

# ऋतम् • Ritam

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A Journal of Material and Spiritual Researches in Auroville

Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research

## **RITAM**

A bi-annual journal of material and spiritual researches in Auroville

### **Our aim:**

- This is a journal under SAIER connecting the various units under its umbrella, with the focus on education and other related areas of research.
- The purpose is to create a space where we express and share our work in Auroville and also invite others to share their perceptions with a view to look at where we stand with reference to the ideal.
- It will publish articles, interviews etc. which are relevant to the Charter of Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as those from elsewhere.
- This journal is for both Aurovilians as well as others who are looking to Auroville for pioneering work in many fields.
- The goal is to understand better the spirit of Auroville and in that context what we are doing and what further we can do.

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*Please email us at [saiier@auroville.org](mailto:saiier@auroville.org) in with your views and for any other information. We hope you enjoy this issue!*

*Editor*

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# *The Truth behind Appearances*

*The Mother comments on a passage from The Life Divine*

The only really important thing modern science has discovered is that from the purely outer and physical point of view things are not what they seem to be. When you look at a body, a human being, an object, a landscape, you perceive these things with the help of your eyes, your touch, hearing and, for the details, smell and taste; well, science tells you: “All that is illusory, you don’t see things at all as they are, you don’t touch them as they really are, you don’t smell them as they really are, you don’t taste them as they really are. It is the structure of your organs which puts you in contact with these things in a particular way which is entirely superficial, external, illusory and unreal.”

From the point of view of science, you are a mass of—not even of atoms—of something infinitely more imperceptible than an atom, which is in perpetual movement. There is absolutely nothing which is like a face, a nose, eyes, a mouth; it is only just an appearance. And scientists come to this conclusion—like the uncompromising spiritualists of the past—that the world is an illusion. That is a great discovery, very great... One step more and they will enter into the Truth. So, when somebody comes and says, “But I see this, I touch it, I feel it, I am sure of it”, from the scientific point of view it’s nonsense. This could be said only by someone who has never made a scientific study of things as they are. So, by diametrically opposite roads they have come to the same result: the world as you see it is an illusion.

Now what is the truth behind this? People who have sought spiritual knowledge tell you, “We have experienced it”, but of course it is a purely subjective experience; there are as yet no

grounds on which one can say absolutely that the experience is beyond question for everybody. Everyone’s experience is beyond question for him.

In fact, the value of an experience or a discovery could perhaps be proved by the power it gives, the power to change these appearances and transform things, circumstances and the world as it appears to us, in accordance with the will that manifests through that experience. It seems to me that the most universal proof of the validity of an individual or collective experience would be its power to make things—these appearances that we call the world—different from what they are. From the subjective point of view, the effect of the experience on an individual consciousness is an undeniable proof; for one who attains bliss, sovereign peace, unchanging delight, the profound knowledge of things, it is more than proved. The effects on the outer form depend on many other things besides the experience itself—depend perhaps on the first cause of these experiences—but out of all this, one thing seems to be a proof which is accessible to other people as well as to the one who has the experience; it is the power over other people and things—which for the ordinary consciousness is “objective”. For instance, if a person who has attained the state of consciousness I am speaking about, had the power of communicating it to others, it would be partially—only partially—a proof of the reality of his experiences; but further, if the state of consciousness in which he is—for instance, a state of perfect harmony—could create this harmony in the outer world, in what apparently is not harmony, it would be, I think, the proof most readily accepted, even by the materialist scientific mind. If these illusory appearances

could be changed into something more beautiful, more harmonious, happier than the world we live in now, this would perhaps be an undeniable proof. And if we take it a little farther, if, as Sri Aurobindo promises us, the supramental force, consciousness and light transform this world and create a new race, then, just as the apes and animals—if they could speak—could not deny the existence of man, so too man would not be able to deny the existence of these new beings—provided that they are different enough from the human race for this difference to be perceptible even to the deceptive organs of man.

From these deductions it would seem that the most conclusive and obvious aspect and the one which will probably be the first to manifest—probably—will be the aspect of Power, rather than the aspect of Joy or of Truth. For a new race to be founded on earth, it would necessarily have to be protected from other earthly elements in order to be able to survive; and power is protection—not an artificial power, external and false, but the true strength, the triumphant Will. It is therefore not impossible to think that the supramental action, even before being an action of harmonisation, illumination, joy and beauty, might be an action of power, to serve as a protection. Naturally, for this action of power to be truly effective, it would have to be founded on Knowledge and Truth and Love and Harmony; but these things could manifest, visibly, little by little, when the ground, so to say, has been prepared by the action of a sovereign Will and Power.

But for the least of these things to be possible, there must first be a basis of perfect balance, the balance given by a total absence of egoism, a perfect surrender to the Supreme, the true purity: identification with the Supreme. Without this basis of perfect balance, the supramental power is dangerous, and one must on no account seek it or want to pull it down, for even in an infinitesimal quantity it is so powerful and so formidable that it can unbalance the entire system.

Since I am speaking to you about it, I would like to recommend something to you. In your desire for progress and your aspiration for realisation, take great care not to attempt to pull the forces towards you. Give yourself, open yourself with as much disinterestedness as you can attain through a constant self-forgetfulness, increase your receptivity to the utmost, but never try to pull the Force towards you, for wanting to pull is already a dangerous egoism. You may aspire, you may open yourself, you may give yourself, but never seek to take. When things go wrong, people blame the Force, but it is not the Force that is responsible: it is ambition, egoism, ignorance and the weakness of the vessel.

Give yourself generously and with a perfect disinterestedness and from the deeper point of view nothing bad will ever happen to you. Try to take and you will be on the brink of the abyss.

*Questions and Answers* Dec. 18, 1957  
CWM 9: 239-42

# *The scientific Method*

by Georges Van Vrekhem

‘The scientific method’ is the much praised way of practicing science which is supposed to have changed a medieval world into a technological one, because it enabled humanity to unveil some secrets of nature and to use this newly acquired knowledge for mastering nature. The late Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* and friend of Richard Dawkins, wrote: “The invention of the scientific method is, I’m sure we’ll all agree, the most powerful intellectual idea, the most powerful intellectual framework for thinking and investigating and understanding and challenging the world around us that there is, and it rests on the premise that any idea is there to be attacked.”<sup>1</sup>

The all-important first attack took place during the axis time of the Renaissance. The authoritarian dogmas and superstitions of the Catholic Church were put to the test of reason by intellectuals who were reading the rediscovered ancient Greek and Latin authors, and who, inspired by them, launched the movement they called *la nuova scienza*. A decisive confrontation in this general attack was the trial of Galileo Galilei by the Inquisition, lost by Galileo but ultimately won by science.

Galileo’s premises would become the foundations of the revolutionary scientific method. His first premise, and the most important one, was that only matter and material things should be the object of science. This created, from the start, a gap between science on the one side, and religion, occultism and everything else on the other. How sharply this separation was felt by both sides is illustrated precisely by the Galileo Affair, the core of which was the justification of

different worldviews. Matter could be directly experienced by the senses; life and mind – and the non-material worlds of occultism, religion and fantasy or superstition conjured by them – could not. The fundamental materialism of science, and its offhand dumping of all else, have become so common that at present to academic science and its popularization the world is wholly and exclusively material.

Galileo’s second premise was that science cannot handle wholes, it has to divide or reduce them into parts, consisting of smaller parts, consisting of still smaller parts: it is reductionist. This reductionism has been absolute in physical science since Galileo and Descartes, and was later adopted by the biological sciences. A thing consists of parts; if we know all the parts and the parts of the parts, we know the whole. The ‘mystic’ view had always said the contrary, not that the parts explain the whole but that the whole explains the parts, and that the entire universe explains every single part of it, however large or little. “The Universe is one. Its origin can only be the eternal unity. It is a vast organism in which the natural things find their harmony and reciprocal sympathy.” This view, called ‘holism’, is far from defunct and seems on the rise again, for a scientist of the stature of David Bohm has said: “It must always be remembered that, at a deeper level, attention must be given to the whole, which, in turn, acts to guide thought as it abstracts elements which do not in fact have a separate existence.”<sup>2</sup> It is also this indelible intuition of the unity of all things that drives theoretical physics to continue its search for a Grand Unified Theory.

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1 Richard Dawkins: *A Devil’s Chaplain*, p. 184.

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2 David Bohm and David Peat: *Science, Order and Creativity*, p. 142.

However, Richard Lewontin warns against “extreme holism” or “obscurantist holism.” Even if it is true that “the whole is always prior to its parts” and everything is interconnected, “that should not be confused with the methodological claim that no success at all in understanding the world or manipulating it is possible if we cut it up in any way. Such a strong methodological claim we know to be wrong as a matter of historical experience. Whatever the faults of reductionism, we have accomplished a great deal by employing reductionism as a methodological strategy,” wrote Lewontin recently.<sup>1</sup> It is, after all, reductionist science that has made our world. Yet the increasing awareness that “we need much more comprehensive [i.e. holistic] and much less reductionist understanding” may be a sign of “a new sort of science which is being forged at the moment.” (Russell Stannard<sup>2</sup>)

The problem of the whole and its parts is a problem of the mind, and hence cannot be solved by science itself as it recognizes only matter. Science is an exercise of the mind, a mental activity – a blatant truth which is often negated or overlooked. “Mind establishes this fiction of its ordinary commerce that [the given objects] are things with which it can deal separately and not merely as aspects of a whole,” writes Sri Aurobindo. “For, even when it knows that they are not things in themselves, it is obliged to deal with them as if they were things in themselves, otherwise it could not subject them to its own characteristic activity.”<sup>3</sup> This means that “a new sort of science” would have to be the child of a different kind of mind, one that can work with wholes and is not forced, because of its own constitution, to cut everything into parts.

Galileo’s third premise is that all changes in matter are brought about by external forces. Matter is dead, it has no internal life or internal dispositions to react. Moreover, internal actions and reactions, like those in animals and humans,

cannot be determined quantitatively, they cannot be measured and represented by mathematical formulas. This tenet of the scientific method excludes from its field of examination an enormous part of phenomena essential to living organisms and to life itself. It leads unavoidably to the view that the whole of all living beings consists of material elements, which react to each other through external forces. The prime example of this view is the Cartesian metaphor of the machine.

Nothing in the universe exists by itself; everything is hierarchically interconnected with larger entities, to which it belongs, and with smaller entities, which are part of it. (Arthur Koestler gave the name “holon” to a thing in this multi-relationship.<sup>4</sup>) As the mind cannot grasp the totality even of the simplest thing in existence, it projects on it a simplification which makes the thing determinable and perhaps reconstructable. The metaphor of the machine is the consequence of the limited capacities of the mind.

A simple machine is evidently an artifact, but scientific materialism supposes that an ever increasing physical complexity will, at some undefined point, suddenly turn into a living organism. “The entire body of modern science rests on Descartes’ metaphor of the world as a machine, which he introduced in Part V of the *Discourse on Method* as a way of understanding organisms, but then generalized as a way of thinking about the entire universe,” writes Lewontin.<sup>5</sup> In Descartes’ days automata that could perform amazing feats like gesturing, rolling their eyes or whistling were all the rage. “Wandering through the Royal Gardens, Descartes was impressed by some water-driven robots and theorized that human and animal action was likewise machine-like.”<sup>6</sup>

4 “The organism is not a mosaic aggregate of elementary physico-chemical processes, but a hierarchy in which each member, from the sub-cellular level upward, is a closely integrated structure.” Arthur Koestler: *The Ghost in the Machine*, p. 64.

5 Richard Lewontin: op. cit., p. 3.

6 Larry Witham: *By Design*, p. 192.

1 Richard Lewontin: *The Triple Helix*, p. 110.

2 Russell Stannard: *Science and Wonders*, p. 172.

3 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 162.

“While we cannot dispense with metaphors in thinking about nature,” continues Lewontin, “there is a great risk of confusing the metaphor with the thing of real interest. We cease to see the world *as if* it were *like* a machine and take it to *be* a machine. The result is that the properties we ascribe to our object of interest and the questions we ask about it reinforce the original metaphorical image, and we miss the aspects of the system that do not fit the metaphorical approximation.”<sup>1</sup> This is how the cell came to be called a machine (by Monod) and that animals, including humans, are called robots (by Dawkins). There are futurists who expect man-made robots, within half a century or so, to be living organisms.

All this follows from the third premise that in science only external forces are legitimate, at first sight an innocent statement but deadening in its effects. “The problem for biology is that the model of physics, held up as the paradigm for science, is not applicable because the analogues of mass, velocity, and distance do not exist for organisms. ... Organisms move in a viscous medium; they suffer friction; they are too small and too distant from each other to interact gravitationally; their collisions are not elastic; their shapes, masses, and centers of gravity are changing; if they live in water they are buoyant; their paths are constantly being influenced by *external and internal* forces. The characteristic of a living object is that it *reacts* to external stimuli rather than being passively propelled by them,” writes Lewontin, who is a geneticist at Harvard University.<sup>2</sup>

Science, as held by Galileo’s fourth premise, can only work with the primary qualities of things: extension, motion, and mass. Secondary qualities like colour, scent and taste are conditioned by the primary qualities. Like all elaborate mental formations, the scientific method is an instrument, a set of mental formulations which fit more or less together as a whole, and which apply to a certain aspect of ‘objective’ reality. The primary qualities

mentioned are the ones the scientific method can handle. The secondary qualities, sometimes called ‘qualia’, escape its examining grip and are therefore considered of minor importance. Again, the division into primary and secondary qualities was necessary to enable any science to be done at all. But, again, this division has impoverished the world in which we live, reducing it as it were to black and white, this in total contradiction with our experience.

Galileo’s fifth premise says that the language of science is mathematics, using the data of measurement. To quote his own words from *Il Saggiatore*: “Philosophy is written in that vast book which stands forever open before our eyes, I mean the universe; but it cannot be read until we have learnt the language and become familiar with the characters in which it is written. It is written in mathematical language, and the letters are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures, without which means it is humanly impossible to comprehend a single word.”<sup>3</sup> The importance of this step can only be realized when weighing it against the science of the medieval scholastics, which was mainly rhetorical verbosity and sophistry, a mental juggling game in the void with quotations from ancient authors and references as “proofs” from the Bible, the Church Fathers, and dozens of other, mostly contradictory, sources.

