



*Establishing  
Theosophical  
Schools*

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## Preface

This booklet has been prepared at the request of theosophists in India who are interested in education or have established schools but have not been able to convert them into what may be called theosophical schools.

The ideas and suggestions are based on more than 20 years' experience in establishing and running theosophical schools in the Philippines, particularly Golden Link College Foundation, which offers classes from pre-school to tertiary level. Conditions may vary from country to country, particularly with regard to culture and legislation, but it is believed that the fundamental principles are applicable regardless of the country.

The principles have been presented as straightforwardly as possible and details about the progress of current theosophical schools in the Philippines will be found in the Appendix.

Interested persons are invited to read a previous work of the author entitled *On Education*, published by Golden Link College Foundation, which outlines certain essential elements in theosophical education, and may be obtained by downloading an online copy at the website of the college: <http://theosophy.ph/onlinebooks.html>. For information on Golden Link College, the reader can go to its website: <http://theosophy.ph/goldenlinkcollege.html>.

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Discussions or suggestions about the content are welcome. You may email them to [v.haochin@gmail.com](mailto:v.haochin@gmail.com).

Vicente Hao Chin Jr.  
April, 2015

## **What is Theosophical Education?**

A theosophical education does not necessarily mean teaching what is referred to as theosophy. In fact, it may better to refer to our subject as “Holistic Education” or “Wholesome Education” rather than “theosophical education”, because the label sometimes gives wrong impressions both to its teacher and to outsiders. When we think of “Christian education” or “Muslim education”, we have the impression that education in those traditions has to adhere to some kind of dogma or pre-established belief system. Theosophical education has no such preconceived dogma.

Based on the belief that individuals must discover the core values of their lives for themselves free from fear and prejudice, theosophical education is a preparation for life in all its dimensions. Through innovative teaching methods that respect and nurture the individuality and creativity of its students, it integrates the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of their growth in a well-rounded programme. Teaching students to embrace their common humanity and to recognise their place in the web of life, theosophical education strives to honour many faiths. It holds the conviction that individuals who are at peace with themselves will ultimately create a world at peace.

H. P. Blavatsky, the primary co-founder of the Theosophical Society, wrote in *The Key to Theosophy* (Sec. 13):

If we had money, we would found schools which would turn out something else than reading and writing candidates for starvation. Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all men, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves. We would reduce the purely mechanical work of the memory to an absolute minimum, and devote the time to the development and training of the inner senses, faculties and latent capacities. We would endeavour to deal with each child as a unit, and to educate it so as to produce the most harmonious and equal unfoldment of its powers, in order that its special aptitudes should find their full natural development. We should aim at creating *free* men and women, free intellectually, free morally, unprejudiced in all respects,

and above all things, *unselfish*. And we believe that much if not all of this could be obtained by *proper and truly theosophical* education.

Note that in this very clear description of theosophical education she says nothing about what subjects to teach but rather focuses on the importance of the development of certain qualities in the student. The particular belief system of the student is less important than his or her character and capacity to think freely.

N. Sri Ram, the 5<sup>th</sup> international President of the Theosophical Society, states the same thing:

What we call Theosophical Education must be education in a real sense, not the inculcation of a few ideas which we may label as Theosophy. First of all, it has to be realized that education is primarily education of the individual, not instruction in any subject or the teaching of any technique, although these may be very necessary, and should come in incidentally. It is not imparting anything from without so much as the drawing out of what is within, the capacities that are already in the Ego or soul, fostering the process of its natural growth and development in its fresh manifestation at a period when such help is greatly needed. (*The Theosophist*, April, 1960)

This is similarly stressed by one of the greatest educational philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, J. Krishnamurti:

The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and therefore intelligent. . . . Education in the true sense is helping the individual to be mature and free, to flower greatly in love and goodness. (*Education and the Significance of Life*, Ch. 1 & 2)

Right education is to prepare a young individual to face not only the challenges of social life (such as career or financial stability) but to understand better the art and science of living itself and to have the capacity to live according to such understanding. It involves an understanding of the growth process of human beings and to attain the highest possibilities of a truly mature individual. It involves an understanding of the growth process of human beings and facilitates the unfolding of the highest possibilities of a truly mature individual.

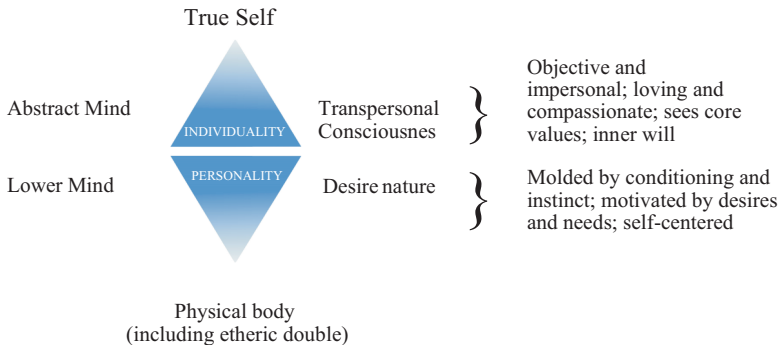
In theosophical terms, such an end-result is called “perfection”, and is attained only after many lives of experiences, lessons and growth.

The idea of perfection is not unique to theosophy. The great spiritual traditions offer the same insight about the apex of human growth, such as Buddha for Buddhists, jivanmukta (liberated soul) for Hindus, “just men made perfect” by Christianity, and *Al-insan al kamil* by Muslims. Psychologists have spoken of similar potentials. Abraham Maslow refers to a state of “self-actualization”, Carl Rogers to the “fully functioning individual”.

