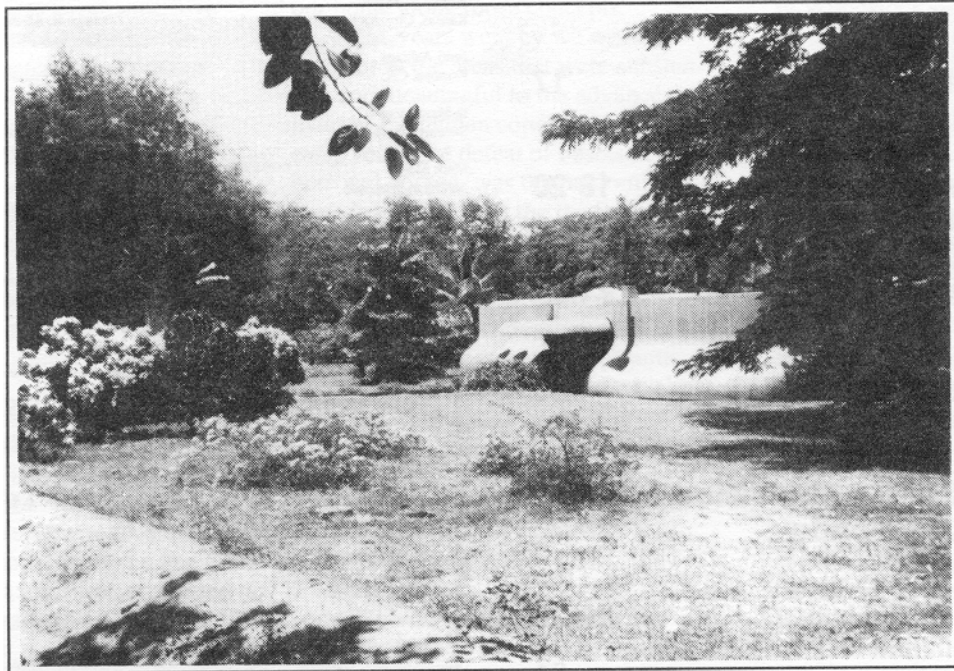


# Collaboration

Winter, 1993

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Last School, Aspiration, Auroville, summer, 1993

**In This Issue:  
Life in the USA  
After Auroville**

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### Next Issue: The Last of the Original Sadhaks

With the passing of Madhav Pandit, Dyuman, and others, the number of "original sadhaks," those fortunate souls who came to Sri Aurobindo and Mother before World War II, has dwindled. We will feature an interview with Amal Kiran and a talk in Auroville by Nirodbaran. If you have reflections or experiences you would like to contribute to this topic, please contact us at (802) 869-2789.

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# A Partnership of Half a Century

By Joseph Spanier

I WAS THREE YEARS OF AGE the day my father, a physician, brought a baby into this world who, unbeknownst to me, would someday be Muriel, my beloved wife and companion for over half a century. In early October Muriel died in my arms. I thought how logically meta-physical it was that my father was the first person to touch her and I the last.

The journey of our lives, of more than five decades, was a romantic love affair and an adventure in consciousness—a series of materialized dreams. Muriel and I believed that one with a dream could be open to the wonders of the universe and able to develop the capacity to keep an open and searching mind for the ever evolving truth.

I was fifteen years old when I met Muriel at a party. This unbelievably beautiful twelve year old with her penetrating brown eyes, sweet smile and gentle demeanor immediately inundated by entire being with love.

She and I each had the kind of family which existed during the early part of the 20th century, consisting of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins—all of whom played different but very important roles in our lives. That kind of family structure is now a rare and endangered social phenomenon.

We were thus raised with certain

fundamental values and social and political orientations which, with the love we had for each other as man and woman, were factors in our decision to get married.

We believed that our children, yet to be born, should live in an atmosphere of love and openness to ideas of growth and freedom for all of human-kind. We reasoned that one could not plant a rosebush hoping for beautiful blossoms if it was planted in the Great Sand Dunes rather than in soil that had been properly cultivated.

We therefore created an atmosphere in our home along those concepts.

As the years went by we worked together in the areas that were substantive and meaningful to the advancement of the human condition. In those early years, the defeat of Fascism, both here and abroad, was the predominant issue beginning with the the Spanish Civil War. We were also visibly active in the struggle against McCarthyism. We picketed with black people, together with our children in their baby carriages, to desegregate the Atlantic Coast beaches on Long Island which were closed to them. We organized the first human rights committee on Long Island when a black man (a retired colonel in the U.S. Army) wished to, but was thwarted from buying a home on our block in a middle class neighborhood.

Muriel was a member of the non governmental organization group that worked with the United Nations. She



Muriel Spanier, with Anie Nunnally and Joe Spanier

and I were co-founders of a collective in Woodstock, New York which was partly based on the social concept of human unity in diversity. During the past twenty-five years of our lives, we worked for the development of Auroville, the city which embodied in its charter all of our beliefs—one of those dreams which has now materialized.

Muriel was essentially a quiet activist and a highly evolved human being. Her gentle nature, graciousness and just that soft smile with a modest sense of humor attracted people to her. During her illness of eight years of virtual incapacity and pain without complaint, many people came from all parts of the world to offer their respect.

Her death has left me with an appalling void. To ameliorate the anguish of my being, I now resort to the memory of the meaningful and productive half century with which we were blessed—the joys and sorrows fully shared, the achievements and even some of the failures mutually endured. Certainly there are no regrets in those memories. Only a sense of loss and great pain that it ended. Yet can anyone hope for more? Just a little more time to keep away the inevitable?

Our generation is fading away to make room for the next. Muriel and I traveled the road less traveled and it was together that we triumphed. The future was never ours to begin with but we surely lived the past and my memory of that will endure.

*Joseph Spanier lives in Boulder, Colorado.*

## In Memoriam: Muriel Spanier

Muriel Spanier came to Matagiri, with her husband Joe, around 1970. At first they visited only on weekends, but after returning from a visit to the Ashram in 1971, she moved in to stay, with Joe coming on weekends.

It was during this time that she kept suggesting to Eric Hughes that they start a publication. Eric, however, thought that there were already too many Auro-publications. Then, in 1973, during a morning meditation, Eric received the message, "Now you can begin." In September of that year, the first issue of *Collaboration* came out.

Muriel went on to dedicate herself to other projects in the Yoga, especially book distribution and Auroville. There will be a memorial service for Muriel at Matagiri on July 3 at 10 a.m. during A.U.M. At that time, Joe will spread her ashes on Mother's mountain.

# To Play My Part in the *Lila*

## An Interview With Tom O'Brien

*Note: This was the first interview done for this issue, and it was subsequently sent around to about a dozen Aurovillians in the USA as a touchstone for their responses.*

**Gordon:** Why did you leave Auroville?

**Tom:** Well, I left being a resident of Auroville in 1979, but Auroville is still within my heart and I feel deeply connected to it.

