

# 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 felt inspired to explore the possibility of developing a University of Human Unity. 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 Reddy, Grace, Rakhil, Rod, Rudy 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 She 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 studied in the university, as in a laboratory. She also suggested that international scholars and Nobel Prize winners 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, the most important being the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) which was Roger's initiative.

**Rakhil:** 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 thought of another name. 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 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 new universities being set up.

Why has it taken so long? I feel Auroville had to pass through various stages of self-development on the physical, vital and emotional levels and these have now found sufficient self-expression. On the mental level Auroville is ready to share with the world all the experience it has gained over the past forty years. Now we can contribute something very new to the world.

**Rod:** The University is also a response to a request from the new President of the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). He met a group of us in 2004 and said he would like Auroville to provide solid, coherent programmes for visiting CIIS graduate students. Also there are more and more university

students coming, for whom new resources need to be developed.

**Vladimir:** Another reason for Auroville to have a university is that there are no higher education possibilities here. We should provide our youngsters with the opportunity to grow in a new way without them having to go outside.

ed people from Auroville and around to present different approaches to knowledge, then we began to see if an integral vision would emerge.

**Vladimir:** We were learning from each other, deepening each other's knowledge. There were no teachers and students any more, simply learners on the path.



From left to right: Rudy, Vladimir, Grace, Rod and Ananda (not in photo - Rakhil)

## What would this university offer?

**Rod:** We are still exploring this. We've held a number of sessions to discover how we could be a university that would be a key to the meaning of Auroville, that would open up new possibilities for learning and that would coordinate other projects in Auroville that are geared towards learning. But we're still in a very preliminary phase.

**Ananda:** One thought is, if we acquired the status of a university we could attract many Indian scholars and it could be a good 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.

## Isn't there a danger that this university could become just another academic talking-shop?

**Rakhil:** We've had some very interesting sessions so far but, for me, the intellectual approach has been predominant. I'm very eager this university does not fall into this trap. There are many ways of learning. While some focus on the intellect, others deal more with the emotional level or with action. We should take all these forms of knowledge and learning into consideration if we are to succeed.

**Rod:** So far we've always had in our seminars a diversity of interests: they haven't been academic per se. We've had presentations by musicians, artists, philosophers, teachers, social workers, most of whom are Aurovilians. If we can preserve that balance, I think we can integrate the academics.

The Mother emphasised that Auroville should develop a simple way of living that would enable further research in consciousness; that would make it possible for Aurovilians to develop an integral approach to knowledge, where spirit and matter and all the levels in between are the focus. The integral approach needs to be discovered, so we made this the central focus of our first series of seminars. We invit-

**Rod:** This 'discovery learning' is based on the idea that knowledge is not ready-made but discovered. If a diverse and aspiring group enter into a process of discovery learning, they can open up unlimited possibilities of further exploration.

**Rakhil:** We definitely experienced something that was new. At the end of each session a sense of unity was felt among us. But some processes were more effective in creating this. Deep listening was very important, and when the morning was not too full of ideas, people had more space to breathe and experience something beyond a mental reality.

**Ananda:** While I sat there, listening to different approaches I made a very definite effort to be connected with The Mother's consciousness because I'm aware that it's only Her consciousness which can bring in this sense of unity. I'm clear that unless we, the group, have this inner unity, we can't speak of human unity. So while, on an intellectual level, we learned a lot from each other, above all it was an exercise in consciousness. I gained an inner experience of oneness: I felt I could truly be myself and, at the same time, be united with the others.

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

**Grace:** My biggest challenge has been to create a cyber structure that is flexible and not in the traditional university style. I want participants to feel they are embarking on a new approach to knowledge, and therefore need to share their perspective in a way that is more integral – from the heart rather than from the head.

**Rod:** When people participate in this process, it changes the quality of the research. The website can provide a point of connection for those who would eventually come and participate here. We all agree that being here is essential because when people come here something happens.

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

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

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 envisage setting up a programme later this year, hopefully in collaboration with Ananda's University of Tomorrow and Matthijs Cornelissen'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. Moreover, when you go to higher levels of intuition, that automatically brings in a greater sense of human unity: the sense of 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 it and disseminating that knowledge. The University could play a key role here.

From an interview by Alan

visit the website at:  
[universityofhumanunity.org](http://universityofhumanunity.org)

## LETTER

Dear Auroville Today,

I enjoyed the interview with Abha and Claude in the November 2007 issue. I would like to add to Claude's 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 not make 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 and be executed 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 immeasurable 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)

