

Youth and spirituality essay sample

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



In the recent times , due to a change in lifestyle and the social fabric of the society, it has been viewed that there has been a shift of people, in particular the youth , from the old religious practices towards the folds of SPIRITUALITY. This has led to the emergence of a number of alternative, holistic movements and faiths taking the large number of youth into its folds. The youth today is exposed to varying degrees of socio – economic and political changes leading to shift in their lifestyles and thought process.

The youth are trying to search for some inner peace in the fast pace of their lives. The ART OF LIVING plays a crucial here simplifying the complex meanings of life for the youth and helping them cope with the changing society. During the course of my research , I have tried to answer the question of why the youth is important for our society and why is the youth entering into the folds of spirituality focusing on art of living being one of the forums for imparting spiritual knowledge and helping in holistic wellbeing of the youth. During the course of the research, the field of focus was Art of Living and youth between the age group of 18 to 35 years were the subject of study.

BODY

SPIRITUALITY OR RELIGION?

There is a need to first understand spirituality in a little more detail.

Spirituality is a foundational aspect of what it means to be human. Each of us has the ability to experience something more in life than is immediately apparent to us on the surface level of life events. Spirituality is our capacity to discover or create something more in the ordinary events of life.

Spirituality functions as the energy, the capacity, and potential for transforming our lives into something purposeful, meaningful, and valuable. From that perspective, spirituality really isn't about religion. As mentioned in "the handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence", around the world there is a growing concern with spirituality in the lives of general public and scholars. Whether one looks at the bestselling books, or T. V shows, one quickly finds some mention of the same. Religion and spirituality are also seen as playing important roles in major geopolitical conflicts in a world that is seen to be getting smaller and fragmented. We also come across different views on the scope and meaning of religion and spirituality.

Wulff (1997), said that 'religion is becoming reified into a fixed system of ideas or ideological commitment'. Also according to Zinbaur and his colleagues (1997), 'spirituality is now commonly regarded as individual phenomena and identified with such things as personal transcendence, supra-consciousness, sensitivity and meaningfulness. Religiousness in contrast is now often described narrowly as formally structured and identified with religious institutions.' There are also those who clearly describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. What that means can vary a great deal from one person to another.

Among people who use this description are people who may not have a belief in a deity but who practice meditation because meditation is proven to support healthy brain and emotional functioning. There are also those who may have been raised in a family that maintained rigorous religious practices

but as an adult these practices were rejected in preference for personal rituals and practices. There are those who have chosen a variety of elements from different sources that have personal meaning. The consistent theme among people who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious are a preference to maintain a certain distance from religious organizations and to focus on personal spiritual development.

Further , we find that as mentioned under ‘ The sociology of spirituality’ , in the 1990s, concepts of identity risk and globalization came to the fore and became of great focus for sociology with spirituality being the conceptual key opening many cultural doors. As a term, spirituality betokens matters of spirit world and signifies an indispensable dimension of what is to be human. Spirituality is not about what is beyond human limits but also about the sensibilities of incompleteness in the journeying. As the social unsettles in modernization, the unsettlements generate feelings of inadequacy, healed by spirituality. Culture is defined as a self awaiting spiritual fillings. Yet oddly for some, this spiritual enlargement occurred despite organized religion.

In some sense, secularism has won, weakening organized religion. Yet spirituality has not failed, being the solace of soul survivors who journey outside organized religion. Given the way religion is infused in cultures around the world, it’s very difficult to be spiritual without being religious. That’s because the tools and practices used in spiritual development grow out of religious traditions. Those traditions may be unknown and truly foreign to an individual, but that doesn’t make the practice any less religious in its origin. Ultimately, I understand the phrase, “ spiritual but not religious” as a

critique of religion and religious institutions. The critique is simple: religious institutions have often failed to convey the spiritual wealth that's really at the heart of their tradition. Because of this fundamental failure, many people choose to pursue their own spiritual growth and development apart from a religious institution.

YOUTH AND SPIRITUALITY

Furthermore, while spirituality in general has considerable currency, there is additional focus on the spiritual development of the youth. The modern Indian society sees youth as the most powerful agents of social change. As stated by Swami Vivekanandji, 'youth is a wonderful time in life with limitless energy and human creativity.' In a nation like India, youth constitute a very large section of the society. Youth is also an impressionable age where they try to copy a 'role model' or icon. The young today are extremely result oriented and need to understand the reasons and benefits for what they need to do. There are multiple worlds in which the youth reside and these worlds socialize the youth in different ways. These worlds are not static, being impacted by processes of modernity and globalization. The cultural landscape has changed utterly. Rootless, restless and operating alone, with solace a scarcity, the self is searching for meanings and turning towards spirituality which is being seen as a force for self empowerment and expressiveness, democratized available to all.

CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND LIFESTYLE OF YOUTH

In the last few years, due to socio economic and political factors, there have been increasing health problems among the youth. Unemployment, suicide,

alcoholism, sex related offences and general adjustment problems are found in the youth today. The youth in India form one of the most vulnerable groups, who on the one hand are expected to be leaders to determine the destiny of India and on the other hand are an exploited and confused group. Dr. Ashok Sahni states the various changes in the Indian society and the youth. Role and value conflicts

India has moved from traditional stable society that was mostly agrarian, to a developed industrial space. There has been a change in the family structure from a joint cohesive one to a micro in cohesive family. The youth comes from various strata of society and with the diversity of culture , religion , economic status , language and lifestyle they find it difficult to adapt to the changing roles and value system.

Career decision and unemployment

To cope with the demands of life, the youth experience a conflict between economic survival in a competitive society versus pursuit of inner human interests and services to the society. A high percentage of youth, even after higher studies, remain unemployed. Hyper tension, cardiac problems, depression, suicides etc. are increasing among the youth. Development of low self esteem under great pressure to succeed in life and prove themselves. Coping with pressures of living

Youth today face much more pressure of coping with living as compared to their parents. In most cases they have to move away from their parents to urban cities. Lack of social and familial support lays great personal

responsibilities on the youth to evolve their own lifestyles and adapt to the society.

THE ART OF LIVING

Who doesn't want a little peace in life? In today's scenario, this entity appears to be something of a rarity. The daily stresses of modern living are taking a heavy toll physically and mentally, leading to conflict and friction at the work place, nervous disorders, disease and even suicide. To overcome these stresses in their lives, the youth engages in alternative holistic healing and finds solace in spirituality. It is for this purpose that alternative organizations like the Art of Living have come up. The Art of Living course, created by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, provides tools that help in bringing back peace to our lives. Techniques in breathing , sound relaxation , and meditation , among many others , are used to eliminate stress from the system, so that the mind gains the clarity to look within and the body is able to calm and strengthen itself. At a time when many people feel that modern knowledge and ancient traditions tend to contradict each other, it is refreshing to come across someone like Sri Sri Ravi Shankar who has been able to reconcile his scientific education with his Vedic training to find a path relevant to contemporary needs. Through the various courses designed for the youth, there is an aim to nurture a sense of belonging, sharing, and non violence, caring for life, and caring for the planet. Further, the various youth programs revolutionize their outlook from failure, sorrow, and stress to enthusiasm and dynamism, making them feels incredibly strong. There comes a sense of commitment, responsibility, love and patriotism.

METHODOLOGY

1. For my research , I prepared a questionnaire comprising of ten open ended and close ended questions pertaining to the Art of Living organization.
2. This research was conducted on youth between the age groups of 18 to 35 years.
3. I collected information from 25 volunteers, teachers and followers of the Art of living forum. Out of 25 respondents who responded, 17 were volunteers and 8 were teachers.
4. Sample questionnaire along with responses of one volunteer and one teacher of Art Of Living has been attached.

NAME: Sachin singh (volunteer)

AGE: 32

GENDER: male

MARITAL STATUS: single

ECONOMIC STATUS: service class

1. When did you first join art of living?

A. in 2006

2. How long have you been associated with AOL?

A. 4 yrs

3. How did you first get to know about AOL?

A. friends pushed me into the course

4. What motivated you to be a part of AOL?

A. it changed my life completely

5. Which profession do you belong to?

A. I own a shop

6. How much time do you devote to AOL in a week?

A. mostly evenings

7. How are you able to balance between AOL and your job?

A. I feel relaxed n stress free when im with the friends of my type.

8. (to the teachers) With what kind of motives do people come for your courses? What % of them is the youth? A.

9. Why did you decide to be a volunteer?

A. As i mentioned earlier AOL changed my life full 360 degree. I was a smoker, A drinker, and use to be a total ' awaara". my friends just took me n made me do the course. they had to make me sit for a couple of days n then from 3rd day i was enjoying every bit of the course. those 6 days of my life are Irreplacable n unexpalnable. today i own my shop n free from my past, have wonderful friends to hang out, participate in all the activities n living a wonderful life. Thanx to Guruji.

10. Any other valuable information you would like to share regarding your own personal thoughts on AOL? A. the ' thing' that is missing in your life is AOL. so don't miss next course at any cost.

NAME: Berindam Gunakar (AOL Teacher)

AGE: above 40

GENDER: male

MARITAL STATUS: single

ECONOMIC STATUS: upper middle class

1. When did you first join art of living?

A. 2005

2. How long have you been associated with AOL?

A. 7 yrs

3. How did you first get to know about AOL?

A. heard Guruji's speech n met him

4. What motivated you to be a part of AOL?

A. my eagerness to learn n perform such as it can make some positive difference in the world around me.

5. Which profession do you belong to?

A. Self employed and AOL Teacher

6. How much time do you devote to AOL in a week?

A. All my time

7. How are you able to balance between AOL and your job?

A. It is so me that I don't need to keep a balance. I incorporate the teaching of AOL in my work, with the help of which I am always Doing my job with the Unique style of AOL.