The last premise had perhaps the most direct influence on the founding of *la nuova scienza*: all guesses, theses, or theories have to be tested as to their truth and reality. It was the authentic, innate need of truth that, after centuries of theological, philosophical and pseudo-scientific fiction, led to the rule of the experiment as an absolute precondition for the acceptance of any idea, thesis or theory. “Correctness is more likely to be obtained by the experimental method than by any other process,” writes Lewontin.<sup>4</sup> Richard Feynman put it as follows: “In general we look for a new law by the following process. First you

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1 Larry Witham: op. cit., p. 4 (italics in the text).

2 id., p. 93 (italics added).

3 P.H. Crombie: *Medieval and Early Modern Science*, vol. II, p. 142.

4 Ullica Segerstråle: *Defenders of the Truth*, p. 105.

guess. Don't laugh, this is the most important step. Then you compute the consequences. Compare the consequences to experience. If it disagrees with experience, the guess is wrong. In that simple statement is the key to science. It doesn't matter how beautiful your guess is or how smart you are or what your name is: if it disagrees with experience, it's wrong. That's all there is to it."<sup>1</sup>

Experimentation became the norm during the birth period of the modern sciences. William Gilbert (1544-1613), in his great book on magnetism *De Magnete*, was one of the first "to set out clearly in print the essence of the scientific method: the testing of hypotheses by rigorous experiments." Realdus Columbus, Vesalius' successor as professor of anatomy in Padua, told his students: "Try the experiment and find out whether what I have said agrees with the thing itself." (Formerly, anatomy lessons consisted mainly in reading passages from Galen as comments rather than dissections.) William Harvey (1578-1657), who discovered the circulation of the blood, wrote: "I do not profess to learn and teach anatomy from the axioms of the philosophers, but [directly] from dissections and from the fabric of nature." This experimental approach was enthusiastically espoused by the Royal Society, and firmly established, well before the end of the seventeenth century, as *the scientific method*.<sup>2</sup>

### Is there a scientific method?

To ask this question after the matter discussed in the previous section may seem nonsensical. Yet, Isabelle Stengers sounds a first warning: "Every science has its own methods which cannot be applied without precautions to other sciences. Moreover, the methods evolve within the same science. To speak of *the* experimental method of physics or biology is omitting to take into account the evolution of the practices and the kinds of argumentation proper to each particular period,

country, or even [scientific] institution."<sup>3</sup> Henry Bauer, in his *Scientific Literacy and the Myth of the Scientific Method*, goes at it more directly: "The scientific method is a myth, it does not explain the success of science, and scientists in practice do not follow the method."<sup>4</sup>

Science, writes Bauer, "begins by chance and caprice, at the frontier, with hardly a shadow of the scientific method in evidence," after which it is "sieved, tested and modified until it appears in the textbooks." This sieving and testing happens in the course of the procedure of trying to have a new idea or discovery accepted by the community of scientists. First there is the writing of a paper expounding the idea; then the paper must be submitted to one of the numerous publications in the discipline, where it is reviewed by a jury of senior scientists called 'peers'; if the peers find the idea interesting and the authors of the paper are lucky, it will be published. More luck may bring the paper – one in a stream of hundreds which are continually published – to the attention of the scientific community. If the new idea is accepted, it may be integrated into the discipline's reigning paradigm and perhaps in the general scientific paradigm. After having negotiated all these hurdles, the new idea may be included in the text books, the ultimate consecration, and spread through academia.

"The ubiquity of intuition in science can scarcely be overlooked," writes John Ziman, confirming that "science begins by chance and caprice."<sup>5</sup> It is true that in most cases the intuition is the spark made possible by the tension of much reflection or experimenting. Newton's apple is a well-known example; whether a real event or legend, it certainly tells of an instant illumination. Wallace's theory of evolution came to him "in a sudden flash of insight" during a bout of fever on a tropical island. August Kekulé 'saw' the

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3 Isabelle Stengers and B. Bensaude-Vincent: *100 mots pour penser la science*, p. 244 (italics in the text).

4 Henry Bauer: *Scientific Literacy and the Myth of the Scientific Method*, p. 39.

5 John Ziman: *Reliable Knowledge*, p. 101.

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1 Simon Singh: *Big Bang*, p. 357.

2 John Gribbin: *The Fellowship*, pp. 3, 104, 119, 50.

structure of the benzene ring, the key to organic chemistry, while dozing. Descartes had his three dreams in a similar condition; they were the call to his vocation and the occult instigation of his philosophy of rationalism. Mendeleev's fundamental insight of the periodic table of elements came to him also in a dream.

Albert Einstein narrated: "The breakthrough came suddenly one day. I was sitting in a chair in my patent office in Bern. Suddenly the thought struck me: If a man falls freely, he does not feel his own weight. I was taken aback. This simple thought experiment made a deep impression on me. This led me to the theory of gravity."<sup>1</sup> For Watson and Crick, co-discoverers of the double helix structure of the DNA molecule, "the penny dropped, a moment of great insight." "At three o'clock one morning, lying sleeplessly on his bed in a small hostel, Werner Heisenberg knew that he had the tool enabling him to perform calculations in his new [quantum] mechanics. So he rose from his bed and started figuring. In his feverish state he made endless slips and errors and had to start over again and again. But finally he got an answer, and it was more than he could have dreamed for. What he had found was a gift from above, he thought, a discovery of unwarranted and unexpected proportions."<sup>2</sup>

These examples must suffice, but it seems that hardly any important theoretical discovery is the end product of an effort of logical reasoning: most discoveries, and certainly the important ones, are the consequence of a sudden illumination. The same conclusion could be drawn from the history of biological and technological research. The way Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin will readily come to mind, but Royston Roberts has filled a volume with "accidental discoveries in science" and called it *Serendipity*. Scientism attacks with disdain all forms of irrationality on every possible occasion. Yet, strange to say, it has no explanation for the phenomenon of rational consciousness, which it supposes to be a material

"activity of neurons in the central nervous system;" and the history of science is a succession of irrational illuminations without which neither science nor scientism would exist.

"What has been presented as the scientific method, at any given time, has been a simplified snapshot of an intrinsically much more opportunistic enterprise," writes Piet Hut, the Dutch astronomer. "The strength of science is not at all in its currently accepted method. The strength is the fact that scientists allow the method to change."<sup>3</sup> And Henry Wolpert concludes his enquiry among fellow scientists thus: "Many famous scientists have given advice [to their younger colleagues]: try many things; do what makes your heart leap; think big; dare to explore where there is no light; challenge expectation; *cherchez le paradox*; be sloppy so that something unexpected happens, but not so sloppy that you can't tell what happened; turn it on its head; never try to solve a problem until you can guess the answer; precision encourages the imagination; seek simplicity; seek beauty ... One could do no better than to try them all. No one method, no paradigm, will capture the process of science. There is no such thing as *the scientific method*."<sup>4</sup>

The problem of the scientific method, especially in biology, becomes clearer if one realizes that the Galilean premises are relevant to *material* objects. Material objects have no internal reactions and are moved by impacts of external forces. If the external circumstances remain the same, material objects will not change; therefore can be counted, measured and weighed. But, as Lewontin remarks, first, in nature external circumstances never remain the same, and, second, "the characteristic of a living object is that it *reacts* to external stimuli rather than being passively propelled by them."<sup>5</sup> "Scientific laws only give a schematic account of material process

1 Marcus Chown: *Quantum Theory Cannot Hurt You*, p. 117.  
2 David Lindley: *Uncertainty*, pp. 113-14.

3 John Brockman (ed.): *What Are You Optimistic About?* p. 351.  
4 Lewis Wolpert: *The "Unnatural Nature of Science*, p. 108 (italics in the text).  
5 Richard Lewontin: op. cit., p. 93 (italics added).

of Nature – as a valid scheme they can be used for reproducing or extending at will a material process, but obviously they cannot give an account of the thing itself,” writes Sri Aurobindo,<sup>1</sup> and certainly not of a living organism.

“... We live in the surface mind of ignorance, do not know what is going on behind and see only the phenomenal process of Nature. There the apparent fact is an overwhelming determinism of Nature and as our surface consciousness is part

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*, p. 214.

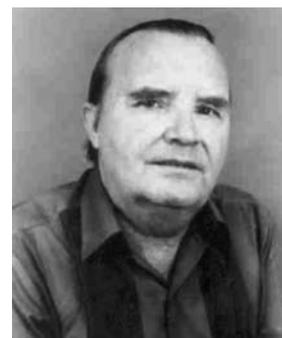
of that process, we are unable to see the other term of the biune reality. For practical purposes, on the surface there is an entire determinism in Matter – though this is now disputed by the latest school of Science [*at the time of writing quantum mechanics*]. As Life emerges a certain plasticity sets in, so that it is difficult to predict anything as exactly as one predicts material things that obey a rigid law.”<sup>2</sup> And the plasticity increases with the growth of Mind.

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<sup>2</sup> id., p. 474.

### **Georges Van Vrekhem**

Born 1935 he is a Flemish-speaking Belgian who writes in English. Well-known in his country as a journalist, poet and playwright, he first got acquainted with the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in 1964. In 1970 he joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry and in 1978 he became a member of Auroville, where he is still living. He is the author of many books on the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, some of which have been translated into Dutch, French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish.



# *Evolution towards Human Unity*

*Some passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother  
with comments on their application to Auroville  
by Shraddhavan*

*In April and May of 2009, some of the Savitri Bhavan team-members were feeling an urgent need for reorganisation there, to keep up with a big expansion in our premises and activities. By an interesting synchronicity, around that time we were studying, under the leadership of Professor Kittu Reddy of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the last section of The Renaissance in India – a collection of Sri Aurobindo's writings on Indian culture. The last section is entitled 'Indian Polity' and deals with social organisation. We found there some passages that seemed to cast a lot of light on the situation we were facing – and we saw that this situation was not restricted just to our own project : what Sri Aurobindo was saying seemed relevant not only to our own concerns, but to the collective organisation of Auroville, of India and the whole world. Here are some extracts :*

Human society has in its growth to pass through three stages of evolution before it can arrive at the completeness of its possibilities.

The first is a condition in which the forms and activities of the communal existence are those of the spontaneous play of the powers and principles of its life. All its growth, all its formations, customs, institutions are then a natural organic development,— the motive and constructive power coming mostly from the subconscious principle of the life within it,—expressing, but without deliberate intention, the communal psychology, temperament, vital and physical need, and persisting or altering partly under the pressure of an internal impulse, partly under that of the environment acting on the communal mind and temper.

In this stage the people is not yet intelligently self-conscious in the way of the reason, is not yet a thinking collective being, and it does not

try to govern its whole communal existence by the reasoning will, but lives according to its vital intuitions or their first mental renderings. ...

*The Renaissance in India* CWSA 20:398

*We could clearly see that as Savitri Bhavan has developed over the previous ten years, this was what we had been doing: we had a vision, and for its realisation we had been 'playing it by ear', doing what seemed right at the time, improvising, and being ready to change according to the need of the moment. That had worked very well so far – but now we seemed to have reached a threshold where something 'more organised', 'more structured', felt like an urgent need. And we were applying our minds to find a solution. And this need we were feeling seemed to reflect a trend in Auroville as a whole, where over the past years there has been a lot of reflection about our internal organisation.*

A second stage of the society is that in which the communal mind becomes more and more intellectually self-conscious, first in its more cultured minds, then more generally, first broadly, then more and more minutely and in all the parts of its life. It learns to review and deal with its own life, communal ideas, needs, institutions in the light of the developed intelligence and finally by the power of the critical and constructive reason.

This is a stage which is full of great possibilities but attended too by serious characteristic dangers.

Its first advantages are those which go always with the increase of a clear and understanding and finally an exact and scientific knowledge and the culminating stage is the strict and armoured efficiency which the critical and constructive, the

scientific reason used to the fullest degree offers as its reward and consequence.

Another and greater outcome of this stage of social evolution is the emergence of high and luminous ideals which promise to raise man beyond the limits of the vital being, beyond his first social, economic and political needs and desires and out of their customary moulds and inspire an impulse of bold experiment with the communal life which opens a field of possibility for the realisation of a more and more ideal society.

This application of the scientific mind to life with the strict, well-finished, armoured efficiency which is its normal highest result, this pursuit of great consciously proposed social and political ideals and the progress which is the index of the ground covered in the endeavour, have been, with whatever limits and drawbacks, the distinguishing advantages of the political and social effort of Europe.

Ibid. p. 399

*In Auroville there is a great reluctance to come to the point of applying the scientific mind to life, because many of us have experienced the down-side of that effort; many Aurovilians have come here very specifically to get away from the limitations and drawbacks of that kind of system. So we resonate strongly with what Sri Aurobindo says next :*

On the other hand the tendency of the reason when it pretends to deal with the materials of life as its absolute governor, is to look too far away from the reality of the society as a living growth and to treat it as a mechanism which can be manipulated at will and constructed like so much dead wood or iron according to the arbitrary dictates of the intelligence.

The sophisticating, labouring, constructing, efficient, mechanising reason loses hold of the simple principles of a people's vitality; it cuts it away from the secret roots of its life.

The result is an exaggerated dependence on system and institution, on legislation and administration and the deadly tendency to

develop, in place of a living people, a mechanical State. An instrument of the communal life tries to take the place of the life itself and there is created a powerful but mechanical and artificial organisation; but, as the price of this exterior gain, there is lost the truth of life of an organically self-developing communal soul in the body of a free and living people.

It is this error of the scientific reason stifling the work of the vital and the spiritual intuition under the dead weight of its mechanical method which is the weakness of Europe and has deceived her aspiration and prevented her from arriving at the true realisation of her own higher ideals.

Ibid. p. 400

*In Auroville today, this is a real and living question : how can our city continue to grow in size, in complexity, in effectiveness and credibility, and yet avoid this deadening institutionalisation which would cut us away from the secret roots of our life, and above all the roots of Auroville's very specific mission? Sri Aurobindo gives us the following answer :*

It is only by reaching a third stage of the evolution of the collective social as of the individual human being that the ideals first seized and cherished by the thought of man can discover their own real source and character and their true means and conditions of effectuation or the perfect society be anything more than a vision on a shining cloud constantly run after in a circle and constantly deceiving the hope and escaping the embrace.

That will be when man in the collectivity begins to live more deeply and to govern his collective life neither primarily by the needs, instincts, intuitions welling up out of the vital self, nor secondarily by the constructions of the reasoning mind, but first, foremost and always by the power of unity, sympathy, spontaneous liberty, supple and living order of his discovered greater self and spirit in which the individual and the communal existence have their law of freedom, perfection and oneness.