First of all, it was very difficult to leave Auroville. It was a struggle to make that decision because I felt so hopeful and in love with Auroville to begin. There were obvious worldly problems that contributed to my decision, such as that I missed my family; my father was in his mid-70s and I wanted to see him before he passed away.

In addition, I had no money. In fact I had spent the money I had put aside for my return fare and had to borrow from a brother-in-law just to fly back. As much as I wanted to give everything to Auroville and did, I had no trust fund nor financial support to lean on. During those years in Auroville, there were a lot of financial crises going on, but some people seemed to have resources. I didn't. I didn't feel comfortable living in a state of poverty. Those were some of the practical considerations.

Another thing is that I'm a homosexual, and I felt, when I went to Auroville, that I was going to be **celebrate**. It seemed to be the most **yogic** thing I could do, and Yoga was/is the central thread of my life. Also, I didn't feel a part of the gay scene in 70's America. When I went to Auroville it was with the intention that this was my home and that I would try to live a life of brahmacharaya. But I struggled with that. I still longed for some kind of relationship, and it didn't seem like it would happen in Auroville. **That** was another very personal reason.

In addition, the collective process was quite chaotic then. I felt tossed around by factions and dizzy with the instability-the split with the Ashram

was particularly painful. In a sense, I left to get a better perspective on myself, yoga, and my own life direction.

**Gordon:** What difficulties did you face when you came back to the USA?

**Tom:** I felt like a foreigner when I returned. I had traveled through Europe, The Middle East, and Asia before reaching Auroville and was accustomed to being in foreign countries. I had been away for about three years but was somewhat amazed and surprised to get to New York and feel like a foreigner again-this just didn't seem like my culture. That was a bewildering experience, because I was raised in America. And yet, had gone through such changes and soul-searching, living in India, that I didn't feel like an American. Out of that sprung a lot of difficulties: How am I going to make a living? Where will I live? What kind of life am I going to live (now that I'm in this foreign country)?

**Gordon:** Yes, I felt the same thing—you arrived back and you were kind of a blank slate. One of the reasons I left was that I had never done anything in the USA, never held a job, and yet all my training, especially as a man, up until the age of 22, was that I would get a job one day. So there were those inner expectations ... that I had to somehow prove myself.

**Tom:** I can recall struggling with this issue when I was in Auroville and being quite confused. I was raised to go to college and become a professional of some kind, and then I tabled that approach to life. I was really a flower child of the 60's, and in the 70's was a teacher, librarian, activist... lived at Matagiri, and basically did not get on this career spiral track, because I felt that what was important was consciousness and helping to create a new world.

But when I came back, I felt that I had to do something about those traditional goals. Looking back now, I

25 years after the founding of Auroville, *Collaboration* decided to contact former and current residents of the physical/psychic community to get their reflections on their experience. If we missed you or you didn't have the time, please be encouraged to send us your thoughts on the questions that are addressed in the following articles and interviews.

can see that it created a lot of confusion ... confusion about values, priorities and social expectations. It took years to sort out.

**Gordon:** Do you mean, returning and trying to find how you can fit the Auroville ideal into concrete contributions in this country?

**I had been away for about three years but was somewhat amazed and surprised to get to New York and feel like a foreigner again-this just didn't seem like my culture.**

**Tom:** That's right. That's right. When I initially came back, I had no idea how to do that-or how I could even begin. After a few months of being here and staying with friends and family and working odd jobs, I decided to return to Matagiri. The emotional and spiritual support of other devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was very important. While living at Matagiri I landed a job teaching emotionally disturbed children in Woodstock and making an extremely low salary by American standards. But given my **mindset** of poverty, it didn't matter. It was more than I had, and I gave everything to Matagiri anyway.

**Gordon:** I had a similar experience. On my first job I was offered a salary of \$11,000, and I said, "Of course," not realizing ...



**Tom:** That it was the bottom 25% of America or something like that. That it was barely out of poverty. I lived like that for a couple of years. In many ways Matagiri was another experiment, like Auroville, but after two years I realized again that I was somehow putting my personal life on hold, and that didn't seem correct. So I left.

**Gordon:** This is an interesting point that I hope others will comment on—how to make the transition from Auroville into regular American society. Matagiri was one way for you to do it. For me, it was being in a community (at Wesleyan University) of people studying Indian music. Did other people gravitate toward similar transition vehicles?

**Tom:** Perhaps. Even after I left Matagiri and I was teaching in a small town in Massachusetts, I looked for people who were meditators or who were interested in Indian philosophy. I became close to people in Siddha Yoga and was happy to go to their meditations where I felt a sense of community. I needed that!

On a funny note, at the school where I was teaching, I took some Ashram stationary and wrote a description/invitation about forming a study group on *The Bhagavad Gita*—just wanting to get people together—and not one person in that school ever asked about the study group. The only comment I got was how pretty the paper was. To me, that was a reflection of how much of a foreigner I was to my fellow Americans, but eventually I found a few who were interested and together we created a cozy nucleus of seekers.

**Gordon:** There's another theme here: the difficulty in communicating the Auroville experience to people with whom you find yourself in daily contact. That's another good question for everyone: Did you try to communicate the Auroville experience to Americans whom you met on a day-to-day basis.

**Tom:** If we were close, I would say to this day, yes. However, I've gone through an evolutionary process in that



Karna, Perumal, AuroPrem, and Tom O'Brien at a peace march.

regard. In the beginning I used to feel this urge to give slide shows and talks—and I still might do that for friends or a particular group—but in the beginning that seemed to be the only way I could communicate Auroville, to substantiate it through slides or maybe some literature.

Now, it's more informal ... with people who get to know me. If they're close friends, they'll get to know fairly soon. If they're colleagues or professionals whom I know through work, it might be six months or so before they find out I've been to India. And it might be a statement or two, such as that I lived at an experimental community in India that has an international, evolutionary focus. Then if they ask me more about it, I'll provide greater details, but if they're not interested, that's as far as I'll go.

**Gordon:** When did you feel like ... I don't quite know how to put this, but either you had "made it" in this country or you didn't need to go back or you were on to something here—do you know what I mean?

**Tom:** It's actually an ongoing, not an answered, question. I still think of Auroville as a part of me and I a part of

it. I think what's happened is a sense that life is a process—it's a verb, not a noun. So "geographical place" I see as temporary.

**Gordon:** I guess my question is that ... when did you decide you were going to stay here.

**Tom:** Again, it's very personal. I'm involved in a long term relationship with a companion who's here. He is now tied to a life here, his family and career. That's a big piece of it. I also have this sense that everything is temporary, and that I'm here now, and while I'm here I want to be as rooted as I can be, whether here is for the next ten years or next ten months—I don't know. There is a real strong sense of temporariness about everything. I used to feel insecure with that thought, but now I take comfort with it. There's this sense that one of these days I'm going back to Auroville, either for a few months or a few years. That sense of returning has never left me.

I did return once, in 1989, only for a few weeks because of work constrictions. It was both great and weird; weird to go back for only a couple of weeks having lived there for a couple of years. It was a bit of a shock. But it

was still so sweet to see the growth of the community and the beauty of the forest.