It will be noted that the end of such a growth process is not simply material or social “success”, but the full development of a human being. While a theosophical school will help young people to attain material and social competencies, such capacities would only be part of a larger goal which is the overall wholesomeness of the life of the individual. There is no point in making a person a financial success if the person is unhappy, unscrupulous or evil. The present world situation is so mired in violence, injustice, greed and selfishness that any school that helps mold more such people will actually be doing more harm to people and to the world.

## **Character Building and Personality Development**

One of the most important insights of theosophical education is about the dual nature of a human being – the outer personality and the inner individuality. The outer personality consists of the physical body (including the etheric double or energy body), the desire nature and the lower mind. The inner individuality is composed of the higher abstract mind, the transpersonal consciousness and the true Self within. These two groupings are symbolized by two triangles:



The personality is conditioned by instincts and habits. When it feels threatened, it reacts instinctively to defend or protect itself through a surge of energy that is characterized by tension and unpleasantness. From babyhood onwards, it is continuously being conditioned in multifarious ways.

Character building is an essential element in theosophical education. Without it, the school will just be an issuer of vocational diplomas.

Life is not just about having a job. It is primarily about being good, being happy, being of service to others, and having inner peace. And these qualities depend on the right character of the person.

Character building is not only about having healthy values in one's mind. It also involves a well-nurtured personality that has habits and patterns of behavior that enable the individual to adhere to such values. Values belong to the higher individuality, while habits and behaviors are characteristics of the lower personality. These two aspects must harmonize with each other. A theosophical school must inculcate behaviors that will not contradict the core values that eventually will be awakened in the individual.

***Avoiding Unwholesome Conditionings.*** *An important element of a theosophical school is to have an environment and relationship that does not create unwholesome conditionings such as fear, insecurity, resentment or low self-esteem. These prevent inner freedom from flourishing. This means that teachers must not use threats, put-downs, comparison, punishment, or competition to motivate students.*

*Fear* is aroused in a student when a teacher behaves angrily. Anger is the result of frustration and feeling a lack of control. *A teacher therefore must be trained in approaches to effective classroom leadership without the use of anger or threats.*

Punishment is the attempt to inflict physical or psychological pain on the student. This has harmful effects. Instead of punishment, the teachers should let students face the *consequences* of their failure to perform a duty or task. The consequences must be the logical result of the failure – for example, repairing or paying for a broken chair.



A teacher can inspire *respect* from students without being feared. The absence of fear does not mean that the students will abuse kindness on the part of the teacher.

*Comparison and competition* cause insecurity in students. When young children suffer from the teacher's disapproval when other students perform better than they do, then their feeling towards the other students becomes one of guardedness or inner hostility, instead of readiness to help and cooperate. The other students become adversaries. *The school therefore must avoid ranking the students (first honor, valedictorian, etc.) or have competitions where a few will get gold medals or silver medals. Ranking and competition develop low self-esteem and low self-confidence* for those who do not attain the highest rankings ? the majority of the students, in fact. Even the winning students will develop a sense of insecurity by feeling pressure to stay at the top of the class.

Ranking and competition are unnatural and unfair. Some students are more talented than others in some areas but not in other areas. If they are compared solely in one area (such as logical-verbal intelligence) then only those who are talented in this area will be recognized as the best. But there is no single standard of measuring intelligence. Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner identifies nine types of intelligence and one cannot say that one is clearly superior to the others.

In sponsoring events, such as public speaking programs, contests should be avoided. What is done in the Golden Link schools is that *all* students, without exception, are asked to deliver a piece during the Declamation Program that is held once a year. It can be a simple nursery verse for preschool students or a full speech for high school students prepared by the students themselves. The parents are invited to come and watch, but there is no contest. They do their best and are appreciated for their best efforts. For a school with 400 students, the program can be divided into different groups being held on different days.

Let students be inspired to achieve *excellence – which is to be the best that they can be*. The teachers must seek to arouse the interest and

enthusiasm of students, and inspire them to achieve excellence in whatever they do, regardless of how other students perform.

***Wholesome character traits.*** In addition to the avoidance of negative push buttons, *the school must awaken wholesome qualities, such as respect, kindness, self-confidence, fairness, sensitivity to others, non-violence, and rationality.* Another booklet entitled *Nurturing Character and Personality Development* outlines 26 character and personality qualities that need to be encouraged.

The nurturing process is not simply done by lecturing but is demonstrated in the daily life of the school. These values must become part of the culture of the entire school, the teachers using every opportunity to demonstrate their presence and application in the issues, problems and relationships of campus life.

## **Teacher Selection**

It should become obvious that selection and training of teachers are important ingredients in developing a truly theosophical school.

A vast majority of teachers went through teacher training in college without going through the self-preparatory processes necessary to become a wholesome teacher. They measure both the students and themselves by the extent the students can pass examinations, but neglect to give attention to their own personal qualities as a teacher. It matters little if the students are terrified of the teacher so long as the students can pass the examinations. In fact, many teachers take pride in the fact that they are feared by the students. An environment of fear has the tendency to make the students hate the subject.

Teachers of a theosophical school need to be selected on the basis of certain personal qualities or potentials. The school itself must undertake a continuing training of teachers in order to develop such qualities among the faculty.

*A Loving Nature.* This refers to the quality of compassion, care, kindness, and understanding.

*Firmness and Assertiveness.* Side by side with their loving quality, they must also be capable of being firm or assertive where necessary.

*Enthusiasm for the Subject Matter.* The students are greatly influenced by the enthusiasm shown by the teacher for the subject. Such enthusiasm can often be infectious, sometimes even leading students to choose to specialize in that subject later in life.

