

Auroville Today

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The first necessity, the inner discovery



Didier Weiss joined Auroville in 1994 and started a few years later Sound Wizard, an Auroville unit that specialises in turnkey design of high-end acoustics and audio-visual environments such as music studios, auditoria, and elite home cinema theaters.

AV Today: Can you speak about your inner development after you joined Auroville?

Didier: Like many Aurovilians, I came to hear about Auroville through Satprem's book '*Sri Aurobindo ou l'Aventure de la Conscience*', and soon after joining the community, I spent a good deal of my initial years reading Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's works. But at some point, there was this felt sense that I was doing all those readings from a flawed perspective. This is when I realized that the first thing that I needed to do is to make that inner discovery of this 'being free, vast and knowing' which The Mother describes in *To Be A True Aurovillian*:

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

I could not continue to envision my life from a restricted specific point of view which evidently has no true reality, so I attempted to understand – or rather realize – what She means, what that vaster and freer being is. I avidly searched for answers from different traditions and walked different spiritual paths until I met in person Ramesh Balsekar, a non-dual teacher in the lineage of Nisargadatta Maharaj – a renowned Advaita master – who at that time lived in Mumbai and welcomed spiritual searchers from India and elsewhere in his home. While still in France I had read one of his books *Pointers* – 1982, which had had a significant impact. His message had resonated and I was thrilled to be able to have a face-to-face exchange on this central burning topic. Following a first visit in 1996, I made sure to visit him a couple of days at a time, every time I had a work assignment in Mumbai till his death in 2007.

Ramesh was neither a philosopher nor an Advaita scholar; he offered several practical tools for inner discovery. He would painstakingly and relentlessly demonstrate, but always with affection and a twinkle in his eyes, how to use them in daily life. He would invariably open his talks by saying his concepts were not the Truth, but only pointers. They were not concepts to accumulate as mere intellectual knowledge and be quoted or recited by heart, and they were certainly not to be taken at face value. On the contrary, they were to be heard once, and put to the test of life until they made total sense, until there was a seeing/knowing that was alive, that did not come from mind. He gently discouraged people to sit at his feet for months waiting for some divine sign or intervention, and would send them out of his home – sometimes even a bit ruthlessly – into the world to live their life fully, as a friend, as a husband, as a father, as a professional, etc. no matter their role. This talked to me deeply as there was never an intention to study scriptures and to live a so-called spiritual life separate from daily living. In fact, there was this intuition that spirituality and daily life were seamless. So I trusted Ramesh and put his tools to use, which helped me greatly in understanding – not through mind but in direct experience – what was meant by that first paragraph of '*To Be A True Aurovillian*'.

What were these tools?

When you tackle this essential existential question about who we really are behind all appearances, you quickly see that many of the answers that you generally come up with are not really true. You cannot possibly be limited to your identity and social status (name, age, marital status, profession, etc.), nor your body, mind and emotions. All these are constantly fluctuating so they cannot possibly define who you really are. So the first step is to de-identify from that ‘which you are not’, and then look at what remains. In my case, this process of complete deconstruction of what I thought I was took several years ... as I had an active mind and a rather stubborn and rebellious spirit.

Ramesh did not teach me to live my life in a certain spiritual or not spiritual way. He only suggested that I deeply looked at a few assumptions that I had taken for granted. These unverified assumptions determined the way I lived, which often included optional emotional and psychological suffering – not to be confused with body or psychological pain, which is alas not avoidable in the course of a life.

One of his tools was to explore what we usually call our ‘sense of doership’. Do we make choices/decisions and do we act with total control, or is it merely an appearance of control? Is what we really are defined by our choices, decisions, actions, thoughts, will or feelings?

Through the analytical investigation the Indian philosophers called *Neti Neti* – not this, not that – you might realize that you are not the doer of your actions, you are not the perceiver of the perceptions, and so on. But then you wander through all the avenues that indicate that ‘someone’ is there, and then you realize that yes, you are! You exist 100 %, there is a sense of being. There can be no doubt about that, but not as a separate individual localized in time and space! And this is a life-changing discovery, which brings us back to that first paragraph of ‘To Be A True Aurovilian’.

AV Today: Then how do you take actions? Do you step back?

It is not at all a question of inwardly taking a distance and stepping away from life, there is a fuller involvement on the contrary. There is simply no longer separation: a ‘me’ here and ‘an outside world’ out there. The discovery is that “I am” is absolutely not localized. We could say it is “without a center”, Life knows itself and lives itself directly. When the sense of ‘me’ is de-identified, it is still Didier who goes through life, as we know it, who makes choices, takes decisions and actions, but there is a simplification. There is no sense of authorship: choices and decisions are made and actions are taken, according to the elements that are there in the moment, without a single exception.

This seeing/knowing comes with a side effect, a sense of deep peace and harmony, a sense of fundamental well-being, whatever the circumstances, as what we really are is not bound in time and space. There is a void, but not a void that is cold and full of desperation. It has instead the vastness and fullness of life. At this point in time in the history of Auroville and the world, we could easily say that circumstances are excruciating, however peace prevails. There is a force, which moves us, makes us do what we do. We could say that when The Mother acts, She uses us as Her instruments.

So you see a play of forces?

“I” don’t see anything; there is only a play of forces. The force pushes X to take this decision or to behave in that way, for X is very much part of the whole thing. A force to get X to act in a specific way uses his specific set of genes and conditionings through upbringing, belief systems and cultural background and so on.