So I can't say that a particular date occurred when I said, "Now I'm staying in America." That has never happened; it's all been a transitive verb.

**I still think of Auroville as a part of me and I a part of it. I think what's happened is a sense that life is a process—it's a verb, not a noun. So "geographical place" I see as temporary.**

**Gordon:** It was different for me. For five years I worked and did my American thing. Then I reached the stage when I said, "That's it. I don't want to do this regular job anymore," and took a job in a Quaker school, something more Aurovilian. At the same time I went to Auroville and realized that I wasn't going to go back permanently—that I wanted some kind of relationship with Auroville that didn't involve staying there. Because, the other aspect of Auroville is a commitment to the place and the ideals, and this feeling that it would take such incredible dedication and perseverance. That's why breaking away from it was so difficult—and in some ways always will be—because of the feeling that Auroville is the real work. Being there is the real work.

**Tom:** Even when I lived there, I didn't quite feel that. I have an innate rebellion against what to me is a fundamentalist attitude—that there's a "right" way to do things, to be Aurovilian, to be spiritual. I believe that it comes from a need, a collective need perhaps, to feel a unity with others in the process, whether it be in Auroville or a particular religious denomination. However I rebel against that. Maybe because of my strong upbringing which was Irish Catholic.

You see, I also lived in Matagiri for a few years as well as Auroville, and I experienced the same "pressure," if you will, by the collective that wants you to be married to it. Mother said that the true marriage is in the spirit and not in any outer conformity. If one is not happy or growing in a relationship, not superficially but deeply, then perhaps one should leave.

In many ways I didn't continue to grow in Auroville and finally felt that I had to leave, and I am glad that I did. I believe now that it has been right for me to return to the USA. It has been important for me to claim my gay identity, to struggle with that; I am trying to play my part in the *lila*-world play—as a man who seeks truth, the new consciousness and is willing to accept my karma as a gay person. I didn't feel that I could do that in Auroville. In no way does that diminish my allegiance to the Work, which is a Divine process throughout the world.

**Gordon:** That leads me to another question: besides coming into your own as a gay person, what other ways have you been able to grow here that you might not have done in Auroville.

**Tom:** One way is as a teacher. I felt a certain futility in the use of my talents and gifts in Auroville. I did teach some of the Tamil village people English, which I loved to do. But I worked on Matrimandir, in the plant nursery, cooked, did construction work ... I felt great doing that, but I also felt that my greatest gift was to be a teacher; and it didn't seem to me that teachers were really wanted in Auroville in the late 70's, even though I know now that there's been a tremendous growth in valuing education. I didn't know how to give myself integrally to the community; and it's only through giving that we grow. Coming back to the USA and claiming my role as a teacher enabled me to grow, both professionally and personally.

**Gordon:** Did you continue to work for Auroville here?

**Tom:** Initially yes. I got Matagiri to import Encense D'Auroville, and for a couple of years Matagiri became a major importer. Informally I gave

slides and talks at local colleges, as well as being always ready to talk to visitors about Auroville. A few years later, I started a newsletter for the Matrimandir that encouraged tithing.

Around 1983, it distressed me to hear that the Matrimandir construction might have to stop for lack of funds, and Arya Maloney and I felt like doing something. He went to Auroville and, from there, kept me abreast of what was happening so it would appear in the newsletter. Eventually the work was taken up by AVI-USA, and the Matrimandir Newsletter came directly from Auroville.

I was involved with the Nexus group which linked together devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. As a group we collaborated in helping to get Nexus set up which in turn became the Sri Aurobindo Association over the years. I became quite involved in that and also helped A.U.M. get off the ground.

Then, in the past few years, with PeaceTrees, in welcoming the wonderful young Tamilians. It's been a real joy for me to have many of these young Aurovilians come and stay with us. I continue to support Auroville financially through donations for certain projects, read *Auroville Today* to keep up-to-date, talk to people who come from Auroville and host periodic visitors.

**There's this sense that one of these days I'm going back to Auroville, either for a few months or a few years. That sense of returning has never left me.**

**Gordon:** What aspects of your Auroville experience are still with you?

**Tom:** I came to Auroville through the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and what they have done for me is to revolution-



Muriel Spanier, Tom O'Brien, and Bina Chaudhuri

ize my perception of what is a human being; and in a nutshell what that is, is that we are all the divine though we might not be awake to our divinity. Therefore the life process, both individually and collectively, is to

**I have an innate rebellion against what to me is a fundamentalist attitude—that there's a "right" way to do things, to be Aurovilian, to be spiritual**

awaken to that divine potential. The reason for Auroville is to have a laboratory where that potential can be ... incubated... hastened along. Auroville is a special place for the collective process, but I don't feel that Auroville is the only place where evolution is happening—it is happening throughout the globe. So I try to keep that evolutionary awareness alive in my heart and mind wherever I go.

**Gordon:** What about on the day-to-day level?

**Tom:** I meditate nearly every day. I think my work as a psychotherapist is largely based upon my view of what it means to be a human being. For all eternity I'll be grateful to Mother and Sri Aurobindo for opening that awareness in me . . .

But then there's the more banal, the memories that come back. We had termites in our last house, and I was reminded of how the white ants were a regular feature of Auroville, while once in a while, here, there might have to be a termite inspection.

**Gordon:** It reminds me of what we said earlier about poverty. We've lived in the "third world," and no matter what happens here, that is always in the background, a reference point.

**Tom:** Here's a mundane way of perhaps addressing that. There are times when I'm in awe of what most Americans take for granted, like hot water, a roof over my head, clean drinking water, a garden that's beautiful.

I'm a lover of beauty, and there's an abundance of beauty in America. But there are still times, particularly in the winter, when I miss the beauty I knew in south India—the proliferation of

flowers and foliage. These are little ways I might remember.

Life here is a pressure cooker of time and money, and of course that's also true of anywhere in the world. But in the USA when you have a job and bills to pay, you must conform to a certain lifestyle which is stressful. Then time becomes precious because you have so little free time. That's something I miss. I feel that I had much more time in Auroville.

So this life that I'm leading now, well, I know that it's what I need to do for this moment (and this moment might be another ten years), but I know in another part of my heart that I want to live a different way. I value having more freedom—being less busy than I am now. I'm not complaining about my life because I feel grateful for what I have and ... fairly fulfilled with what I'm doing ... but there's the wish for something different. One of the main differences is to have more "time" in the day.

**I came to Auroville through the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and what they have done for me is to revolutionize my perception of what is a human being.**

**Gordon:** I agree with you. I think about that aspect of time a lot. I didn't mind taking the village bus to Pondy, even though it took 45 minutes to go 10 miles. You know, it's ...

**Tom:** OK, you see the sights, the people, the animals, the flow of life. It is here too. We just need to take time to see—and be.

*Tom O'Brien is a social worker and psychotherapist who lives in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.*



# The Only Way to Leave Auroville is to Leave the Earth

By Constance

**I**T SEEMS TO ME THAT THE question why one leaves Auroville—or what is the nature of life after Auroville—is one that assumes a rather conventional model of the universe. However, all questions concerning Auroville exceed the conventional and consensual dimensions of human experience.

