Introducing the University of Human Unity

Perhaps we can contribute something very new to the world.

just over a year ago, a small group of Aurovilians was inspired to explore the possibility of developing a university in Auroville. The group has continued to meet regularly and, together with friends from Pondicherry, recently organised a series of seminars exploring different approaches to knowledge. We spoke to some core members – Ananda Rddy, Grace, Rakhal, Rod, Ruddy and Vladimir – to find out more.

Auroville Today: Why does Auroville need a University of Human Unity?

Rudy: On 1st Feb, 1969, The Mother asked Roger to go to UNESCO and present the concept of a Université de l’Unité Humaine (University of Human Unity) for Auroville. She added that the permanent university “will be the key to the raison d’être of Auroville.”

Did you give any indications concerning what it would be like?

Rudy: She told Roger that She would like the four dimensions – the physical, vital, mental and spiritual – to be included in the university, as in a laboratory. She also suggested that international students and researchers could meet there, to brainstorm about various issues and then spread the results all over the world.

So why has it taken Auroville forty years to get this university?

Rudy: Different attempts have been made before Auroville University was born, for example, the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) which was Roger’s initiative. Rakhal: In fact it was the University of Human Unity which came into his mind because he knew of Mother’s statement. But Kireet Joshi, former Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, told him that the term “university” would not be recognised in Indian law, so they named it something else. But the work that’s been going on in CIRHU is inspired by the same spirit.

Rod: The main difference between our project and CIRHU is that we started on a very practical level, to try to explore how we could serve the needs of Auroville, whereas CIRHU was very idealistic and for a long time the practical level of it didn’t manifest.

Ananda: Actually, this concept of a university had been in the Mother’s mind for a long time. In the early 1950s She wanted a Sri Aurobindo International University to be built in the Ashram, but because the government objected to the name, it became the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education instead. But now things have changed and the government no longer has any objection to any university being set up.

Rakhal: We’ve had so much interesting meetings so far, but for me, the intellectual approach has been predominant. I’m very eager to see this university is not going to disappear, but open up new possibilities for learning and that would co-ordinate other projects in Auroville that are geared towards learning. But we’re still in a very preliminary phase.

Ananda: One thought is, if we acquire the status of a university we could attract many Indian students and it could be a great meeting-point for Aurovilians and Indians on an intellectual level. Indian universities are bogged down in their approach, they could get many fresh ideas from the University.

Rakhal: What part can the University website play in this integral learning process?

Ananda: It could be one approach of the university's website. Auroville Today, pondicherry, the University of Human Unity, and maybe the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) which was Roger’s initiative.

Can you say in what concrete way the University would benefit Auroville?

Rod: There are two areas in which we foresee making an important contribution to the practical development of Auroville. Firstly, we can help link together the different opportunities for experiential learning that already exist in Auroville.

Secondly, we have decided to bring to this platform of integral learning some current issues of development in Auroville. We’re located in the Unity Pavilion which was the development of the International Zone, so we felt it would be appropriate to begin with this zone. We would like to invite to this platform all those with different perspectives regarding the role and development of the International Zone. Through exploring these perspectives, we hope some new picture could emerge which would bring integration among the players and give the project a new impetus.

Rudy: We also envisaged setting up a programme later this year, hopefully in collaboration with Ananda’s University of Tomorrow and Mathij’s Corelasis’s Indian Psychology Institute in Pondicherry, to introduce Aurovilians and outside students to this integral learning process.

The main point of the University for me is to find another way of being with each other and to help people on the way of self-discovery and transformation. My feeling is that the university will be a place that will lend expression to the ineffable; it will help people explore something that is beyond.

Ananda: I remember when we were students The Mother said the time had come when we have to go beyond the mind and into intuition. This could be one approach of the university. The aim of the project is not to get higher levels of intuition, that automatically brings in a greater sense of human unity and oneness is one of the primary benefits.

Rod: Today the challenge for Auroville is to realize human unity exists so that we can develop a society and a world based on unity rather than division. Auroville is not going to discover human unity by randomly building houses and creating new financial structures. The development and expression of human unity in Auroville requires a deliberate concentration on discovering and disseminating that knowledge. The University could play a key role.

From an interview by Alan

Dear Auroville Today:

I enjoyed the interview with Abha and Claude in the November 2007 issue. I would like to add to your column comment on the question of teaching Buddhism at the Tibetan Pavilion.

As Claude says, Buddhism has a lot to offer. In particular it is rich in knowledge about how to purify the Mind. The Mother’s ‘Commentaries on the Dhammapada’ (a Buddhist collection of verses) begins with this comment: “Every Friday I shall read out to you a few verses of the Dhammapada, then we shall meditate on that text. This is to teach you mental control.”

When The Mother said that we must have a religion of Integral Yoga, she was surely referring to the making of a fixed body of rules and regulations that exclude all other ways and means and that focus on external forms. She wanted inner development to come first, completely unrelated uniquely and flexibly to each individual via the Divine Shakti in each.

Her acceptance of the practices and wisdom of all sorts of schools of thought (see for example her book ‘The Lesson of Life’) is evidence that all wisdom, wherever it is to be found, is acceptable to us in our integral development.

I have used Buddhism in this way. In helping me to achieve mental peace i.e. mental purification, it has been of immense help to my practice of Integral Yoga. Its advice has been fitted into my own goal, which is not the Buddhist Nirvana, but Transformation as outlined by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. For, Integral Yoga’s Transformation, in common with other Paths, requires the disciplining and purification of the Mind.

So to avoid confusion, perhaps the Tibetan Pavilion or those who conduct courses there, could take a little time to explain how Buddhist knowledge fits into the aim of Integral Transformation. A single sheet distributed with each course may be a simple means to achieve this.

With best wishes,

Girija Shettar (London, UK)