes in custom and adaptation to the new lifestyle.

Ritual Abandoned

The ritual which is the focus of discussion here is but one of several that were abandoned, modified or otherwise reformulated in the immediate aftermath of resettlement. Traditionally, the birth of a child, especially a firstborn, was

met with great rejoicing. Women of adjoining mountain villages would learn of the event from long-distance yelling and would converge on the birth village dressed in finery and armed with spear-like poles which they would hurl into the roof of the birth hut after ritually dancing round it. The spears were adorned, symbolising the gifts that the dancers expected in return for their celebratory presence. This *bale-bale* (pronounced like barley) *naduna* or running feast, as it was called, set the newborn child and their parents on a path of obligation and reciprocity that would punctuate their lives thereafter.

In October 1963 I was told that the wife of the local school teacher at Bakoiudu had just been delivered of her first child. Kuni women urged me to come to observe the *bale-bale naduna*. By the time I got to the birth hut, I was met with an extraordinary spectacle: the hut looked like an echidna, bristling with spears and adorned with other pieces as well. Inside the hut, the parents sat slumped in despair, notwithstanding their beautiful son cosily asleep in his mother's arms. The situation was dire: the father estimated that some two hundred women had come to dance at dawn and there was no way that he could ever hope to repay the dancers for their part in the *bale-bale naduna*. He was ruined; in due course he asked for a transfer to Port Moresby and never returned to Bakoiudu.

In November, soon after this event, word went round that Faika Peto, the original landowner who had donated the land for resettlement at Bakoiudu, required leading members of all groups to convene at his place after Sunday Mass. A hush descended on us all as the local leader spoke to the effect that Bakoiudu was a new place; that he welcomed the resettlement and proposal to start cash cropping; that customs need to change with changing times; that his daughter-in-law was pregnant and that he formally put a *taravatsu* or prohibition, on the practice of *bale-bale naduna* for her, or any other future newborns at Bakoiudu. 'We are Catholic believers and have no more business with those old pagan customs; let each family celebrate the birth of their child at the time of baptism, along with the godparents. Babies

and baptism are the business of families, not community-wide participation. These are my final words on this subject.' So ended the ritual of *bale-bale naduna* at Bakoiudu, and in Kuni generally.

Ritual Resuscitated

The second ritual that I should like to discuss unfolded in the Soviet Union in the late 1960s. I was at Moscow State University on a post-doctoral scholarship, and was struck by an unusual (to me) exhibit which featured in almost every ethnographic or historical museum that I visited, whether in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev or Tashkent. This consisted of a cabinet displaying a mannequin dressed as a bride, complete with white dress, veil (or white hat), pearls, white shoes and handbag. The explanatory inscription referred to 'new customs' and their importance in consolidating the social fabric of Soviet society.

My inquisitive research unearthed the following background to these museum exhibits. In the aftermath of the Communist revolution of 1917, many so-called bourgeois practices were abandoned as being representative of a bygone privileged and stratified social order. One of the rituals which was particularly criticised was institutionalised marriage with all its (religious) trappings and wasteful extravaganza. Under the new order flushed with idealism at every level, marriage was abandoned and couples simply cohabited to rear good, communist families. At least that was the theory. In reality, however, the extent of broken families, abandoned children and social dysfunction at the very basic level of family life led to a concerted effort to restore some customs to their former, albeit modified, importance. The mid-1960s saw this renewal in the reinvention of 'new traditions' relating to marriage, naming ceremonies (to replace baptism), and in the former Baltic Lutheran states, young citizenship ceremonies (to replace confirmation). I became an assiduous attendee at these ceremonies which were especially intriguing as they were being resurrected in the context of an atheist state which had hitherto labelled similar rituals as superstitious, elitist and/or bourgeois.

“What, then, can we deduce from these disparate examples of ritual abandoned (Kuni), resuscitated (Soviet Union) or perpetuated in a foreign setting (Greek Adelaide)? In the first place, it is quite clear that in all instances the matter of ritual (dis)engagement was taken seriously and the focus of community involvement. Secondly, all three examples concerned major rites of passage at birth and/or marriage. In all cases we are reminded of Arnold van Gennep’s seminal Rites of Passage in which he explored the three steps of transformation that are ritually enacted at major stages of life: separation, transition and incorporation.”

Allow me to describe a typical marriage ceremony, 1960s style. Marriages took place in so-called Palaces of Happiness, former aristocratic villas, with grooms shepherded in one room and brides in a room opposite, well-furnished with mirrors, tissues and other such luxury items. An usherette in uniform would call out a certain groom and his bride, and the couple and their entourage of up to twenty people would then progress up a grand staircase illuminated by a beautiful stained glass window, most often featuring a woman holding a child, while a dove hovered above, holding a banner displaying the word *mir*, peace. Reaching the grand hall, the wedding party faced an imposing table behind which stood a sashed celebrant, with the bust of Lenin prominently displayed alongside, or nearby. Music was entoned and the couple moved forward to exchange their vows, swap rings, kiss each other and be admonished to live in harmony and fidelity to raise good Soviet citizens of the future. The whole pro-cedure lasted exactly seven minutes. And so on, in pressured succession, as these marriage ceremonies were extremely popular.

It is a matter of regret that I have never found out whether divorce and/or abandonment of children were significantly reduced by this return to ritual in the 1960s, or for that matter, by the reinstatement of religious marriage in recent times.

Ritual Perpetuated

The final example of sustained ritual was in 1997 when my daughter married a much loved young man of Greek provenance, whose parents had emigrated to Australia some thirty years earlier, living a self-contained ethnic life in Adelaide, speaking only Greek, frequenting Greek supermarkets and the local Greek Orthodox church, having Greek friends and practising Greek custom in exile. Our first serious engagement was the ritual called *krovati*, or dressing the marriage bed. This took place a week or so before the actual wedding day and involved the making of the bed with brand new mattress, covers, linen, doonas, pillows – the full catastrophe. One could rationalise *krovati* as good for the economy, especially as specialist Greek stores were well stocked with necessary items. In due course the ritual took place with women only present, intoning a moving traditional song as the bed was made, then throwing rice, rose petals, money and finally a loaned live baby onto the bed. All the women then retreated, the men apparently oblivious to what had been happening. Throughout the afternoon, though, men would sneak into the bedroom and toss bundles of money onto the bed and retreat as though they had never been there. The crux of the *krovati* ritual, however, was that it was alive and well in Adelaide, but had apparently become defunct in Greece years earlier.

The Importance of Ritual

What, then, can we deduce from these disparate examples of ritual abandoned (Kuni), resuscitated (Soviet Union) or perpetuated in a foreign setting (Greek Adelaide)? In the first place, it is quite clear that in all instances the matter of ritual (dis)engagement was taken seriously and the focus of community involvement. Secondly, all three examples concerned major rites of

passage at birth and/or marriage. In all cases we are reminded of Arnold van Gennep's seminal *Rites of Passage* in which he explored the three steps of transformation that are ritually enacted at major stages of life: separation, transition and incorporation¹. Thus a newborn is separated from the community straight after birth, it enters a period of transition when the ritual of baptism or *bale-bale-naduna* takes place, and is then incorporated with a new status, name and identity at the end of the ritual. Van Gennep shows how rites of passage punctuate the social life of individuals right through life. Lynne Hume goes further when she suggests that ritual is in fact 'sacred drama' in which participants are actors affirming a set of beliefs and practices that validate the cosmological order². This is also the stand taken by Farmer though he argues for ceremony (rather than 'mechanical' ritual) as creating the 'free movement of our soul into the mundane, and our consciousness in the realm of the soul'³. Roy Rappaport follows a more prosaic tack when he refers to ritual as 'sealing a social contract' between participating individuals and groups⁴.

What happens then, that rituals should be abandoned? Among the Kuni we could say that there was an economic imperative that made *bale-bale naduna* unsustainable outside the confines of the small mountain villages where it had originated. It is noteworthy, however, that Faika Peto did not simply abolish the ritual. He tendered an alternative focus for celebrating birth: the occasion of baptism. The reader may extrapolate to what extent this amounted to a rite of passage, a sacred drama and/or a social contract. In the Soviet Union, marriage was initially abandoned as a relic of an overturned social order. However, its restoration was not left to individual improvisation. The social imperative of restoring family values was publicly debated and engineered in a mass educational campaign which included a new genre of literature on 'new traditions', explanatory tracts and exhibits in museums. All heralded the importance of new rituals in the evolving Communist order. Finally, the ongoing practice of *krovati* in Adelaide (despite its abandonment in Greece) speaks of the importance of ritual in sustaining meaning and identity in a foreign cultural



matrix. In all three instances the importance of ritual lay in its bonding mechanism between participants and the affirmation of common values. Perhaps we should bear this in mind when we reflect on different practices and customs in our multicultural nation.

References

1. Van Gennep, Arnold, *Rites of Passage*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960.
2. Hume, Lynne, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997.
3. Farmer, Steven D., *Sacred Ceremony: How to Create Ceremonies for Healing, Transitions, and Celebrations*, Hay House, Sydney, 2002.
4. Rappaport, Roy, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.



Born in Brussels, Dr Olga Gostin completed her first degree in South Africa, majoring in Social Anthropology. After completing her PhD in Australia, Olga joined Australia's founding programme for Aboriginal tertiary students at the University of South Australia, where she is currently adjunct senior lecturer. Olga has been a member of the Theosophical Society for over four decades.

The Flight of the Bird (Awakening Perception)

Helen Steven



Having attended the School of Theosophy at the Springbrook Centre I learned one very important lesson: There is a story in everything, and everything in a story! Consequently I was inspired to tell this short story:

Once upon a time there was a little bird. Every day he would sit on his perch in his cage. He liked to look in the mirror. He was satisfied with what he was fed. Sometimes he would sing, and sometimes he would try to fly. This is what he knew. He saw that there was something else outside his cage, but it was not what he knew. He saw other birds flying outside, but that was not him, that was not his world. Then one day the cage door was left open. He did not think to go through the doorway. He stayed safe with what he knew. Sometimes he looked through the doorway, but did not understand what he saw. Then one day another bird stopped and asked, 'Why don't you fly out of your cage?', and he said 'I'm happy here. I feel safe.' The other bird said, 'But it's not in your nature to be in a cage. You're a bird. The true nature of a bird is to fly free.' Then the little bird started to see things differently. He watched the other birds outside flying free. He heard their song. He looked through the doorway. Then he looked at what he knew. He questioned: 'Do I really know how to fly? Is this really all there is? Is this what I'm destined to be?' He became dissatisfied. He kept looking out there for answers. Then he thought about his true nature. Maybe that is what he was destined to do – fly free. 'What is freedom? What does it mean?', he asked. So he moved to the doorway, sometimes sat in the doorway, and looked and listened. He felt what it might be like to be free. He was not happy in his

cage any more. Now he had smelt the freshness and seen what he could not see before. Now he wanted to be free. So he went to the doorway, and looked and listened more and more often. Soon he stopped noticing what was in his cage; and then stopped thinking about his cage.

