

MANUAL  
ON  
WORKSHOP METHODS



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# MANUAL FOR WORKSHOP METHODS

## WHAT IS A WORKSHOP?

A workshop is a method of training which combines personal experience with theory and practice. There are many forms of workshops, but here we are concerned with a form especially suited for Theosophical work. This consists of several meetings—usually three or more—in which a group, on a basis of equality, undertakes to understand one author or some specific subject matter. Groups may gather for the purpose of doing research or undertaking work projects that would show specific and tangible results, but other results may be just as important, including finding goals or seeking solutions to problems. Problems and relationships can constitute the main task of a workshop. Sessions should be planned to meet the needs of those attending and deal with matters of vital interest to them.

In the democratic atmosphere of a workshop, people tend to gain new insights into themselves, into others, into relationships. They may also find that the mutual assistance and creative thinking that occurs within a group can sometimes go far beyond the normal abilities of the separate individuals when working on their own. Today, people generally feel quite comfortable in situations that permit individual expression and group cooperation rather than working under the direction of a strong authority figure. This is not to say that every group activity bearing the label of “workshop” is democratic. There are still variations in understanding, from paternalism and individualism to a naive confidence that a group can do anything.

Particularly suited to Theosophical groups are workshops where opportunity is provided for the practical application of brotherhood and where members may seek greater understanding of fundamental Theosophical principles. Such gatherings may also have the added benefit of helping to identify unrecognized potential among the members of the study group, and afford opportunity to try new methods.

## THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Sometimes, it is necessary to state the obvious. Groups are made up of individuals, each with their own personality and temperament. Some people enjoy working with others, while some prefer to work alone. Some try to use groups for their own personal agenda, while others champion group action. Skills may vary; some may excel at doing research, while others may have good conversational skills. Remember, too, that the ability to cooperate in a mature fashion is often an acquired art. Some feel efficiency is all-important; these people are often impatient with group

effort. Others find efficiency to be of secondary importance to the special stimulus and enrichment derived from sharing ideas and thoughts with like-minded souls. Self-respect and respect for others go hand-in-hand to make successful group cooperation. During moments of free exchange, implicit or submerged attitudes often become more readily apparent. Occasionally, one assumes that he knows what others think and feel, or that they feel as he does. These assumptions may or may not be correct. Sometimes a person fears change, because it is assumed that others might not be willing to change. Encouraging free expression may help to clarify the actual views of the participants. Therefore it is advisable to establish a friendly attitude of mutual respect and trust, as well as an honest desire for truth.

In the process of experiencing alternate leadership and membership roles, people can learn how groups operate, and the relation between values and behavior.

Truly creative moments cannot be planned in advance, but then creativity does not arise in a vacuum; settings may be provided in which—all other factors being present—spontaneous creativity may arise.

In a Theosophical workshop each member is assumed to have some understanding of basic Theosophy, and of those principles generally accepted as guideposts to truth.

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