Ibid. p.400

*This is what Mother was always telling us, and is still telling us through her messages and talks to Aurovilians : Auroville will only become what it is meant to be, when there are enough 'true Aurovilians' — and she has carefully defined for us what she means by that:*

The first necessity is the inner discovery — in order to know what one truly is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At our centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.

MCW 13:207

*In the early years of Auroville it was, I feel, more widely understood that the real work to be done here was a change of consciousness — that the city could never be built, or at least could never become what it is really intended to be, without a change of consciousness which would bring us into a truly effective harmony with a higher Will that knows better than we with our limited minds can ever do what needs to be done at each moment.*

*In the chapter we were reading, Sri Aurobindo went on to write (in about 1918) :*

That is a rule that has not yet anywhere found its right conditions for even beginning its effort, for it can only come when man's attempt to reach and abide by the law of the spiritual existence is no longer an exceptional aim for individuals or else degraded in its more general aspiration to the form of a popular religion, but is recognised and followed out as the imperative need of his being and its true and right attainment the necessity of the next step in the evolution of the race.

CWSA 20:400-01

*Our teacher, Kittu Reddy, has grown up in the Ashram from the age of five, and was asked by the Mother to start teaching when he was only in his teens. She guided him in the study of Sri Aurobindo's books on social psychology : The*

*Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, and the essays which used to be published as The Foundations of Indian Culture and which are now collected in the volume The Renaissance in India. When we came to this point in our reading, he insistently reminded us that the Ashram had been created to begin this effort, and that the founding of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education was a continuation of that effort, and that Auroville has been specifically created by the Mother as a place where this effort can be pursued on a larger and wider collective scale.*

*In a letter of 1964, referring to the organisation of the Ashram, the Mother wrote :*

Sri Aurobindo has told us, and we are convinced by experience, that above the mind there is a consciousness much wiser than the mental wisdom, and in the depths of things there is a will much more powerful than the human will.

All our endeavour is to make this consciousness and this will govern our lives and action and organize all our activities.

It is the way in which the Ashram has been created. Since 1926 when Sri Aurobindo retired and gave me full charge of it (at that time there were only two rented houses and a handful of disciples) all has grown up and developed like the growth of a forest, and each service was created not by any artificial planning but by a living and dynamic need.

This is the secret of constant growth and endless progress.

The present difficulties come chiefly from psychological resistances in the disciples, and the yielding to the intrusion of mental methods which have corrupted the initial working.

A growth and purification of the consciousness is the only remedy.

16.03.1964

*In these words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother we found a powerful inspiration for the restructuring we were attempting at Savitri Bhavan, and we like to share them here, in the hope that they might give some inspiring guidance to*

*our on-going effort to realise a truly effective collective organisation for Auroville. For forty years we have been trying 'to govern [our] collective life ... primarily by the needs, instincts, intuitions welling up out of the vital self; Now we experience a pressing need to make these life-intuitions more aware and more organised: we want to rationalise and generalise in order to give more structure to our collective organisation, and to enable us to realise more effectively the high ideals which are inspiring us. But at the same time we want to avoid the deadening effect of a too rational approach which loses touch with deeper underlying realities. So the challenge is to find a way of opening up not only our individual lives and consciousness but our collective living and above all our collective decision-making to a higher will and wisdom.*

*The Mother has given us Matrimandir as the Soul of Auroville, a powerful radiating centre for transformation. But for the intuitions and inspirations that we receive from this centre to become powerfully effective in our individual and collective lives, they need to be expressed in our minds, lives and bodies, in all our thoughts, feelings and activities. Essentially this is an individual work, but the intention is that these individual efforts and realisations should find expression in the whole life of our city. For this, deep concentration in the soul is the starting point; the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother then show us the way to clarify our thought and our will; and then we have to live them out - in our work-places, our homes, on the roads and in the schools, in our play, and in our interactions with everyone we come into contact with: colleagues, visitors, business contacts, government officials, anyone we may have to deal with. This is the way that what pours down onto the Crystal in the Chamber will become a powerful force for change in the physical collectivity. It will only happen when, to use Sri Aurobindo's words :*

The attempt to reach and abide by the law of the spiritual existence is no longer an exceptional aim for individuals ... but is recognised and followed

out as the imperative need of [our collective] being.

CWSA 20:398

*In his book The Ideal of Human Unity Sri Aurobindo examines how this persistent ideal has been working itself out in the past development of humanity, and how it could be realized in the future. He gives as the ultimate solution a change in the general consciousness which would lead to :*

The clear recognition by man in all his thought and life of a single soul in humanity of which each man and each people is an incarnation and soul-form; an ascension of man beyond the principle of ego which lives by separateness,— and yet there must be no destruction of individuality, for without that man would stagnate; a principle and arrangement of the common life which would give free play to individual variation, interchange in diversity and the need of adventure and conquest by which the soul of man lives and grows great, and sufficient means of expressing all the resultant complex life and growth in a flexible and progressive form of human society.

*The Ideal of Human Unity CWSA 25:563*

*How could this change come about? Recognising the rise of a sort of philosophical 'religion of humanity' called 'Humanism' which today is inspiring all the growing movements for human rights, civil rights, women's and children's rights, concern for the environment and greater sustainability and so on, Sri Aurobindo says that this Humanism needs to become spiritualised for it to gain the psychological strength to bring about real changes in our human behaviour. Mere idealism is not enough to change us fundamentally. For that a real experiential change is needed.*

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. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of cooperation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race. To go into all that this implies would be too large a subject to be entered upon here; it is enough to point out that in this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer

self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.

Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way from the inner truth to the outer forms. Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed.

But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent,— perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing,— the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.

*Ibid.* 577-78

*In The Human Cycle, he has written :*

This is a solution to which it may be objected that it puts off the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date in the future evolution of the race. For it means that no machinery invented by the reason can perfect either the individual or the collective man; an inner change is needed in human nature, a change too difficult to be ever effected except by the few. This is not certain; but in any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind. Then the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal and a greater race must come that will be capable of the spiritual change, a form of life must be born that is nearer to the divine. After all there is no logical necessity for the conclusion that the change cannot begin at all because its perfection is not immediately possible. A decisive turn of mankind to the spiritual ideal, the beginning of a constant ascent and guidance towards the heights may not be altogether impossible, even if the summits are attainable at first only by the pioneer few and far-off to the tread of the race. And that beginning may mean the descent of an influence that will alter at once the whole life of mankind in its orientation and

enlarge for ever, as did the development of his reason and more than any development of the reason, its potentialities and all its structure.

*The Human Cycle, CWSA 25:220-21*

A sudden turn can come, a road appear.  
A greater Mind may see a greater Truth,  
Or we may find when all the rest has failed  
Hid in ourselves the key of perfect change.

*Savitri — A Legend and a Symbol, p. 256*

### **Shraddhavan**

This is the Sanskrit name given by the Mother in 1972 to a young Englishwoman who had left her country, after completing studies in English Language and Literature as well as Library Science, to join the up-coming project of Auroville. Since 1999 she has been the Project Coordinator of Savitri Bhavan, a centre of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother Studies in Auroville.



# *The Secret of the Eternity Game<sup>1</sup>*

*by Toby Neuman*

Sometimes, after a long search and much effort you find the ‘thing’ or ‘secret’ just in front of you. It was there all the time, with you and around you, but you failed to see or recognize it.

How often do we have the feeling that we are stuck or don’t know why we have to go through something? The orientation is lacking and we know, of course, that solutions are somewhere - but for the moment they are inaccessible, which increases the feeling of being ‘stuck’.

We also know that many methods are available to help us and that we only have to ask or call to see things revealed in a new light and understanding.

The Eternity Game gives us such a helping hand. Just playing with these apparently simple cards opens up hidden parts in our being which were waiting for the call to be discovered and shed a new light.

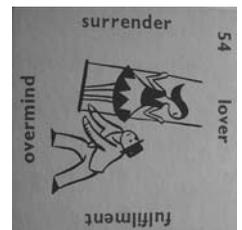
The Eternity Game was created in 1973 by Medhananda, who joined the Ashram in 1952. He combined the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with his vast knowledge of symbols, numbers, words and occult forces into a card game. Medhananda worked in the Ashram as Librarian of the Sri Aurobindo Library, and as such had easy access to a rich supply of occult, spiritual and philosophical books which he assimilated. The sheer richness of Medhananda’s teachings, publications and drawings are found in the issues of the journal ‘Equals One (=1)’ which he edited and wrote for from 1965 to 1978.

<sup>1</sup> The cards displayed are the version of 1973. Most of the displayed cards were drawn during the writing of this article.

The Eternity Game was published for the first time in a limited edition in 1973, and distributed almost exclusively among friends and Aurovilians. Later, Spanish, German and Dutch editions were made. So far the Eternity Game has never reached a broad public and could therefore hardly survive. We are still in some way in this situation. If we see how many books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are sold, the Eternity Game should have a much wider circulation. Perhaps with a growing understanding, the Game will become more widely appreciated. As one of the ‘new consciousness’ games it has the potentiality to gain much wider use, like the I Ching or the Tarot, which are of another era.

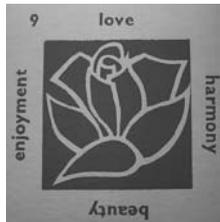
Each of the 64 cards of the Game represents a specific force, a consciousness, a part of the Self, which is active and directs your situation and even tells you which path to follow.

Let us elaborate a little on how the Game works: for example, you have been asked to involve yourself with a certain work and you really do not know what to do. The Eternity Game



gives the answer as shown in the above card: ‘Surrender’. The card shows Surrender ‘on top’. The card 54 “Lover” is turned clockwise by 90°. This one of the twelve ‘Helpers’ in the game: Sri Krishna, living in the Overmind, asks you to ‘surrender’. We all know that an integral, sincere surrender is not simple, but surrender is an important requisite to proceed with the yoga. If surrender succeeds, Sri Aurobindo tells us in ‘The Synthesis of Yoga’, fulfilment is certain. If we look from this perspective at our question of

whether to accept the work- offer or not, then a few conclusions can be drawn on the basis of this answer given by the Eternity Game. The ‘work-offer’ is of a high level. The Overmind has given you the opportunity to take up this work. It gives you the possibility - but not without a personal direction: you have to surrender, you have to work, you have to submit yourself. So the answer is a clear ‘yes’ but with a condition.



The card itself and its position give more information. The number is: ‘54’. In numerology this is a ‘9’ number (5 + 4). Card number ‘9’ is Mahalaksmi. Love and Lover are well connected.

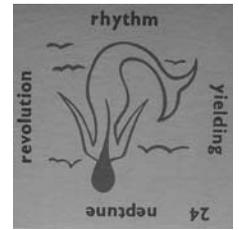
One of the rules of the game is that all cards are number-connected. All ‘9’ cards have a strong connection to ‘Love’.

The position of the square cards – the 4 different sides are all equally important – tells us how the consciousness is acting: instrumental or conditional, gifted or fulfilling, blocking or opening, balanced or distorted. Each side has its own particular message, so on an individual basis the 64 cards can give you 254 messages. In combination with each other there are thousands and thousands of subtleties, hints, advices, predictions, clarifications and jokes to be discovered.

To comprehend the Eternity Game fully takes some time. It emanates from the Integral Yoga and it may take a while before one truly grasps one particular card. The ever-expanding understanding and experiences are precisely what makes the game so rich and interesting to play. Even after playing and working with the Game for many years, new levels of understanding may open up and even the meaning of the cards themselves can change for us. These numerous experiences make the Game a close friend, providing every time new surprises and deeper understanding.

This friend of yours is patient and wants to help. It gives its advice with an unexpected precision and clarity if you are open to its suggestions.

To get to know the cards and start playing is simple: draw a card every morning after a meditation. Let’s suppose that on one of these mornings you drew a blue card: ‘Neptune’, a planet card. The card shows

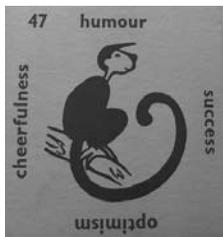


itself bottom-up. Neptune is upside down: rhythm - Neptune, the God of the (primordial) Waters (Nun in Egyptian), with the enormous force to change the tides continuously. For an individual it is impossible to influence the magnitude of what is coming. The day passes and in the evening you look at the card again. You let the day go by in your mind and the moments when that strong ‘rhythm’ presents itself clearly in the mind. The card ‘knew’ already what was coming. The force which was working behind this card was already acting and the card tries to make you aware of it. The position of the card also tells you that when the rhythm came, you were basically resisting it, and instead of following and going with the rhythm you became a stronghold against the rhythm and refused to go along with all the consequences this might have. This is obvious from the upside-down position of the card. In the evening, looking at the card again, you become more aware of the situation which has taken place. You start to connect with that movement in a direct way. The force, the consciousness,



Neptune in this case, which was active and wanted to tell you ‘something’ pulled the card and used your hand so that you were able to contact it. In the same way as you have drawn the card the

force gave you the experience that day. There is a oneness behind selecting the card and the situation which you have experienced. It is good when you see the card again in the evening and become aware not only of the situation on this day but also of the drawing in the morning, to say ‘thank you’ to the force which was behind both. The beings are looking over your shoulder and are whispering into your ear. You had better listen, carefully.



After some months, once you have started to understand the symbols of the cards, the relation between you and the Eternity Game changes and becomes more intense.

In the early morning when you start playing the Eternity Game, you feel that you get attracted to one specific card. Your hand and body are open and this card gives you a specific feeling. Of course, the cards lie face down; but the hand senses and feels things the eye cannot see. A clear feeling, a clear signal, a clear message comes and fills the body with its presence: 'Humour' is calling. Ganesha is with you today. Obstacles will be removed, 'things are coming together', a cheerfulness is in the yoga today. Suddenly, sometimes even without a sign, without knowing why you are in a certain situation, meeting someone or getting a letter or an email, your hand and body start to feel the same energy as in the morning when you drew the card. There is an immediate recognition. Through the layers of our outer consciousness a clear signal pierces through. You are connected and understand what is going on. An important situation or meeting takes place between you and Ganesha.