I am the little bird. The perch is my beliefs, they are my support structure, but they keep me from flying. The mirror is my relationships – everything in my life relates to my self. I only look at what pleases my self. The food is my knowledge – for a while it sustains me. I don't question where it comes from or what it means. My song is the Song of Life – always a part of me, and trying to fly is my instinct or intuition. It is my nature to fly free, but at first I don't see it for what it is. At first I don't look into what happens around me, even though I'm aware that there is another reality; it seems to be only for others and it doesn't affect me.

Sri Ram said:

Preoccupation with oneself and all that one wants to enjoy and possess concentrates at that centre which is the self those energies that should be flowing in all directions. The periphery, where the self meets the world, then hardens into a shell of indifference ... shutting off all that life in every form has to convey.¹

And he said: '... we live in a condition of being shut in, except for what affects our personal selves.'² This is the birdcage. Our mind creates our limitations.

Sri Ram also said: 'the clouds in our mental sky are born of our attachment ... A person who has not had even a momentary glimpse of the beauty and nature of that sky will not even believe there

is such a thing in existence'.³ Attachment is what stands in the way of freedom.

The opening of the door is a seemingly random event but it becomes a catalyst for an awakening of perception. The door is open for the possibility of change. Then a moment of inspiration (the other bird who poses a question) is when I start to question everything. This is when I join the TS! Yet this is just looking through the doorway. As I become gradually more aware my food (knowledge) no longer sustains me because I want to taste the real thing, and I'm not happy in my 'cage' any more.

Sri Ram said: 'It is only when what is called truth, that is to say, our apprehension of it, ceases to satisfy, that there is the beginning of further search ... inevitably disillusion comes.'

Knowledge is not truth. Truth doesn't come from thought. And so there is a movement toward the doorway where I begin to look and listen. This is how real change in perception and being can take place. In *Light on the Path* HPB says that 'listening points to a state of being and a condition of receptivity to the true nature of things' then truth unfolds. We have to listen with our whole being and whole heart. In *Seeking Wisdom* Sri Ram talks about the need for a condition of silence in order to hear what life has to say. Only when the mind is still, real truth is revealed.

When I sit in the doorway I am meditating. The more we look at the true nature of things the less we look at what we know, which is based on memory and previous experience. Meditation gives a taste of freedom, but it is not freedom, it is not wisdom, and it is not truly living.

Wisdom has to act. If we are a bird we are meant to fly. Sri Ram said: 'In a state of freedom, action is according to an innate law which, in an individual is the law of his being. It is a law which ... always maintains a state of harmony.' We know how to fly. We know how to act, how to really live in Truth, but it requires release, renunciation, of everything of a personal nature. We must leave the cage.

Sri Ram said: 'Life wells up from within, from the pure nature and an expanse of consciousness, the very nature of which is sensitivity.' As the wings

of a bird in flight adjust to the slightest variation so are we, when in 'flight', so receptive, sensitive and non-resistant to every vibration, so beautifully tuned.

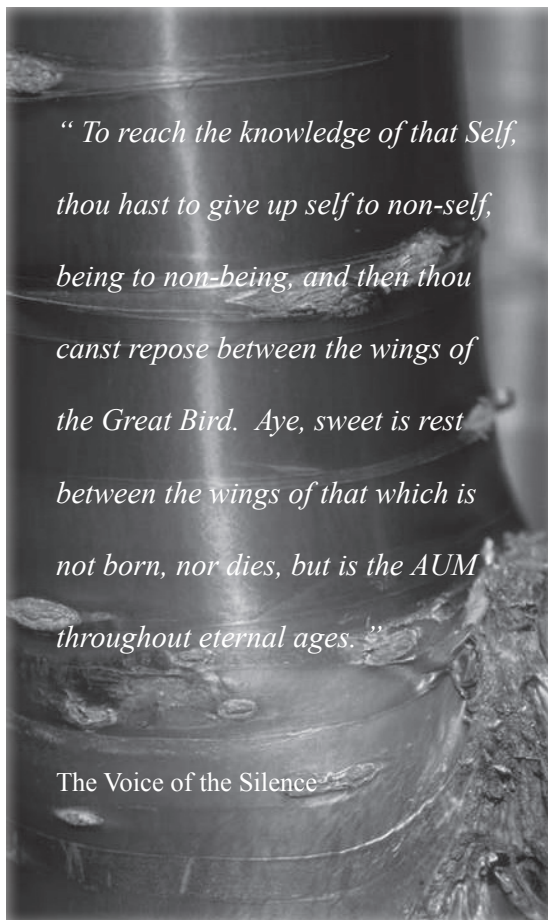
Take a leap of faith. You intuitively know what to do. Wisdom is flying free. Fly!

Endnotes:

1. Sri Ram, N., *Seeking Wisdom*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, 1989, p.132.
2. op. cit., p.133.
3. op. cit., pp. 104-105.



Helen Steven is the Acting President of Hobart Branch. She gave this talk at the 2012 School of Theosophy, Springbrook.



National President's Annual Report

1 September 2011 to
31 August 2012

Linda Oliveira

Preamble

I am pleased to present my first Annual Report since taking office in January this year and would like to commence with a few items of particular note.

It is important that any democratic system includes both representation of constituents (in our case, representation of members), as well as consultative mechanisms. Democratic processes are integral to this Section, for example, through the election of officers and committees as well as committee procedures. An example at the national level is the election of *State Representatives* to the *National Council* by members in each Electoral State. However, sometimes additional consultative measures can be useful to obtain feedback from a larger field. With this in mind, I decided to send out a survey to the Lodges/Branches throughout the Section in April to help ascertain their main needs in relation to services provided by the National Headquarters. It was extremely helpful to receive responses from all TS centres concerned, which I then brought to the mid-year *National Council* meeting. A number of patterns emerged. Broadly speaking, the main need is for the provision of more educational material in a variety of forms. The *Education Unit* has been examining these requests and is planning to respond to a number of them with the development of a resources package for Lodges, Branches and Certified groups. Another request received from a number of Lodges/Branches was for DVDs of Convention sessions. We will be trialling this at the Convention in Melbourne next January.

Aside from the Needs Survey, two areas which I have earmarked for special attention are:

- upgrading our national website, and
 - a variety of issues relating to membership.
- A workshop on the latter topic was held in July after

the completion of the *National Council* meeting. More about both of these follows later in the report.

NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

The first several months of the year under review were under the stewardship of my predecessor, Dr Dara Tatray. She had the dual offices of *National President* and *Education Coordinator* for the Section. Dara is to be greatly commended for managing to organise and run two events at the Springbrook and Canyonleigh Centres during that time, and take on other additional duties, during a period when there was a staffing shortage at the National Headquarters. Also, she has been a great help during the transition period. Dara was appointed as *Acting National Secretary* of the Section by the *National Council* in January. Subsequently the position was advertised. Three applicants were interviewed for the position and, after considering the comments of the interview panel, the *National Council* appointed her in July as the Section's *National Secretary*.

As the duties of the *National Secretary* had been engaging almost all of Dara's time, she voluntarily relinquished the position of *Education Coordinator* in July. Some important property matters have been particularly time consuming during 2012, including the sale of the Merrimac property in Queensland which Dara arranged and which was almost completed by the end of the year. However, we are fortunate that she is a member of the national *Education Unit* and will continue to work on courses, travel and speak as time permits.

Special appreciation is due to Donald Fern, who served the Society at the national level for seventeen years. He did so with great flair, creativity and business acumen. Two outstanding projects which he either participated in or else oversaw, were the building of accommodation blocks and the large meeting hall/library complex at the Springbrook Centre, and the completion of Bolitho House at the Canyonleigh Centre in order to enable residential events to be held there. Donald held the office of *National Secretary* for many years and in more recent times was the Section's *Hon. National Treasurer*. After retiring, and while *Hon. National Treasurer*, he agreed to take on the position of *Acting National Secretary* during the second half of 2011 when the *National Secretary*, Zehra Bharucha, was on leave due to ill health. Donald declined to accept the

office of *Hon. National Treasurer* this year and the *National Council* has declared that position vacant. Although it has not been filled at this stage, members can be assured that the Section's financial work is being competently and responsibly carried out.

Thanks are also due to Zehra Bharucha who, during a period of a decade, ably and efficiently carried out various duties in the National Headquarters including, as mentioned, the position of *National Secretary*. She was unwell and on leave for a period which commenced prior to the beginning of the year under review. After considerable discussion, at its January meeting the *National Council* decided not to continue her appointment. We wish her well in her future endeavours.

To complete some substantial changes in the administration of the Section during the past eight months or so, Pedro Oliveira was appointed as *Acting Education Coordinator* at the July meeting of the *National Council* as a result of a suggestion by a member of the Council. Pedro commenced work in the National Headquarters office at the beginning of August. The position of *Education Coordinator* will be advertised in March 2013.

Considering these major changes during the year, I am very happy to report that the National Headquarters office is running extremely well and now has a better complement of staff. Our members of staff are very dedicated and are a pleasure to work with. Also, it is very gratifying that more energy and resources can now be put towards specific educational projects for the Section, particularly in the light of the results of the Needs Survey of Lodges/Branches mentioned previously.

National President's Work

The *National President's* work spans a range of areas. Since commencing in January, my duties have included overseeing the National Convention; visiting TS centres around the Section; writing presentations; reviewing Section policies; organising a schedule of Supporting Lecturers around the Section; organising events at national TS centres; co-presenting morning study classes as well as afternoon training sessions at the annual Australian School of Theosophy; editing and production of the national magazine, *Theosophy in Australia*; membership of the *National Council* and the national *Executive Committee*; chairing meetings

of the national *Executive Committee* and *The Australian Section Theosophical Trust*; commencing a review of the national website; membership of various subcommittees; answering correspondence; and dealing with matters of concern raised by Lodges and *State Representatives*. Apart from similar duties my predecessor, Dara Tatrav, also represented the Section at the meeting of the international *General Council* in Adyar last December.