I believe that, for an Aurovillian, the only way to leave Auroville is to leave the earth.

In my experience, this is neither a fantasy, an idealization, nor a rationalization. And this belief is in no way affected by how the present "official" community of Auroville currently defines who is or who is not an Aurovillian or what does or does not constitute Auroville.

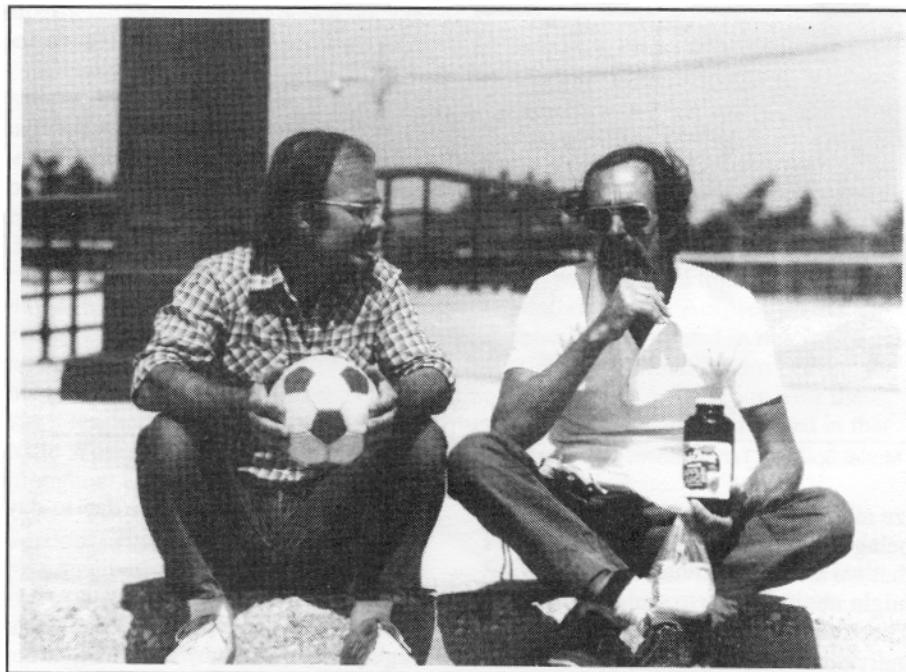
Being an Aurovillian is an inevitability for us. It is the tragic/comic fact of our existence on the earth at this time. There is no getting out of it. As long as we are alive, we are unable to ignore the truth of our purpose here—or to avoid our responsibilities to this Divine Work and to one another.

This, of course, depends upon the extent to which we remember who we are.

## My Personal Awakening to Auroville

Before considering the significance, if any, of living at some specific geographic distance from the Matrimandir and the banyan tree, I would like to briefly outline my personal awakening to Auroville. Because, for me, the primary question is: how can one be in Auroville, in the first place?

When I was twelve, I met "by chance" a person who was to become a lifelong friend. When I first saw him, he was surrounded by a golden light. The space in front of me seemed to open and he appeared to be speaking to me from other dimensions. Later I realized that I had been seeing and



Constance and Bill Sullivan

speaking with his soul (whether or not he was aware of that fact). It was my first reunion with a member of what another friend calls "the eternal family." In time, I met and recognized many other persons whom I have known long before this birth.

Mother speaks of a "psychic family": a collectivity of souls who take birth at approximately the same time — called to the earth for a common purpose. We are able to find each other here in our physical existence, because, in more subtle dimensions, we are always together. Mother also speaks of the Supramental ship which is transporting souls to the new creation. It is symbolic of our work — linking, through the transformation of our lives, the earth with the new world. And, for me, it also symbolises the community of Auroville — a community which can only come into being here, because it already exists.

## Remembering

One evening in Mazatlan, Mexico, while crossing a street — I stepped into eternity. I returned to a place where I always am. In a diamond blue light, where I always have been and always will be, I received my soul rising from the earth. When I returned to my body, I had been changed forever. The witness self had become conscious. Purusha was separated from prakriti. Sadhana had begun.

From that point, I have been able to remember that I have a conscious life (conscious lives) on other planes. Since then, geography and nationality have become meaningless. Somehow, the body and the earth have become the same. Where one is — is physical existence itself.

I recall one day opening a copy of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, reading a sentence at random, and, in an intense state of *ananda*, realized that I had found the voice of the one who had revealed to me everything that I knew to be true. The fact that Sri Aurobindo

was real **confirmed** that the sadhana was also real, and that it was, indeed, a good time (**the right time**) to be alive.

During a conversation with an acquaintance in New Mexico, I heard the Mother mentioned for the first time. The room filled with a white opalescent light and I saw her standing on her balcony giving darshan. There was no doubt that I would be going to India.

## Home

I arrived in Auroville in the summer of '68. The first part of my life's journey was at an end. Even before birth, Auroville had been my destination. I was home. (I often marvelled at **the** people who, after making the pilgrimage out to the Center, found that landscape to be empty and disappointing.)

As in a fairy tale, where the hero spends an adventurous life searching for the Sacred Mountain and one day arrives, only to face another truth: one must then make the ascent...I soon realized that I needed to know my place within the creation of Auroville. One morning in the fall of '68, I awoke into a vision. I saw my life transforming, unfolding, expanding until it became Auroville. And I saw innumerable other lives unfolding, interpenetrating one another — each an Auroville — flowering into an integral, rich and complex being.

**The room filled with a white opalescent light and I saw her standing on her balcony giving darshan. There was no doubt that I would be going to India.**

This, then is the definition of “spiritual anarchy”. Each of us contains and completes all of us. By faithfully following the curve of our own lives, we arrive at the common goal. One can never be out of place in Auroville — since each one of us is a place in

Auroville.

From the moment I arrived, I felt the fullness of Auroville. I had already become familiar with a subtle physical city where we live together (regardless of where our physical bodies may be located). The land of Auroville was clearly the site where this subtle reality was manifesting, externalizing. I recognized it because (in a subtle sense) I was already there. In a concrete way that I have not experienced elsewhere, I felt around me the **presence** of all the beings I knew and loved so intimately (though may never have met).

Often their faces and forms would appear unexpectedly out of the akasha, and often I would later (sometimes years later) see them physically cycling up the road to the Center, getting off the bus, sitting in the Indian Coffee House. Old friends who had also found their way home.

## Who Is An Aurovillian?

It should be clear then that I feel it is in the nature of things that one either is or is not an Aurovillian. It has nothing to do with whether or not one actually resides physically in Auroville. (or whether one has been “accepted”) The present people who live there are not the community of Auroville—they are representatives of the community of Auroville (though, one must add, they are the legitimate representatives). Most Aurovillians do not live there.

The physical realization of the city of Auroville is vitally important. It is inevitable. But we do not understand everything that needs to be done to make that realization possible. Those who live “outside” of Auroville are grateful to those who live there. On the other hand, life in Auroville is supported to a great extent by the *karmayoga* of innumerable other persons scattered about the earth. From what I have seen, I believe that, for the time being, work done in Santa Cruz is at least as effective as work done in Kottakarai.