One by one the experiences link up into a chain and a pattern becomes visible in the cards you draw. Of course you keep track of all the cards drawn in your note book and make little remarks about what happened on that particular day. Also the position of the card is noted down so the direction of the suggestion becomes visible. You look back and ponder over the cards of the last months. You read the notes of the months which have passed. You find that the row reveals a trend. The row can reveal systematically the same problem, opportunity or state of affairs. The row reveals when the inner contact started and reveals what to do next. It also reveals when you changed levels.

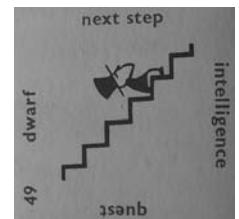
It is then that the Eternity Game will tell you that it is time for another Game: your next

step in the ascending levels of the game. The questioning starts, the quest starts. Only with the right questions can we go forward. The famous 'Dwarf' needed only two steps to gain earth and heaven and then looked around for the third step.

'Because the way of the mind is continuous inquiry, eternal **quest** appears: a search for higher truth than itself, and we have to follow it on this exploration.'<sup>1</sup>

To get a clear picture for the entire row of cards which you have drawn each day over the last few months, you can draw one card, one card for the entire row as a whole, with the question: 'What is behind this chain of experiences?' Or: 'Where are all these experiences leading?' We slowly separate ourselves from day-to-day events and watch the movement from a certain distance; we become the witness, the observer. Again a force, a power offers its helping hand and advises the method of the process. From a one-card game the two-card game appears. Two birds on the branch: one is eating, the other one is watching.

The practical exploration of the different parts of the Self has come to a point where the different cards start to explain why things are happening as they happen. We go from the day-to-day events to the



cause-and-effect aspect. We start to see that things are really connected. Situations which we thought were disconnected suddenly reveal how they interrelate with each other. We 'play' with the cards, but basically we are playing with levels of consciousness. By playing with and understanding the cards, the awareness grows that there is no difference between 'inner' and 'outer' and that connections exist on many levels. The 'card' looks beyond all differences and appearances. And because the 'card' is only a medium, it makes us aware of many other symbols that the forces are using as mediums.

<sup>1</sup> The Eternity Game page 101

Numbers, words, images, sounds, colors are all symbols, and the growing sensitivity to all these different aspects of reality increases dramatically. It is not only that every category (colour, number, sounds, images etc.) is in itself its own medium but there are also systematic combinations between the categories.

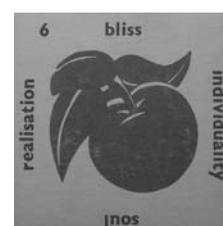
When you are playing regularly and daily, and when you are well-connected with the force the 'card' represents, you recognize the situation(s) during the day. The card you drew in the morning showed you already what would happen. So when the situation emerges the combination or (part of it) presents itself. Since you are working on that occult level, you recognize the different symbols of the situation, you see the colour and you hear the sound. You also recognize when one of the symbols is missing. Not only what is there is important, but also what is not there but is supposed to be there, is important. This can be a message in itself, as if the force is hiding something. Then you start to search. Everything was there but, for example, where is the missing number? These beautiful details hide whole worlds. So you ask the Eternity Game, 'Why did I meet you and why did you hide your number?' The answer can be very revealing, but we also have to say that sometimes it doesn't make any sense at all. The cards can just say: 'Wait, it will come later', or 'You have to listen better, it was there, but you didn't see it'. Or the situation has not reached its fulfillment yet, it has to go to another stage or process, and the missing number can tell you what this is. This is the art of correct interpretation which is only possible after quite some study.

It should be mentioned and understood that the Game has its peculiarities. Sometimes when you have asked a question, and the day has passed, the card drawn at the end of the day as a confirmation looks alien, without any connection to us, as if the Game is saying, 'I am not going to tell you anything today'. It could be that the question you have asked appears to be 'wrong' (not appropriate) or you are in a 'bewildered' state or you are too interested and involved in the

outcome. When the player is trapped in his/her own desires or preferences, the gods look to the other side and keep silent. There is no contact. But even then the Game does its work. The magic second card brings you back into your own Self and brings the situation back to normal. It takes a while but sometimes you need a handle to reverse or understand the situation.

The experiences continue into the nights as well. Dreams, if remembered, become self-explanatory with the cards. Even cards themselves appear as symbols in dreams. The symbols are well-chosen and refer to archetypal forces hidden in our subconscious. Cherries, animals, trees, lakes are equally important as progress symbols, and the cards can help to explain or interpret the symbols or where those dreams come from.

Let us give an example: in an apparently unimportant dream a face of an elderly lady appeared to me and tried to tell me something, but there were no words. It was a stern face. The face in my dream



remained in my memory for many years and without any particular reason I asked the cards for an explanation. The answer was: Number 6: Bliss. This is the number 3 in the Sat-Chit-Ananda series. This is a very important card, it is one of the top 6 golden cards! I was surprised: How could this seemingly unimportant dream be so important? It puzzled me for years. How was I to connect this dream with the Bliss-card? Many years passed without any explanation or hint, and finally I forgot about it. And then, one day, in an apartment, I met that same face and recognized it as the face in my dream years ago. I got a shock and was alert. The lady turned out to be one of my main teachers of esoteric phenomena. I spent many years with this lady. Every word of her teaching was pure joy. On these occasions it is as if the inner self 'rings you up' and you have to take up the telephone. There is nothing without a meaning, nothing without a message or direction.

When you start playing, you first question the daily situations, then you become gradually an observer of those situations, and the next stage can be that the Game becomes an adviser for the required direction. This is the moment when the Game starts to intervene actively in your life.

Medhananda says about that state: “Who is playing with whom? Are you playing with the forces or are the forces playing with you?”

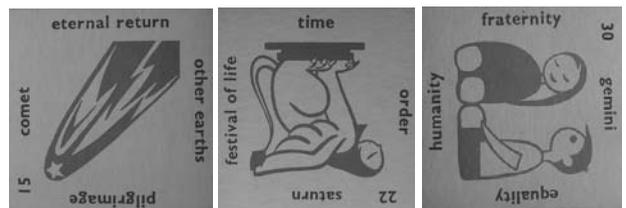
As said earlier, when you play regularly with the cards and the patterns become visible, it might happen that the same cards appear over and over again. This is the moment to be very alert. It means that somehow a message is not getting through and starts to push. Usually it starts with a friendly advice. Later, when the advice is not followed, the ‘tone’ of the Eternity Game becomes more serious. If we persist in our behaviour and do not listen to our ‘second self’ the Eternity Game even starts to warn us. From a friendly ‘Call’ (Card 17: Venus) the next answer is ‘sincere’ (card 31: Cancer) and you may find yourself with Saturn (22) who tells you: ‘Order’, which means: ‘get yourself together’.

The interpretation of the cards and their relation with each other needs a good understanding of every single card. The cards have to start to speak to you and you have to start listening to them. This is how you gather your own insights and experiences. As a complement, you can play also for other people and see what the cards are telling you about the other person. You then start to relate the experiences of others with the cards. Step by step, having thus collected many experiences with the cards of yourself and of others, you develop a relationship with the cards and are able recognize a common feeling or experience or situation which is connected to that specific card. The direct knowledge and the intuitive recognition of the force behind the card is the most relevant part. Second, and equally important, is the sharing of these experiences with others. It is astonishing to see that the correlation of the cards matches other people’s experiences. Thirdly, it is important to keep in mind that the cards are only a medium.

Don’t mistake the medium for the force itself. The force is the common denominator, and it expresses itself through the card. Therefore the experience of one card is similar for everyone because the force working through the card is similar.

After we have watched our actions and dreams, we start to understand how the cards work. The next step is that we want to be more in control of situations. Can we influence certain events and outcomes? Yes, we can. But it is not that simple. And sometimes you have to do things which are very alien to your nature. And we have to say also that it is not always possible. It depends very much in what kind of situations you are and what your possibilities are to countervail.

Let us explore this with an example. To start this exercise, draw three cards representing past, present and future. We want to know the forces behind the past, present, and future of a certain situation. Especially you want to know in what context we have to see an event and what will evolve from it. Can we do something to correct or reverse the likely outcome if we get to know what caused it and drives it? Just as an exercise, let us see this combination:



There are two blue cards (past and present) and one green one (future). None of the cards is positioned straight, they all lie on their side or upside-down. The three cards are not well oriented, the row seems chaotic, the cards all lie in different positions. And what is even more disturbing is that Saturn, a very strong card, is upside- down. It is a relatively low drawing: only blue and green cards. No higher colour is present. The interpretation starts positively with the Comet, number 15: The person or group faces a similar problem or situation as in the

past. There has been a meeting or a situation or a confrontation which has taken place in the past. It is a repetition of a past experience, which might even have happened lifetimes ago<sup>1</sup>, under different circumstances, but the essence is the same, the repetition is the same. The direction of the card is 'gifted' which means that now you experience the situation (again). The position 'eternal return' tells us that we are going through the experience, that it will be a fulfilment. The second card, the present, Saturn, which has 'time' at its base, is 'out of balance'. Nothing is in order and everything seems messy. The card is in the blocking mode (upside-down). This means that there is a standstill of the situation, there is no progress, it is as if the gate is closed. But let us also remind ourselves that a 'blockage' can be a movement of making a pathway free. Gemini, the third card, representing the future, gives us a more positive perspective. Gemini tells us that if we are capable of looking at other people as equals, instead of being arrogant or looking down on them, a more unifying process can / must take place. The card asks you to assume an attitude of treating others as yourself, which is the basis for a true humanity. What is asked from you is an attitude of basic equality in all situations, so that there are no more attachments or preferences. The overall explanation of the three cards is that the person or group finds itself back in a situation which has already occurred in the past, but was unresolved then. Saturn, in this case, helps to resolve this situation by blocking the unfruitful movement of the past from continuing, and says to the person or group that they have to do and see and feel things much more in line with the people around them, with the community. The Eternity Game offers basically three helping hands: firstly, it shows you that you are in a known situation again, secondly, it blocks the unhealthy aspect of this movement, and thirdly, it offers a solution: that you should act on the basis of equality so that you can resolve the knot forever and progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the question the Comet can go back many lives. Some experiences are not fully processed and need more time and actions. It is in this context that the same situation re-occurs in a different set of circumstances.

The basic concept of the Game is that 'everything is a part of the (Divine) Self'. There is nothing outside the Divine Self. Every situation in daily life, in the yoga, in relations, in progress, in work, in experiences, is a part of this Divine Self. Even when it does not seem like it, it is like that. This basic truth which connects everything to everything else is the main principle of the Game. In all situations the compass always points to the Self. One doesn't always see it, but the cards always see it. The Game is constructed around this principle. The card number 'one' which has 'many' as its base, tells you that the 'many' are always pointed towards the 'one'. And when the 'many' are part of the 'one', all cards are part of the one Self. With card two it is exactly the same. The Self is a portion of the one with 'all-in-all' as its base, so when all is a part of the Self, then everything is directed towards the Self. It is exactly the same, just on a different scale. It is the Divine, and the Divine Self. This is where duality comes in, this is card number three.

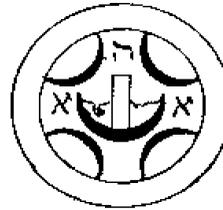
From this basic truth the symbols are chosen. We can argue that the whole creation is more complex and more layered than just 64 different kinds of entities. This is true. Every symbol, however powerful it may be, has a kind of in-built simplification or limitation which makes the force stronger and weaker at the same time. But 64 is a magic number. The 8 x 8 squares on the chess board are well known. We should not approach our numbers in a logical mathematical sense, but more in an occult intuitive way. In numerology, numbers are symbols of forces. Calculations are made to arrive at or reveal 'hidden' characteristics or possibilities. Of course the number '2' can mean 1 plus 1. But it means also duality, separation, complement etc. There are many ways to arrive at 64:  $8 \times 8$ ;  $1 \times 2 + 2 \times 2 + 1 \times 3 + 2 \times 3 + 3 \times 3 + 1 \times 4 + 2 \times 4 + 3 \times 4 + 4 \times 4 = 64$ ;  $1 + 11 + 21 + 31 = 64$ . A more complex way is the well known Greek septad, the number of cosmic harmony multiplied by the Egyptian ennead of growth and wisdom to form the fullness of being, the infinite, the universe in expansion, 63. We add the joker of the game, the emptiness, and get 64.

In a formula:  $(7 \times 9) + 1 = 64$ . In Binary Code the number 64 is 1000000. There are more magic numbers but 64 is a special one, as if the whole creation fits into this single number.

The cards are square. This detail was already mentioned, but it is easily overlooked. The centre of Sri Aurobindo's symbol is square and represents the 'manifestation'. Every situation, every side is equally important. Everything can have a different position but the basic line (the direction towards the Self/psychic being) is as above stated. This immediately brings to the forefront another aspect of the game: there are no negative cards, no negative situations. Our preferences and moods make situations negative and positive, but the game is above this duality. A daring remark here is that some games have explicit negative explanations on the symbols they present. Let's not be mistaken: death, separation, loss, grief etc. are also part of the Eternity Game. But the consciousness of the player, and the origin of the game explains feelings and forces as 'conditions' or 'blockages' and it is up to us to turn them towards the one Self. When the 'dwarf' is upside down, 'intelligence' is on top. The living place of our god is closed and intelligence is not connected anymore, it has separated itself from its origin. The Dwarf is connected to the One, but if intelligence thinks 'I don't want to be connected', then it becomes a power in itself, but separated from the one Self; instead of serving its god, it thinks it is the god. I think we call that arrogance. It's all there in the game.

The cards have two axes. Combined with other cards and their positions, the possibilities are endless: up and down and right to left and vice versa. Let us explain these axes on an example with card 35 (Scorpio).

The vertical axis represents ascent and descent. Scorpio 'lives' in his 'house': the 'Unexpected'. Scorpio descends into his realm where events, situations and experiences, long-wished, willed, and aspired for, take place. The crises of time are his moments of realization. It is in those



instants that he can manifest himself. There is nothing negative with Scorpio, but it can be painful when you are suddenly confronted with a situation you have long wished for. Scorpio arranges the moment and the circumstances so that the break-through can take place, and the promises and wishes, long dormant, come to the surface and realize themselves. This is the North-South axis.