Since taking office in January I spoke at the following places during the year under review:

January - the National Convention in Brisbane;
February - Blavatsky Lodge, Sydney;
April - the annual School of Theosophy, Springbrook;
June - Northern Beaches Group, Sydney;
June - Melbourne Lodge;
July - Mornington Peninsula Group, Victoria;
July - Canberra Branch;
July - Perth Branch; and
July - Adelaide Lodge.

It has been a pleasure during my travels to connect with old friends as well as new ones.

National Council

The *National Council* deals with questions of broad policy and other matters, including those referred to it by the national *Executive Committee*. The *Council* met twice during the year in Brisbane during January, and in July at the National Headquarters, Sydney. As at 31 August 2012 the *National Council* comprised two *ex officio* members (the *National President* and the *National Secretary*), as well as six elected *State Representatives*, each of whom may serve up to three two-year terms:

Denise Frost – Tasmania
Geoffrey Harrod – Queensland
Travis James – South Australia/Northern Territory
Dianne Kynaston – New South Wales/
Australian Capital Territory
Kari Torgersen – Victoria
George Wester – Western Australia

In January 2012 the *National Council* made the following appointments for a 12 month period:

. Chair of the *National Council* and *National Vice-President* until January 2013 – Geoffrey Harrod. This office is normally rotated fairly regularly to give *State Representatives* from different Electoral States the opportunity to serve in this capacity.

- . *Executive Committee* – see next item
- . *Acting National Secretary* – see item on National Administration above

I would like to thank all of the *State Representatives* for giving voluntarily of their time and energy in order to participate in the two meetings they attended during the year. This is greatly appreciated. Lodges/Branches and members may make representations to the *National Council* through their *State Representatives* on issues of concern.

National Executive Committee

This *Committee* deals with the day to day administrative and business work of the national Society. It met monthly during the year under review except in January. As at 31 August its members included two *ex officio* members, the *National President* and the *National Secretary*, as well as the following members who were appointed by the *National Council* in January: Beatrice Malka, Dai Trandang, Ken Edwards, Marlene Bell and Dianne Kynaston. Two of these members live in Melbourne and Adelaide.

The members of the national *Executive Committee* are also required to be the Directors of The Australian Section Theosophical Trust, which is responsible for the Section's properties except for Theosophy House in Sydney.

In January the national *Executive Committee* appointed Linda Oliveira as the *Editor* of *Theosophy in Australia*.

In February appointments of the following Committees for 2012 were made by the national *Executive Committee*:

Rules, Finance, and Public Relations and Promotions.

Headquarters Staff and Volunteers

Sincere gratitude is extended to each member of the National Headquarters team for their ongoing work for the Section and their cooperative spirit. I would also like to express great appreciation for the work of our various national volunteers who give their services freely. The main duties of the headquarters staff and volunteers during the year under review were:

- Dara Tatray, *National President* until January 2012 and *Education Coordinator* until July 2012

(*National President's* duties were listed previously; duties as *Education Coordinator* included organising and giving presentations at national events; ensuring the provision of appropriate study and training courses; responsibility for the Campbell Theosophical Research Library and Archives and responsibility for the Section website).

- Donald Fern, *Acting National Secretary* and *Hon. National Treasurer* until January 2012 (Headquarters office administration; accounting; maintenance and management of Section properties; insurance; *Administrator* of both the Springbrook and Canyonleigh properties; *Chair* of the *Rules Committee*; *Secretary* of The Theosophical Foundation Pty. Ltd. and *Secretary* of The Australian Section Theosophical Trust.)

- Dara Tatray, *Acting National Secretary* as from January 2012, *National Secretary* as from July 2012 (duties included most items listed in the paragraph immediately above).

- Jennifer Hissey (entering data for the Online Public Access Catalogue; handling enquiries for material from the Campbell Theosophical Research Library and Archives; networking with other libraries in Australia; liaising with Softlink in order to improve OPAC; *Convention Secretary*).

- Gil Murdoch (*Webmaster* for the Australian Section's website; maintaining sound equipment and data projectors; updating the Union Index of Theosophical Periodicals; assisting in the Campbell Theosophical Research Library and Archives).

- Richard Larkin, *Membership Secretary* (preparing membership reports; maintaining the membership database; banking; responding to DVD and course orders; general office duties, assistance to the *National President* and the *National Secretary*) and *Supporting Lecturer*.

- Pedro Oliveira (volunteer – *Supporting Lecturer*, including co-presentation of study and training classes at the Annual School of Theosophy at Springbrook; assistance with mail outs of *Theosophy in Australia*); *Acting Education Coordinator* as from 1 August (duties as listed previously for *Education Coordinator*).

- Barry Hora (see item on Springbrook Centre).
- Lucille Crocker (bookkeeping duties).
- Dai Trandang (volunteer – organising the quarterly mail out of *Theosophy in Australia*; work on the Union Index of Theosophical Periodicals, member of the national *Executive Committee*).
- Beatrice Malka (volunteer – *Assistant Treasurer*

and member of the national *Executive Committee*).

- Marlene Bell and Ken Edwards (volunteers – members of national *Executive Committee*).
- Dianne Kynaston (volunteer – member of national *Executive Committee*, *Supporting Lecturer* and member of *Editorial Committee*).
- Janice Scarabottolo, Dr Olga Gostin and Patricia Ossenberg (volunteers – member of *Editorial Committee*).
- Noel Bertelle, Barry Bowden and Simon O'Rourke (volunteers – *Supporting Lecturers*; see also item on *Supporting Lecturers* below).
- Jef Ladbroke-Sloan (volunteer – calligrapher, Membership Certificates for new members).

MEMBERSHIP

As at 31 August 2012, there were 1,060 members of the Australian Section, including 135 National Members.

Members may belong to Lodges or Branches, or else be National Members attached directly to the National Headquarters. We are a membership based organisation. Each and every member is important. In this country we have members from very different religious, professional and cultural backgrounds. This mixture is actively contemplated by the principle Object of the TS, as well as the fact that we are a world-wide Society. One challenge is looking after the common – while diverse – interests of our members, as well as considering what will attract and interest new members.

National Workshop on Membership

I arranged a mid-year workshop on membership after the July *National Council* meeting to deal with factors which might have contributed to a gradual overall decline in the membership of the Australian Section over a number of decades; how to enhance the quality of membership for our current members; and how to attract new members. There were many responses to these questions and the conversation will be continued after the next meeting of the *National Council*. For many, belonging to an organisation is clearly not as important today as it was some decades ago. However, we need to look closely at how we reach out into the community, how we deal with potential members, and how we can enhance the quality of TS membership for our existing members. With this in mind, before the end of the year plans were also commenced to develop

a survey of members. In due course, Lodges and Branches will be asked to assist with this process.

Theosophy in Australia

Theosophy in Australia magazine, produced for the members, was published four times during the year under review in September, November, March and June. The magazine is a tangible unifying factor in the Section. Received by every member, it reflects a diversity of views and provides some thoughtful material for reflection. Members of the *Editorial Committee* met in January and their responsiveness in reviewing submissions for publication has been greatly appreciated.

2012 CONVENTION

The theme of this year's Annual Convention was 'Current Thinking in Evidence of the Third Object', one of the highlights being a stimulating presentation by Brisbane Lodge member Peter Bruza on 'Subject-Object Duality in Buddhism and in Quantum Theory'. The Convention was a very successful week, arranged by Dara Tatrav. Brisbane Lodge hosted the Convention with warmth and efficiency. Appreciation is extended to Phillipa Rooke, the President, as well as other Lodge members for organising the day outing, providing suppers and books, and arranging the evening cultural entertainment, among other things. Fortunately, no floods necessitated the cancellation of the Convention there as happened last year.

EDUCATION

Education Unit

At the end of the year under review the Education Unit consisted of the *National President*, the *Acting Education Coordinator* and the *National Secretary*. We are mindful of the need for fresh educational material to be produced. While a number of events at national TS centres have been organised, it has not been possible to produce new educational material for some time. This has been due to staffing issues at the National Headquarters outlined previously, along with many hours of preliminary work invested in the projected Headquarters move in 2012, as well as other time consuming matters. However, I am pleased to report that work commenced on planning a resources package to be sent to TS centres in due course, based largely on the results of the national Needs Survey of Lodges/Branches mentioned previously. Now that we have a fuller complement of staff, more work can be done in this important field.

Website

The national website includes a wealth of resources and is well worth visiting. Work has commenced on plans to upgrade the appearance of the site, without changing its essential architecture which works very well. Information on national events is updated regularly and the 'newly added' links are worth watching. The addition of three audio files during the year commenced an important new phase of building an online audio library. *Theosophy in Australia* magazine continues to be uploaded the month after it is published. Also, the site continues to host programmes around the Section.

Campbell Theosophical Research Library and Archives

Our Research Library and Archives are excellent resources. A PDF service for scanned copies of material from the Library is available on request. Many enquiries are received, as well as many referrals from the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library at the Headquarters of the TS in America. The substantial collection of periodicals in the Library, dating back many decades, has helped greatly with the development of the Union Index of Theosophical Periodicals which is updated with new material at regular intervals for placement on the Section website. This index is used by researchers world-wide.

Supporting Lecturers

At its meeting in July the *National Council* appointed a number of *Supporting Lecturers* for 2013, subject to their agreement. Those who agreed to their appointments were: Noel Bertelle, Barry Bowden, Dianne Kynaston, Richard Larkin and Simon O'Rourke.

A number of presentations by our *Supporting Lecturers* in different parts of the Section were organised by the National Headquarters during the year. Several TS centres also made direct arrangements with *Supporting Lecturers* for visits. In addition Noel Bertelle, Pedro Oliveira, Dianne Kynaston and Simon O'Rourke all gave well received presentations at the National Convention in January.

At the time of writing this report, news has come to hand of the passing of Noel Bertelle, who was a serious theosophical student with a particular

devotion to the primacy of meditative practice in leading the spiritual life. He will be missed.

International Lecturers

No *International Lecturers* toured the Section during the year. However, plans were commenced for Dr Pablo Sender, from the American Section, to tour in 2013.

Events at National Centres

See next item.