**So...to the question.** Why after ten years did I return to America? Hopefully, I am still following the true curve of my life. All other answers are rationalizations. I have experienced no discontinuity in my spiritual life. I do not feel separated from other

Aurovillians. The sacredness of the earth, the immediacy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, remain unchanged.

Life in America has been good for Iris and me. We have been able to continue to work with and associate with other Aurovillians. We have provided a healthy life and a quality education for our children (which, for us, takes priority over most other things).

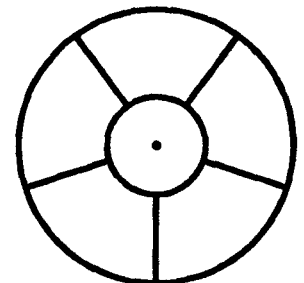
**Being an Aurovillian is an inevitability for us. It is the tragic/comic fact of our existence on the earth at this time. There is no getting out of it.**

I have returned to Auroville three times in the past fifteen years, most recently in August this year with my son, Gopala. I do not feel that, being “outside,” I have fallen behind any in the collective sadhana.

As a board member of Auroville International, I maintain some involvement with Auroville's development (though, as such, I do not fool myself that I am fulfilling some indispensable role).

In short, it is difficult to speak of life outside of Auroville, because I have never really been outside of Auroville. As an Aurovillian, I am at home anywhere in the world—I am a citizen of the earth. On the other hand, if Auroville did not exist — life itself would be unbearable, impossible.

*Constance lives in Santa Cruz, California.*





# Being Where I Belong, Nothing Else, Nothing Fancy

## An Interview with Francis Neemberry in Auroville

*Editor's Note: I interviewed Francis on a hot Auroville afternoon at his house (which was built by Joan Tomb) behind Certitude. He looked fit, even though he had recently gone through Typhoid fever for two months, when, he told me, he had spent days unable to do anything but stare out the window. The fever had done nothing to shake his "at-oneness" with Auroville, nor his delight and confidence in life. Probably no one in Auroville is more willing to say what he thinks and feels in deceptively simple terms.*

**Gordon:** We should start at the beginning here.

**Francis:** 1940.

**Gordon:** Well . . . how about 1968. Why did you stay the first time in Auroville.

**Francis:** I was totally unaware of Auroville when I came to India.

**Gordon:** Those were the good old days. People passing through—waylaid by Mother. I was too.

**Francis:** Well, let's see. I was sitting in Madras and looking around for good food, good French cooking, and it was 1968 and I was in the Connemara Hotel, and I was just looking. So they said, "Try Pondicherry," and I said, "Where's Pondicherry," and they said, "Take the bus."

I think it was like 4 rupees at the time or something. Actually, I was travelling through India by taxi up to that point and 4 rupees didn't really seem like a great number, so I didn't think it was a great distance. I got on this bus and every 15 minutes I would get up and say "Pondicherry?" and they'd say, "No, no, sit down."

Six hours later (because it was a local red bus) we pulled into Pondicherry, and I went to this "Hotel de Europe" and had a half-way decent meal actually. So I stayed in the Hotel de Europe and looked around town and saw a whole bunch of foreigners. I

said, "What's going on here?" and they said, "It's the Sri Aurobindo Ashram," and I said, "The what?"

I had been on the road for awhile and was kind of weary. I figured I needed a clean place to stay, some good food, the beach and everything seemed nice and it was good to be around westerners. So I went to the Ashram and asked them if I could stay there. Madhav Pandit was the one who I came in contact with, and Madhav and I had an instant clash. We became friends over the years, but at that particular moment, it was very trying. I didn't realize . . . actually it was the first Ashram I was ever in, so who knows what I realized, but it turned out that we were actually yelling at each other, and Amrita came running in, wondering what all this noise was about. I said I wanted to stay in the Ashram and Madhav said that we had no money and we couldn't stay. I had just come down from Calcutta where I did a lot of business and I had a wad of hundred rupee notes that would choke a horse, so I just broke them out and said, "What do you mean I have no money."

Then Amrita calmed Madhav down and sent us off to a guest house, and we were just hanging out here, being among the westerners and eating nice food. I thought that Fellini (Federico Fellini, the late Italian filmmaker) was in Pondy because I walked into the Samadhi area and there was all this incense and everybody in their white envelopes and what not, and it looked like a scene out of *8-1/2* and I was totally entranced by it.

I would sit at the Samadhi every evening and try to communicate with Sri Aurobindo or anyone, just seeing it from the cinematic viewpoint of how Fellini must have seen it. . . . I liked the whole movement, so I would sit there and watch everybody in their white envelopes carry their incense sticks back and forth and their little conversations going on and whispers and I just enjoyed that so much that I hung out there.

Then I drove through the park in Pondicherry, and the one thing that made me fall in love with Pondicherry was when I drove by the governor's house on a bicycle and both the guards saluted me. So here I had two police officers saluting me. But then when I turned into the park and I saw this tower or whatever it is, it reminded me of *Juliet of the Spirits* (a Fellini movie) and I thought that for sure Fellini was in town and that he got his inspiration for both scenes from being here.

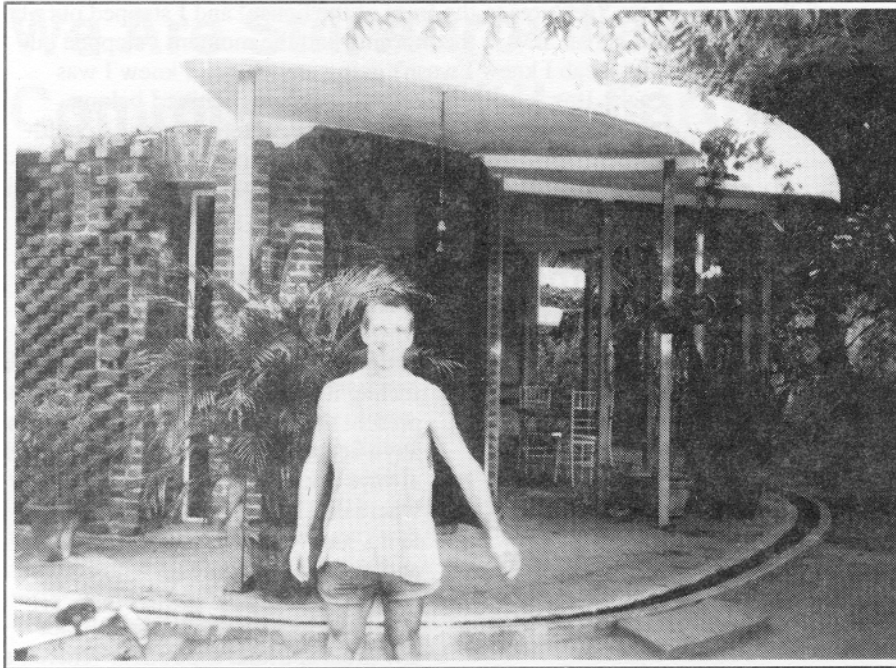
When I decided to stay in Pondy I went to Parc a Chabon and Daibai, who was running it, tried to give me one of those little rope beds—I mean I must have looked really ragged, because everybody was trying to save me money, so Daibai tried to pass me

## I went to see the Mother with the same head as going to see the Pyramids or Angor Watt or the Taj Mahal

off on this dormitory with all these little rope beds, and then he tried to pass me off on this little claustrophobic room with a bed, and then finally we walked by this big room, and he told me it was a family room—5-6 people could stay—so I gave him 6 months rent on a family room and became his best buddy instantly.