The horizontal East-West axis shows the cause-effect sequence in time. On the left side we have the instrument, the path, the point of departure, the yoga, the action to do: the cause. On the right side we have the result, the effect, the gift, the destination: the 'if-then' in different forms. Referring to our Scorpio card it means: Faith is your yoga, your instrument to realize the promise. What has been promised will come true. It is conditional. You need to have faith, otherwise it will not come true. Suddenly the card is strikingly direct.

Scorpio is now self explanatory with its four sides. It is also clear that the four sides of Scorpio are an aspect of the same thing. We are with Scorpio in the zodiac, one of the 12 conditions for a spiritual life. We will talk about the hierarchies later. In a straight position Scorpio can make the 'unexpected' event happen. Suddenly the event is there. The other way around is equally true. If there is an unexpected event, Scorpio is acting. The unexpected is the domain of Scorpio.

If 'Faith' is dominant (left side up) Scorpio tells you that there is work to do. You need more faith.

## Scorpio

The scorpion, which is one of the most splendid constellations in our sky, brings us the **promise** that all that has ever been foreseen will sooner or later be fulfilled. But the magnificence and the splendour always manifest in the most **unexpected** way or moment: **the hour of god**.

All that is asked of us is to have **faith**, faith in ourselves, in our destiny, and the help which the universe around us constantly offers. This basic faith which fights for God while knowledge is withheld is the secret certitude in our inmost heart that, come what may, the glory we have glimpsed will one day be our home.

Medhananda; Eternity Game 1973 Page 68

**The high gods look on man and watch and choose today's impossibles for the future's base.**

Sri Aurobindo

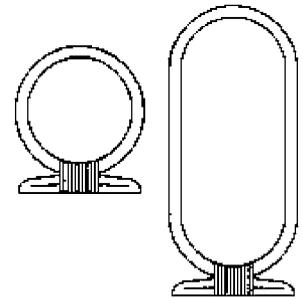
Even when everything seems to be lost the advice of Scorpio is clear: it wants to help but you have to listen and work on that faith. You have to believe that the event will take place, even if it seems far away or impossible.

If the promise is dominant (right side up) Scorpio is busy 'giving' you what you have wished for (knowingly or unknowingly). How often we do not know that unconsciously we wished deep inside for something. Secret wishes are hidden and without any notice the result is there. It is almost mechanical. You have to be careful when you make a wish-formation, because it comes true. The wish or faith energy is so strong that the result can knock you down. The energy you put in your wishes starts growing and arranges the circumstances which lead to realization. You wanted this – remember !

The crossing of the two axes is an important point. Time and space are coming together in the single 'Now' moment. No future, no past: here the Gods have the possibility to reach us. In the Now-moment the gods come in. You withdraw yourself from the past, you withdraw yourself from the future, and only in this moment it can

happen. Not yesterday. not tomorrow but NOW - the Eternal Now. Only in the Eternal Now you can play. This is the secret of the Game. The sides of the cards are not the most important, nor the axes: the crossing is the most important point. The Now-moment is always fully active in any position. The crossing is always there, but mostly we fail to see it because we are looking either at the cause or at the effect or at the base or at the god itself; but in fact, what you want and need is in the middle. When you step into the Eternal Now, everything opens. This is the secret door to your higher Self, to Eternity. Eternity touches Time; but Eternity touches only in the Now-moment. For this reason the Game is called 'Eternity Game'. In the 'Now' lives the eternity, one can experience eternity in a split second; every single second contains eternity. It is at the crossroad of cause and effect and realization. The Egyptian symbol is the Shen Ring:

The circle is tied on Time. When we zoom out from a single card to the Game as a whole, the 64 cards can be grouped together in many ways: according to colours, numbers, symbols, positions, words, and so on. Every grouping has its own significance or evolving reality. One of the first clarifications is the hierarchy in the different ontological principles:



Principle	Card numbers	Color
The Ontological Principles	1 to 6	gold
The Mothers	7 to 10	red
The Heavenly Rulers	11 to 25	blue
The Zodiac	26 to 37	green
The Chakras	38 to 44	orange
The Helpers	45 to 56	violet
The Great Meditations	57 to 64	silver

Every member of a specific group has the characteristics of the group but also unique features of the force itself. For example, Mercury,

as a planet, a heavenly ruler, belongs to the (blue) planet group. These planet forces stretch themselves over millions of years and universes and galaxies and they have something very direct, but they are also limited. They operate close to the human body, to the vital and mind, and govern primary processes like rhythms and programs. The Helpers, where most of the Avatars are located, are of a different nature. They push for growth and new manifestations and completely new worlds appear. We are invited to participate in these new worlds.

A number grouping evolves when you pick an arbitrary number and start multiplying it with 1, 2, 3 etc. Take for example the number '8':

**Rhythm of transformation and manifestation:**

8.	Power	Mahakali
16.	Kundalini	Mercury
24.	Revolution	Neptune
32.	Courage	Leo
40.	Vitality	Tapas
48.	Cooperation	Amrita
56.	New Man	Sri Aurobindo
64.	Plenitude	Secret

The Game can be played and used in many ways. It is constructed as emanations of the One Self and so it contains everything that is within us. Everything in us resonates with at least one or a combination of the symbols. The precision and directness is really astonishing and the capacity of the Game to teach us is endless. On top of it, it is fun to play. It is fun to see what is behind a thought, a desire or a situation. It is also interesting to see what will happen in the near future. But above all it is fun to play.

The Eternity Game leads from progress to prediction and from learning to teaching. Medhananda created the structure of the Eternity Game in one single night, incorporating all his experiences. From a single card game to multi-facetted drawings, the Eternity Game is always ready to give its advice. It asks for experimentation and above all, for playing. When you have a question, you always get an answer. The Game responds immediately. It knows who and where the questioner is. After a while you find that you are not the player but that the Game is playing with you.



**Toby Neumann**

Comes from the Netherlands, where he came into touch with the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through the writings of Auroville pioneer Ruud Lohman. He has been a very active member of Auroville International until he came to settle in Auroville in 2006. He has been studying Medhananda's Eternity Game intensively since 1974.

# *The Indian Oral performing Tradition compared with Western musical Notation & Interpretation*

*by Eugeen Liven d'Abelardo*

Coming to Northern India with my partner Marijke for the first time in 1998, and touring for 3 weeks with performances of Gregorian chant in Japan in that same year, was a new experience which drastically altered my view on the interpretation of Western classical and contemporary music.

In the years that followed, we visited Auroville a couple of times to give workshops at the invitation of conductor Nuria and the Auroville Choir, and from 2001 onwards we have settled in Auroville, gradually finding our own place and way of living and working in the community.

Although I am still traveling extensively in Europe each year during spring and summer giving concerts, lecturing in universities, recording new CD's, mostly with Gregorian chant repertoire, I find it an enriching confrontation of two worlds. On one hand I need the contact with professional musicians and organizations in the West; on the other hand the atmosphere in India and Auroville is inspiring and stimulating for my compositional work. Also here I have found a few like-minded artistic friends with whom I can discuss new experiences or challenging views.

Another profound encounter which has influenced me strongly in my approach to musical material, its concepts and interpretation, was the meeting in the eighties and subsequent study with the legendary Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache, who was at that time living in Paris, working as the Director of the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and teaching "Phenomenology of Music" at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz.

Celibidache (1912-1996) was known for his exploration – especially in lengthy Bruckner Symphonies – of new acoustical dimensions in time and space. Therefore, he also radically refused during his lifetime to make recordings of any kind on CD or DVD, because these canned registrations were, he felt, a falsification of the real happening. He used to liken it to making love with a black and white photograph of the French model and actress Brigitte Bardot, a fake and not very satisfying experience, compared with the possibility of meeting the real person in flesh and blood.

It might sound a bit farfetched, but this is exactly what I sometimes – actually most of the time, to be honest – experience when attending concerts or watching audiovisual recordings, both here and in Europe. Let me share some thoughts with you about this, wandering through music history.

Growing up as a young boy in West Flanders, I had parents who stimulated my early discoveries in the musical world. My mother taught me some salon piano music (*Galop du diable*); I would play the church organ during the daily mass in the Gymnasium, improvise on themes of the Beatles, and also conduct some amateur choirs.

But the first encounter with "oral tradition" was not in the field of music. The old priest of the village, a man in his seventies whom I admired because he was a "cultured and learned" man and could satisfy my never-ending curiosity, would recite to me long passages from Goethe's *Faust* in German with his thundering bass voice. What I found most mesmerizing was that he did this, seemingly without any effort, "by heart" (*auswendig*). When I asked him how he came to

learn these rather long poetic texts without the use of a book, he told me that during the First World War (1914-18) in his parental home, a bakery in Flanders, there were German soldiers billeted. They fed him the Faust. He actually never had to “learn” the passages; they became as much part of himself as daily bread.

From that moment on, I have always been aware of the process of learning material by heart and passing it on to later generations. Later on, when I had the possibility of attending orchestra rehearsals in Vienna with famous conductors such as Bernstein, Carlos Kleiber, Abbado, Maazel, Rattle, etc. I was intrigued by the way they memorized the scores. The legendary Dimitri Mitropoulos would come to the first reading rehearsal of ‘Wozzeck’ by Alban Berg with the New York Philharmonic, a very complex and nerve-wracking opera, saying: “I have already done some home work. I expect you did the same.” And he started rehearsing without score, by heart.

I had a similar experience when touring in Japan. After a concert in Osaka, I shared the taxi back to the hotel with colleague conductor Frans Brüggen of the Orchestra of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. We were alternating Mozart’s Requiem Mass with the Mass for the Dead in Gregorian Chants. He carefully asked me how it was possible that I conducted all these chants by heart, and what procedure I applied to learn them by heart. I was a little embarrassed and couldn’t find the answer right away. Then I had to confess that actually I hadn’t ‘learnt’ them by heart; but conducting these chants many times over the years, they had become part of my subconscious. I only needed to activate them. Once you started singing, the logical musical flow of the text appeared by itself in the course of time.

This natural process of a gradual evolution of the musical material, I have since then witnessed innumerable times when listening to Indian musicians performing their ragas, both in Hindustani and Karnatic tradition.. Although I

am a real illiterate on the subject of Indian music, I am fascinated by the way they develop their themes and rhythms.

The first more conscious and deeper encounter with such a wonderful musician during a live performance took place in the mid-nineties, in the Tropical Museum Amsterdam, just a couple of years before we came to India. I was completely flabbergasted: Here was this man, with a couple of very simple bamboo-flutes, no keys, no artificial amplification, sitting on a beautiful rug, hardly noticing the public. He would scratch his back, adjust his position, warm up his instruments slowly by blowing into them, tune the tablas, then drink a sip of water or tea,... this ritual seemed to go on for ever. There was a timeless dimension to it. I do not exaggerate when I say that the whole procedure took at least 15 minutes in physical time. This was something the Western concert public couldn’t handle. They are used to waiting for the bell, taking their seats, being quiet, clapping when the soloist or conductor comes to the podium, and then, not a single move or cough is to be heard from that moment on.

This was completely different. Hariprasad Chaurasia surely took his time to mentally prepare himself, to swing himself into tune, completely organically and in harmony with his surroundings. He would very softly produce a first low tone of the raga, hardly noticeable for the listeners. Then stop, adjust once his position again, maybe scratch his nose, look around or give a smile to the other accompanying musicians, as if to approve of the atmosphere. Then he would slowly start to explore the modality of the *Alaap* (introduction) note by note, returning every time to the initial tone.

This seemed so natural: motif by motif gradually expanded. After some time, I discovered that I hadn’t noticed any real beginning of the piece. Within these preparatory proceedings, there was no clear point where one could say, ‘That’s the start of the piece’. He sort of sneaked into it. And then he would with unbelievable knowledge

and mastery build up this sonic cathedral that lasted more than an hour: no showmanship, no compromise whatever to Western listening habits, just with an imperturbable logic and perseverance gradually developing the musical thoughts. There was not a single moment when you would even consider thinking of technical difficulties in the virtuoso passages. All seemed harmonically perfectly evolving in time and space.

Such an experience is rare these days in cultural life in expensive concert halls in the West. Music-making or reproducing has become a more technocratic and commercial undertaking, also due to the search for technical perfection of the recording industry. Festivals like Bayreuth or Salzburg are social events for the VIPs in political and cultural life. This is so far removed from the very essence of music making.

A small boy that I watched studying *tabla* with his guru on the library terrace of the Ashram School in Pondicherry, was so much into the real core of it, a thousand times more authentically and honestly than famous musicians I have met during almost 40 years of professional music life. Of course, there wasn't a textbook or score to be found. He just repeated what he had heard from his guru, again and again, until it was satisfying. It went on with such a complexity and speed that, even as a trained musician, I was hardly able to notice the difference in the improvement of the repeated formulas. I felt humble that afternoon. I sat there for a long time, realizing slowly what the power of oral musical tradition has been able to bring to light over thousands of years.

Surely, there must have been a parallel period in the development of Western music, when similar events took place. For me it was clear that the origins of Western classical music must have had a similar development. Out of the vast liturgical repertoire of Gregorian chant, most of our so called "classical" Western music has originated during the centuries.

In the cathedral schools of medieval Europe, it was a self-evident requirement that young boys gifted with a beautiful voice, would learn by heart the 150 Psalms in Latin. Give it a try, and notice how similar a lot of the phrases are, especially when the verses have these Hebrew parallelisms in the first and second part of the verse. And then you go on for about 200 pages...

This mnemonic ability to reproduce large amounts of text or songs has been lost since long in most traditions. You might still perhaps meet Icelandic bards who can recite excerpts from the Eddas, or Jewish cantors who can sing sacred texts from the Bible for hours. Maybe there is a person in Auroville who can recite by heart the whole of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*?

For centuries liturgical singing was transmitted orally. Around 800 A.D. (Coronation of Karl der Grosse, Charlemagne, in Aachen) there were specialized choirs in churches and cathedrals, called *Schola Cantorum* (school of singers), who sang during services the liturgical Gregorian chants, a mixture of the original Galician chants and the chants of the Roman liturgy. There were a couple of thousand chants in the repertoire of these choirs. When eventually the amount and the differentiation became too large, slowly the need for notation arose.

