



The Spirit of Youth

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WHAT is the spirit of youth? In trying to understand it, it is helpful to examine its expression in different ages. “Zeitgeist” means the defining spirit or mood of a generation or a period of time — the prominent ideas and beliefs of the time. It is the invisible agent or force dominating the characteristics of a given epoch and this force seems to express itself differently in every age. The “spirit of youth” is what underlies zeitgeist and its varying manifestations. It is this creative force that gives birth to the respective zeitgeists, revealing different modes of awareness and expression.

One such period-specific cultural pattern in America is the free love and hippie movement of the 1960s. Other examples are modernism and post-modernism. These constitute only a few puzzle pieces of the whole picture, as they are but external and imperfect manifestations of a deeper energy, an essential force. Theosophists may also see its expression in the spiritual enlightenment at the end of every century and the impulse given to propel civilization into the next age. As Theosophists we would focus on the spiritual aspect more than the worldly side of things, but we cannot afford to ignore the latter, for it shows us where our work lies and how to go about doing it.

When we look at the zeitgeist of the 21st century, many of us see decadence and moral degradation everywhere, perhaps far more evidently than the spiritualizing impulses. We will not explore this aspect today, but let us try to pierce through appearances. Seen in a higher light, today’s decadence is but the lower expression of the spirit of youth, and the more we can understand its higher aspect, the true force that drives, the more we will know what needs to be done to help the world transmute its lower expressions. In other words, this discord is but part of a larger harmony that we could try to perceive.

So, what is the spirit of youth? Are we touched by its grace? I think we can all agree that, as a whole, we are not fired up by the spirit of youth; otherwise our membership would have snowballed in this digital era and we would have thousands of youths in the Theosophical Society (TS); it is inevitable. When we look at the TS in its heyday, we had thousands of youths who were interested in the Ageless Wisdom, not in all sorts of peripheral or unrelated activities. A reason for this could be that Theosophy was new back then and it has since permeated many movements in its diluted form, reaching the masses indirectly. But the fact remains that the torch of youth is not aflame in the TS.



For years I have pondered, planned, and tried to find and embody this spirit, but I have not found the answer. Just like many of us, I am still seeking. And it is not an intellectual or practical answer that I seek — it is an answer of the spirit, an answer that shall fire up and transfigure our society. I have no doubt that its inner side is still very much alive, but the outer must be harmonized with the inner.

However, I am not going to leave us hanging with this unanswered question. While we are still seeking the spirit of youth, there are some things we can start doing. It is just like treading a foggy path — we cannot see ahead if we stay put, but once we start walking, the fog seems to recede and the path appears. So in which direction should we start walking if we will to revitalize the TS?

First of all, let us explore some qualities of the spirit of youth, of this creative fire, and our path ahead may become clearer. The spirit of youth is ACTIVE. Let us not gloss over this word and the living spirit it represents. We may think: Well, are we not active? That is a valid question, as we are active in so many areas. But in our activities, are we doing the same thing over and over without change or innovation? Are we doing things with the same old spirit, the same attitude, reactions and methods? That is passivity, the force of inertia running in its old grooves, masquerading as an active driving force.

Let us ponder on this: In our activities and methods, are we only changing due to necessity, because the tide of change has swelled so high that we have no choice but to change our ways? That is not an active

spirit. It is a passive one, born of conditioning and the old order, even as we try to engage people on Zoom during the pandemic, for instance. What if we had done that earlier? What else can we do now, which is lacking in our Zoom programs? Can we avail ourselves of other affordances of technology? Can our lectures spur people to think for themselves and lead them to truth rather than simply telling them what the Ageless Wisdom is all about?

There must be many and varied ways to present even the same truths, which make the Ageless Wisdom shine like the resplendent diamond that it truly is, such as thought experiments, riddles, quizzes, puzzles, drawings, games, role play, hands-on and meditative exercises, all these could be facilitated by multimedia and the pedagogical tools and platforms teachers are using in the modern classroom. Of course, the old format still has its place, but should we not innovate? In fact, we need not innovate, because pedagogy and educational methods in many countries have already gone far ahead, and we only need to imitate, unfortunately for us, since Theosophy is supposed to spur us to be on the leading edge, if not in science then at least in presenting the timeless truths of life.

Due to paucity of time, I shall not elaborate on other qualities of this spirit of youth, but simply list them. It is a trinity of Activeness, Enthusiasm, and Creativity. You will notice that these qualities in which the spirit of youth expresses itself can be seen in every new generation, in every new age — it is the life that spurs change and growth. Without it, civilization would stagnate.