NATIONAL CENTRES

Theosophical Education and Retreat Centre, Springbrook Queensland

Our *Caretaker*, Barry Hora, continued his very capable and dedicated management of this Centre which was no doubt appreciated by all who stayed there during the year. Kay Schiefelbein provided additional assistance and looked after the Centre when Barry was away on leave. Catering for events run by the National Headquarters was generously undertaken by Barry Hora and volunteers Kay Schiefelbein, Rohzi Hicza, Marie Bertelle, Lynden Thomas and Janet Blake. Also, great appreciation is extended to those members of the TOS who helped with the maintenance of the Centre through their annual working bee.

The events organised by the National Headquarters during the year were:

October 2011:

Theme: 'Heaven and Earth – Change and Continuity, An Exploration of Taoist Thought, the I Ching and Tai Chi Chuan'.

Presenters – Horacio Paz and Dara Tatray.

April 2012, School of Theosophy:

Theme: 'Seeking Wisdom'

Presenters – Linda Oliveira and Pedro Oliveira

We were very pleased to welcome three members of the New Zealand Section to this event.

Canyonleigh Centre

This Centre continues to be maintained by Charlotte and Ron Stahl, who live on a property adjacent to the Centre. They help keep Bolitho House on the property aired and cleaned, and maintain the building and garden as required. The event which took place during the year was:

November 2011:

Theme: 'Heaven and Earth – Change and Continuity, An Exploration of Taoist Thought, the I Ching and

Tai Chi Chuan’.

Presenters – Horacio Paz and Dara Tatray.

An event planned for March this year with a theme related to meditation unfortunately had to be cancelled due to a small number of registrations. There may have been a number of reasons for this. Different methods of publicity for our national events are being explored. On the whole, in recent years there has been less interest by members in attending live-in events at our national centres compared with, say, a decade ago. If this trend continues, we may need to rethink their frequency and redirect our efforts more towards a stronger online presence, while continuing the provision of educational material and presentations for TS centres.

PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

General

During the year the main sources of publicity and promotion for the Section and its TS centres were the national and local websites, as well as emails about forthcoming events which were circularised to individuals on distribution lists. Also, some advertisements were placed in local newspapers for special events.

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)

Work proceeded steadily during the year on the online catalogue of holdings of TS libraries in this Section. Jennifer Hissey from the National Headquarters and Pamela Lloyd, from Melbourne Lodge, continued this valuable work. At the end of the year under review, 9,299 titles had been listed on the catalogue from several collections. The Campbell Theosophical Research Library and Adelaide Lodge Library collections were completed, only requiring periodic updating. Data continued to be added for Brisbane Lodge and Melbourne Lodge collections. Work had yet to be commenced on the collections for Hobart Branch, Launceston Lodge and Newcastle Lodge. To view or use this catalogue, go to: www.austheos.org.au/resources/LibraryCatalogue.

Universities

A regular university prize which was commenced in 2002 is one form of publicity by the TS within the academic community, as well as a way of encouraging studies into aspects of the Perennial Philosophy. At its January meeting, the *National Council* agreed to continue the funding of the John Cooper Memorial

Prize for a further three years – 2012, 2013 and 2014. The scope of the Prize remains: ‘A prize for an honours or postgraduate student working on any aspect of the Perennial Philosophy and its Eastern and Western traditions’. The prize winners for 2011 were:

Postgraduate, Yahya R. Haidar: Master of Philosophy thesis on ‘Thinking Without Religion: Religion, Essence and Existence’.

Undergraduate, Michael Deegan: essay on ‘Sethian Gnosticism: Issues in its History and Teachings’.

I was pleased to attend the prize giving ceremony in May to present the 2011 prizes and meet the prize winners as well as some faculty members.

Prof. Garry Trompf from the University of Sydney, who has a long-standing connection with the TS, has proposed the development of a comprehensive Encyclopedia of Gnosticism. At its July meeting the *National Council* agreed to a small grant by the Section towards this project, on the understanding that the Theosophical Society in Australia be given some editorial control over statements made about the Theosophical Society. The project has a very broad scope and is still in its incipient stage. In time it has the potential to be another helpful avenue of publicity for the TS within the academic world.

SUPPORT

Support for TS Centres by National Headquarters

The National Headquarters continued to give support to TS centres around the Section during the year in various ways. These included the provision of educational material, publicity material, visits by the *National President* and *Supporting Lecturers*, and the provision of space for the programmes of Lodges, Branches and Certified Groups on the Section website. Advice was given in response to various queries on local matters of concern. A number of Lodges/Branches also benefitted from administrative assistance from the National Headquarters in a broad range of areas.

Support to the Indo-Pacific Federation

1% of our annual membership dues is contributed each year to the work of the Indo-Pacific Federation, of which the Australian Section is a member.

Support to the International Headquarters

Generous financial support to the International Headquarters at Adyar has been given during the

past decade. The amount donated during the past year was \$1400. A base rate of \$3000 may be paid annually depending upon factors such as the Section's finances.

FINANCE

Finance Committee

At its January meeting the *National Council* appointed the *Finance Committee* for 2012, consisting of the *National Treasurer*, the *Assistant Treasurer* and the *National President*. Special appreciation is extended to Beatrice Malka (*Assistant Treasurer*), an accountant with proven experience, who has been especially helpful with giving excellent advice on financial matters since January. The National Headquarters commenced the employment of a bookkeeper once a week in February. Our approach to investments continues to be conservative. We have had a run of surpluses for quite a few years, but this situation is likely to change in the next financial year due to the global economic situation.

Annual Fund

Donations to the Annual Fund continued to be matched \$ for \$ by The Theosophical Society in Australia during the year. One third of the cost of the Online Public Access Catalogue work continued to be paid out of this fund. During the year the fund was used to purchase copies of *Concerning the Spiritual: The influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian Artists 1890-1934* for distribution to Lodges/Branches and several selected overseas theosophical libraries. Also, one copy of the *Theosophical Digest* was purchased for inclusion in the folder of each live-in delegate at the 2013 Convention. In addition, any work done to upgrade the Section's website which cannot be undertaken within the National Headquarters office will come out of the Annual Fund.

INTENDED SALE OF THEOSOPHY HOUSE

Theosophy House in Sydney has housed both the National Headquarters and Blavatsky Lodge since the mid-1980s. At its Annual General Meeting in December 2011, Blavatsky Lodge made some major decisions for serious financial reasons (see also item on Blavatsky Lodge). Subsequently, the Lodge and the relevant national bodies agreed to sell Theosophy House in Sydney. However, with the downturn in the commercial property market, the building failed to sell at auction. No reasonable

offers resulted from a three month contract with two agents, nor a number of viewings by prospective buyers which were organised later by other agents. Discussions subsequently took place between the National Headquarters and the Lodge. Up until now the building has been jointly owned by Blavatsky Lodge (75%) and the Australian Section (25%). Just prior to the end of the year under review the Lodge agreed to an offer by the Section to increase its share of ownership, with each to own 50% of Theosophy House, thereby assisting the Lodge to remain in the building with the National Headquarters for the time being. It is intended that one floor be leased out by the Australian Section. Also, a plan to purchase from Blavatsky Lodge the former premises of the Adyar Bookshop, which was closed in January, will no longer apply.

REPORTS FROM LODGES/BRANCHES

Below are a number of highlights of the many activities of Lodges/Branches for the year under review. They are based on reports received.

Hobart Branch, TAS (chartered 1889)

A highlight during the year in Tasmania was a first combined Hobart Branch and Launceston Lodge weekend seminar in Launceston on the theme 'Pathways to Awareness', which was well attended. In years past members from both places had met in Ross, a town located between the two cities. Weekly evening public meetings were held by the Branch as well as monthly weekend meetings. Social activities which were held included an annual Christmas supper and a movie night, as well as two dinners. Visiting speakers included the *National President* and *Supporting Lecturer* Barry Bowden.

Melbourne Lodge, VIC (chartered 1890)

Several new initiatives took place in Melbourne Lodge during the year. One development was the launch of the national inter-library loan system, which has been generating a steady request for book loans from the Lodge library. The bookshop has been trying new ways of attracting and keeping customers. Two of these are a new bookshop website and a very successful customer loyalty programme. Also, both the ground floor lecture auditorium and the members lounge were leased out to private companies, the Lodge tea room being converted into a Lodge activity room. Members meetings continued once a month and public meetings twice a month.

Study/discussion groups included subjects such as 'Holistic Study of Religion, Philosophy, Science, Cultures and Civilisations', 'Metaphysical Studies' and 'Meditation'. Also, a series of sessions over seven weeks was devoted to '*Secret Doctrine* Vol. I, Stanzas of Dzyan'. Visiting speakers included *Supporting Lecturer* Dianne Kynaston, Mary Masselos and the *National President*.

Adelaide Lodge, SA (chartered 1891)

'Sunday at the TS' continued monthly with themes including 'Life after Death', 'The Future' and 'Art and Spirituality'. An impressive number of study/discussion groups were held during the year. Book study groups included: *The Chakras*, *The Secret Doctrine*, *The One True Adventure* and *The Voice of the Silence*. Other activities included DVD discussions. The Theosophy-Science Group met monthly. A weekend on *The Bhagavad Gita* was held and the *National President* gave a talk as well as a one day seminar. The library continues to be well managed with a group of regular volunteers and the bookshop is run by a small but efficient group of staff. The end of year gathering in December was well attended, with fifty-six in attendance. Also, the TOS group held a Sunday event during the year with the theme of refugees, which included personal accounts by three refugees.

Brisbane Lodge, QLD (chartered 1895)

The average attendance during the year at regular evening weekly public meetings was between twenty-three and twenty-five, which is a good number for a mid-city venue these days. A number of regular groups met, with themes including 'Introduction to Theosophy', 'Isis Study Group', 'Krishnamurti Study Group' and a meditation class. Two silent retreats were held at the Section's Springbrook Centre. Visiting speakers included Prof. Victor Gostin and *Supporting Lecturer* Pedro Oliveira. The library was open five days per week and the activities of the small bookshop continued. A TOS core group worked hard during the year using some varied fund-raising methods such as craft selling and theatre film/supper activities.

Perth Branch, WA (chartered 1897)

Events held at Perth Branch's Mt. Helena Retreat included 'The ABC of Life', 'Karma Yoga', 'Discovering Your Creativity' and 'Art of Self-Realisation'. Visiting speakers during the year

included the *National President*, *Supporting Lecturer* Barry Bowden and former *National President* Beverley Champion. The attendance for members and public talks given by these speakers was very good, with thirty or more people present. TOS healing meditations were held approximately once a month, as well as weekly yoga classes.