First Codices appeared without any musical signs, only a catalogue of texts for the office and mass services of the liturgical year. Then in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century we encounter Codices with neumatic (similar to shorthand) signs written above the Latin texts in Carolingian minuscule, and then finally in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century there came the invention of the musical staff notation by the Italian monk Guido d'Arezzo. From then on musical pitch could be fixed. He used the first letters of every verse of the Hymn for the Feast of St. John Baptist "*Ut queant laxis, resonare fibris, mira gestorum, etc...*" for indicating the pitches ut (later do), re, mi, fa, sol, la of a hexacord scale. But at the same time the finesses of the rhythmical differentiation disappeared in later manuscripts

Also the fact is to be noticed that in those days, there was not really any stringent classification into sacred or profane music, or even classical or entertainment music. The same melodies were used equally for scabrous songs or for the most holy texts. Renaissance composers often used profane love songs as a tenor (i.e. melodic motif usually sung in the tenor part). A composition of chants for a mass could be called: '*Missa sopra "Ma douce maîtresse"*', and the love song could be heard all through the compositions in different voices, tempi and ornamentation.

The great master Johann Sebastian Bach himself was not shy of recycling a lot of cantata arias that had been commissioned for different profane occasions. For instance in the Coffee Cantata, Bach's daughter Liesgen sings the praise of the seduction and addiction of good coffee; we find the same notes of this aria in one of Bach's Passions accompanying some of the most deeply moving mourning texts in music history. Bach in his function of *Thomascantor* had to produce a cantata every week, and was sometimes under serious time-pressure. But this is the genius of Bach: he was able to adapt to his own practical needs without losing the greatness of the music.

This mixture of music as part of everyday life and religion – without any separation of genres – seems to be still alive in Indian classical or traditional music.

What are the characteristics and qualities I admire in Indian music performances perceived through the ears of a Western trained musician?

In spite of the fact that they use a common language that is by definition played or sung *unisono* - that is, without explicit harmony, one musical line without any chords or harmonic accompaniment, and that there is usually within one section or even a whole piece, no trace of modulation (changing from one modality into another), it never appears boring. But we do not always perceive the music as *unisono*: there is a certain margin of ornamentation or imitation

when instruments or voices play together, so that for a Western mind, we are not able to reduce what we are hearing to one single line in our consciousness. There is a great sense of coloring with the different registers of the voice or instruments.

Especially flutists, violinists and singers have the ability to manipulate the expression of long-held tones, going from a flat non-vibrato to increasingly vibrato or even modulating trills. Of course there are many styles or traditions in doing so, comparable to the many different pronunciations or dialects of a same language. Also from one generation to another you might discover fashions, or a particular special liking for repetitive formulas. The art of developing a motif out of one single tone, and repeating it ad infinitum in all conceivable appearances, until it reaches almost breathtaking proportions, this is unique. Perhaps it reminds us of the improvisation skills of great Western Jazz players or church organists, who still nowadays learn how to improvise on their instruments.

One aspect where the differentiation is almost without limits is an endless variation in rhythmical patterns. In this field Westerners do feel very intimidated, especially when listening without any introduction about what to listen for in the *tala* structure.

Years ago in Dharamsala, I was presented with some cassettes along with a student manual of transcriptions of rhythmical *tabla* studies, noted in conventional Western music staff notation. I couldn't believe my eyes. The complexity of what was written on these lines surpassed every single conducting score I had ever studied in my life, even ones by contemporary music composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen or Iannis Xenakis.

When I noticed the ease with which Indian listeners followed the complicated rhythmical developments by gently tapping their palms on their knees and then turning them at the right

moment, I was jealous. Nowadays I manage to follow, if it doesn't get too complex.

Of course, the *tabla* player helps a lot in recognizing the beats, but sometimes the irrational proportions get out of hand. While there is a regular recognizable pulse of two or three beats, one can often hear some groups of five or seven beats against that regular pattern. This technique is used to create extra tension, and is mostly used when the piece develops towards its musical climax. Here the sense of timing is primordial, as it is in Jazz where you might encounter similar parallel techniques.

For instance the so-called "blue notes" have their counterpart in the modality of the Indian *raga*. Although the modal scale is fixed throughout going up and down the scales, when the inspiration takes over, and things get "hot", blue notes can be heard as ornamentation or even as persisting *ostinato* figures. An overdose in using them can easily destroy the logical or natural development of the music.

The almost endless variety in modal scales strikes the Western listener. The great French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) has applied some of them in his composition techniques (*Technique de mon langage musical*, 1942 Leduc, Paris) and called them "*modes à transpositions limitées*": scales (*ragas*) with a limited number of transpositions. These create a particular modal color, also in the harmonic

chord progressions. As Messiaen had the gift of synaesthesia, he would describe them with colors. (Bright vermillion with a sparkle of dark purple). He also included Hindustani *talas* as rhythmical "non-retrogradable" patterns, (which can be performed forward and backward with the same sounding result) as a skeleton structure for his compositions.

Although Indian scales are easily recognizable as being what we call major or minor in their modal tendency, Westerners are inclined to perceive most of them as in minor mode: in our ears they sound melancholic (as for instance the *mi-mode*, Phrygian mode, which starts with a semitone right at the beginning of the scale, and is used for most love songs).

I could go on describing the striking facets of Indian music to the Western listener. The voyage of discovery is long, and there is still a lot to be enjoyed by heart and mind.

I can only speak for myself, after living in Auroville for a decade, and thus having had plenty of opportunities to attend concerts of the finest performers of Indian music, who regularly perform here. This has been a gift of Grace. It has certainly enriched my musical experience, and has fine-tuned the way I study and approach music scores. I am grateful to those who have given me this opportunity, showed me what to look for and opened my ears.

### **Eugeen Liven d'Abelardo**

Born in Belgium in 1950, he is a composer, conductor and radio-producer, Director of the Gregorian Chant group 'Hartkeriana' in Amsterdam, and Guest Professor in Gregorian Chant and Medieval Music at the Universities of Graz (Austria) and Trondheim (Norway). Since 2001 he has been a resident of Auroville, where he is the Director of the Auroville Renaissance Capella.



## **Bruno Taut on “Urban Visions”**

*Since its inauguration in 1968 – or even earlier – Auroville has been struggling to find convincing guidelines that would enable its ideal plan, conceived by Roger and approved by the Mother, to be implemented. Are we attempting the impossible or something which exceeds our powers? Is a weak decision-making process (based on consensus) combined with vested interests responsible, or are we just lacking faith and good will, as often is pointed out? In any case it seems we have to question the means we have applied so far in order to manifest the Galaxy plan.*

*The following passage from “Architekturlehre” (A Course on Architecture), written in 1938, and translated from the original German, is offered as a contribution to the ongoing discussion.*

The sheer size of what has to be realized in future has a tremendous seductive power. It is something alluring for every architect, to imagine in detail how a city could be created by him. He wants to test the limits of his creative power, and this justifies such a labour of fantasy. It can be fruitful, because with the widening of his field of vision the forms of his single buildings, even of small ones, become more free and clear. Everybody naturally needs to relate a single action, even an unimportant one, to a greater whole. Only through seeing the small as part of a larger whole and gaining a rough idea of the possibilities of his artistic imagination, he achieves scale, remains humble in detail and stays like that when big commissions come his way.

In such a case he would consider such sketches for whole cities (or even more) merely as fantasy creations – never as projects to be possibly realized. He will rather strongly warn against perceiving them as such. That is how we have to look at the visions of the future which outstanding architects occasionally come up with.

Completely different altogether are works which in full seriousness are presented as projects for the realization of whole cities and want to be taken as such. This intention is based on faulty thinking. These architects fail to see the continuous change in time and believe that from now on all knowledge will stand still. Because they cannot deal with the totality of functional elements caused by permanent change, and the

relativity of the city development process, they isolate one or a few elements which appear to them most modern and progressive. They think that the future is going to freeze them. But since they know the future no better than any of us, their belief becomes even more hardened and fantastic, and to an even greater extent this kind of work becomes part of the realm of formalism. The emphasis on the high-rise, the overestimation of certain mobility features, subterranean streets, total linearity or such characteristics, are visible indicators. These architects have been seized by megalomania, which can be understood and excused by the effects of a dimension run wild and the mesmerism of the massive scale.

Practical urban planning cannot follow an ideal imagination. In cases where this has been tried, many unexpected undercurrents came up, turning the basic idea, as far as it could still be retained, into a limbless torso. The urban planner must be aware that he simply cannot know the future; because he never can build the city in one go - fortunately. But he also has to know that even for the immediate future, in fact already in the present, much escapes his scrutiny. Something that at first appears to be insignificant might still destroy his idea if he keeps clinging to it. The builders of the Louvre have not designed the Tuileries, nor the Champs-Élysées or the Arc de Triomphe; the whole grew because successive generations had basically the same sense of proportion. This makes it obvious that urban planning and design ceases to be the art of a single personality – it

is much more like the process of crystallization which is made possible by a core. The better the core, the more easily (and successfully) growth will happen. In this way the task of the architect working in urban design is being led back to humility. The more quality he can endow a single building with, the more his work will radiate into the environment.

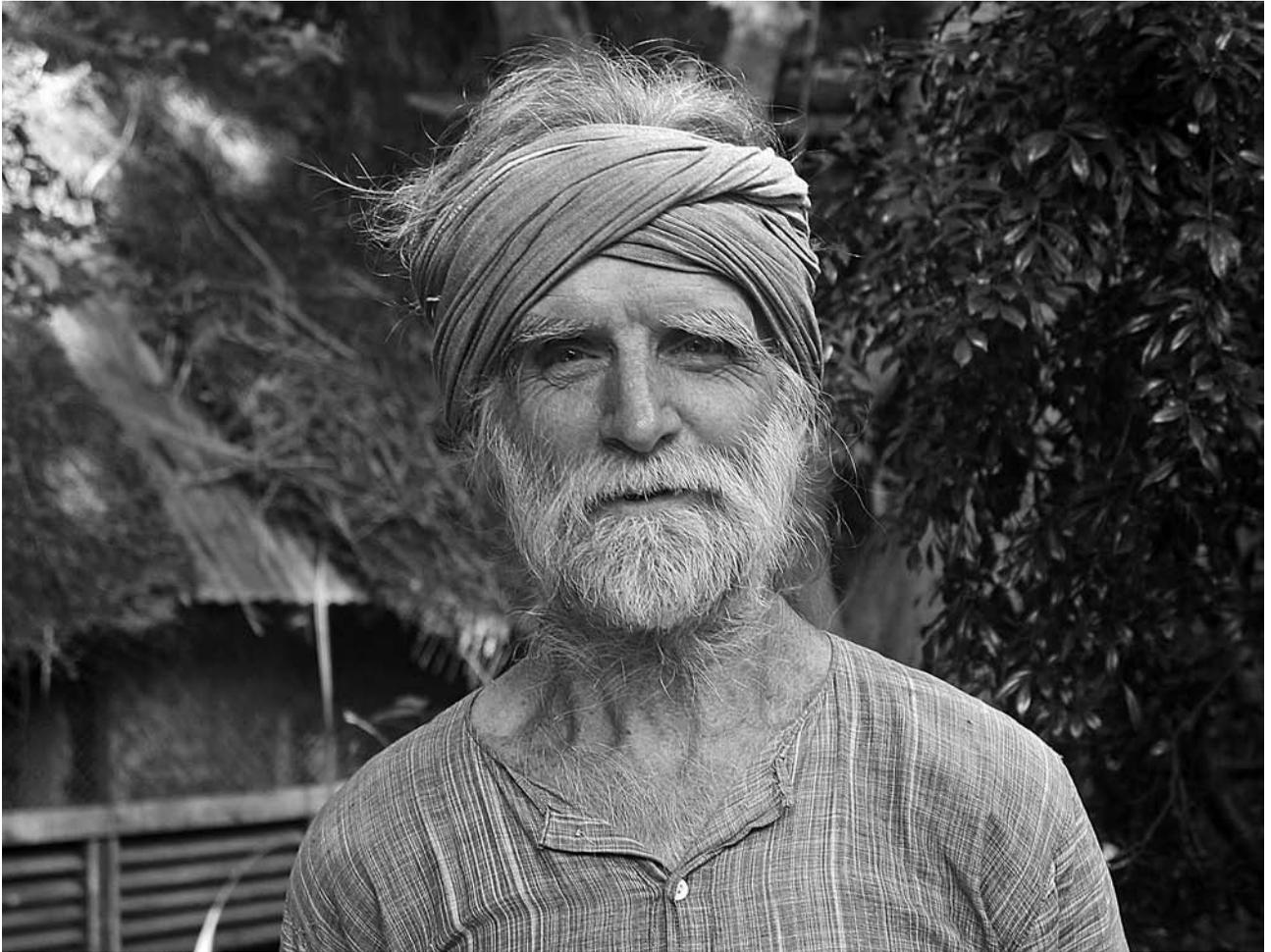
I am not disputing that it is necessary for streets, railways, service lines, etc. to be planned in advance, well before a city is expanded or a new development area is set aside. Such economic plans are the only fruitful field of so-called city planning. The more flexibility they allow for future development or possibilities to play, the better they will be. But as soon as they exceed the framework of what can be built immediately, and parts of cities or whole cities are projected, formalism will be the inevitable result. The worst effect is that formal ideas take root in peoples' heads, removing any impartiality of lay persons in influential positions, and thus disturbing the process. The formalism of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, expressed in star-shaped squares, *points de vue* etc. has since long become a credo of lay persons through award-winning competitions or other planning projects rather than through the urban beauty of Paris. It is the same with modernistic formalism with its different special theories propagated by this or that architect about

high rise, building in rows, ribbon development, radial concepts, satellite cities, etc., etc.

“City Planning” – the term in itself is already arrogant. “Preparation for a possible development of cities” or parts of them – that is today the real and fruitful work of a good town planner. He knows how relative, dependant on time and subject to change city function is; and this insight is the best way for him to support the organic becoming of a city. In this way he also serves architecture and proportion. And an architect who remains faithful to proportion is bound to solve this task in a not bad way, very likely best amongst all other connected specialists. It is in this way that since around 1900 architects have been able to conquer urban planning as a domain of their work. After some initial struggle, trust was extended to them; quite rightly it was felt that a profession whose aim is good proportion, is also the most appropriate one to bring order and harmony to all the different influences and points of view which the city complex is exposed to. But if today an architect claims the right to fix once and for all the shape of a city or a public space or the skyline of buildings, and everything else which cannot be realized within the immediate future, he is in serious danger of completely losing all the trust which his predecessors have painfully laboured to acquire – this has already occurred in certain practical cases.