He gave me a bicycle and basically that's where I was living—a beautiful place because we had the sea right in front of us, and we had our own little courtyard and our own piece of lawn and it was unbelievably cool as far as my head was concerned. I'd go to the Liberty Hotel and have a steak, french fries and a beer when I just couldn't do the Ashram dining room anymore.

And then I assisted Maggie Liddchi with a problem that she had, and she



Francis at home

invited me to tea. We started talking and she asked when my birthday was and I answered that it was two days ago. And she said, "Oh, you should have seen the Mother!" and I said, "Really?" She went into a whole conversation about how great it was to see the Mother and made arrangements for me to go and see her the next afternoon.

I went to see the Mother with the same head as going to see the Pyramids or Angkor Watt or the Taj Mahal or any other great things I was looking for while traveling.

**Gordon:** She didn't make you read *The Adventure of Consciousness* overnight?

**Francis:** No. She knew better. And then I went up to see the Mother, and basically from that moment on everything changed.

I was hanging out in Pondicherry after that and then Gene Maslow asked me to come out to Auroville to help them build this house. And I did, and one time I missed the jeep back in and slept out at Gene's which was a pump house, and liked it so I stayed out a few more days, and Arindam came to me and said, "I'm going to New York tomorrow."

I wasn't off the road so long that these quick changes seemed strange to me, and the next morning I had two workers standing in front of me and

somebody banging on a 55 gallon drum demanding water. So I had to learn how to start the pump and asked the workers what they did and so forth and so on.

At that time I never believed in the concept of Auroville. In fact, I still have difficulty in its reality. But I was attracted to that force of the Mother's like a moth to a light. I wanted to get as close to that as I could. I always planned to leave Auroville once Mother had left her body, even though I was being told it wasn't going to happen. I was too cynical to think otherwise.

So, month after month, year after year.

Mother left her body and we still stayed, and we stayed right up till '79, March of '79. I was very low on money and I was not agreeing with the movement that was happening in Auroville, so I thought it would be a great time to step out for one year to earn some money. And that was in 1979.

Once back in the USA, I found out

the definition of culture shock and the degree of inflation. I also found it difficult to earn money. Mother had given me the one thing that I could least afford—a conscience. All of a sudden, I would say, "No I can't do that, that's wrong." So that made earning a living a lot more difficult actually. I'm also not very good at jobs in the role of an employee. I'm much better as an employer or out on my own. I was trying to make some money and I got very hung up in the whole system. It sucked me in and it held me. Like every other American, I was horrified on the first of the month and that whole trip of making my monthly payments on this and that.

I made some money, lost some money, went back and forth. Florida is where I basically made money. I lived in Florida, Virginia, California, and what I was continuously looking for was a place that I felt at home, and in the eight years that I was in America, I never found it.

The one or two times that I did come back to visit Auroville, it was like instant . . . it just felt like I was at home, and I wanted to find that in America, not Auroville, because I thought this conflict in Auroville (between the Sri Aurobindo Society

and the Aurovilians) was all nonsense—going down the hill, becoming more ridiculous every day—the personalities and the egos and the power plays and the government—it was just way over my head. People

spoke high idealism with their mouths and basic materialism with their bodies. So it was sort of discouraging.

When I was in America we moved 13 times. That's 13 times we started off with what we could put into a Honda station wagon and the last time we moved we had a gigantic U-Haul trailer pulling a Honda station wagon plus a Ford whatever-it-was. We acquired all this garbage.

Then Lila came up to me in Florida one morning and said to me, "Listen, I want you to do me a favor. I've

**Mother had given me the one thing that I could least afford—a conscience. All of a sudden, I would say, "No I can't do that, that's wrong."**

followed you around 13 moves in the last eight years without question, just packed my bag and moved wherever you wanted to move. Now I want to go somewhere and I want you to come along."

I said, "Sure, great, where are we going."

"Auroville."

And I said no, I don't want to go there, not yet. So she used the same trick on me as I used on her getting her out of Auroville. I said to her, let's go to America for a year so I can make some money. Here it is eight years later and she's saying to me, let's go to Auroville for a year, and then let's come back and make some money. I tried to talk her out of it—how about a year in Greece, how about a year in Hawaii, how about a year here or there. No, no, let's go to Auroville.

We had a house in this development, and I had made money on the house by building it and using different mortgage opportunities and so forth. So I was trying to sell it and it was a very bad market. I said to Lila, "Okay, we'll go right after we sell this house." It had been on the market for six months or something like that.

The next morning I went over to my brother-in-laws, and he says to me, "You're going to India!"

"Don't worry about it," I said, "it all depends on whether we sell the house or not." No more than 10 days later, my doorbell rings. I open the door, and there's a guy standing there, and he says to me, "Do you own that house down the block?" I almost closed the door right in his face.

We gave this guy the nickname "Bookworm" and I put every condition down, every stringent, hard-line situation I could think of, and he bought the house. I had nothing else to do.

We came back to Auroville and actually we pulled in right

here, (gestures to the front of the house) and I stepped out of the cab at 3:30 in the morning and the moment I stepped out of the cab I knew I wasn't going anywhere. I knew I was back. It was and is a sense of just being where I belong,

nothing else, nothing fancy. I could tell you about a certain mental realization in my life—enlightenment is about to happen in the year 2010, but I'll let you go.

What keeps me here? If I look at it with my logical mind, there's absolutely nothing. The one basic thing is a feeling it's where I belong at the present time and I have no desire to go anywhere else or to do anything else. I always ask myself three questions, where do I want to go, what do I want to do, and who do I want to do it with, and as long as I come up with zero on all three, I'm happy where I'm at.

The reason for being here is not any great spiritual aspiration. There's a strong feeling of wanting to express a

gratitude towards the spirit of the Mother that periodically comes through to me, that makes me tingle all over and brings tears to my eyes, from a joy center that's so deep that you don't even get excited.

To be grateful is one thing—then I discovered that you have to express your gratitude. Then by reading I found out that what she wants you to do is express it through work, so that's what I'm doing, hoping that she's taking care of my yoga like she said she would. But I can't question her because I'm not into that level or what-not, so what I gotta do is believe. I always have trouble doing that, so I just go ahead and do it. If it works out, great, and if it doesn't, I have nothing else I really want to do.