Launceston Lodge, TAS (chartered 1901)

Study/discussion groups included themes such as 'The Perennial Philosophy', 'Book Reviews' and TS DVD/CD evenings. Regular weekly meetings were held, preceded by meditation. Visiting speakers included Ven. Lama Tsewang Lhakpa, speaking on 'Compassion and Awareness', *Supporting Lecturer* Barry Bowden and the *National President*. Also, a listing of the Lodge's library books was provided to the National Headquarters for inclusion in the OPAC project – see previous item on this.

(Joint seminar in Launceston – see item under Hobart Branch above.)

Blavatsky Lodge, NSW (chartered 1922)

The Lodge's programmes and activities were publicised on its website and on Facebook. Monthly members meetings were held for most of the year. Speakers included the *National President*, Linda Oliveira, and *Supporting Lecturer* Barry Bowden. Book stock of the Adyar Library was increased due to donations from private libraries. A Library workshop was held which boosted the number of volunteer workers. There was an increase in the number of courses offered, especially book study courses. Also, Friday nights at the TS were reinstated with the focus on cinema, the general theme being 'Magic Light, Where Cinema Meets Ancient Wisdom'. A major development, and a sad one for many, was the official closure of the Adyar Bookshop on 1 January after many years of operation. A virtual bookshop now continues online in conjunction with Phoenix Rising.

Newcastle Lodge, NSW (chartered 1941)

During the year the meeting venue of the Lodge changed. The library holdings have been held at the home of a member, with a list of books given to all members. Books are brought to the meeting for borrowing on request. A study group was held on the book *A Study in Consciousness* by Annie Besant. Also, monthly members meetings continued as well as monthly public meetings. Visiting speakers

included *Supporting Lecturers* Richard Larkin and Simon O'Rourke, Gerard Brennan from Blavatsky Lodge and Arthur Goodall from New Zealand.

Atherton Lodge, QLD (chartered 1950)

This Lodge in the Far North of Queensland continued to meet regularly. Several programme highlights during the year were a two-part presentation by *Supporting Lecturer* Noel Bertelle on 'How free is your will?' and 'Into the Silence'; 'The Cornerstones of Religions and the Differences that Matter'; 'Seventh Day Adventist: Beliefs and Lifestyle'; 'The Baha'i Faith and Theosophy'; 'Cellular Memory Phenomenon' and 'Theosophy as the Masters See it'. The Lodge's Cairns group had to close at the end of 2011, a lunch being held at a local beach to mark the occasion.

Canberra Branch, ACT (chartered 1971)

At the beginning of the year, the Branch returned to its customary meeting place, the Friends Meeting House, where it has met for many years. Monthly meetings continued, and discussion groups met on most months dealing with themes such as 'Krishnamurti – Transformation in the self', 'The Secret Life of Madame Blavatsky' and 'After Death States'. Visiting speakers included the *National President* and *Supporting Lecturer* Simon O'Rourke, and highlights during the year included two forums. A small TOS group met regularly.

Sunshine Coast Lodge, QLD (chartered 2004)

Highlights during the year included a retreat organised by the Lodge at the Springbrook Centre with the theme 'A Timeline of Divine Wisdom'. A film of members offering their thoughts on the subject was made at Springbrook and later shared at the two venues of the Lodge – Buderim and Tewantin. Visiting speakers included Prof. Victor Gostin and Dr Olga Gostin, *Supporting Lecturer* Pedro Oliveira and the *National President*. The library is opened twice a month and the Lodge has a folder which includes book reviews of library books. The Lodge decided to hold more frequent open discussion nights and dinner nights rather than presentations only. The study/discussion groups included 'What is Theosophy?', discussion on varying topics for members only, and 'The Watchers', based on some references in *The Secret Doctrine*. The TOS was active with a table display each week.

REPORTS FROM CERTIFIED GROUPS

Blue Mountains Group, NSW

Meetings were normally held once a month by this Group, with a variety of guest speakers. In addition, a study group met three or four times a month. The book for study was changed during August from HPB's *Isis Unveiled* to the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine*.

Gosford Group, NSW

This Group continued to meet monthly. An introductory course to the TS was run by the *Group Coordinator*. Some of the speakers were *Supporting Lecturer* Simon O'Rourke, Pamela Petersen and Gerard Brennan, as well as *Supporting Lecturer* Dianne Kynaston. Some members of the Group also travelled to Sydney to participate in presentations at Blavatsky Lodge. Monthly study groups focussing on various books were held in the private homes of members. Titles of presentations included 'The Journey West: the Story of Tripitaka' and 'The Other Side of Death'. A number of senior members belong to the group and phone calls and visits are made, if needed, between meeting dates.

Northern Beaches Group, NSW

The Northern Beaches Group in Sydney met regularly on a monthly basis. Visiting speakers included the *National President* and *Supporting Lecturer* Richard Larkin. The venue changed during the year from one private home to another. Some of the presentations were 'What Sikh Means', 'A Clean Life and an Eager Intellect', 'Opening the Dragon Gate' and 'The Simplicity of Life in a Complex World'.

Toowoomba Group, QLD

Regular meetings were held by this Group except in December and January, normally twice a month. Some of the subjects were 'Our Connections with the Nature Realm', 'Thought and Transformation', 'Humanity at its Turning Point', 'Mind and Body', 'Ramana Maharshi his Life, his Teaching and Significance', and 'The Theosophical Society a Deeply Humanitarian Organisation'. In addition, a study Group was run on 'Basic Principles of Theosophy'. Social activities included a camping weekend, a monthly movie night and the end of year breakup gathering.

Mornington Peninsula Group, Vic

Possibly our oldest Certified Group, Mornington

Peninsula Group met once a month except in January. A highlight during the year was the participation by members in a local Interfaith Festival with a stall and the opportunity to give out TS brochures. Visiting speakers included the *National President* and Brian Parry. Titles of presentations during the year included 'Living Ancient Wisdom in the 21st Century', Karma', 'Choiceless Awareness – All is Perfect' and 'On Simplicity – a Key to Inner Spiritual Ecology'.

Wodonga-Albury Group, Vic

Members of this group continued to open the library for half a day from Mondays to Fridays. Regular book study took place mid-week on subjects including 'The Mahatma Letters', 'The Secret Doctrine' and 'The Astral Plane'. *Supporting Lecturer* Dianne Kynaston visited and spoke during the first half of 2012.

Dissolution of Group

During the year one of our Certified Groups, the Caboolture Group, voluntarily dissolved due to low attendance at meetings and a move out of the area by the *Coordinator*.

THE THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE

Last but not least, the following report was received from the *National Coordinator* of the TOS in Australia, Jean Carroll:

Our founder Annie Besant reminded us that our goal is to make our profession of brotherhood a real and practical one. This is evident when we look around our various TOS groups. We see such a mixture and variety of service exemplifying our founders' words encouraging pragmatic outcomes.

TOS groups nationwide have complete autonomy and respond in many practical ways to the requirements of their local communities and the wishes of their members. Some groups knit rugs for nursing homes; others produce woollen beanies for Buddhist monks living in Tibet. Some of our groups reach out to their communities providing assistance at locally sponsored events such as Clean Up Australia Day, or helping local service groups and volunteering in shelters for the homeless. Assisting in neighbourhood activities not only allows the participant to be involved locally, but heightens the community's awareness that Theosophy and the TOS exist. Individual members also participate in social

activism e.g. Get Up, Animals Australia, Avaaz – The World in Action, et cetera.

Many of our nine groups showed enterprise by raising funds for specific programmes of their own choosing. These included: supporting a village in western Kenya by providing mosquito nets, medical supplies and soccer balls for children; providing education and health programmes through SAW Australia's work for women in Afghanistan; supporting the HPB Hostel, Sri Narayana Orphanage and Olcott School in India; the Guide Dogs Association of Australia; Amnesty International; and Prisoners Aid.

Members also give generously to raise funds for our International TOS Programmes. Our local groups generally nominate the charity with which their donations are to assist. These local contributions, combined with the generous donation of \$5,000 from Maple-Brown Abbott Limited (investment managers for The Theosophical Society in Australia), enabled us to distribute funds to our major international projects including the Kenyan Water Bore undertaking; 31 educational sponsorships and home schooling in Pakistan; the Golden Link College in the Philippines; the Heart Babies Programme in Tanzania; plus the following programmes in India – See Vision, Assam Mobility project and the Animal Dispensary at Adyar.

Service of a practical nature was evident in the maintenance of the grounds and the buildings during the annual TOS working bee at our national Theosophical Education and Retreat Centre at Springbrook. The event was well attended by members and friends of members.

CONCLUSION

The larger view is invariably different from partial views. When taken together, the many single reports which make up this more comprehensive one show clearly that, notwithstanding an overall decline in membership over some years, a tremendous amount of useful activity has gone on around this Section during the past year. The enthusiasm and dedication for the TS which I have experienced during my travels in a number of places augurs well. But there is always more that can be done, and different ways in which things can be done. And it is important that we have the courage to *try*.