*Serving as a Model.* This is the hard part but a necessary one. Young people are greatly influenced by the behavior of adults around them. When adults tend to lie or deceive, young people begin to think that such behaviors are permissible. When adults shout and become violent when they face problems, then young people may adopt similar behaviors in their own lives. Theosophical teachers need to consciously develop in themselves qualities and behavior that are conducive to positive growth in those around them.

## **The Principal**

The possibility of establishing a wholesome environment in the school depends to a great degree on the school's leader, whether called President, Director, Principal, Headmaster/mistress, Rector, etc. *The Head must clearly understand the educational philosophy of a theosophical school and should preferably embody the qualities of a good teacher and leader. Such a Head need not even be a professional teacher.* When the Head is unclear about the philosophy, he or she will tend to succumb to pressures and compromise the principles of the school when facing difficulties. For example, some parents may threaten not to enroll or to withdraw their children from the school unless the school adopts ranking or competition. When the principles of non-comparison and non-competitiveness are unclear to the Principal, he or she may attempt to please the parents by instituting such practices.

In establishing a theosophical school, therefore, the availability of a competent Head who will guide the institution is an important ingredient in its success.

## **Teacher Training**

Teachers are generally inexperienced right after they have graduated from a teacher training college. After they are hired, they need to be trained and developed over many years. The theosophical

school therefore must be an institution that undertakes continuous training of its faculty and staff.

In the recruitment of teachers, it is generally better to hire young teachers since they are not yet heavily conditioned by previous exposures to unwholesome methods of educating the young. The older one gets, the more hardened is this conditioning and the more difficult to modify. The disadvantage of young recruits is that they are less mature and lack experience, but the advantage is that they are more open to training and transformation.

*Self-Transformation Training.* One of the most important training programs for a theosophical school is the Self-Transformation Training for Teachers. This contains modules that will help develop self-preparedness of the teacher as an individual and as a teacher. Below are examples of qualities developed by the Self-Transformation Training:

Capacity to handle and resolve stress

Capacity to remove fear or handle fear

Capacity to remove unhealthy emotional reactions such as anger or resentment

Self-awareness and inner calmness in daily life

Capacity to handle human conflicts without being timid or aggressive, but being harmoniously assertive

Capacity for the inner will to neutralize or overcome the unwholesome habits and tendencies of the outer personality

Capacity to enter into inward silence or meditation

Clarity and integration of one's values

Capacity to love and express love effectively

Capacity to be cheerful and happy

It will be seen that the above capacities are needed not just for teachers but for anyone, whatever their professions, for these capacities are foundations of well-being as well as effectiveness in living.

*Classroom Management.* Handling a class of thirty or forty nine-year-old children poses special difficulties. The issues and approaches in effective classroom leadership will vary according to the age levels of the students. In the younger age levels, preplanned activities and learning tools (such as Montessori materials) are highly effective because these can naturally absorb the attention of children. For higher elementary to high school and college, the classroom management skills will involve new dimensions, such as personal leadership, authenticity in relationship, the inspiring nature of the teaching approach and similar factors.

*Familiarity with the Ageless Wisdom or Theosophy.* The teachers must be aware of the larger picture of human life. Life is not just about getting a degree or getting married or having children and retiring. One must find out whether there is a larger purpose to human life and what laws govern its processes; whether there is a pathway towards the realization of one's highest potential.

The Principal therefore needs to arrange for regular study meetings in the exploration of theosophy. The purpose of such meetings is not to convert the teachers to theosophy or to make them members of the Theosophical Society, although they are most welcome to join, but rather to help them become aware of these larger issues in living and think about them seriously and deeply. Theosophical inquiry includes the study of comparative religion, transpersonal psychology, parapsychology, happiness and sorrow, self-awareness, self-development, mysticism, and spirituality.

Such studies should be handled non-dogmatically and rationally. Where relevant, a scientific approach should be taken, for example with the subjects of reincarnation and parapsychology. A very significant part of this study is the ethical side of the theosophical life. It should lead to a wholesome way of living.

## **Curriculum**

Schools are normally required to adopt the standard curriculum prescribed by the education department or ministry of the government. To transform the curriculum to a theosophical one, the following facets should be looked into:

- a. The theosophical school can add subjects to the regular prescribed ones that will contain the character building aspects of the curriculum. It can be referred to as “Values Education”, “Self-awareness”, or “Self-Transformation”, for example.
- b. The approach to teaching other standard subjects can be modified so that it has a theosophical orientation, such as encouraging questioning or constantly linking them to value issues.
- c. Introduce the practice of regular periods of silence once or twice a day. For lower elementary and preschool, it can be five minutes. Students at higher levels can handle ten to twenty minutes.
- d. Have co-curricular activities that will help build life skills, form right values and establish right behaviors. An example of this is the youth camp that may last for three or four days.
- e. At high school and collegiate levels, the theosophical worldview may be introduced formally as a subject in its own right (See Appendix on the Golden Link Experience). In adopting the standard curriculum required by the government, the theosophical school must be aware of core academic knowledge and skills that must be given high priority and attention. *Proficiency in language and basic math is of course fundamental.* When language skills are poor, competence in other fields will greatly suffer; reading comprehension will be low, and the student will be loath to read.

## **Measuring Academic Achievement**

The school's staff must constantly be aware of the real academic goals of education. The goal is not only for the students to pass exams and move on to the next grade level. *The goal is for students to understand the subject and be proficient in it in a practical manner.* For example, in studying history, the teacher must keep in mind that the aim is for the student to know the origin and development of modern civilization and to learn the lessons of the past so that we become aware of the harmful and helpful factors that will affect our present efforts to build an ideal society or world. *This is real competency in the subject.* Focusing on the memorization of dates and names will only make students hate the subject. History can be as fascinating as a fiction novel.

