

International Congress in Auroville, 5-8 January 2010

“Spirituality beyond Religions” A New Path to a Universal Cultural Dialogue

There is an emergent trend worldwide to explore the integral momentum of spirituality.

There is a growing awareness that although religious traditions continue to support ethical values, individuals need and are seeking a deeper personal understanding of the spiritual dimension.

There is an urgent need to account for an experience of transcendence that is inherent in the universal human potential referred to as “spiritual”.

The Enlightenment (Aufklärung) in the West, which founded the high ideal of political and social freedom for individuals in society, should now be combined with the perennial enlightenment as taught in the East to guarantee the spiritual freedom of the human being and promote the suitable evolutionary structures to support this.

Social reality proves that it is no longer possible or workable now for a state or religious organisation to impose ethical values on a society - practical wisdom is still a universally warrantable reference, but ethical systems based on a merely intellectual, rational footing have been found wanting; they are too limited for the developed evolutionary life-force humankind has grown into and are impotent to stop the new flows of knowledge opening up in many human beings through means that are often unorthodox and that reason flounders to classify - or support.

To come up with the ethical convictions of the future, which will be the foundations on which to build new kinds of society, we need an open cultural dialogue which prioritises experiential knowledge of the spiritual essence of the human being, of humanity as a whole, and of the cosmos.

A trans-denominational, interreligious study of religious traditions reveals that they have at least one message in common which is considered by their respective mystics to be of primary importance:

the self-transcending capacity of human nature to open to the Divine, as experienced in meditative and contemplative practices.

A commitment by all nations to a secular integral spirituality could help open up this cultural dialogue.

A secular integral spirituality would respect the content of all religious traditions while seeing each as a part of a greater whole.

It would thus accept their existence but seek to harmonise them through digging deep to find their common meeting places. It would thereby provide individuals with a foothold to transcend all limiting religious forms without having to lose access to their spiritual essence. This approach would also have the advantage of developing a spirituality that avoids exclusivist viewpoints, which engender fundamentalist attitudes and hatred.

This is a practical solution which Mankind, in the midst of the diversity of its individual realisations, now calls for - the recognition of a living spirituality beyond religions, East and West.

“There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for both (East and West) are needed as co-workers. ... There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on a spirituality or mysticism of the East and materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live.”

Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, SABCL 26:414.

We are planning an international congress on "Spirituality beyond Religions" in the international township of Auroville in Southern India (www.auroville.org). Auroville has been supported from its very inception in 1968 by the UNESCO with four resolutions as a 'laboratory of mankind', a 'learning society' (1983) and in October last year Auroville celebrated her 40th birthday at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The name Auroville refers to the rise of a new mankind, the City of Dawn (Ville de l'Aurore) and to the Indian sage, poet and philosopher Sri Aurobindo. The international township was brought into existence

by Mirra Alfassa, a French artist and visionary whom Sri Aurobindo called "the Mother" as she joined him in Pondicherry. In 1954 she had a vision : "A Dream", and founded Auroville in 1968, "to realize human unity". In 1969 The Mother had asked the architect of Auroville, Roger Anger, to go to the UNESCO in Paris and plead for the creation of a "University of Human Unity" which would be the key for the existence of Auroville (la clé de la raison d'être d'Auroville). In November 2006 we started the University of Human Unity Project (www.universityofhumanunity.org, click on what is UHU, then: Introduction). The "University of Human Unity" is meant to be a place of international dialogue on Human Unity, on Eastern and Western philosophy and psychology as well as scientific studies. The UHU is part of a strong community of research in Auroville, the Centre of International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), the Laboratory of Evolution ...

The interreligious dialogue is one of the major intellectual and cultural challenges for this millenium. The Mother had said: "*All religions will be studied in Auroville*", emphasizing the spiritual teaching: "*You must not confuse a religious teaching with a spiritual one. Religious teaching belongs to the past and halts progress.*

Spiritual teaching is the teaching of the future – it illumines the consciousness and prepares it for the future realization.

Spiritual teaching is above religions and strives towards global Truth. It teaches to enter into direct relations with the Divine." (On Education, CWM, 12:319).

Auroville's mission is to realize human unity and to advance the spiritual progress of humanity. In his book on the "Ideal of Human Unity", Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means

the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth".

Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, CWSA Volume 25, pp. 577-8. Written between 1915 and 1918; revised in the 30s and in 1949.

We plan the International Congress on "Spirituality beyond Religions" for January 2010, Tuesday 5th to Friday 8th. Welcoming and respecting the spiritualities deriving from all religions, the word *beyond* is meant here in the sense of *above*: "*Spiritual teaching is above religions*" (The Mother, cf. above).

It is about the universal dimension of spirituality that the mystics of all religions and ages agree upon...

As an event of the "University of Human Unity" – a project that as early as in 1969 the United Nations invited the UNESCO to establish in Auroville, with the cooperation of the Centre of International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), the UNESCO Transdisciplinary Chair "Human Development and Culture of Peace" at the University of Florence and The Californian Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco (CIIS) – this International Congress endeavours to provide an open forum for a process of transformative practices and discussions in the field of philosophy, psychology, religious studies, spirituality and healing arts, sacred music, to study the idea of a secular spirituality from different perspectives. Workshops, conferences, panels and seminars will provide the arena for a creative, participatory research process.

This mail is to welcome you to this Congress with your innovative ideas and papers, inviting you as well to contemplate possibilities of facilitating connections with foundations for donations/grants.

Auroville is a non-profit organization.

We will be happy to meet with you in Auroville in January 2010!

Cordially,
Rudy

(co-organizing the event – rudolf_schmitz-perrin_phd@hotmail.com)