**Annual Membership
Analysis of Lodge/Branch Membership as at
31/08/2012**

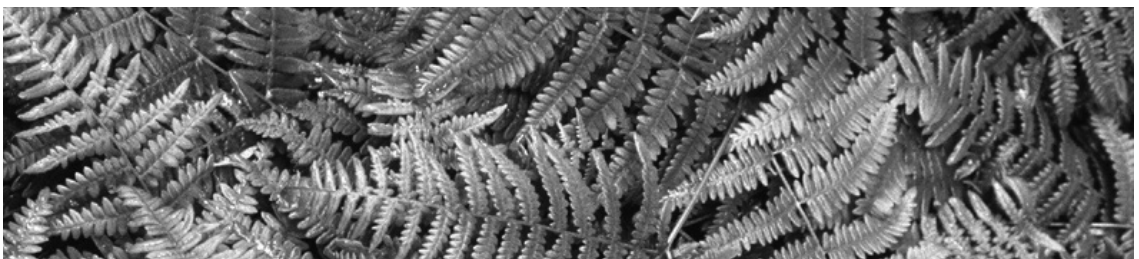
Lodge/Branch	Members 31-Aug-11	Trans in	New	Rejoin	Total in	Resign	Lapse	Dec	Trans out	Total Out	Members 31-Aug-12	Diff
Adelaide	95	0	16	5	21	1	16	4	0	21	95	0
Atherton	20	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	17	-3
Blavatsky	243	2	15	6	23	3	29	2	0	34	232	-11
Brisbane	85	1	7	6	14	0	10	3	1	14	85	0
Canberra	14	2	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	1	16	2
Hobart	33	1	0	1	2	3	5	0	1	9	26	-7
Launceston	27	0	4	0	4	1	2	0	0	3	28	1
Melbourne	199	1	8	12	21	4	32	1	1	38	182	-17
Newcastle	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	16	-1
Perth	159	0	12	4	16	1	35	0	0	36	139	-20
Sunshine Coas	91	0	11	1	12	0	15	1	1	17	89	-5
Sub Total	986	7	73	36	116	15	146	12	4	177	925	-61
National	147	4	7	4	15	1	22	1	3	27	135	-12
Total	1133	11	80	40	131	16	168	13	7	204	1060	-73

“ It is hard to feel a sense of gratitude for an inanimate, mechanical world proceeding inexorably in accordance with eternal laws of nature and blind chance. And this is a great spiritual loss, for it is through gratitude that we acknowledge the living powers on which our own lives depend; through gratitude we enter into a conscious relationship to them; and through gratitude we can find ourselves in a state of grace.

All religions provide opportunities for giving thanks, ... Each religion has its own ways of recognising the living powers on which we all depend, and of establishing a relationship to those powers through thanksgiving.

For those for whom traditional religious practices seem empty and meaningless, there are three possibilities: first, to recognise no living power greater than humanity, and hence to recognise neither a need for gratitude nor a means of expressing it; second, to feel such gratitude privately, but with no means of public expression; third, to find new ways of expressing gratitude collectively, and new conceptions of the life-giving powers to whom thanks are due. ”

Dr Rupert Sheldrake



2012 CONVENTION PROGRAM

19-26 January
St. Mary's College, Melbourne

Key Speakers:

Prof. Richard Silberstein, professor of neuroscience,
Swinburne University, Melbourne.

Dr. Jenny McFarlane, freelance art historian,
writer and curator, Canberra.



Saturday 19 January Arrivals

7.30pm Welcome, Introduction - Key Speakers, Introduction - Workshops, Greetings to the Convention
Reception – Light Refreshments

Sunday 20 January

6.30am Qigong

7.30am Morning Attunement

9.15am Official Opening of Convention

ANNUAL CONVENTION BUSINESS MEETING OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN AUSTRALIA

Agenda

Roll Call of Voting Delegates and Proxies

Confirmation of Minutes of 2012 Convention Business Meeting

National President's Report for the Year Ended 31 August 2012

National Treasurer's Report for the Year Ended 31 August 2012

Financial Statements and Balance Sheet for the Year Ended 31 August 2012, and
Auditor's Report thereon

Budget for the Year Ending 31 August 2013

Appointment of Auditor

Announcement of Newly Appointed Officers

Announcement of Ballot Results:

- NSW/ACT, Victoria and Western Australia

Vote on Notices of Motion

Place and Time of Next Convention

Resolutions of Goodwill

Any Other Business

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION SESSION

3.00pm Public Talk: 'Intuition: a Transpersonal and Neuroscience Perspective'

KEY SPEAKER: Richard Silberstein

7.30pm 'An Adventure in Theosophy and Science: A Historical Overview of the Theosophical Research Centre,
London' – PowerPoint presentation, Pedro Oliveira

Monday 21 January

6.30am Qigong

7.30am Attunement

9.15am: Short Talks: 'Theosophical Insights and our Global Village', Linda Oliveira and Beverley Champion

11.00am Workshops:

Sheryl Malone: 'The Karmic Impact on the Modern World of the Work of the Devic Kingdom'

Edward Sinclair: 'Numerology in the Light of Theosophy'

Shirley Stack Tolhuis: 'Therapeutic Touch'

- 4.00pm 'The Contemporary World: Coming Ready or Not'
Dara Tatray
- 7.30pm 'The Ancient Wisdom and Modern Music', Dianne Kynaston

Tuesday 22 January

- 6.30am Qigong
- 7.30am Attunement
- 9.15am 'Concerning the Spiritual: The Influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian Artists 1890-1934 – Deleted Scenes'
KEY SPEAKER - Jenny McFarlane
- 11.00am 'Lodges and Branches: Opportunities, Tests and Shared Insights'
Workshop for Lodge/Branch Committee Members (other members welcome as observers)
- 2.00pm The Theosophical Order of Service (TBA)
- 4.00pm 'Theosophical Reminiscences'
Linda Oliveira with Brian Parry and Erica Patient: a Conversation
- 7.30pm 'Memes: From Mindful Imitation to Mindless Replication' – PowerPoint presentation, Olga Gostin

Wednesday 23 January

- 7.30am Attunement
- OUTING AND PICNIC LUNCH
- 7.30pm Cultural Evening

Thursday 24 January

- 6.30am Qigong
- 7.30am Attunement
- 9.15am 'Evolution and the Intelligence of Life': Victor Gostin
- 11.00am Q and A: Beverly Champion, Harry Bayens, Ken Edwards
- 2.00pm The Theosophical Order of Service: AGM
- 4.00pm Short talks:
'Worldview Literacy' - Rosanne de Bats
'Science and Holistic Awareness' - Brian Harding
- 7.30pm DVD: 'The Mahatmas and their Letters', featuring Ed Abdill, Joy Mills, Ianthe Hoskins and Radha Burnier

Friday 25 January

- 6.30am Qigong
- 7.30am Attunement
- 9.15am 'Theosophical Principles in Modern Science': Pedro Oliveira
- 11.00am Workshops:
Simon O'Rourke: 'Isis Unveiled'
Mary Masselos: 'The Transcendent Nature of Cosmic Sound and its Relevance in the Individuation Process'
Victor MacGill: 'Theosophy 1875 to 2050: Retaining the Heritage while Stepping into the Future'
- 4.00pm Perspectives on the Convention
Invitation to 2013 Convention, Sydney
Closing of Convention (National President)
- 7.30pm Cultural Evening

Saturday 26 January

- Departures

National Calendar of Events...



Springbrook Centre, 2184 Springbrook Road, Springbrook QLD

Mon 15 April – Sun 21 April 2013

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

2013 SCHOOL OF THEOSOPHY

Theme: ‘The Secret Doctrine: Esoteric Insights and Spiritual Practice’

International Guest Presenter: Dr Pablo Sender, USA

Cost: \$230 (includes accommodation, all sessions, meals and \$10 non-refundable registration fee)

Overview: H. P. Blavatsky’s major work, *The Secret Doctrine*, is frequently taken as a treatise of metaphysical teachings or as an esoteric history on the genesis of the Universe. However, regardless of how useful its volumes may be as a source of information, this book has even greater potentialities. Madame Blavatsky pointed out that its study, by appealing to the inner faculties rather than to the ordinary comprehension of the physical brain, is meant to awaken the spiritual intuition of the student. We will examine the basic concepts found in the ‘Three Fundamental Propositions’ of *The Secret Doctrine* and explore how they can nurture our spiritual practice. Students will be asked to give a five-minute talk at the end of the School on a topic of their choice relating to the morning study sessions. Interactive afternoon sessions will also be presented by the National President and the Acting Education Coordinator on the TS and its work.



Canyonleigh Centre, Bolitho House, Tugalong Road, Canyonleigh, NSW

Fri 23 November (arrivals) to Sunday 25 November (mid-afternoon departure)

FOR MEMBERS

Theme: ‘Theosophy in the Light of Truth and Love’

Presenters: Supporting Lecturers Barry Bowden and Simon O’Rourke

Further information: see national website and September 2012 magazine

Registration deadline: Friday 16 November

Cost: \$120 (includes accommodation, all sessions, meals and \$10 non-refundable registration fee)



Canyonleigh Centre, Bolitho House, Tugalong Road, Canyonleigh, NSW

Fri 17 May (arrivals) - Sun 19 May 2013 (departures)

Theme: ‘What is Nature? And What is a Human Being?’

Presenter: Dr Dara Tatray

Registration forms: available soon on the national website and from the National Headquarters.

Further information: see national website and March 2013 magazine.

2013 National Convention – St. Mary’s College, University of Melbourne

Saturday 19th January - Saturday 26th January

FOR MEMBERS

Registrations for day visitors are still open: \$40.

Registration forms: national website and National Headquarters

Registration forms for Springbrook and Canyonleigh events: available from the National Headquarters (02 9264 7056) and on the national TS website: [www.austheos.org.org.au/what's on](http://www.austheos.org.org.au/what's%20on).

Results – Election of State Representatives

As announced in the June 2012 issue of *Theosophy in Australia*, nominations were called for one *State Representative* for each of the Electoral States of New South Wales/ACT, Victoria and Western Australia. As two valid nominations were received for Western Australia, a ballot was held. The result of that ballot was not known at the time of printing. It will be announced in the March issue. As there was only one candidate for each of the Electoral States of New South Wales/ACT and Victoria, the following were re-elected unopposed:

New South Wales/ACT:	Dianne Kynaston
Victoria:	Kari Torgersen

The term of office for the *State Representatives* is for a period of two years from the date of declaration of these election results. The State Representatives will represent the Lodges (Branches), Groups and Members in the State in all meetings and affairs of the *National Council*. They shall also liaise with all Lodges (Branches), Groups and National Members in their Electoral State and shall represent their views to the *National Council* and to the National Society Officers, as appropriate. As well, they shall receive and deal with representations from individual Members within their Electoral State, and shall refer the representations where requested or deemed necessary.

Viewpoint



Linda's editorial on spirituality had particular relevance to me. The day I read it, I was about to do an online 'Chat' with students on the subject of 'spirituality in children'. The students were Early Childhood teachers (upgrading their qualifications) and the subject, 'Wellness and Well-being'. We look at the holistic health of children. This week, the topic was 'spiritual wellness', said to be one of the six dimensions of wellness (Donatelle, 2006). For some time, teachers of small children have been aware of the need to provide for the development of spiritual wellness, but in this week's chat, I centred the discussion on Linda's quotes from David Tacey and Professor Ravindra. The students liked the words 'bodily stillness', 'emotional generosity and compassion' and 'mental clarity and

serenity'. They thought that to teach children these states of being, they themselves need to find their own meaningful spirituality and they saw that spirituality was not necessarily religion. Remaining inwardly at peace is hard in a childcare environment, where there can be so much stress, but what was pleasing to me was that in this secular environment, these teachers were honestly seeking the truth about their own spiritual needs.