### **Bruno Julius Florian Taut**

(4 May 1880, Königsberg, Germany – 24 December 1938, Istanbul, Turkey), was a prolific German architect, urban planner, teacher and author. While he was a professor at the Technical University in Berlin he completed several architectural and urban projects in Germany. After his emigration in 1933 he worked in Moscow and Tokyo and later became head of the renowned Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts in Istanbul.



## *Walking the Talk*

*Excerpts from a conversation with Johnny*

### **On self-sufficiency**

I'm fundamentally a practical and simple person, and I must admit that the original attraction of Auroville for me was self-sufficiency. It was the ability under these circumstances to set up our own survival conditions by our own standards. Initially this was the very common ethic that unified the original Aurovilians: the belief that we would grow our own food, build our own houses, educate our own children, generate our own energy, deal with our own waste, be fundamentally as autonomous as possible - this was in the 1960s and early 70s when this was a major planetary ethic anyhow. This was the whole revolution of ethics. And for me in this context I still see India as the

host country, which is already strapped for resources, and it has been an inspiration to me to try to take as little as I can from this country and give back as much as I can. That has been a very fundamental motivating force. People often say to me, "You are a man of principle", but I don't think it's so much principle as the fact that I have discovered that the closer I get to the fundamentals of life the more enjoyable it is. If you are living by solar panels or when the water is pumped by windmill for instance, then your relationship to the sun and the wind becomes totally different from when you just take them for granted. And the technical details: I am no wizard, I just enjoy the very simple technical detail, so I try to surround myself with

things that I can repair myself, and as much as possible, I avoid involving technologies which I can't. We did generate biogas when we first came, as an attempt to have cooking fuel, but now we do well with firewood, and within those parameters you strike a fine balance in the end.

What I valued in the Tamil population in particular as a standard was firstly their work ethic. When the Tamils that we originally landed with would do something that they enjoyed, they didn't mind how much they were paid for it. And if they didn't enjoy doing it, then any amount of money wouldn't make them do it. They are famous for being hard-working people. The reason that there are Tamils in Sri Lanka, in Fiji, in Africa and also in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore is that they are famous as industrious people, physically and mentally. So that was an original attraction to me.

I came from a situation where I had a small amount of practical building experience and quite a lot of architectural experience. Suddenly I found myself amongst people who enjoyed working the way I like to, working with their hands; and an invaluable thing was that they did it for the enjoyment and not for the reward.

I have had to widen my concept of self-sufficiency beyond the thing of individuals. For the whole community to be self-sufficient it doesn't mean that everybody will have to grow their own food; but it means that as a whole we should value a much more complex interaction with the outside world that balances our books.

Agriculturally, self-sufficiency is a challenge under these circumstances. I didn't come from a farming tradition so I wasn't attracted to a good soil. Klaus in Nine Palms was attracted to a good soil. The farmers in Auroville - like Krishna and Jaap and Daniel - are attracted to the low-lying, high water-table clay soil. When these guys first pioneered the land they chose the soil suited to agriculture. Where we are, our water table is

about 20 meters lower than those guys have. We've got a sandy soil which drains very fast. So the agriculture that was going on here then was millet farming, mostly Combu, Varagu, Ragi, Ulundu (black gram) - so we did have the basic ingredients for idlies!

The water of course has always been an issue with this altitude; and then there is the problem of pests. I grew millets up until five years ago: we used to fall into the old routine of Combu, Ragi, Varagu, Ulundu, sometimes Sesame - but the peacocks put an end to that. With the traditional crops one didn't have pests even when you were storing; you didn't even need to worry about sunning your seeds. They were so traditional that there were no pests. But the peacocks in my eye were a mistake to introduce into Auroville, because they have virtually driven me out of field-cropping, which was something I very much enjoyed. I am still able to find isolated fields, I've been farming some fields down by the American Pavilion, in order to find crops that aren't attacked by peacocks, just to be able to grow enough Ragi and Varagu. And I do have friends like Stefan in the Botanical Gardens and Krishna in Solitude who grow more of these crops, so they can share with me. I think Auroville's food perceptions have wandered a long way from indigenous food habits. For instance I use to grow ten times more Varagu than we needed; Bhavana was very good and she would take it for Isaiambalam school - she would insist that the kids ate Varagu - and she would pay me what it cost me to grow it. So long as Auroville was a good customer farming was possible, but that slowly withdrew also. I don't often get to the Solar Kitchen, but they do their best in terms of trying to provide at least a token amount of traditional grain, so people do have a choice. I watch the next generation of children now, and remember that actually our children were raised on Varagu and Ragi - not necessarily that they agreed with it or liked it - but now the contemporary Auroville diet is pasta and pizza! It's made from imported grain, it is as far from being self-sufficient in terms of our understanding of self-sufficiency as you can get.

On the other hand, in terms of support systems we've got wonderful workshops, like the Aureka workshop for instance, as a support for developing windmills and pressed mud blocks and supporting and maintaining and keeping those things alive; CSR and Aurore - all these people promoting the solar panels.... We have a windmill here now and we have a solar pump. So now for the first time in thirty years we have adequate water - for instance for Julia who moved here; so we can maybe increase the population a little bit. Tanks are often empty when you've got no wind and sun but we generally have not such a high water concern. It doesn't mean we can irrigate, but we can sprinkle. We can be food self-sufficient for about three months of the year. We could be self-sufficient all year round, not purchasing anything, but it would mean no oil, no jaggery, no numerous things. We have stopped field farming. In fact what I do now - the interesting thing is that it's more profitable for me - is to sell my compost. Our field agriculture was never profitable because the economics of traditional grain-growing is dependent on free labour. I could never grow Combu or Varagu for the market because it is not viable. The minute I pay somebody to weed, it's a lot of money - so bang go my profits! Interestingly enough, now that I don't grow, I sell the compost to Paul in the Botanical Garden: I made Rs. 40,000 last year. Before, all that compost would go into the field. I have enough food in the store room but the value of the food is probably only Rs. 10,000 by comparison. And this is exactly what we did to the villagers when we first came. When we came, they were doing self-sufficient farming. We bought all their compost to plant the Matrimandir gardens and other gardens ... we were buying compost like crazy from the villagers in the beginning. They stopped farming and became compost merchants.

### **On Education**

I think that the interesting thing about education is - if you're free to look at it in a most general sense - that your personal responsibility to a student is to prepare him or her for the future that you personally believe is going to happen

... not the future the planet is trying to convince you is going to happen. That also means you are then alert to the capacity of the child and the circumstances you are dealing with. If you look at the circumstances in Auroville ... and what I had always felt Mother wanted education in Auroville to be was that the whole place was to be a school, but we wouldn't have school in the normal sense ... if we individually took responsibility for sharing what skills we have and involving children as much as we could in what we were doing; because it appears to me, and I have occasionally tried to put this to the schools, that we have acquired a very valuable set of tools within the community now in the forty-odd years that we have been here: agriculturally and by way of forests and appropriate alternative energy and nutrition and health. Certainly these are generalized skills and none of us are specialized to a professional extent, but these are the survival skills that I personally see are going to be much more valuable in the future than the skills of sitting in front of a computer. This is not to deny the fact that some children are totally adept at solving some sorts of problems with the computer. I don't think you can deny any reality at all, but I think the mistake that we make is conformity, because we feel under pressure from parents to conform to the world outside and not the world that we have here. That is why I have trouble interacting with the mainstream of education now. I still do as much as possible: I take on kids and try to share what fills me the minute they show a bit of enthusiasm. I have trouble with conventional education as it is now. Education is probably the most controversial topic in Auroville because so many parents have a very strong attitude towards it. I don't take it up as an argument. I think one has to find the way. At the moment I have an argument with my son Jonas. He is bringing his children from a conventional education in Australia. They are jubilant to be here and they are reluctant to go back, but he and his wife have a definite set of requirements. You don't want to feel that you are restricting your children's access to anything. So I don't

intrude into their education. I can also see at the same time that parents have concern for their children. You can't criticise.

I can give you numerous cases of kids that stepped out of here with zero conventional education who have wonderfully adapted to dealing with the planet. It's a strange and interesting contradiction though now, isn't it? For instance I read the Guardian Weekly, and there you can have a full page article from a state-of-the-art climatologist or environmentalist, giving absolute evidence that the planet is on a reckless downward slope to catastrophe in twenty years maximum sort of a thing. You turn the page and you find a scientist who is very concerned about an asteroid that is going to crash into the planet in about 500,000 years' time and what we are going to have to do about it! These two people are equally intelligent, equally well-educated, equally aware, you would think ... are we in a state of denial, or how come this information is so incongruous? I even see the same thing in Auroville. We are pouring massive amounts of concrete down holes right and left. Why don't we get out and do it all in paper bags? It can last ten years ... That's part of the dilemma; that's what makes it so enjoyable, I suppose.

I think that the value of any education in Auroville actually stems from the fact that we are basically altruists. We do get to know the children and their parents and the intricacies of their relationships and problems. So we know the children we are dealing with, they are not just ciphers. And no matter what you do, like Jana for instance who lives with us in Fertile, she goes to Transition every day and comes back, what she does is pour love and creativity into these children. I have no question with that at all. And I know for sure she is doing what she feels within her heart to do with those kids, and there is nothing you can do to question that. The value of the children that come out of Auroville is that no matter what education they get here they do know themselves. They are going to come out of here with a pretty clear idea of the fact that they have been caught up in an education which is dealing with a million

contradictions. We are not hiding anything really. We are simply a lot of people trying to solve problems as best as we can, but generally the problems are on top of us before we've got a solution to them; so in many ways we have to solve them in conventional ways. If we had had the foresight and the energy and the wisdom to foresee all these things before they happened, maybe we would have had the imagination and foresight to come up with and imagine solutions that the planet could learn from. In the meantime, I would think of a sort of dance where the music does not match the dance. You can hear the music, and what you are trying to do is to find out the incremental steps you can do to change the dance you are doing so that it will catch up with the music - the stages in between that catch up. But because the music changes all the time, it is a lot of adjustment.

### **On Building in eco-friendly ways**

In the early days, when we first came, the idea was always to have temporary housing, because we were supposed to be a sort of mobile population; we were supposed to be foresting here, then to move on and forest more. What we were constantly developing was not even semi-permanent housing, it was temporary housing. So then we used a capsule. It was an idea to have something which you could move. And my current solution to the so-called housing problem is what I call a 'Demountable House'. It is a house that can be mass-produced. I personally can't see why we have to take on architectural problems, particularly housing, in such a time-consuming way, because surely there is an optimal house that suits our circumstances here - unless we've all come here to build houses, which I don't think we have. Why are we going through the whole history of architecture and all its mistakes in order to get there? Why don't we just come up with something? Anyway what I am trying to come up with is a house that's mosquito-proof, that's computer-friendly, that's big enough to sleep in and to keep your computer in, to work in remotely. You need the house only in the evening, maybe sometimes in the afternoon, it

depends. You are in a community. Then you are connected somewhere to the community kitchen, the community washing, waste facilities, and all sorts of things. If it is a product, something we can mass-produce, when you come to Auroville you may be asked, "How many of these do you want? You want one for the couple, one for the child, one for the ...? OK - this is 3. We put you down for 3. Where do you want to put them?" If we can have mobile foundations all over the place you can put them somewhere, and if it doesn't work there, you can unscrew it and put it up somewhere else. I am building one now. It is made from pipes and wood and board and metal and stainless-steel mosquito mesh. But it is small. You can take it apart in 2 days. I am making it for Angeli. She is 13. She is saying "Come on Johnny, finish it so I can live in it." So when I finish it, she can live in it. If she wants to, when she gets to be 16 or 17 and wants to move into Kailash for instance, then you put a set of foundations in Kailash and she can move to Kailash. She can personalise it and paint it, decorate it and do what she wants so that it suits her. It becomes a sort of housing caravan. I suppose you can always say "Oh yes, that's not going to work for 15,000 people" or something like that, but it has a set price. We are definitely falling into a strange architectural anachronism in Auroville: it is the last place in the world where you can have a client and charge 15% of the building cost for a personally designed house, when you have the right to say whether the wall is round or straight or square, put a handrail and a door bell, a room to watch the television, and you get German architects making German houses, and Italian architects making Italian houses.

My heart is mostly in these sorts of materials. It has been all the time. It is in bamboo and keet and .... See, here is my house: I just thatched it, and since it is up off the ground it has got no termites or insects or animals running around. It lasts for 20 years if you maintain it. 20 years are 20 years! [Laugh] I mean, of course the capsule is only something you live in. And even this is a demountable thing. I think that all you think about is how to make it a bit bigger? Well, if

it is not expensive. I mean, that thatched roof cost me 6000 Rs to put on. True! A thatch on the roof. I mean this house actually cost me over nothing because the floors were from the boxes that Juanita brought her furniture to Auroville in. There is so much wood in Auroville. I am surprised we sell off so much of that anyway. We are so frightened of insects and termites. Yes, you look upon it as a very temporary solution, keet. The value of it is that every time you re-roof, which is something that you do every 3 or 4 years, you rethink your roof. You rethink the whole house - it's like completely cleaning the whole thing out. You are going to take your roof off, you are going to clean the whole thing out, rebuild it. They are high maintenance. Keet becomes increasingly expensive. That is not what I promote now. I'm really thinking of something a bit more permanent, because also I think we are not prepared to put up with the dust and the animals and the bats: it is very hard to get them out of these types of buildings - they find their way in somehow. Also security is the other thing: something which can be locked, it is secure, you can lock it and somebody would have to go with a vicious intent to get in. It is mosquito-proof, it is virtually dustproof, you can clean it out in 10 minutes.

I can say that it relates more to the ingenuity that goes into designing boats and caravans: ingeniously fitting a lot of things into a small space. One interesting observation comes from this financial crisis that we are just now supposedly going through: I can remember my mother coming out of the Second World War: she was totally adapted at making shift, at getting away with minimum resources, patching our clothes and finding ways to cleverly re-use things and to feed us on a minimum. She was Scottish and that is one of their characteristics. But you can see that actually in a survival situation, when resources are tight, ingenuity is more fulfilling: people enjoy more to go into a supermarket with a small amount of money and a large shopping list, than to go in with a large amount of money and a small shopping list, because they get to

use their ingenuity, it is much more of a skill and a craft. And you can feel the same thing in Auroville. We have had a very long affluent period where we seemed to have a lot of money and we wasted a lot of it, so we've built huge houses. I can remember Eleanor, an Auroville friend - I remember finding her one night in this cranky old building. She lived in Ami. She had a cold, she had a blanket wrapped around her head and the roof was leaking, she must have been 65. And I said "Eleanor, you know you've got to do better than this, you've got to give yourself ..." "I didn't come here to build houses!" she shouted. You can say that what we need is an ingenious solution to what is a simple problem, and then consider it solved and get on with the rest of it.