The school therefore needs to be conscious of the way teachers evaluate their students. Assessments (often called examinations) are intended to assess the proficiency level of the students. When the assessments focus on unessential information, such as dates and names of kings or names of documents, then the students are in effect being asked to do rote memorization of relatively useless facts. If, on the other hand, assessment questions require the demonstration of an understanding of key principles and information about the subject matter, then the students are encouraged to understand, analyze, synthesize or even disagree with what is found in the textbook. The capacity to disagree and propose cogent alternative views on a subject is one of the highest forms of competency.

The grading system is another concern. The education authorities of a country may require schools to submit grades. Grades are also requested when students transfer from one school to another. It is best that report cards be in terms of descriptive letters rather than numbers. In the Philippines, for example, as in quite a number of other countries now, the government has adopted a system of describing proficiencies in terms of "B" (Beginning), "D" (Developing) "AP" (Approaching Proficiency), "P" (Proficient), "A" (Advanced Proficiency). This method accentuates proficiency as the goal of learning, instead of a kind of judgment on the capacity of the student to pass exams. These

codes may have numerical equivalents, but do not appear on the students' report cards.

## **Campus Environment**

The entire campus environment is a vital factor in the development and unfolding of the student's inner potential. The following are suggested elements:

- a. Greeting:* At Golden Link College, the administrators and faculty shake hands with all the students they meet upon arrival in the morning. The handshake is accompanied by a warm smile. The daily repetition of this affirming interaction can have a profound effect on the students. They feel recognized and accepted every day, which helps develop self-acceptance or self-esteem. This in turn evolves into self-confidence. If the culture does not disallow such a practice, it is suggested that shaking hands be encouraged. The daily mood of the students is enhanced by this seemingly simple gesture and a pleasant and friendly manner of interaction becomes habitual.
- b. Respect:* Respect is shown by facial expressions, use of language or tone of voice towards each other. If someone respects you, you will feel well regarded or even admired. This is a strong affirmation of the worthiness of a person. When it is experienced daily in school, the self-esteem of a student unconsciously changes and improves.

## **Discipline**

How does a theosophical school develop discipline among its students without the use of threats or punishments?

- 1. Habits.* Human beings are creatures of habit. This is especially so with children. When they repeatedly perform a task without negative feelings, then the task becomes a habit. They will do so without thinking about it. A simple example is standing in a line. Children have no such notion at the beginning. They run anywhere when they want to. But when



they see that there is such a thing as walking in a line, and they do it regularly, they just perform the behavior without question.

Hundreds of behaviors are developed in this simple way: raising one's hand before speaking in class, asking permission before leaving the room, queuing in the canteen, saying "Sorry" when one has hurt another person, talking with a fellow student about a conflict instead of fighting, being honest about things, etc.

Where an instruction does not violate one's nature, children very easily adopt the behavior. There are however many cases where the children have learned anti-social behaviors at home, and the new behavioral pattern at school becomes difficult for them. This is where firmness on the part of the teacher must come in.

Firmness is very different from punishment or threats. The teacher must recognize that some students are undergoing an internal struggle: they may mentally want to adopt the new behavior, but their contrary habits are too powerful. The teacher must therefore help the student's higher faculties win over the lower ones, through firmness, encouragement, praise for small efforts, loving regard, etc. Patience is important here.

In summary, it is helpful for the school to identify key behavior patterns that it wishes the students to develop, and then to provide a loving human environment that will nurture such development.

2. *Rationality.* For students of a higher age, the rational faculty should gradually be strengthened such that they easily recognize a rule that is fair, useful and sensible. They may find it difficult to comply with it, but they do not question the validity of it.

The development of the rational faculty comes from constant interaction and discussion with the teachers about various

issues, such as why it is that we should not come late to school, or why we must not resort to fistfights when we disagree with each other. For this reason, the teachers must have also thought about these issues so that they are also clear on such points. The Principal must include these discussions in the regular meetings with the teachers.

3. *Character development.* The recognition of the importance of certain values or virtues is part of the self-disciplinary development of the student. The school needs to be clear as what character qualities need to be nurtured among the students, and these should be nurtured consistently and systematically.

## **Canteen and Stores**

In accordance with the principle of harmlessness and in the interests of the health of the children, it is appropriate for the canteen of the school to serve only vegetarian food. The rationale of this choice should be explained to parents and students at the beginning of every school year. It may be said that vegetarianism has been proven to be a much healthier dietary practice and is also consistent with the theosophical attitude of non-violence towards animals that suffer when they are being slaughtered.

The canteen or stores should also not serve or sell foods that are known to be unhealthy, such as junk food like candies, potato chips, soft drinks, coffee, etc. Instead, it should promote things like fruits, juices or natural snack food like boiled corn.

## **Religious Matters**

A theosophical school is completely non-sectarian and hence must avoid any kind of religious ceremonies or belief systems that will favor one religion or another. While it respects the religious predispositions of the families of the children, the school itself should see to it that any program, event, invocation is universal or inclusive.

It is common that the religious background and conditioning of teachers openly or subtly communicate an unhealthy worldview to the

students. A science teacher, for example, may unconsciously assume that the Bible is literally true and unknowingly convey to students two parallel but contradictory versions of the origin of things: the creation of things in a fully developed state (e.g., animals and human beings) as stated in Genesis, and the evolution of organisms from simple to more complex units. A theosophical school, while being non-dogmatic about religious matters, must discuss these issues with the teachers and let the teachers sort out these unconscious incongruities within their own minds. Closed-minded teachers who have strong, preconceived notions about religion will find it difficult to adapt to the intellectual freedom of a theosophical school.