Our little children are in good hands.

Donatelle, R., 'Promoting Health Behaviour Change', *Access to Health*, Pearson Benjamin Cummings, San Francisco, 2006, pp.3-37.

Wyverne Smith, Upper Gundowring, Victoria

Questions and Answers

Below are some further responses from the Q and A panel during the January 2012 Annual Convention:

Question: The first Object of the Theosophical Society mentions that the nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, which the Society seeks to form, is without various distinctions including creed. Yet in the second Object, which concerns the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science, there is direct mention of religion. Religion has had a bad press for quite some time. Fundamentalism has raised its head in all religions. A recent survey in Australia has shown that more than sixty-five per cent of young people between sixteen and twenty-four are atheists. They will have nothing to do with religion. Also, in one of the foundational texts of theosophical literature – The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett – religion is pointed to as the cause of two-thirds of evil in the world. My question to this panel is: ‘What is the theosophical view of religion today which could address these different issues and restore some sort of sanity to this subject?’ (Pedro Oliveira, Sydney)

Simon O’Rourke, Sydney:

The quotation you mention from *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* is a classic. However, it does not actually mention how responsible religion is for all the world’s good as well. That is the other side of the question. If all we ever see are the bad things which happen, then we cannot see how much good is constantly being done. So many altruistic things are being done in the name of religion which are never getting reported in the newspapers. It is true that people who act in the name of religion produce great evil. However, so much good is being done at the same time.

Most of us are here because there is something in the values represented by the Theosophical Society which says ‘Yes, we can act in the world, we can have shared values as a result of being a part of this organisation, we can make this a better world’. People adopt religions and philosophies for the same

reason. In a survey conducted only about a year or so ago, about 18,000 respondents around the world were asked to find out whether they thought religion made the world a better place or not. In western countries like Australia and Canada, a number of respondents felt that religion did *not* help the world. However, in countries like America, the United States, India and the Middle East quite a high proportion of respondents indicated that they felt religion *did* provide value to the world.

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11854429>)

Many people were brought up in the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies. The attitudes of Christianity in those days were extremely restricted. Therefore many people feel that the problems in the world really arise as a result of their childhood *memories* of Christianity.

Religion *has* changed in response to changing society and continues to do so. Young people these days are starting to learn comparative religion in schools. Their attitudes are quite different to people who were born sixty to eighty years ago. As these people start to get older, they will be looking at other people complaining about religion and wondering why, because it will not be a part of their experience. Peoples’ attitudes towards religion will also change gradually.

Phoebe Williams, Brisbane

Brisbane Lodge always has wonderful quotes on the front porch. One day there was a quote which said that religion was not about right doctrine, but right living; and it is through right living that the spiritual Self does unfold. I grew up in a very strict Christian family which includes missionaries. I asked far too many questions that were never answered and was a maverick from a very young age. Theosophy was there from early on. But speaking more broadly, if we take the churches out of society we would find a great hole because a lot of them quietly go on fulfilling their role and there is a lot of good work that we never see, such as that which extends to courts and psychiatric hospitals. So we have to look at this question holistically, because various Christian churches are doing an incredible job.

Harry Bayens, Perth

My idea of religion is that doctrines or dogmas are set out and if you are a member you are expected to follow. Unlike this, TS members can adopt any creed.

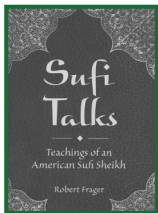
Let me take a couple of examples of what is happening in the real world now which are of great concern to me. When I was younger, if you went to university, played football and so forth, inclusion was based on your skills. My son is overseas doing a PhD which he has just about completed. He is looking for a job in a tertiary institution and the very first question that he is asked is, 'What church do you belong to?'

I was brought up as a Christian. In my school they clipped you around the ears when you answered a question the wrong way. I decided to try and lay my personal prejudices aside, teach my children the laws of nature and about being humanitarian. As they got older, I would tell them what various groups believed, without putting forward any personal prejudice of mine. In my view, most of the religious problems are caused by parents expressing to their children their own prejudices, personal spite and hatreds. There lies

the main problem. People are indoctrinated at a very young age and I think that is the root cause of most of the problems.

However, I think a lot of religious issues could also be assisted greatly if religions could encourage a bit more moderation and tolerance, as well as the provision of a leadership which speaks out strongly against the more extreme members of their community or religion. This does not seem to be happening in certain cases. What TS members can do is continue to be fair, tolerant and understanding of different points of view, and not just go along with the crowd. We should try to forget indoctrination and express our view, but not try to force it on others.

Review



Sufi Talks
Robert Frager
Quest Books, USA 2012

Every theosophical student 'knows about' the essential human problem and how it may be overcome that is expressed in so many different traditions of spirituality. The classic example is verse 3 of *The Voice of the Silence*, 'Having become indifferent to objects of perception, the pupil must seek out the Raja of the senses, the thought producer, he who awakes illusion.' However 'knowing about' must be transformed into 'knowing' if it is to be of any real use.

This book is a series of talks by an American Sufi Sheikh, Robert Frager, to his group of Sufi students in California. He does not directly address the process by which one becomes a Sufi or the details of initiation. He speaks as a Muslim and Sufi to Muslims. However, what makes the talks so useful is that the task to be

undertaken by Sufis is essentially the same as for all spiritual seekers. The overriding theme is that we must endeavour at all times to be aware of the illusory nature of the ego and its desires.

His talk subjects reflect the wide range of approaches of an experienced teacher; e.g. 'Transforming our Egos'; 'The Soul'; 'Inner Work'; 'Spirituality'; 'To Wake before we Die'; 'Wherever we Turn, There is God', however the focus on the problems caused by our ego-mania never wavers. There is a laudable absence of jargon from this Harvard PhD. Like all good teachers the talks are peppered with apt stories and anecdotes of the doings of his own teachers and are as easy read as they would have been to hear.

As a Sheikh, Frager makes it plain that he is also himself a student. He presents himself as facing exactly the same day by day, moment to moment challenges from the omnipresent ego as his students. What is particularly useful is the fact that as we read his advice to them we find that it also has direct application to each of us.

Quest Books USA is to be congratulated on this most readable and useful publication for all seekers on the Way.

Brian Parry

Annual Index

Animals and their Spiritual Qualities: Pedro Oliveira	44	Modern Science and the	
Annual Index	126	Ancient Wisdom: Victor MacGill	81
Annual Membership Analysis	119	National Calendar of Events	29, 58, 88, 119
Bertelle, Noel: Know Thyself	35	National President's Annual Report	109
Bilimoria, Edi D.: Our Attitude and Debt to Science	14	National Secretary, Position of	23
Burnier, Radha:		Nature of Wisdom, The: Ralf Schrub	50
Extract from International President's Address	2	News and Notes	31, 63, 95, 127
Burnier, Radha: On the Watch-Tower	66	Oliveira, Linda:	
Champion, Beverley: Hearing the Melody	69	Freedom of Thought: Is it Essential?	4
Convention 2012 Annual Business Meeting Minutes	53	Oliveira, Pedro:	
Convention 2013: Advertisement	59	Animals and their Spiritual Qualities	44
Convention 2013: Agenda for Business Meeting	90	Our Attitude and Debt to Science: Edi D. Bilimoria	14
Convention 2013: Programme	120	O'Rourke, Simon:	
Crossword: Tina Fiedler	26	From the Concrete to the Abstract	73
Crossword Answers: Tina Fiedler	28	Placebo Effect or the Effect of Belief, The:	
Crossing the Stream: Mervyn Haines	99	Victor Gostin	47
Dadirri – The Art of Deep Listening: Olga Gostin	18	Practical Ethics for Contemporary Society:	
Education: Study Courses available		Tony Fearnside	22
at the National HQ	89	Pulsford, Florence: The Wellspring of Art	41
Fearnside, Tony: Practical Ethics for		Questions and Answers: Harry Bayens,	
Contemporary Society	22	Olga Gostin, Simon O'Rourke and	
Fiedler, Tina: Crossword	26	Phoebe Williams	51, 86, 123
Fiedler, Tina: Crossword Answers	28	Reviews	30, 62, 91, 125
Flight of the Bird, The: Helen Steven	107	Rinpoche, Ven. Samdhong:	
Freedom of Thought: Is it Essential?:		Thoughts on a Meditative Life	21
Linda Oliveira	4	Ritual and the Human Psyche: Olga Gostin	103
From the Concrete to the Abstract:		Schruba, Ralf: The Nature of Wisdom	50
Simon O'Rourke	73	Section Directory – Inside Back Cover	
From the National President	3, 34, 68, 98	Snapshots – 2012 Annual Convention	56
Frost, Denise: The Three Objects as Action	78	State Representatives, Call for	
Gospel of Mary Magdalene, The:		Nominations (NSW/ACT, Vic, WA)	61
Richard Larkin	10	State Representatives,	
Gostin, Olga: Dadirri – The Art of Deep Listening	18	Election Results (NSW/ACT, Vic)	123
Gostin, Olga: Ritual and the Human Psyche	103	Steven, Helen: The Flight of the Bird	107
Gostin, Victor: The Placebo Effect or		Sunday at the TS – Adelaide Lodge	93
the Effect of Belief	47	Tagore, Rabindranath: In Praise of Trees	24
Haines, Mervyn: Crossing the Stream	99	Theosophical Order of Service	60
Hearing the Melody: Beverley Champion	69	Thoughts on a Meditative Life: Ven.	
In Praise of Trees: Rabindranath Tagore	24	Samdhong Rinpoche	21
Know Thyself: Noel Bertelle	35	Three Objects as Action, The: Denise Frost	78
Larkin, Richard: The Gospel of Mary Magdalene	10	Viewpoint	84, 123
MacGill, Victor: Modern Science and		Wellspring of Art, The: Florence Pulsford	41
the Ancient Wisdom	81		

News & Notes

School of the Wisdom, Adyar

Schools of the Wisdom have been held in the tranquil, tropical compound of the International Headquarters in Chennai, India, since November 1949. Information on the sessions to be held in late 2012 and early 2013 is now to hand:



5 November to 23 November 2012:

Theme: *The Secret Doctrine*

Director: Prof. R. C. Tampi

Prof. R. C. Tampi, a long-standing member of the Theosophical Society, is a retired Professor of English. He was a National Lecturer for the Indian Section of the Theosophical Society. He has been the Director of the School of the Wisdom for several years and has conducted a number of courses in the past on theosophical subjects.