Here are three qualities of the zeitgeist of the 21st century:

1. Spirit of universality — the idea of one world, internationalism, global outlook and cooperation.

2. Group consciousness and endeavour — group work, group spirit and group objectives in the service of humanity will assume greater importance.

3. Synthesis and union — the harmonization and integration of different departments of life and the tendency toward union and fusion. The latter has led to extremes in the field of sexuality and an inclination to sexual expression in many directions. As mentioned earlier, this is the lower expression and also the reason why the whole idea of sex is currently so absorbing to people. One thing is for sure — we cannot pave the way for transmutation with the strictures of old.

So far we have been thinking in terms of qualities. Let us imagine that the TS is transformed by the spirit of youth. What are some possible changes we might see? I am only suggesting some possibilities:

1. A revolution in our activities. Lectures will still be our staple means of engagement, of course, but there will be much more engagement than a one-way sharing. I do not mean just discussion, but new ways of engagement, which might go much further than even using tools like

Mentimeter and Padlet. Are we using multimedia? Just look at modern churches and you will see how even music alone drives not just emotions but the most sublime thoughts and sentiments. Our workshops may involve two-way learning in various

ways, perhaps even through games. We have no idea how much can be experientially learnt using a well-designed card game based on particular themes in the Ageless Wisdom. Also, we seem to be unaware of how new technological tools and platforms have equipped us with the means for lasting impact that sits well with digital natives.

2. A revolution in the way we study the Ageless Wisdom together. It hands the responsibility of truth-seeking and meaning-making back to the participants, engaging all members in the pursuit of truth. In all these possible changes common sense must take precedence and we must strike a balance. We cannot possibly ask new students to interpret Theosophy as they will. The new ways we study the Ageless Wisdom necessarily dovetails with the use of technological tools, and not technology per se, as new things can in fact be used in old ways which lull and dull the human spirit. It is this staleness and deadness that keeps us back or attracts those in whom there is very little of that self-regenerating life.

3. More group work, meditation, and service. One thing we can readily see about this age is the growth and advancement of all kinds of group activity and activism. Group awareness and consciousness has been forming in various directions and this can be seen in the sheer number of groups and organizations that have sprung up over the past few decades. Just count how many WhatsApp groups you have — technology has enabled us to form and join an unlimited number of groups, or rather, we could say that it is our growing group consciousness that has spurred technology to provide us



with ever-greater means for interconnection and communication.

While we may feel that we now have too much to keep up with, it is evident that we are moving towards a deeper social awareness and group consciousness that should be even clearer in the arena of spirituality in which the TS should be spearheading change. Group service, both spiritual and physical, is yet another manifestation of this zeitgeist. For instance, group worship has been taken to unprecedented heights by modern churches because they touch the human heart in ways other religions or methods do not, notwithstanding the ramifications. Intergroup cooperation is another discernible phenomenon. What does it all mean to us? Developments in spiritual movements and religions demonstrate that today's youth find the divine through the will to act more than the will to know.

Theosophical literature provides many hints on the direction that humanity is progressing, and one of them is that an increasing number of people are aware of and working with another kingdom of Nature — the angelic hosts. Such is the spirit of the new age — humanity is knit closer not only within itself, but also with other evolutionary streams.

These are just my musings, and I am sure many of us have brilliant ideas which may differ radically from mine. But therein lies the beauty of Theosophy, of our Society, for

there is unity in mutually-enhancing diversity.

There must be many and varied possibilities. But in implementing these ideas, it seems as though we are constantly coming back to square one. The current means of engagement are most suitable for our present demographic, yet may not attract people with the spirit of youth aflame in them. We need such people to propel fresh ways of doing things and we simply do not have enough of them in our Lodges to spark a transformation. To have more youths and the young at heart, we first need enough youths and the young at heart. What a conundrum!

Let us pause and think about it. If we do not have youths, then we need more members who are young at heart. So what should we do? The answer seems to be to raise ourselves into that divine consciousness from which the spirit of youth springs. When the tipping point is reached, when enough of us allow the spirit of youth to dwell in our hearts, then the purpose of the TS shall be fulfilled. I believe that Theosophy is as fascinating to the young as it is to the seniors. Thus I conclude with this quote from *Light of the Sanctuary: The Occult Diary of Geoffrey Hodson*:

The real answer is to make all the presentations of Theosophy so interesting and convincing that no one really wants anything else.

May we all open our hearts to the spirit of youth!