The Principal or a designated leader must then initiate discussions and studies on these issues among faculty members on a regular basis. It is best to combine it with theosophical studies because these issues are inseparable from religious, moral and philosophical ones that constitute the regular topics of theosophical study groups.

Another example is views about God. Teachers may just unconsciously tell students about a God that they have always assumed to be true, not realizing that it may be a traditional concept that is anthropomorphic and has a lot of internal contradictions. Again, these should be the subject of discussion and exploration during study meetings with the teachers.

## **The Teaching of Theosophy**

For higher grade levels, the teaching of what is called Theosophy will become appropriate, but it must be done wisely and prudently – wisely, because theosophy must not be taught as some kind of a dogma like another religion; prudently, because it must be taught with a consideration of the culture surrounding the school. In a graduated manner, the following are examples of principles of the theosophical worldview that can be discussed with children for them to see the practical implications and applications in daily life:

*Human Family.* In addition to character building and right relationship, the first principle to discuss with young minds is the unity of humankind. There is diversity of cultures, religions and languages in the world, but all are human beings, and we are all brothers and

sisters. This lesson can be integrated with many subjects, especially social sciences and history. The celebration of United Nations Day as an annual program brings to a more tangible level humanity's unity amidst diversity. Children wear the national costumes of other countries, greet the audience in different languages, give examples of different traditions and ways of doing things, dance the traditional dances of other countries, etc.

The higher the grade levels, the more detailed can be the way the subject is studied. At a certain point, comparative religion should be introduced, firstly, to make students familiar with the diversity of belief systems and to form an attitude of healthy respect for such diversity, and secondly to understand the nature of the religious quest particularly to the search for what is true and what is right living.

*Compassion.* Another quality to teach is sensitivity to the pain and sorrow of other living things, and that we should avoid being part of the problem by not inflicting pain or harm on any living thing. This starts with compassion towards fellow human beings, then with animals, then with nature in general – particularly taking care of the earth itself.

*Karma.* The principle of cause and effect is one that is easily grasped by young minds. You do harm to another, it creates anger and hostility, and causes others to want to harm you in return. You do good to others, then you create goodwill and benevolence, causing others to want to do things for you, bringing about greater harmony and happiness in life. This can be taught in actual situations at home and in school.

*Reincarnation.* For cultures that believe in reincarnation, this can be discussed at an early age. For cultures that don't, the discussion of the subject can start from high school levels. It must be approached as a scientific matter as well as a corollary to karma. The teachers must be sensitive to the surrounding culture, and must anticipate that the students will talk about the subject when they go home. Whatever the culture, the concept of reincarnation should be presented to students simply for their consideration and not imposed as a belief. There are scientific evidences on reincarnation that the subject can be discussed objectively without making it into a religious debate.

*The Principles of a Human Being.* This subject can be taught at any time that children can understand it. They can partly validate this knowledge with their own experiences: physical, emotional and mental bodies. The astral double (linga sarira) can be explained at an appropriate age in connection with dealing with stress, tension and physical discomforts (such as emotional hurts being felt on the chest, and fear being felt in the solar plexus, etc.). Later, the subject of Kirlian photography, near-death experiences, projection of the double, bilocation, and similar phenomena and scientific investigations can be shared with higher-grade levels. The distinction between the personality and individuality can be explained, together with its implication on inner conflicts and the strengthening of the will.

*The Process towards Maturity and Perfection.* Knowledge is useful when it helps an individual to become more mature, effective and wise. The teacher should let students become aware of the higher aim of the study of theosophy: to enable human beings to understand themselves, to handle inner conflicts, live harmoniously with others, diminish unhappiness, do what is ethically right, never deliberately harm others, serve those in need, be unselfish, and gradually become a fulfilled, happy and mature person.

*Common Teachings in Different Spiritual Traditions.* It is extremely helpful for the teacher to point out that all the above principles can be found in the different religious or spiritual traditions in which they find themselves: Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, etc., particular in the mystical traditions of these religions. The teachers therefore must be well acquainted with the theosophical principles and how they are found in the deeper teachings of each religion.

*Other Aspects of Theosophy.* The above principles are essential elements of basic theosophical knowledge and can be explored increasingly deeply as the students progress. By tertiary level, more advanced reading materials can be prescribed that can include topics like human perfectibility, mysticism, pathway to perfection, the invisible worlds, parapsychology, etc.

## **Special Concerns**

Because of the universal nature of theosophical education, there are special concerns that arise. Below are some examples, and the school administration will need to use its best judgment in dealing with other issues as they come.

*School Programs.* School programs should endeavor to be supportive of universal and inclusive principles, rather than divisive or discriminatory attitudes. In Christian countries, it is common to have a Christmas program or party in December. In Golden Link College and in the Theosophical Society in the Philippines, it is called a Year-End Program or Party, though this doesn't mean that spiritual inspiration is excluded.

It is a common practice in many schools, whether sectarian, non-sectarian or public, to have prayers at the beginning of programs or functions. This is fine, except that such prayers or invocations should not be sectarian but acceptable to all. At Golden Link College, a simple invocation is used: "Let us have a few moments of silence. Today, as we celebrate [e.g., the United Nations Day], let all our hearts and minds be one. May the divine blessings be upon us now and all the time. Thank you".