*Francis, one of the first westerners to live in Auroville (in the community of Forecomers), now works in the Auroville Bakery.*

**There's a strong feeling of wanting to express a gratitude towards the spirit of the Mother that periodically comes through to me, that makes me tingle all over and brings tears to my eyes, from a joy center that's so deep that you don't even get excited.**

#### To Be a True Aurovilian

1. 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 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.

2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free from moral and social conventions; but this freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, to its desires and ambitions.

The fulfillment of one's desires bars the way to the inner discovery which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.

3. The Aurovilian should lose the sense of personal possession. For our passage in the material world, what is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we must occupy.

The more we are consciously in contact with our inner being, the more are the exact means given to us.

The Mother

# We Are Still Aurovilians—Just in a Community a Little Farther Away

By Jack Alexander

**W**HY DID I LEAVE Auroville? I guess the jury is still out on this one.

Mostly it was a rumbling in our (Mary's and my) guts or somewhere that we needed to go back to the USA. It was rather free floating at first, with lots of repressing and denial.

Mary and I had been saying for years that we were there in Auroville to stay, would "never" leave, and that made responding to these feelings of departure less than convenient (One good thing to come out of this discomfort was learning the problems inherent in saying things like "never" and "always.").

## The Fortune Teller

Interestingly enough, while shopping for steel and tools on the back streets of Madras, an unsolicited fortune teller got my attention. I never had an interest in my fortune and kept all these sorts of things at arms length as a matter of course. What I heard at the hands of a funny little Sikh fellow shocked me enough to consider the possibility seriously which had been showing up in the back of our minds off and on. It wasn't the type of fortune telling that was vague but quite specific and made me uneasy in its accuracy, sort of like hearing that somebody had died or equally shocking.

The fellow told of our leaving and a whole litany of events (which now have all come true interestingly enough), but at the time, they were things which meant radical changes in my happy little life. This was Spring of 1977 and somewhat before the political upheaval with Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS). As we were accustomed to letting things of this nature sit awhile before acting on them, we waited for some sort of confirmation either outwardly or inwardly. Permitting our leaving to simmer on the back burner and telling nobody, it got easier to rationalize the departure as a vacation that was open ended.

Within weeks, we got word from our

parents that they were chipping in together to purchase a ticket to bring us back for a vacation. As we hadn't been out at all in five years, this seemed like the sort of answer we were looking for and started to make preparations to take a vacation. Before we departed in late August that year, we felt more and more sure we were not cut out for the type of things we were seeing going on politically, with lines being drawn in the community and relations with folks in Pondy deteriorating. We felt quite possibly that we would be out for awhile, given the previously unavailable option of international travel. Even though the direction the independence movement in Auroville took was quite repugnant to our way of thinking, the inner need for the departure was really something else within us finally getting our attention.

## Neat Clear Plastic Cups

Culture shock was immense. Our son, Satya was six and just needed to space out and watch TV to assimilate the difference. I would go to hardware stores and just marvel at all the things one could buy here. (I still do.) The material world was too much to imagine and the rupee to dollar rate was making us delirious. We found our relatives amazed at our need to save the "neat clear plastic" cups we were served our drinks in while on the airplane home. We couldn't bring ourselves to have them thrown away; we thought, "They

could be reused forever, and they look great!" and carried them off the plane with us unwilling to permit them to be thrown away.

The next thing we discovered was that we had only the clothes on our backs and we needed to get working to earn a living. I got a job as a cashier at a dump, working 11 hours per day 6 days per week, earning a little over minimum wage (but great benefits - it was like being first one at a garage sale).

So from massive shock, to numbing labor - labor in a very strange environment of waste products made possible

by a system of run-away consumerism. I was tossed between feeling really poor to really rich by this milieu of commercial perversity, which was seen by me through my developing-nations-eyes as

**Evolution, new society, and especially spirituality or doing yoga were not things one could discuss over lunch with mechanics or bulldozer jockeys known as "Cat Skinners."**

either total madness or great big shopping sprees put on by the local citizens for anyone who knew how the rest of the world actually lives. You could find anything you wanted or needed being thrown away in America's dumps.

Along with the shock of the material reality, we no longer felt the sustaining group being that was so much a part of our larger family and support group in Auroville; we missed that very much. Although it was refreshing not to be in the fishbowl closeness and the small town attitude of Auroville of those days (we were 200 or so then), and it was pleasant not to have everyone speaking the same Auroville jargon, we did miss the extended ties we became a part of. Feeling the lack of community created a desire to have a larger nuclear family as now three felt





Mary, Jack, Jyoti, and Satya Alexander

quite small, so we became four right away with Jyoti.

## A Job

I studied a book on automechanics that came through the dump on the back of a pickup for something to do between loads. Although I had been a mechanic of sorts in Auroville for the whole five years, I had never really been a full fledged automechanic and found the reading interesting. As my job at the dump was a temporary one replacing the owner's cousin who was having surgery, I thought perhaps I would look for a job later as a mechanic.

Within weeks there were three jobs near our home and I applied as a mechanic in the town we were living in. Due to the book and a little natural aptitude, I aced the test, wowed them in the oral part and as all my references in India were very hard to get on the phone, my scores placed me on top of a heap of seasoned grease monkeys from miles around. Thus I moved up to a normal job and regular hours with slightly better pay.

The regular folks we came in contact with had very little ability to understand why anyone would go to an awful place like India unless perhaps you were weird, interested in a cult,

were a hippie or perhaps if you were a missionary. This meant that we soon took a "pearls-before-swine" kind of attitude. Evolution, new society, and especially spirituality or doing yoga were not things one could discuss over lunch with mechanics or bulldozer jockeys known as "Cat Skinners."

## Searching For Direction

As we got better situated on the material plane, we noticed that we still did not feel at home in America, nor did we feel like going back to Auroville. This was a first for us, not to have some rather clear direction or goal which we were pushing for. We had come back from a very intense five years that was easily five lifetimes and now were slowed down to a crawl without any direction. We tried unsuccessfully to reconnect with past sources of strength and nurturing like the East-West Cultural Center which had been our focal point when leaving. We tried to contact the other Auro-Americans that were finding themselves back in the USA, but try as we may, there was no energy available to make the connection stick or develop into a mini-Auroville-in-the-States; our lives felt to be stuck on hold.

So it was like that for years; more and more the feeling of separation from that which was our center, unable to make sense of our role or connection with what was going on in the states, doing numbing hard work, often in near poverty conditions and hardship as we sought our "fortunes" in places like Clairemont, California and Wichita, Kansas.

Both Mary and I had been able to take rather major turns in our life together at the same times without it being a concession or feeling forced (which was quite unique to us, as most of our acquaintances who had made similar moves and changes in their lives ended up going their separate ways). So it was interesting at this time we both really felt "behind the veil" as it were. We knew the heights and clarity we had felt in the Ashram and Auroville during those marvelous years, and now we couldn't tell the difference between a sadhak and a sandwich. And worst of all, we didn't seem to care; we felt exhausted and lost.