The Mother, in a conversation in 1969, said, “It [the city] will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger Forces. Nothing depends on human beings – neither the planning nor the execution – nothing! That is why one can laugh.” This seems to correspond to your experience.

Yes, but it means also that everyone will act at the position he or she is at, according to the whole context.

Let’s take a practical example. You wake up early morning and you want coffee but there is no coffee. How do you ‘act’ if the shop around the corner has just sold out?

I might jump on my bike and get some coffee as soon as possible in a neighboring store, or stay home and have tea instead, depending on the mood of the day.

Any action comes from a context. Supposed individuals act at any time according to their own specific angle in life at that time, and that is also how an action can become impaired, when it springs out of misidentification. What I am saying is that this sense of existence, as a separate being doesn’t need to be there, because Existence is, Life is, and this is the only player. It is not ‘us’ who act. If we think we do, we may want to verify whether this is true in our direct experience.

So how do you emotionally deal with a very serious event?

It is not that ‘I’ need to remember to be cool and detached when facing difficult or happy times, the belief system in the existence of a separate ‘me’ is gone and cannot be revived. The context dictates how the story develops, but the ‘poor me’ story and related emotional and psychological suffering disappears. There is an opening towards peace and harmony, there is only silence. Actions, thoughts and emotions appear, but they come from a deep sense of peace.

On a day-to-day level, when this non-dual seeing/knowing permeates our life, the ‘poor me’ syndrome and accompanying symptoms are gone and there is a growing sense of equanimity, whether at home with family and friends, at work with clients or colleagues, within a collectivity like ours or with perfect strangers. It is spirituality in action. But until this realization is fully lived, the sense of relaxation and contraction still depends on fortunate or unfortunate life events.

The proposal here is in realizing the utter ‘undividedness’ of life, and to remain there. This is the definition of Advaita: “not two”.

Let's look at the current situation of Auroville. Many things have happened over the past months, which have made many people very anxious and upset. What is your response?

The deep fracture in the fabric of Auroville and the chaos it entails is of deep concern. A non-dual perspective on life does not turn us into insensitive apathetic blobs!

The way out of the hamster wheel is when judgment about yourself or seemingly others goes out of the window. It is like a game of chess, we need to look at it from an impersonal perspective, like an impersonal game. You don't hate the queen of the opponent because she captured your pawn, or point the finger at the fool claiming that he is responsible for your 'poor me' misery ... And similarly the opponent king can't take credit for his prowess, for his actions based on the 'great me' or 'superior me' syndrome – the opposite of the 'poor me' – which is also on the forefront right now in Auroville. A response based from the non-dual understanding, therefore the practical mind – versus the auto referential mind – might be complete stillness or involve a strong action. Nothing is excluded.

Do you believe that the present hullabaloo is caused by the absence of people who have no or little contact with their psychic being?

References to the psychic being is not part of my vocabulary, I have no competence in this field. But in my direct experience, the misunderstanding on the nature of what we really are causes the hullabaloo you are alluding to. The one and only cause of this whole turmoil is this sense of misidentification with a personal 'me' with a goal, a destiny and a mission.

How could we opt out of this hamster wheel in Auroville?

From this non-dual perspective, I see that even if we were to change the Working Committee ten times, or make ten more master plans, it would not change any of our current and future problems. The cause of our failure is not the belief in a perfect circle or not perfect circle [of the Crown Road, eds.], a preference for an organic and friendly development as opposed to a rigidly planned strategy, but the erroneous assumption about what each Aurovilian believes he truly is at the core of his being, which has become his identity, his limitation, his nightmare ...

At present, these identities are clashing. I am not saying that we should not make choices as to which makes more sense. What I am saying is that the solution lies in stopping believing in a 'me' story, in being identified with this or that image of myself, and in acting from the unlimited and undefined vast and knowing space we really are. The essential work in de-identification is key.

The first paragraph of '*To Be A True Aurovilian*', the search for the inner being, ought to be taken up seriously and persistently. I am not talking here about theoretical knowledge to be learned. I am talking about a direct and truly alive experience of what She said, which might change radically one's perspective on life forever. Then, Life

will unfold in a different way within, of course, the limitations of our mental, emotional and physical being. Then, there will be the very much-needed peace and harmony to take things forward in a harmonious way, leaving aside personal identities, like we cast old clothes that have done their time and are no longer needed.

The first necessity for manifesting the greatness of Auroville in all its magnitude is to have ‘True Aurovilians’ who have made this inner discovery, and can act from there. It is not about having a growing population of thousands of people unaware of their true nature and/or merely looking for an alternative life-style.

What The Mother talked about was discovering our shared being, that ‘free, vast and knowing being’, of which most traditions speak from time immemorial. We might then see different decisions emerge from the core of this being and a true human unity manifest. The Mother is pushing us in that direction, towards the discovery of that Center. This is part of the ‘Divine Conspiracy’; it is about time that all of us take up this work, or else we might simply fail her, whatever sophisticated artefacts we use or brilliant reasoning we entertain.

In conversation with Carel

Didier is the founder of Sound Wizard and the author of Explorations non duelles – Retour au paradis perdu – Editions Accarias – L’Originel, 2017 and Une vie libérée – Le guide complet du dépouillement personnel – Editions Almora, 2022, both in French language only.