

they are practiced. But in their esoteric aspects, all religions are harmonious, being expressions, varying of course according to place and time, of the same eternal truth, which Theosophists call the Ancient Wisdom.

Founded in 1875 in New York City, the Theosophical Society is an organization whose name was chosen to align it with the larger theosophical tradition. Among the sixteen persons who participated in the formation of the Theosophical Society, two were notable for their roles in its future development: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), a charismatic Russian of upper-class family, and Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), an American lawyer and journalist who served during the American Civil War (1861–1865), chiefly as an investigator and reformer of military procurement, for which he was highly respected and rewarded by the federal government of the United States. His contacts and influence with the U.S. government help to get Blavatsky and Olcott free from being tailed by the British secret service when they were traveling in India. Blavatsky was the energetic force that brought the Society into existence and remained its chief theoretician throughout her life. Olcott provided the organizing force that held the Society together. He became the first president of the Society and held that post until his death.

Madame Blavatsky's first attempt to form a similar organization was made in Cairo. It did not succeed. Her teachers (the Masters [in a sense more frequent in Britain than in America, namely "a teacher; a person qualified to teach"]) then directed her to go to America, in order to meet Colonel Henry S. Olcott, who was investigating mediumistic phenomena at the Eddy homestead in Chittenden, Vermont, and was publishing the results of his investigations in some newspapers. Blavatsky demonstrated that she could produce such phenomena herself, and she maintained that their real explanation was quite different from the causes assumed by most spiritualists.

Blavatsky maintained that Spiritualistic phenomena were produced, not by the souls of dead persons coming into our world from "the other side," but rather by the force of the human medium, often exercised unconsciously, or by "elementals," which are semi-intelligent forces of nature. Blavatsky sent strongly worded articles to newspapers and journals defending what she called "true spiritualism" and exposing fraudulent mediums. In replying to an article on "Rosicrucianism," she delivered what she characterized as her "first occult shot," hinting at the sources of the great secret teachings of all times, guarded