

Sidmouth Lodge of the Theosophical Society in England

In light of our Lodge having celebrated its 75th Anniversary this year (20th May 2018), it was felt appropriate that we revisit our Constitution and update it where necessary.

The Purpose of Our Work:

- 1) To let people (the Public) know that such a thing as Theosophy exists and
- 2) What Theosophy is

Mission Statement of Our Lodge

The dominant and core activity of Sidmouth Lodge of the Theosophical Society in England (TSE) is to promote and assist the study of Theosophical Teachings as defined by the writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, William Quan Judge, Alfred Percy Sinnett and their lineage. Theosophy has no dogma, no priesthood or elite and recognises no spiritual head. All ideas presented at meetings are for consideration.

Our Lodge Constitution – an Explanation

We have based our Constitution on a letter given to the Esoteric Section of the TS in 1976, by Geoffrey Farthing, who made suggestions that he felt would help Lodges and the TS move forward into the 21st Century.

We retain the **Freedom of Thought Resolution (1924)** below, as we feel it is as apt today and it was when it was written:

“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 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

It is important to understand that our Constitution is the **way** in which we work, whereas the Freedom of Thought Resolution is our Code of Conduct – how we **behave** in all our meetings. It is not the same thing as our Mission Statement, (what we **do** in our Lodge), nor the Purpose of our work (what the work is for.)

Sidmouth Lodge Constitution – 14 Points

- 1) The Lodge is one of Theosophical Instruction and spiritual guidance in your practical life on Theosophical lines.
- 2) The Lodge should be part of the TSE, not separate or distinct, from it. Its members are members of the TSE.
- 3) The Lodge does not interfere with the objects and activities of the TSE.
- 4) The Lodge, as such, owns no building / accommodation. It can share accommodation and equipment with the TSE (or hire a room, if necessary, from other organisations).
- 5) The Instructions given out in Lodge are free of charge. A nominal annual fee is requested to cover additional expenses that may occur from time to time, so that in no way will the Lodge be a financial burden on the TSE. This is in addition to the annual membership subscription to the TSE.
- 6) The Lodge makes no claim to be esoteric beyond the Teachings given us by HPB and the Masters. Any purported new Teachers/Teachings, posing as such, who may come will have to justify themselves against the previous Teachings. Anyone wishing to give talks within the Lodge, who are not themselves a Theosophist, will be given a clear remit from us about what they are being invited to talk about and that our Lodge meeting will allow them half the air time, and then the other half will be given over to us discussing their talk in light of our Theosophical Teachings, which we would like the speaker to remain attending for, so that we each learn from each other.
- 7) The Lodge claims no special relationship with the Masters and makes no claims that scholars on joining will enjoy any special privileges or attention from the Masters, or even be in the way of so doing simply by reason of their joining and being members of the Lodge.
- 8) Membership of the Lodge will, in itself, confer no rights or status with the TSE.
- 9) There are no degrees or initiations. The ability to lead the good life in all respects, scholarship and service will be the only qualifications for respect from other members, and members of the TSE.
- 10) Anyone writing or lecturing, while as members of the TS are free to utter what they like, will undertake not to put out their private views and opinions **as** Theosophy. What is taught as Theosophy must accord with the Masters' Teachings. The Teachings are the Teachings. Members are free to have any opinion they like as long as they voice their opinions as their opinions, rather than as Theosophy. An opinion is not a fact. Dogma can only be based on belief or opinion, not on fact.
- 11) Members can be expelled from the Lodge on well-substantiated grounds of dishonesty, abusive behaviour, malicious gossip, slander, or for not doing reasonably within her or his power to further the interests of the TSE.
- 12) All new members of the Lodge (Beginners) are encouraged to sign up for and complete the Diploma in Theosophy within their first two years of membership, so that every member of the Lodge gains an understanding of the basic foundations of Theosophy. All Lodge members are expected to come to Lodge meetings having prepared for them in advance and come ready to contribute to discussion and bringing any questions they may have. This initial two- year period will enable the new member to decide on their level of commitment* to studying Theosophy. Once this two- year period (and no longer) is up, the member must decide whether to commit or resign their membership of our Lodge. Whilst we hope that members will choose to stay, we understand that not everyone who comes to us will find Theosophy is for them, or they may find they are not at the right time in their life, to commit to Lodge activities, and this is perfectly acceptable.

13) The curriculum of the Lodge includes the study of prescribed books and papers, as fit for the level of the members. Any papers given to members individually are theirs to keep. They are not private, nor do they need to be returned should the member decide to resign. Initially, all instruction will be based on HPB and Master Teaching. Members are free to explore other books in their own time, but all need initially, to gain a basic understanding of the fundamental principles of Theosophy.

14) Lodge meetings follow a format of meditation periods and study. Within all TSE events, including Lodge meetings, alcohol and smoking are not permitted. Please be aware that any catering provided within TSE events is strictly vegetarian. The highest codes of ethics and morals, is the aim of all members.

This new clarification of Sidmouth Lodge's Constitution has been agreed on 12th January 2019 by all members of Sidmouth Lodge who were present at the Special Lodge Meeting for this purpose:

Liz Owen

Suzanne Claremont

Rod Bolam

Julie Faber

Note

* **'Commitment'** – what do we mean by this? Do new people **show evidence of:**

- Reliability (do people do what they say they will do)
- Preparation for meetings / homework done etc
- Non- judgmental
- Do they behave appropriately in Lodge?
- Do they make any offers to help in any way?