8. (to the teachers) With what kind of motives do people come for your courses? What % of them is the youth? A. different ppl come with different motives, some people are eager to serve society, and others want mental satisfaction. some are here just because of the fact that Sri Sri Ravi Shankar ji has touched their lives in some special way, n some believe that they are the lucky chosen ones. And believe me when i say that each person gets whatever he needs to make life more beautiful. % of youth is increasing with every course. They are the trend setters n they know it and are ready to take the responsibility of this society. YES and YES+ are the courses are specially and 100% Youth oriented.

9. Why did you decide to be a volunteer?

A. Because by doing service to society i feel i am blessed.

DATA ANALYSIS

It is very important to specify at the beginning of the analysis that the main aim of the researcher , to study the youth and no other section of the society is that , it is the youth that constitutes a major chunk of the Indian society and has shaped the society to a great extent. It is important to know how changes in society are driving the youth towards society at such a young age. I interviewed a cross section of youth between the age groups of 18 to 35 years and belonging to different socio economic backgrounds . On the basis of their answers , I could infer that most of them had joined Art of Living a couple of years back and since then have been have been associated with it on a continuous basis. They have been attending the courses and satsangs ona regular basis which indicates that they have been benefited with the Art of Living teachings and their association with

spirituality has been a successful one. Another trend that can be noted here is that the family and peer group play a very important role in the lives of the youth, as many of the youngsters entered Art of Living on the advice of their parents or friends. A very little role of media influence is seen in this scenario.

The role of the family in the decision making for their child is very much prominent. Also, the attitude of concern for the wellbeing of their child by the parents is also significant. In today's society, the pace of life is so fast that people are always on the go. Although modernity and technology have brought in great enhancement but at the same time it has also increased a sense of competition and race for success among youth. During the course of my interview I found that most of the youth were employed in MNCs, these youngsters were suffering from a mid life crises situation at their young ages. Despite pocketing huge pay packages, these people could not take pleasure in earning huge sums which they do not even have time enough to squander. They found themselves caught in a state of confusion and dilemma, searching for their real identity and juggling between different relationships. All this added to the magnetism of spiritualism to the youth which guaranteed some amount of cerebral tranquility.

While interviewing some Art of Living teachers, I found out that a large chunk of the people taking these courses are youth mostly because they are at a stage where they have to face the society, come across different types of people whom they have to handle. Also, the youth today have very extreme emotions. They easily get angry or upset and easily depressed. I

found that many of the youngsters had initially engaged themselves into smoking and alcoholism as an easy escape route from the societal pressures which had started affecting their health. But after entering Art of Living and getting into touch with spirituality, they were gradually able to leave these habits that were eroding their bodies. Art of Living has helped in detoxification of their bodies and lives. So Art of Living and spirituality has naturally helped the youth in gaining a healthy body and mind. Art of Living also helped the youth to channel their energies in a constructive way. it has given the youth an opportunity to indulge in seva or social service which has inspired youth to draw some positive meaning out of their lives. Art of Living encourages work not by motivation but through inspiration.

Unlike the rigidities in traditional religious practices, Art of Living is a loose organization giving lot of space for freedom and creativity for the youth. Art of Living also encourages the youth not just to remain followers but to inculcate leadership roles which instilled confidence in them and many were helped in building of their overall personality. the section of youth I interviewed were mostly employed with some being students . Almost all gave regular time and were able to balance between their work and Art of Living. It and spirituality taught them the art of time management which is a prerequisite for today's youth since they have themselves burdened with many responsibilities. Further, being a part of Art of living and coming in touch with spirituality has taught the youth of today the art of giving back to the society. The youth have realized the joy of sharing and there has been a shift from being overly materialistic to sharing.

During the course of my interview , I found that in many cases , these youngsters were living away from their homes or native places. This often led to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Art of living came as an excellent forum to interact with new people and to form social bonds of friendship. Many people have somewhat wronged notions of what spirituality is all about. Instead of what millions of spiritual channels on the T. V showing a picture of boring somniferous lectures given by some sexagenarian who seem to be in amnesia state and surrounded by paraphernalia of faithful disciples. But things have taken a turn for the better now. Forums like the Art of Living, instead of promoting going to the ashram and living there, now promote a simpler and healthier way of leading normal lives which have attracted such large chunks of youth.

CONCLUSION

Now , if we try to answer that how likely is it for an average youngster to have a ringtone of gayatri mantra along with his usual Akon hip hop? Quite likely, it seems. Now we can say that contrary to popular belief that youth is drifting away from all forms of beliefs, the young are inclined towards spirituality in their own distinctive way. Spirituality has become the new way to go as it enables to promote a more efficient mechanism of thinking, doing work in general and a more productive form of life. Thus, forums like the Art of Living are gaining so much importance in the youth's life which despite being a mass movement promotes the growth of an individual, making them strong and brilliant in order to achieve a divine society.

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