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The World Temple. A spiritual experiment.

In the North of India, at the bank of the river Ganges and between the holy cities Haridwar and Rishikesh, is Aurovalley Ashram. Aurovalley means something like 'valley of the golden light' and that light is exactly what many people find here. Charlot Spoorenberg lived in the ashram for a year in 2010. With her heart filled with joy, she returned, also to interview founder Swami Brahmdev.

It's a bumpy road that leads to the ashram. The taxi drives us along dusty shops, roaming cows, little girls with goats and many water buffalo's. The rice fields are bright green in this season, in great contrast with the colourful sari's that the woman who work on them are wearing. People glance at us with curiosity, but everybody here knows what our destination is: Aurovalley Ashram. Since 28 years well known in this area. Due to all the western faces that have visited the small town of Raiwala for it, and also for the free education that the ashram offers to the poorest children. We arrive at a large, iron gate and after honking a few times we are welcomed inside.

Aurovalley is small compared to a lot of other ashrams. Between the green surroundings, there are three buildings situated where visitors and habitants can stay. Among that, there is a dining hall, the mediation temple, and a library. From all over the world, people come to Aurovalley to find peace, to be silent, or to talk with founder Swami Brahmdev. He listens to everybody who talks to him spontaneously and daily there is satsang, the collective question hour. Swami Brahmdev is an energetic man, who is constantly working on new projects. The last one is 'The World Temple', an amazing building. The inauguration was on 12-12-12 and it should be finished in February 2014.

Swamiji, how was the World Temple born?

"I see it as a miracle how all the rays of the sun come to the earth and play their game so well, without contradictions, without competition, without problems with each other. They spread their light and do their work perfectly. They create harmony and give light. We come from the same source; we are also rays of the Divine. We are made from the same light, the same elements, and the same consciousness. But we don't know how to live like the rays of the sun. With the World Temple we want to create a place and atmosphere where we can do an experiment. An experiment to live with each other. To make this life useful and meaningful and to fulfil the purpose of our life."

And the building is round to symbolize that all people are equal?

"There was no design or fixed plan. Everything takes shape at the spot, like we are being guided and someone is using us as an instrument. No, we don't have money for designers or architects. Besides that, architects design with their head. Of course we interfere, like 'this is beautiful and this is not', but mainly I am looking for harmony. If I feel harmony, the building can continue. Otherwise we have to start again."

In the centre of the World temple is a tree. What is the meaning of this?

"It can help us to discover ourselves. This tree is growing with the help of water and soil from more than 70 countries in the world. If this tree can grow, maybe we can also learn to live in harmony."

The goal of the temple is to unite people. How?

We are not preaching any religion here. You have to discover your own divinity. If you have the aspiration to discover the truth of life, the ashram gives you this possibility. This is the place to dig yourself, to change your attitude and to learn to learn from life and nature with a divine attitude. It is a spiritual laboratory.”

What is your roll in all of this? Do you guide people?

“It is not that I ‘guide’ people. But if someone comes here with sincere intentions, open and receptive, they can ask me questions. I answer and my words can help someone.”

How do you know what words to say?

“I don’t have fixed answers. What I say and how I say it, depends on someone’s psychology. Some people just listen and others really understand it, really get it. We are not trying to teach fixed ideas or lessons here. It is just a place with the right atmosphere. When a seed finds the right climate, it can sprout and start growing. The same principle works for us people. If the divine seed in us finds the right atmosphere, it can blossom. One seed that can blossom is enough. The perfection of one person can change the world, even save it.”

How can the World Temple help people to grow?

First of all you need a goal, you need to be searching. You need to want to grow. With that sincere aspiration you follow the program here. With have a very simple lifestyle, that determines when we eat, meditate, speak, sleep, et cetera. That discipline gives a rhythm to your life and after a while, you notice that your life questions are being answered. Because of the atmosphere, something opens inside. Your light can unfold and everything becomes clearer. You already have all the answers inside.”

Why don’t people know how to live?

“Most of us have a very limited definition of life. We think we are on this earth to maintain our ‘box’, our body. That’s why we are only busy with satisfying our mental, emotional and physical needs. And with maintaining the frames and systems we have created. We are maintaining instead of living. Maintenance is hard work. You have to make a big effort to survive and always be scared and worried that you will fail. I tell you this: if you start having faith in yourself, in the divinity in you, you will start living in a whole other way. Then you don’t have to worry anymore about fulfilling your needs and desires. You feel that your soul is helping you and your faith in that just keeps getting stronger.”

How did you come in contact with the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother?

“When I was young, the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother where not very well known in this part of India. I was searching and the first time I saw the eyes of The Mother, something woke up inside me, something opened. Many things became clear at that moment. The presence of The

Mother is like a teacher, like a guru. She is always with you to help you, to support you, to guide you and to protect you. You never have to feel alone.”

How did you get the idea to start an ashram?

“There was no idea. I was looking for a place to sleep, a place to live for the Divine. To live like a sadhu (someone who renounces all material belongings and fully devotes himself to spiritual liberation, red.) . I found this place and after a while people started coming. That was the start of Aurovalley Ashram. In the past years we have had many challenges, but we are still here. People from all over the world come here for a short or longer period and they feel at home, just like you. We become family and that’s why everybody keeps on coming back. People find peace here and clarities.”

You have built beautiful things here. Do you start with a vision or a feeling?

“Nothing like that. I stand on a spot and it starts spontaneously. We start building and when there is no harmony, we start again. There is no mission behind and no pressure. We are not here to impress someone or to compete. We are here to enjoy this life.”

Is this way of life possible in our society? Or should we build a new society, like you are doing here?

“There should be millions of places like this on earth. Fortunately there are many people who make their own laboratories in different places, in different ways. In the whole world we are facing the same challenges and we suffer from the same problems. There is not enough peace, love and harmony. Not for a long time. How long do we continue to live like this? Life is not about coming here, suffer, cry and go again. Life is given to us, let’s at least find out why we are here. Whoever or wherever you are.”

How do we discover why we are here?

“By getting to know yourself. And to do this, you have to make a U-turn. You have to turn inwards. Dig yourself, go very deep inside yourself. Discover from where you feel, from where you speak. Where do your impulses come from, your emotions, your ideas? What is the purpose of your senses? Why don’t you have control over your impulses and emotions? Who or what inside you needs to be satisfied? By discovering these things, you will know that one is your mind, the other is your body, et cetera. But you are much more than that. You are a soul, energy. You are light. By realizing these things, the faith in your soul, in the divinity within you starts. And then it is possible to make different decisions. Satisfying your desires becomes less important, you can control yourself and it becomes even more important to know yourself. Every person on this earth is in the process of his own evolution, on his own level. You should at least realize what the purpose of your life is. If you know that, you can live with clarity. The purpose of life is not to have a fixed definition about life. Because your consciousness is growing and because of that, your life is in a constant process of change and progress.”

The ashram started 28 years ago. Did you ever think: I don’t want to do this anymore?

“Maybe in the beginning a little bit. But now there is no confusion or doubt. The day starts and ends and time goes so fast. The inner as well as the outer work never ends. The more you discover, the more you keep on discovering. That is the beauty of the game of life. If you are curious, life will only become more interesting”.