*The Teaching of History.* The teaching of history needs particular attention. History is generally presented in textbooks from a nationalistic viewpoint, and this may eventually lead to a worldview that is narrow, divisive and hostile. It is essential to make a distinction between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism is love of country, a concern for the welfare of the larger society and the promotion of the common good. Nationalism is love for *my* country as *opposed* to somebody else's country. It often emphasizes the interest of one nation against another's.

It is best to teach history as the struggle of a people towards equity, freedom and progress. A country may encounter oppression or opposition from another nation that pursues its own interests. The quest for independence or self-government is a natural aspiration of a people, resulting in conflict, revolution or war when there is an

unwelcome colonizing or exploiting force. The underlying issue is the struggle for autonomy, not hatred of another people or race. The distorted presentation of history in the perpetuation of racial or ethnic hatred is an extremely harmful effect of narrow education.

In the far future, humanity will no longer think in terms of “my” country versus “your” country, but rather in terms of one world and one human family, divided into administrative districts, and with people who are appreciative of the diversity of cultures, languages and traditions.

## **Parental Involvement**

Because theosophical education is essentially about education for life and not simply about academic competencies, the parents must be well informed about the philosophy and methodologies of the school. Regular interaction with the parents is therefore an important feature of school life. Parents can be oriented about the educational approach of a theosophical school in a number of ways. For example:

1. At the opening of the school year, a meeting is held with them at which the objectives, methodologies and policies of the school are explained.
2. During the school year, programs are held to which parents are invited, such as Family Day, Declamation Program, Year-end Program, United Nations Program, Graduation Program, etc. On these occasions, the Principal, a senior officer or faculty member delivers a talk or message to familiarize the parents with an aspect of the education offered by the school. It can be on relationships, character building, parenting, how parents can help the students in their studies, the wider view of life, the nature of true success, etc. These talks help align the outlooks of the parents with that of the school.
3. The school schedules regular Parent-Teacher Conferences where the teacher discusses with the parent the development of the child and explores ways by which both the parents and the teachers can help the growth and progress of the child. The

teacher can take this opportunity to further acquaint the parents with effective parenting approaches appropriate to the situation.

## **Summary**

1. A theosophical school is basically about the development of a certain type of human being who is psychologically balanced, intellectually free, unencumbered by prejudice, who has intrinsic motivation to attain excellence, is ethical, socially well-adapted, self-confident and unselfish.
2. As such, the work of a theosophical school is about character building, personality development and the awakening of self-awareness and higher intelligence. It is only secondarily about learning what are called theosophical concepts.
3. The school must create a human environment in the campus that fosters the desired qualities in its students. This is reflected in the policies of the school such as no ranking or competition, the relationship between teachers and students, and the way subjects are studied and discussed in the classroom, amongst other things.
4. To attain these objectives of a theosophical school, the choice of the school head is crucial, for he or she sets the tone and atmosphere of the entire school.
5. The teachers must be well screened and trained.
6. The curriculum must be so designed or adapted that the goals of the theosophical school can be achieved.
7. The school must be truly non-sectarian while respecting the beliefs of the students.
8. The formal teaching of theosophy can start at high school and then collegiate level.



## **APPENDIX**

### **The Philippine Experience in Theosophical Education**

It may be helpful to append here a brief account of the Philippine experience in the establishment of theosophical schools, of which there are five as of 2015, located in four cities.

Since the 1970s, the present author has been deeply convinced of the importance of theosophical education, although his academic and professional background was in economics and business. The primary sources of inspiration were the works of J. Krishnamurti. Some years after he assumed the Presidency of the Theosophical Society in the Philippines in 1984, a kindergarten school, Sunshine Learning Center, was started at the headquarters of the TS with about 15 students. The curriculum is based on standard curricula for preschool (e.g., language, math preparedness, practical life). Since its inception it has had features such as no ranking, competition, use of fear or punishment. Further, it has always sought to provide a loving, nurturing environment and a caring relationship between teachers and pupils. It also provides vegetarian food. The pupils grow in an atmosphere of regulated freedom, where they are free to be themselves but at the same time are guided to develop self-disciplinary habits in the classroom. When the pupils move on to other schools for their primary education, it has been observed that they generally fare very well in academic and non-academic respects.

It is worthwhile mentioning that prior to the establishment of this first school, the author went to Adyar in order to interview theosophical educators able to guide him in the curriculum and methodology of a theosophical school. He was disappointed to find no one who could provide such guidance. He knew that during the time of Annie Besant, many theosophical schools were established in India but that after her passing, few remained under the supervision of the Theosophical Society. In the 1970s when he visited Adyar several times, the TS had only one school, the Olcott Memorial School, which was a charitable school for the lowest caste in India, and which was not considered to be a theosophically-oriented institution. This is still the case today. The author spent days in the Adyar library searching for

literature on the educational experiences and policies of the defunct schools, and again he was disappointed. He visited a school running under the auspices of the Besant Educational Fellowship but was told that the school was financially supported by the government and hence was supervised by the latter; the Fellowship had virtually no say on the content and educational approach of the school.

The main model that was then more concretely available was the educational teaching of J. Krishnamurti, who also implemented his ideas in actual schools in India, England and the United States. The present author did not have the opportunity to have any exposure to these schools at that time, except through the printed talks of Krishnamurti. At that time, he also came to learn of a second educational experiment in England called Summerhill, established by A. S. Neill, perhaps the most radical educational experiment ever done in terms of student freedom. Neill explained the details on how the school was run in a famous book entitled *Summerhill*.

In 1996, a second theosophical kindergarten school was established by the Theosophical Order of Service in the Philippines, under the initiative of a United Nations Volunteer from Bangladesh, Ms Rekha L. Nahar. It was called TOS Learning Center and was established in a very poor area of north Caloocan City in an outer slum of Manila. The curriculum and approach used were identical to that of Sunshine Learning Center.