This is how it looks [*he shows a model*]. That's iron, that's sheets of iron and this is based on a floor which is made of sheets of bison board and made to clip down. The whole frame is made of pipes and they are bolted together. And these are all wooden panels that can even be mud, or different panels can be put inside.

It will not be that hot. You can always put insulation. Then you can see the ventilation because ventilation is on top. And these are rising surfaces: they get air that comes out the top. Steel does heat up, it is true. It heats up but it loses very fast. Actually what's more of a problem is what they call thermal mass where you absorb all the heat, like a tile for instance that keeps the heat for 3 or 4 hours into the night or more, so that you've still got this heat in the house - like walls: we don't seem to value shade enough here. Normally what you would have, for instance in the countryside in Australia, is a veranda that would surround everything. It just surrounds the outside of the house with already shaded air which is cool air. The air that goes into the house is already shaded, it is cool; and then it goes out through a vented roof. You never let the sun shine on your walls because the minute you do that, you're heating up your walls, you are going to have to lose that heat. So why don't we have enormous eaves, for instance on the Information

Centre? Really that building should have huge shaded eaves that would cool the walls, and then they won't get wet in the monsoon and they won't get hot in summer. I mean, that is the other thing we've yet to really come to terms with: so far we have had so much money that we haven't really tried to take advantage of natural ventilation and cooling and the principles of that. A lot of tropical countries in the Middle East have developed things that we have not taken much notice of.

### ***On Mother and Sri Aurobindo***

All I can really say is that I have personally constantly felt Mother's guidance and I sometimes have to very dramatically and personally ask her help. For instance, I felt quite strongly that she brought me here - which is in a book published recently by Auroville Press. About Sri Aurobindo : I had an interesting period in Australia when I tried to live as a hermit. I left Auroville in 1989 when an old friend died and left me a piece of land in Australia. I always thought that the ultimate existence was a hermit's, living absolutely alone: you had the time and space to make every single decision, be creative, so to speak and live like that. But I rapidly went insane living alone. I suddenly realised that it's a high skill being able to live totally isolated without any social life. But it was interesting because I was in a tiny cabin, there in the wilderness in Australia - not so far from the highway and the supermarket but buried in the bush and set down a windy path so that nobody knew I was there. Nobody ever came down there. I had no social contact at all really. So I was free to do what I liked. I didn't have much literature but I did have *The Life Divine*. My view of spiritual writings is that they respond to a need, in the sense that you can pick up all sorts of spiritual writings out of curiosity. They all basically say the same thing. I was getting to a point where I'd wake up in the morning in a state of spiritual need. That is the way I read it. And I had to take Sri Aurobindo you know. It was extraordinary: I have notebooks that date back to that period - I would sometimes only read a paragraph and based on a single paragraph I could write 3 or 4 pages which would get me through the day. It

was amazing; it was so sustaining, living alone like that. I can see with Sri Aurobindo that he had two sorts of writings: he had his historical and philosophical writing, but he also wrote directly to sadhaks, to the ashramites when they needed it. And that's basically what that book meant to me. I have the same feeling about meditation. I've done eight meditation courses, and I like Vipassana meditation because it's without dogma, it's simply a meditation technique. My personal feeling is that I do need a technique. When I first came, I used to sit in the ashram and meditate: you just sit there and let your sort of thoughts wash around in your head and that was it - I was peaceful and quiet. It was only when I did Vipassana that I began to take on the mind as an adversary - it is not so much of a friend. I knew about Vipassana for about 10 years before I did a course.

I had left Australia without saying goodbye - almost overnight I disappeared. And then old friends of mine turned up in Auroville and said "Come on Johnny, that is enough of living here! Come on! Come back and get on with the real thing." And here was the family and the whole thing, and I was saying, "Hang on a minute, what are we talking about?" It is amazing that for the first 10 years or so that I was here I absolutely and entirely dismissed the call of the society I'd come from. It never even raised its head. And then suddenly I was caught in this terrible dilemma which started to pull me back. So I went and did this Vipassana course, which helped me to resolve it to the point where I could go back there and come back here without any friction. What I felt was that it was simply a practical thing that I'd learnt, like fixing your motorcycle: you know a way to deal with reality. And that is still how I use it: if I am in a situation where I really feel that I

need guidance or advice or some other reference to deal with something. It happens once every 3 months or so I would say; then I need to resort to both Sri Aurobindo and Vipassana.

I enjoy the poetry. I am just picking up the way Sri Aurobindo writes. I enjoy the way he uses words. Some of his poems I have learnt by heart, simply because I love his writing. He was an articulate man. I love his political and scientific thoughts and notes on books and his theories of evolution. I particularly love *The Secret of the Veda*. It's a sort of spiritual detective novel. But I must say I do not read a lot about anything spiritual. These days I read mostly environmental books. What I can say is that I constantly feel grateful for the guidance of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. And I think - because I've seen similar endeavours, in Australia for instance, and all over the world, based on self-sufficiency, that have fallen through - I think that the only reason Auroville is still alive - and a lot more than alive: thriving - is that it does have a solid spiritual basis. Self-sufficiency can keep a small community alive in a remote place with a small number of individuals, but it could never keep alive as diverse a community as Auroville unless you were completely to generalise the thing into something much wider.

The spiritual base is not obvious to people that come. The reason is that there is no evident spiritual practice and a lot of what goes on wouldn't fit into the spiritual context. But I think that one of the essential things is that we don't own anything here, that we are the trustees of the community and the trustees of a belief that this can work. That is what makes it work you know: it is something bigger than self sufficiency and that is it.

### **Johnny Allen**

Came to Auroville from Australia in 1971 and became one of the pioneer greenworkers. The settlement he founded on the northern border of Auroville was named 'Fertile' by the Mother. He is also much appreciated for his unconventional contributions to Auroville education, which have enriched the lives of two generations of Auroville youth.

# *The Upanishad of Upanishads*

*(Compiled from Sri Aurobindo's translations of the Kena, Katha, Mundaka and Isha Upanishads by Amal Kiran. Text from SABCL vol. 12)*

## *1 (Kena)*

By whom missioned falls the mind shot to its mark? By whom yoked moves the first life-breath forward on its paths? By whom impelled is this word that men speak? What god set eye and ear to their workings? (1.1)

That which is hearing of our hearing, mind of our mind, the speech of our speech, that too is life of our life-breath, sight of our sight. The wise are release beyond and they pass from this world and become immortal. (1.2)

There sight travels not, nor speech, nor the mind. We know It not nor can distinguish how one should teach of It; for It is other than the known; It is there above the unknown. It is so we have heard from men of old who declared That to our understanding. (1.3)

That which is unexpressed by the word, that by which the word is expressed, know That to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here. (1.4)

That which thinks not by the mind, that by which the mind is thought, know That to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here. (1.5)

That which sees not with the eye, that by which one sees the eye's seeings, know That to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here. (1.6)

That which breathes not with the breath, that by which the life-breath is led forward in its paths,

know That to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here. (1.8)

He by whom It is not thought out, has the thought of It; he by whom It is thought out, knows It not. It is unknown to the discernment of those who discern of It, by those who seek not to discern of It, It is discerned. (2.3)

## *2 (Katha)*

One calm and controlling Spirit within all creatures that makes one form into many fashions: the calm and strong who see Him in the self as in a mirror, theirs is eternal felicity and 'tis not for others. (2.2.12)

The One Eternal in the transient, the One consciousness in many conscious beings, who being One orders the desires of many: the calm and strong who behold Him in their self as in a mirror, theirs is eternal peace and 'tis not for others. (2.2.13)

The childish wit bewildered and drunken with the illusion of riches cannot open its eyes to see the passage to heaven: for he that thinks that this world is and there is no other, comes again and again into Death's thralldom. (1.2.6)

He that is not easy to be heard of by many, and even of those that have heard, they are many who have not known Him, – a miracle is the man that can speak of Him wisely or is skilful to win Him, and when one is found, a miracle is the listener

who can know Him even when taught of Him by the knower. (1.2.7)

The self-born has set the doors of the body to face outwards, therefore the soul of a man gazes outward and not at the Self within: hardly a wise man here and there, desiring Immortality, turns his eyes inward and sees the Self within him. (2.1.1)

The Wise One is not born, neither does he die; he came not from anywhere, neither is he anyone: he is everlasting, He is ancient and sempiternal: he is not slain in the slaying of the body. (1.2.18)

If the slayer think that he slays, if the slain think that he is slain, both of these have not the knowledge. This slays not, neither is He slain. (1.2.19)

Finer than the fine, huger than the huge the self hides in the secret heart of the creature; when a man strip himself of will and is weaned from sorrow, then he beholds Him; purified from the mental elements he sees the greatness of the Self-being. (1.2.20)

This that wakes in the sleepers creating desire upon desire, this Purusha, Him they call the Bright One, Him Brahman, Him Immortality, and in Him are all the worlds established: none goes beyond Him. This is That thou seekest. (2.2.8)

The Purusha who is seated in the midst of our self is no larger than the finger of a man; He is the Lord of what was and what shall be; Him having seen one shrinks not from aught nor abhors any. This is That thou seekest. (2.1.12)

The Purusha that is within us is no larger than the finger of a man: He is like a blazing fire that is without smoke, He is lord of His past and His future. He alone is today and He alone shall be tomorrow. This is That thou seekest. (2.1.13)

### 3 (*Mundaka*)

Two birds, beautiful of wing, close companions, cling to one common tree: of the two one eats the sweet fruit of the tree, the other eats not, but watches his fellow. (3.1.1)

The soul is the bird that sits immersed on the one common tree; but because he is not lord he is bewildered and has sorrow. But when he sees that other who is the Lord and beloved, he knows that all is His greatness and his sorrow passes away from him. (3.1.2)

When, a seer, he sees the Golden-hued, the maker, the Lord, the Spirit who is the source of Brahman, then he becomes the knower and shakes from his wings sin and virtue; pure of all stain he reaches the supreme identity. (3.1.3)

The knot of the heart strings is rent, cast away are all doubts and a man's works are spent and perish, when is seen That which is at once the being below and the Supreme. (2.2.9)

This is the life in things that shines manifested by all these beings; a man of knowledge coming wholly to know this, draws back from creeds and too much disputings. In the Self his delight, at play in the Self, doing works – the best is he among the knowers of the Eternal. (3.1.4)

In a supreme golden sheath the Brahman lies, stainless, without parts. A Splendour is That, It is the Light of Lights, It is That which the self-knowers know. (2.2.10)

There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not, how then shall burn this earthly fire? All that shines is but the shadow of his shining; all this universe is effulgent with his light. (2.2.11)

All is this is Brahman immortal, naught else; Brahman is in front of us, Brahman behind us, and to the south of us and to the north of us and

below us and above us; it stretches everywhere.  
All this is Brahman alone, all this magnificent  
universe. (2.2.12)

#### 4 (*Mundaka*)

The Omniscient, the All-wise, whose is this might  
and majesty upon the earth, is this self enthroned  
in the Divine city of the Brahman in his ethereal  
heaven. (2.2.7)

This Self is not won by exegesis, nor by brain-  
power, nor by much learning of Scripture. Only  
by him whom It chooses can it be won; to him  
this Self unveils its own body. (3.2.3)

Eye cannot seize, speech cannot grasp Him, nor  
these other godheads; not by austerity can he be  
held nor by works: only when the inner being  
is purified by a glad serenity of Knowledge,  
then indeed, meditating, one beholds the Spirit  
indivisible. (3.1.8)

Where the nerves are brought close together like  
the spokes in the nave of a chariot- wheel, this is  
He that moves within, - there is He manifoldly  
born. Meditate on the Self as OM and happy  
be your passage to the other shore beyond the  
darkness. (2.2.6)

A mental being, leader of the life and the body,  
has set a heart in matter, in matter he has taken  
his firm foundation. By its knowing the wise see  
everywhere around them That which shines in its  
effulgence, a shape of Bliss and Immortal.  
(2.2.8)

That which is the Luminous, that which is smaller  
than the atoms, that in which are set the worlds  
and their peoples, That is This, - it is Brahman  
immutable: life is That, it is speech and mind.  
That is This, the True and Real, it is That which  
is immortal: it is into That that thou must pierce,  
O fair son, into That penetrate. (2.2.2)

Take up the bow of the Upanishad, that mighty  
weapon, set to it an arrow sharpened by adoration,  
draw the bow with a heart wholly devoted  
to the contemplation of That, and O fair son,  
penetrate into That as thy target, even into the  
Immutable. (2.2.3)

OM is the bow and the soul is the arrow and That,  
even the Brahman, is spoken of as the target. That  
must be pierced with an unfaltering aim; one must  
be absorbed into That as an arrow is lost in its  
target. (2.2.4)

It is Truth that conquers and not falsehood; by  
Truth was stretched out the path of the journey  
of the gods, by which the sages winning their  
desire ascend there where Truth has its Supreme  
abode. (3.1.6)

Vast is That, divine, its form unthinkable; it shines  
out subtler than the subtle, very far and farther  
than farness, it is here close to us, for those who  
have vision It is even here in this world; it is here,  
hidden in the secret heart. (3.1.7)

When every desire that finds lodging in the heart  
of man has been loosened from its moorings,  
then this mortal puts on immortality; even here  
he tastes God, in this human body.  
(Katha 2.3.14)

#### 5 (*Isha*)

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is  
individual universe of movement in the universal  
motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy;  
lust not after any man's possession. (1)

Doing verily works in this world one should wish  
to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and  
not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a  
man. (2)

One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the  
Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front.

That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters. (4)

That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this. (5)

But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught. (6)

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness? (7)

It is He that has gone abroad — That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal. (8)

He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality. (14)

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do Thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight. (15)

O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there, He am I. (16)

The name of That is “That Delight”: as That Delight one should follow after It. He who so knows That, towards him verily all existences yearn. (Kena 4.6)

Thou hast said, “Speak to me Upanishad”; spoken to thee is Upanishad. Of the Eternal verily is the Upanishad that we have spoken. (Kena 4.7)