

Approaching the Sacred Through Committee Work

Let us look at the dictionary meaning of some words that are used later:

Rule: Principle to which action or procedure conforms, normal state of things.

Law: Body of enacted or customary rules recognized by a community as binding.

Committee: Persons entrusted with the charge for treatment or safe keeping of another's property.

The Theosophical Society is comprised of Sections throughout the world. One of those Sections is the Australian Section which is known as The Theosophical Society in Australia. It is comprised of component Lodges / (Branches) and National members not attached to any Lodge/ (Branches).

The Rules of all three bodies are compatible and include in common the three Objects. They have the same core business. Rule 6(2) of the National Rules states that a Lodge/(Branch) is a self governing body provided that its rules are consistent with the rules of the National and International bodies.

Members at a Convention Business meeting of the Lodge approve any changes to the National Rules. Members approve any valid changes to the Lodge Rules at an Annual General Meeting of the Lodge. In order for these rule changes to be valid they must first be approved by the national Executive Committee. The National President (elected by the members of the Section) is a member of the General Council of The Theosophical Society, which is the international governing body. In consultation with the national Executive Committee the National President votes as a member of the General Council on any changes of the International Rules.

It is from the interconnectedness of the compatible rules and identical objects that we have the right to use the name and seal of the Society, similar to a franchise. But of course that right brings forth obligations. As a Society based on the promotion of Brotherhood nothing done in the name of the society should be to the detriment of that ideal, to our Objects or to our name. In fact it would be seen as working against the Society and its Objects.

Therefore there is an expectation that all Sections and Lodges (Branches) using the name and seal of the Society, and especially their elected Committees, act so as to actively promote brotherhood and not demean the good name and character of The Theosophical Society.

In applying for membership an applicant signs that:

Being in sympathy with the Objects of The Theosophical Society and The Theosophical Society in Australia, I hereby apply for admission to membership thereof and agree to abide by their Rules.

So let us now start looking at Committee work.

The prime purpose of TS Committee work is ensuring that the organisation is focusing on the core business i.e. to let people know that Theosophy exists and to pursue the three Objects. Members of the Society cannot be members of the Committee unless they have had 24 months membership immediately prior to the elected position (with occasional exceptions which need to be approved by the national Executive Committee). This is the minimum time for a member to become basically acquainted with theosophical principles and the Society and to get a grip on what it does not embody.

It has been said that to approach the sacred one must sacrifice one's self centred ways. We all come from different backgrounds. Some are men or women who have been the breadwinner for the family who have needed to be dominant in business, home, school and sport in order to survive in contemporary times. Sometimes that dominating behaviour comes over into other places including The Theosophical Society and its committees. This discussion is not about discriminating about that behaviour but to point to another way. That way is cooperation, mutual respect, trust, dedication, discretion and ownership.

One of the key roles in fostering this atmosphere is the President or Chair of the Committee. They need to lay down the Rules of Committee procedure but firstly they could ask the members for a few minutes of silence and to be mindful of the purpose they are here and of the sacredness of their duty. They also could encourage members to be mindful of the art of listening by concentrating on what other members are saying and not focussing only on what they are about to say. The prime purpose of the Rules of procedure is for full discussion in an orderly manner and that no one is to speak unless given permission to speak. In order to keep harmony with the procedure, if more than one person raises their hand to speak the chair should acknowledge those speakers and the order in which they will be speaking.

In order to make the decision making process one that is impersonal and not "my way" here are some handy hints:

- Make the process more like a workshop and ask the committee members:
 - What are the positive aspects if the decision is made
 - What are the negative aspects if the decision is made
 - What are the larger implications outside the immediate problem
 - What effect has the decision on theosophical principles
 - What are the creative ramifications outside the square
- The Chair needs to ensure that everyone has contributed to the discussion, everyone has been heard, everyone has been respectful, understanding and courteous, and everyone owns the decision.
- The Chair also needs to be mindful of the time for each person to speak (not excessively and not dominating the debate), also allowing time for the Secretary to take notes for the minutes.

- In many walks of life, committee work becomes a political numbers game. The TS has a sacred and cooperative spirit. Unless a decision is urgent, the Chair of a TS committee can ensure there is a consensus with the decision or otherwise defer it to another time when there has been more impersonal debate. Time heals a lot of things.
- Resolutions that have been made by various Committees over a period could be collected to make a Policy Document. This document combined with the Rules is our greatest tool to help create harmony.
- Another tool is the prior distribution of the agenda of the meeting and copies of all important documents and correspondence.

This paper has been prepared from A Regional Workshop held at the National Headquarters 26 & 27 November 2005. There is a hope that the above tools will help you and your Lodge Committee approach the sacredness in your work for the TS.

Dictionary:

The Golden Rule:

“Do unto others as you would had them do unto you”

Isis 1,317

It is only through observing the law of harmony that individual life hereafter can be obtained; and the farther the inner and outer man deviate from this fount of harmony, whose source lies in our divine spirit, the more difficult it is to regain the ground.

Isis 1, 318

Pythagoras taught that the entire universe is one vast system of mathematically correct combinations. Plato shows the deity geometrizing. The world is sustained by the same law of equilibrium and harmony upon it was built.