In 2002, as an offshoot of the TOS Learning Center, the Golden Link School was established with the intention of offering elementary and high school classes. A parcel of land of about 1,500 square meters was acquired and funds were raised for a three-storey building. The realization of this major phase of our educational work was made possible through the efforts and perseverance of Rekha, without whom Golden Link would not have been born. She spent three years looking for a suitable land, and the college TOS scholars who were under her care became the first teachers of the school. It started as a kindergarten school. In 2003 it opened classes up to Grade 3. It was when the school started offering elementary level classes that new issues on what constitute theosophical education arose. In 2006 the high school

department was started with classes up to third year. The school had its first batch of high school graduates by March of 2008.

During all these years, the school had difficulty in hiring faculty members who could adapt to the educational philosophy of Golden Link. The teachers were graduates of standard teachers' colleges and were unfamiliar with teaching approaches that did not employ anger, threats, fear or punishment. Some of them felt so helpless in the first two weeks that they would cry in frustration! We trained them for a period of one year and even longer. While they were willing to adapt to the new teaching approach, they could not immediately change their own reflex reactions. The older the new teachers were, the more difficult it was for them to adapt to the new methods.

Two things emerged out of these years. First, we avoided hiring teachers above a certain age. Fresh graduates were acceptable, provided they were open to learning new things. Second, we realized that we needed to train our own teachers at college level. Thus came the decision for Golden Link to open a college department that would offer Bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education (BEE) and Secondary Education (BSE). The college department started in 2009 and had its first batch of graduates in 2012. In 2010, the college offered three more bachelor's degree courses majoring in Information Technology, Business Administration and Psychology. We considered offering a Bachelor's degree in Theosophy, but realized that it had no career opportunities and would therefore have no enrollees; hence we dropped the idea for the time being.

It was at collegiate level that we could now implement a fully theosophical education by requiring students to take up certain subjects that were not specified by the government education authorities. Here is how it was done:

1. The following subjects (one semester each) were made an integral part of all the degree courses:
  - a. Theosophy
  - b. Comparative Religion
  - c. Philosophy

- d. Self-Transformation
- e. Marriage and Parenting
2. Education students had to further take the subject of “Theosophical Education”.
3. Psychology students had to take two additional subjects: “Transpersonal Psychology” and “Parapsychology”.
4. They attend an annual 4-day youth camp that deepens self-preparatory sessions and exercises on personality and character development.
5. There is a weekly student meeting for one hour on self-development

By their own account, the introduction of the theosophical subjects has had a deep impact on the lives of the students. Many entered the college with narrow, almost fundamentalist religious views. One even actively tried to convert the other students to her church. Once they have gone through the four theosophical subjects (theosophy, comparative religion, philosophy, and self-transformation) they find their outlook irrevocably changed. They invariably come to cherish intellectual freedom despite lingering discomfort caused by the differences between their new outlook and those of their families or traditions. Such a broader and freer view is something however that, once learned, they can no longer unlearn. And this transformation is not limited to religious views, but includes such things as self-awareness, relationships, the need for altruism and the capacity for optimism and cheerfulness.

Many visitors, including foreign theosophists, who come to the Golden Link College campus have commented that they are struck first and foremost by the exceptionally loving atmosphere amongst students and teachers. This indeed, with all the school’s shortcomings, is what is intended. Many factors build this atmosphere, such as the absence of the use of fear as a motivating technique in the education of the children, the capacity of many of the teachers to express care, and the absence of competition in student activities and programmes. This approach of drawing out the best in a child through a loving

relationship is a very important element of a truly theosophical education. It is something that is very hard to implement in almost any school that does not have a deeper philosophy of human growth and development.

Character building is a complex art and science because human nature (including that of children and youth) is so complex. In facing many and varied situations, the teacher must respond from the heart and not from a discipline manual, from love and understanding rather than from the counting of merits and demerits. These qualities take years to develop in young teachers, but they are the necessary ingredients of theosophical education. In the nurturing of these qualities in its teachers, Golden Link College makes use of insights from the self-transformation process, which is rooted in the theosophical philosophy.

Through the years, we have seen the results of Golden Link's educational approach. Despite the fact that the school doesn't use fear, intimidation or punishment, the students are remarkably (although not perfectly) well-behaved, respectful, helpful and happy. In fact, the school generally doesn't have what are called "problem students" (if anything, it has problem parents!). This is so despite the fact that Golden Link College has been admitting students who have been expelled or not accepted in other schools due to their previously "unacceptable" behaviors. Some of these students have been transferred from two or three schools before coming to Golden Link College. After they are admitted to Golden Link College, their behavior and attitude change remarkably within about six months. The reason seems very evident and simple. Virtually every child becomes a balanced child in an atmosphere of love, orderliness, respect and challenge. The motivation for destructive or anti-social behaviour disappears. Happy children tend to become good children. Virtues sprout easily and naturally in such an atmosphere and environment.

Golden Link College seems to have developed a reputation in the community for effectiveness in dealing with "problem" children. There was a period when we had an unusually high percentage of boys enrolled.

The students are remarkably happy. They want to be in school. They tend not to be averse to taking on difficult challenges because there is no punishment if they fail. They are continually encouraged and commended for their efforts instead of being laughed at or put down. March 29, 2009 was the last day of school for the second batch of senior high school students. It was their graduation day. They didn't need to come to Golden Link College again because they were ready to go to college and university. But the next day, March 30, the entire class turned up, in full school uniform. The teachers asked them, "Why are you here? There are no classes anymore". They said they just wanted to come to school. They were missing it, with all the teachers and staff! In the months since, they have been turning up in school as a group either with a reason or for no reason at all.

