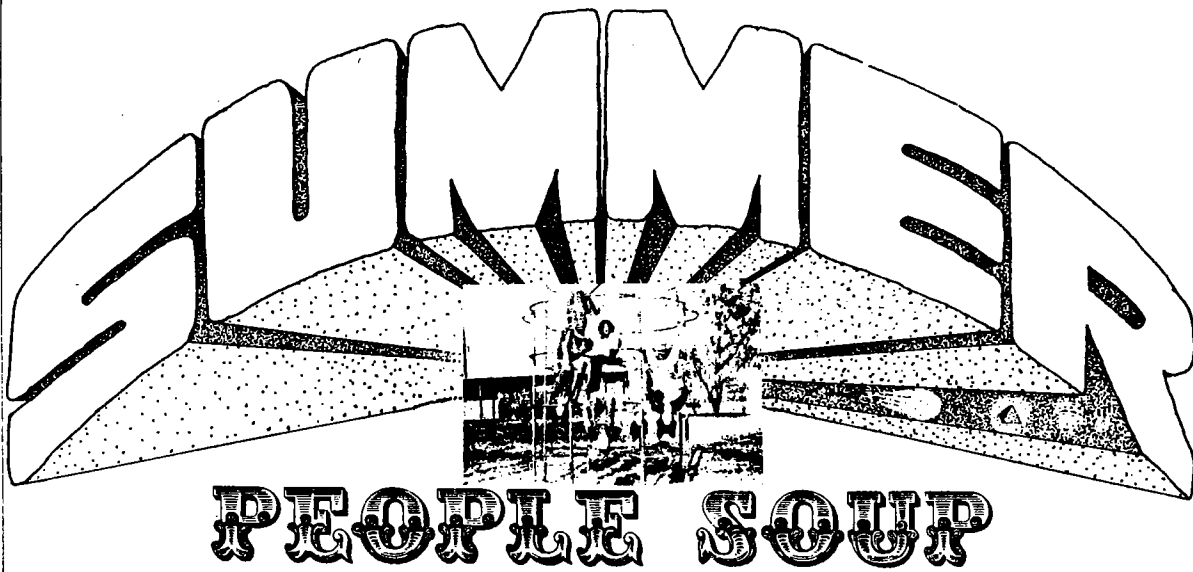


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Self-Determination

An overview of the youth programming issue by an individual LRYer.

by Shelley Cantril

At the April meeting of the UUA Board of Trustees the decision was made to continue funding of youth programs through the auspices of the Continental Youth Adult Committee. The Board's decision was contingent upon a greater emphasis on dialogue concerning youth programming and attempts by the Continental Youth Adult Committee to further the development of YACs across the continent. The Board was also responding to the indication of the LRY Executive Committee that evaluation was happening within the LRY organization, and to an attitude of cooperation among LRYers.

Further dialogue, more extensive funding, and formation of more YACs will be of no avail unless there is a more distinct sense of direction for dialogue and a willingness towards understanding within the denomination as a whole.

A denomination based on the free and questing mind often entails more transiency and less commitment. The liberal religious movement is a small one, and the existence of an autonomous youth group is even more rare. At a time when the future of the denomination is questionable, it is natural that the UUA would look to its' youth group and question whether it operates in the most effective way possible. Questioning is a very important process which must be continual to promote communication, certainty, and support.

It is time that every Unitarian Universalist and/or LRYer examine his/her personal faith, thereby expressing a faith that is a "flaming chalice" that cannot be squelched by societal shifts. All factions of the denomination must clarify their common purpose(s) based on individual beliefs and determine whether the present structures are in alliance with these beliefs and purposes. The denomination is not in a position where it can afford to be divided.

To be part of the liberal religious movement assumes that the members will be liberal, religious, and active. One's spiritual lib-

eration must be examined regularly to be a living personal faith. Some suggested stimulators of spiritual thought Emerson, Thoreau, Parker, Channing, Gandhi, Jesus, and Buddha. The following questions may also stimulate individual consideration. Challenge others with these questions and questions of your own.

- 1) Do you believe you have a spirit?
- 2) Do you believe that everyone has a spirit?
- 3) What happens when you live or act in a way that is contradictory to your spirit?
- 4) Does your lifestyle align with your spirit?
- 5) What changes could you make in your lifestyle to respect your spiritual needs?
- 6) What environment would be most supportive and stimulating to your spiritual liberation?
- 7) How can you support and stimulate spiritual liberation in others?

To be a unified spiritual community we must share a common belief about people, the earth, and the universe. It is not coincidental that the Unitarian Universalist denomination has a self-managed youth group. It is important that we clarify why we have such an unusual structure within the denomination in order to support and include its unique needs. By determining why LRY is youth-run we may identify an individual and communal purpose for its existence. Regular examination of our beliefs and purposes will encourage us in approaching the problems inherent in such a uniquely structured group.

- 1) Do we believe in an intrinsic human right to self-determination?

- 2) Do we believe that all persons, given support and stimulation) have the power to be self-determining?
- 3) Is it our purpose to support and stimulate self-determination in all people?
- 4) Is there a need for and means of supporting and stimulating self-determination beyond our group?
- 5) Where and how can we as a group encourage a liberated and self-determined spirit?

A structure is much more likely to answer a groups' needs if it receives regular evaluation. Some questions which may be helpful in determining the most effective structure for a group (be it local, federation, or continental) are as follows:

- 1) What are the beliefs about people and purposes for the group that all of the members unanimously agree on?
- 2) What personal and financial resources are available to the group?
- 3) What kinds of things does the group want to do?
- 4) What structure would encompass our beliefs, purposes, and resources most effectively?

The society-at-large has always taught young people and rarely encouraged young persons to teach themselves or each other. Youth have not been trained or prepared to be leaders. Youth leadership not only requires self-confidence and self-determination but presently entails the risk of being criticized or ignored by the denomination. It is a very tall order to ask for commitment from youth without the support of persons who are experienced. The purpose of a youth-run organization is to insure respect for the youth as persons; this does not mean that support

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