

Feeding the Soul. First Transpersonal Festival. Milano 2015
Opening Ceremony: Circle of Youth. Keynote

Ladies and gentlemen, dear brothers and sisters, fellow souls,

Life on this earth was never simple or easy. And certainly life isn't becoming less complex in this globalized, digital age. Today, we, the younger generation, continue to address the perennial questions of human existence: Who are we? What are our origins? And what is our destiny?

In doing so, we draw widely upon the rich cultural and religious heritage passed down to us from our ancestors. However, today, this encounter is mediated by contemporary culture in new, complex, and often unforeseen ways, which come both with risks and opportunities for young individuals.

So, for example, nowadays, as a result of globalization, the transpersonal heritage of humankind is no longer bound to a single place or culture; due to the information revolution, knowledge of such traditions and their practices is steadily increasing in scope and availability; and, today, in the digital age, much of this information is becoming instantaneously accessible on our mobile devices anywhere, at anytime.

At the same time, we live in a materialist society, whose values often go against transpersonal views and experiences; the dominant cultural force of science delivers to us a worldview devoid of the virtues of inner experience; and our capitalist economic system will commodify and appropriate even our deepest longings to create a supply of products to be sold on the spiritual marketplace.

Thus, today, we are free to encounter our heritage in a large variety of forms and settings; while we are also likely to face a range of various challenges in the process. These developments demand of the younger generation to face many open questions as we strive towards an understanding and integration of transpersonal issues into our living environments today, such as:

How can we gain access to the full depth and richness of our heritage without feeling lost or getting confused on the way?

How can we open up to the incredible amount of available information sources relevant to transpersonal study and practice without becoming overwhelmed?

How can we foster a true dialogue between the needs of modernity and our traditional heritage without falling into the extremes of fundamentalism or relativism?

How can we open up to real innovation and change by departing from the traditions handed down to us without feeling ashamed or excluded?

And how can we support each other in integrating transpersonal views and experiences into our modern lives and communities?

In short, what is today that we need to feed the soul?

While such open questions certainly hold great value in themselves, on the other hand, they may also cause distress to the individual and thus lead to difficult emotions such as confusion, overwhelm, shame, and alienation. I feel that it is important that we publically acknowledge, here and now, the difficulties many of us have encountered on our paths, especially since more traditional religious and academic settings often foster “cultures of silence,” which make it difficult for its members to give voice to their subjective experience and sometimes difficult emotions.

And so since we are all gathered here today as a community of like-minded souls, I thought this would be an appropriate context to bring to the surface some of these difficulties with mindfulness, to set them into their larger context of a common or shared humanity, and to encourage everybody to respond to these in themselves and others with a caring and compassionate attitude.

So, in closing, I want to invite you, over the next days, to nourish our souls together in the face of the difficulties we encounter in our lives today, and to give to ourselves and receive from others and our community the love and compassion we all deserve.

(by Dennis Johnson, dennisaxeljohnson@gmail.com)