In reading this, the reader must not think that Golden Link College has a utopian environment. It is as imperfect as the people who run it. New teachers will always carry with them their own past conditioning (e.g. irritability, a tendency to feel personally offended by small misbehaviors, impatience, personal and family problems, etc.) as well as their old teaching methods (the use of denigration, measurement by exams and grades, wanting to finish the textbook, etc.). It takes years for them to unlearn these conditionings and methods. There are of course regular assessments (equivalent to examinations) but the purpose is mainly to determine the weaknesses of the students in specific subjects or what they have not understood. This guides the teachers in deciding whether to repeat a lesson, to modify the teaching approach, or to have special enhancement classes for those who are having difficulties. It also helps the school to identify advanced students who are ready for more challenging tasks.

There are other things that are done naturally as part of this philosophy of education. For example, meditation is taught and the secondary students observe ten minutes of silence regularly during normal school days. Elementary students go through five to ten minutes of silence regularly depending upon the age bracket.

Children are treated as evolving souls. They are taught how to recognize negative emotions and to handle them constructively.

Teachers learn how to recognize tension in themselves and defuse it as soon as it develops.

There is no practice of a specific religion; instead, reverence for the divine in all and sensitivity to all forms of life are taught. Loving attention is drawn to the animal, insect life and plant life on campus: the fishes, dragonflies, butterflies, etc. The children are taught – and teach each other – never to harm an insect or animal in the garden. In fact one day a group of students ran up to the Administrator’s office on the second floor with the urgent news that a dragonfly had died!

Golden Link College put up its own theosophical study group composed of its faculty members and students. By 2014 there were already more than seven members and it was able to become a regular lodge, meeting twice a month. The teachers themselves conduct the discussions or give the lectures.

The incorporation of elements of the theosophical philosophy into the curriculum and campus life has been done rather naturally as a way of life, and less as a kind of preconceived system. The campus culture is continually evolving and developing. In an important sense, the campus is something like a secular ashram, a centre for inner growth, not only for the students but also for the entire faculty and staff.

In 2006, the Bacolod Lodge of the Philippine section, through the initiative of its president, Susana Cruz, decided to put up its own school based on the Golden Link model. A two-story building was put up for the new Besant School. This did not work out very well, however, because of the lack of a principal exposed to theosophical educational approaches. It operated for a few years, but it was eventually discontinued. A second kindergarten school was put up called the Rainbow Play Center in Bago City. This time, the teachers were first trained at Golden Link College for one year before they were sent back to handle the local school. Susana, however, really had higher dreams in the field of education. She arranged for the purchase of a large tract of land (10 hectares or about 25 acres) in Bago City and put up another school called the Philippine Lumen School. The building was completed in 2010, just a few months before Susana passed away. The entire educational enterprise was continued by her daughter, Ruth Cruz, also a member of the TS. Like Golden Link,

Lumen School started as a preschool, adding higher grades year after year. Rainbow Play Center was closed in order to consolidate the educational effort at this larger school. In March, 2015, it had its first batch of graduates in the elementary level (Grade 6) and will start its high school classes by the same year. It hopes eventually to open collegiate or tertiary courses in its campus.

In 2012, Golden Link opened a branch in Bohol province in the southern part of the Philippines. This became possible because, a few years back, the then president of the Bohol Lodge of the TS, Mrs. Cora Ponteres, decided to take early retirement from her government job in order to pursue an education degree so that she could devote the rest of her life to theosophical education. She wanted to set up a school in her province and she volunteered to manage it. Upon learning about it, Golden Link planned with her and the Bohol Lodge, which eventually led to the purchase of 1.1 hectares (2.7 acres) of land in nearby Cortes town and the start of preschool classes. It starts its elementary classes in June of 2015. Its teachers are trained in Golden Link main campus for one year.

The experiences in Bacolod and Bohol brought out two insights:

First, in opening a theosophical school, there is a need for a TS member who is willing to commit his or her time, resources and energies to lead the school project and be its Principal. And this commitment must be a long term one. Such a person will be the pillar and mainstay of the enterprise especially during its early years when enrollment, staff and finances are not yet stable.

Second, the initial teachers of the new campus must be sufficiently trained in a theosophical school, that is to say for at least a year. Training to become a theosophical teacher requires immersion in a new educational environment and culture to learn many things: classroom management, lesson planning, handling student and parental problems, planning of events, handling stress, relationship with students, colleagues and supervisors, administrative matters, self-development, enrollment systems, textbook selection, community services, theosophical studies, etc. It is an entire applied philosophy and way of life that are being imbibed. The trainees themselves are



undergoing personal transformation, not just absorbing knowledge and techniques.

Golden Link College and its sister schools are mostly subsidized because they were primarily established to serve the less privileged. Of the five, only Sunshine Learning Centre earns more than its expenses. Every year the four other schools receive donations from TS members to meet whatever deficits the schools may incur. In 2009, Golden Link College received a substantial boost when the TOS USA decided to support it through an annual international fundraising program supplemented by a matching grant from the Kern Foundation. This support, for which we are extremely grateful, stabilized the financial situation of Golden Link College especially after it started the collegiate department whose students are almost all scholars.

In the meantime, many schools and universities have shown interest in the educational experiment done by Golden Link College. Some have expressed the desire to adopt GLC's educational system. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to transplant the system to an existing school, especially one that has had a long history, with tenured faculty members who have been used to fixed ways of doing things for years or decades. In many ways it is easier to start fresh with young teachers and a completely new system of running and managing a school.