26 November to 7 December 2012

Theme: *The Science of Yoga*

Director: Mr P.K.Jayaswal

Mr P. K. Jayaswal, joined the Theosophical Society in 1952. He retired as Chief General Manager of the State Bank of India in February 1994. He has worked as National Secretary of

the TOS and General Secretary, Indian Section. Presently, he is working as a National Lecturer and contributes articles to theosophical magazines.

10 to 14 December 2012

Theme: *The Science of Life*

Director: Prof. C.A. Shinde

Since his retirement as a university lecturer in Zoology, Prof. C. A. Shinde has been working as the Librarian of the Adyar Library and Research Centre at Adyar. He is also a National Lecturer for the Indian Section of the TS and has conducted several sessions of the School of the Wisdom.

9 January to 1 February 2013

Theme: *With Krishna in the Battle of Life - Life Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita*

Director: Dr Ravi Ravindra

Prof. Ravi Ravindra is retired Professor of Comparative Religion and Physics from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. An author of many papers in Physics, Philosophy and Religion as well as several books including *Whispers from the Other Shore*, *The Yoga of the Christ* and *Science and the Sacred*, he has conducted a number of past sessions of the School of the Wisdom.

For further information about these sessions, see the international TS website:

<https://www.ts-adyar.org>

Any queries about the School of the Wisdom itself should be directed to Mrs Kusum Satapathy, International Secretary: secy.hq@ts-adyar.org.

All members who wish to apply to stay at the International Headquarters, in order to attend the International Convention in late December or the School of the Wisdom, need to email the National President initially with proposed dates: pres@austheos.org.au.

On receipt of permission to stay at the International Headquarters, flights can be booked.



National President with members of the Toowoomba Group, September.

Triennial Indo-Pacific Federation Conference, 2013 – Diary Dates

The next Indo-Pacific Conference for members is due to take place from 1-5 November 2013 in Bali, Indonesia. The Federation consists of members from twelve countries in the region, including Australia. Further information will be supplied when it is to hand. The website of the Indo-Pacific Federation is: <http://www.ipf-ts.org/>

Transitions

News has been received of the passing of several long-time members:

Sheila Ehret, Melbourne – 8 September 2012. Sheila joined the TS in 1947 and had therefore been a member for sixty-five years.

Noel Bertelle, Brisbane - 13 September 2012. Noel was a Supporting Lecturer for the Australian Section and a deep student, with a commitment to the primacy of meditation in spiritual practice.

Ena Harris, Perth - 11 October 2012. Ena and her husband, Phil, were pioneers of the Mt. Helena Centre owned by Perth Branch, and lived there for many years.

Carla Hooker, Perth - 21 October 2012. Carla was a past President of Perth Branch. She joined the TS in 1986.

Distribution List – National Headquarters

A new distribution list being developed by the National Headquarters, to help keep members up to date about forthcoming events. Members who wish to be included in this list are requested to email the Acting Education Coordinator: edcoord@austheos.org.au

Note to all Overseas Recipients of this Magazine

We are happy to continue to mail this magazine to our complimentary overseas recipients but wish to check whether receipt of *Theosophy in Australia* is still required. If you are an overseas recipient and are receiving a complimentary copy of this magazine, please email Richard Larkin if you wish to **continue** being on our mailing list: memsec@austheos.org.au. The next (March 2013) issue will be mailed to those overseas recipients who have replied to this request.



The use of one gender to cover both genders is avoided as far as possible in this magazine. However, quotations from writings in which one gender is used in this way are printed as originally written. This applies both to older writings and some contemporary ones.

Section Directory

Australian Section National Headquarters

4th Floor, 484 Kent Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Ph: 02 9264 7056 / 9264 0163 / 9264 6404
Fax: 02 9264 5857
www.austheos.org.au
Campbell Theosophical Research Library:
campbell@austheos.org.au

Australian Capital Territory

Canberra Branch, Chartered 17/7/1971:
Postal Address: PO Box 7418,
Fisher ACT 2611
Meet: Friends Meeting House, cnr Bent &
Condamine Streets, Turner ACT 2612
7.30pm 1st Monday of month
(Please confirm by email or telephone)
President: Peter Fokker
Tel: 02 6236 3170
Email: fokkerbakker@gmail.com
Secretary: Tony Feamside
Telephone: 02 62887656
Email: janton@netspeed.com.au

New South Wales

Blavatsky Lodge, Chartered 22/5/1922:
2nd & 3rd Floors, 484 Kent Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Telephone: 02 9267 6955 Fax: 02 9283 3772
Email: contact@tssydney.org.au
www.tssydney.org.au
Meet: 2.00pm Wednesdays
President: Stephen McDonald
Secretary: Pamela Peterson

Newcastle Lodge, Chartered 3/12/1941:
Meet: Morrison Room, 29 Highfield Street,
Mayfield NSW 2304
8.00pm 2nd Friday each month
(excluding January)
Study group (members) confirm dates
with Lodge
President: Tony Buzek
Tel: 02 4933 1326, 0452 633 132

Blue Mountains Group:
Meet: 1st Floor, 122 Katoomba Street,
Katoomba NSW
2.00pm 1st Monday each month
Coordinator: Donald Fern
Tel: 02 4757 1910

Gosford Group:
Meet: The Neighbour Centre,
Pandala Road, Narara NSW 2250
8.00pm 2nd Tuesday each month
Coordinator: Marianne Fraser
Tel: (02) 4339 7118, 0400 713 273

E-mail: marifraser256@gmail.com
Secretary: Roni Ostergaard
Telephone: 02 4358 1413

Northern Beaches Group:
Postal address: c/ Mina Singh Batra,
22 Woodland Street,
Balgowlah Heights, NSW 2093
Meet: c/- above address
8.00 pm 3rd Friday each month
Coordinator: Patricia Witts
Tel: 02 9450 1362

Queensland

Atherton Lodge, Chartered 27/4/1950:
Postal Address: 14 Herberton Rd,
Atherton QLD 4883
Meet: Meeting Room, Community Services
Tablelands, 38 Mabel St, Atherton
2.00pm 2nd Saturday of month except Jan.
President: Max Brandenberger
Secretary: Chris Pang Way
Tel: 07 4091 5156

Brisbane Lodge, Chartered 21/1/1895:355
Wickham Terrace, Brisbane QLD 4000
Tel: 07 3839 1453
Email: brisbanelodge@theosophyqld.org.au
President: Phillipa Rooke
Secretary: Angela Read

Sunshine Coast Lodge, Chartered 1/4/2004
Meet: Buderim Croquet Club,
Syd Lingard Drive, Buderim QLD 4556
7.00pm Thursday
President: Penny Houghton
Tel: 07 5453 7595
Email: penny26@tpg.com.au
Secretary: Joyce Thompson

Toowoomba Group:
Meet: 49 Lindsay Street, Toowoomba
1st Wed at 7pm and 3rd Sunday at 2:30pm
of each month
(Meditation 1pm & Study Group at 1:30pm)
Annual Springbrook Retreat each winter
Coordinator: Barry Bowden
Secretary: Julie Murphy
Tel: 0427 751 464
Email: murphyj@usq.edu.au

South Australia

Adelaide Lodge, Chartered 26/5/1891:
310 South Terrace, Adelaide SA 5000
Tel: 08 8223 1129
Email: president@tsadelaide.org.au
http://www.austheos.org.au/adelaide
Meet: Members Meeting 1.00pm 4th Friday
of every month. Please contact Lodge for
additional meeting dates.
President: Sheryl Malone
Secretary: Marlene Bell

Tasmania

Hobart Branch, Chartered 7/6/1889:
13 Goulburn Street, Hobart TAS 7000
www.theosophicaltas.websytle.com.au

Meet: 8.00pm Monday
Acting President: Helen Steven
Tel: (03) 6228 3048

Launceston Lodge, Chartered 12/1/1901:
54 Elizabeth Street, Launceston, TAS 7250
Postal address: 66 Flinders Street,
Beauty Point, TAS 7270
email: rmholt@gmail.com
www.austheos.org.au/launceston
Meetings: Wednesdays commencing
7.00 pm for meditation, followed
by meeting at 7.30 pm
President: Tony Harrison
Secretary: Ruth Holt
Tel: 0448 397 246

Victoria

Melbourne Lodge, Chartered 9/12/1890:
126 Russell Street, Melbourne VIC 3000
Tel: 03 9650 2315 Fax: 03 9650 7624
email: meltheos@netspace.net.au
Meet: 2nd, 3rd and 4th Tuesdays, 6.00pm
President: Dorothy Darby
Secretary: Ken Edwards

Mornington Peninsula Group:
Coordinator: Daphne Standish
Tel: 03 9589 5439
Meet: Mt. Eliza Neighbourhood Centre,
Canadian Bay Road, 1st Sunday
of the month 11am - 3.30pm
(meditation - lunch - Theosophy)
www.austheos.org.au/centres/mpg

Wodonga-Albury Group:
Meet: Shop 6, Tower Place, High Street,
Wodonga VIC 3690
1st Tuesday each month
Library hours Mon-Fri 10.00am-2.00pm
Coordinator/Secretary: Denis Kovacs
Tel: 02 6024 2905

Western Australia

Perth Branch, Chartered 10/6/1897:
21 Glendower Street, Perth WA 6000
Tel/Fax: 08 9328 8104
Email: tsp Perth@iinet.net.au
http://tsp Perth.iinet.net.au
Meet: 7.30pm Tuesday
President: Harry Bayens
Secretary: Deborah Weymouth

Mount Helena Retreat Centre:
1540 Bunning Road, Mt Helena WA 6082
Currently Closed
All enquiries to Perth Branch
Tel: 08 9328 8104
Caretaker/Manager: Hana O'Rourke

Theosophical Education and Retreat Centre, Springbrook, Qld

2184 Springbrook Road,
Springbrook QLD 4213
Tel: Office/Hall 07 5533 5211
email: bhora@bigpond.net.au
Caretaker: Barry Hora
Administrator: Dara Tatrav
Tel: 02 9264 6404