This condition went on for what seemed to be years with the culmination being our leaving Wichita and coming back to the West Coast where we had family and friends and we felt more at home. We shortly became involved in the West Coast group that became the nucleus of what now is Auroville International USA and got back in touch with our center. We had left Auroville five years earlier.

## A Return Visit

On the West Coast, two years later, we finally had enough money to afford my going back to Auroville for a short visit of two weeks. I felt that I had to return, even though I would run the risk of feeling torn to pieces at the specter of leaving again in such a short time.

The importance of this trip back for me was twofold, as I received two major/capital experiences. On my way, via the AVI meeting in Europe, I discovered the beauty of the French and their contribution to the whole (while in Auroville I was unable to find any good reason for them to exist). Secondly, I found out that in a very real way I had not been disconnected at all from my center in India. I felt



completely at home and up to date with the lives of friends, the context of Auroville, the Ashram, even though I had not written or spoken to them for much of the time. My command of street Tamil was still as good as ever. More importantly, at the end of the two weeks I felt no twinge at having to leave.

The realization of this palpable bond between me and all of the parts of India, Ashram and Auroville that I had come to love, could not be lost by leaving and going back to

"normal" life in America. The part about the French is now flopped over the other way, and now I am practically a Francophile with a great affinity developing despite their reputation for fiercely capricious tendencies and lack of a wide sense of global fraternity.

Another problem with being here in America has been that very few of the folks who have lived all this time in Auroville can understand what it is like to live out of Auroville. They generally feel that to leave Auroville physically is tantamount to wholesale rejection and turning away from the values that Auroville represents. Because of a lack of experience of having to leave for some inner reason, they cannot imagine how we feel as if we are still Aurovilians—just in a community a little farther away, suffering from poor communications due to the distance. They tend to feel that they are the only Aurovilians and cannot perceive of anyone feeling like they really still belonged, thus compounding our sense of separation and alienation.

### Self-Evident Truths

I came to grips with being here in a "common sense" sort of way. My mind created "self evident truths" for dealing with the vast difference between our outlook and that of the person on the street. For instance, I thought that our attempt to create an American "mini-Auroville" was

thwarted at every turn because we were to be either alone for our growth or to scatter the word of Auroville more evenly throughout America. Or, my inability to speak about Auroville with Americans was because there were only 1% of the folks here who could really hear or understand the beauty

and wideness of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, or could understand why Auroville was important.

Therefore,

my common sense told me that we were here for some work that would become clear if we were patient enough and, when we found it, would not necessarily look like anything we had imagined.

In a sense, our being here is as much a mystery as our departure. It is also amazing that the change occurred to us as a family unity, or at least a couple with youngster in tow. In the light of the Aurovilian propensity to "intermingle" and swap partners, to change life work or vocations, to experiment with all of the conventions and social norms, our feeling of continuity and the sense of this happening to both of us is quite noteworthy, and still amazes me to this day.

I say that during the most of the last 20 or so years, I have followed my nose in seeking direction of the proper thing to do at any given moment. Following the energy flow and listening within, I feel that the work for me in the States is that of personal development and of working in America as a representative of Auroville.

Auroville is a lifetime kind of connection for me and one that goes back to a commitment to Mother I felt emanate from deep within me when I met her for the first and last time. I felt that I would do anything she wanted me to do from then on. Shortly after that meeting, we sought some guidance from her as to what we should do with

ourselves: live in the Ashram or Auroville. She said that we came to be in Auroville and that was the place we were needed.

From that point onwards, the decisions have been made by watching the inner applause meter: Where do we live? What do we do for a living? Do we rent or buy, work for a living or volunteer for Auroville, etc., etc. The current living/working setup is now a little over a decade old and sometimes I wonder if the applause meter is hooked up anymore and I try it out and it keeps pointing to the sometimes hard to appreciate "status quo" as the appropriate answer. Having been a bit of a radical during my youth, and having made some rather breath-taking and bold decisions in my time, "keeping on, keeping on" often looks a little like being rusted up or something. But apart from a mid-life crisis, "Status Quo" comes out the right thing for me to do, no matter how silly it looks to some parts of me.

### Learning The Ropes

When I look at the way we American Aurovilians have been spread out all over the place, as if evenly scattered across the "Fruited Plains," I feel that we have been placed in our exact spot for a reason. I have noticed that those of us who have spent time learning the ropes of creating a job or family or whatever, have had to go through some rather difficult things that I feel in my own case, were for my soul growth. Because these difficult things came at the hands of impersonal circumstances rather than that of old friends and comrades from Auroville, we have been spared the animosity that would have been generated in the process.

**Few of the folks who have lived all this time in Auroville can understand what it is like to live out of Auroville.**

One of my truisms about early Aurovilians is that they were a tough bunch with larger than normal egos and vitals that were needed to do the

pioneering. This headstrong quality was a boon to Auroville in terms of getting things started, but a bit of a bar when faced with creating a Gnostic community or in actualizing an effective human unity, if you see what I mean. To get these rough places smoothed up, we have been placed in difficult situations, required to pay our dues without lots of outer support and made to face the music. (Sorry for all the cliches.) I feel that having this process kept more impersonal was actually a very "humane" thing for the Divine to do.

Because we can't blame X or Y for some untoward thing that happened to us, we have basically remained friends within the community and had compassion on those of us who went through lean times without a job.

I feel that applying ourselves to surviving in the USA has made us skilled in

the pragmatic function of getting things done. In Auroville there was lots of scope but very little accountability requiring folks to focus on a job and keep up with demand. This may have changed in today's Auroville, but in the outside world of paying rent and grocery bills, we had to keep our nose to the grindstone or face the abyss.

This rather simple but unrelenting fact has made us shake out the *tamas*; at least enough to survive, and some of us have even excelled in the process. I

have learned some basic truths of discipline and perseverance. Perhaps this would have also taken place in Auroville at its own pace, but this is one way of looking at it.

## The Auroville Filter

One of the interesting realizations I have noticed was that we seem to be linked on many levels with the group of Aurovilians in terms of the subtle and even some of the overt. We seem inexorably linked with Auroville/India, and our possibilities and abilities seem to share the same governing of the Time Spirit. As needs and abilities change, new possibilities are created and manifest in our daily lives that

seem often to the casual Auro-American observer to be a mirror of each other's worlds, both individually and collectively.

This is sometimes maddening or

inconvenient, but more and more this linkage is made clearly a reality we have to learn to deal with.

The fact that I now can say that it really does not seem to matter where I live is the best indication of my connection to the Auroville experience. I feel Aurovilian wherever I go and whatever I do. Everything I see or come in contact with goes through an "Auroville filter." As I hear about new products, watch TV programs, or read newspaper articles, I am always

assessing: how can this be used in Auroville? How is this of benefit and how can I get it there? No other involvement in my life holds this kind of attraction or power.

## What I Miss

I miss it all—that is, I love it there. I love the friends and being able to have discussions that deal with the whole being, knowing that my "silly" notions will be taken seriously by at least my closest associates if not the average person on the street. I can go to Auroville and be more completely myself than I can any place I have ever been.

I also miss the Auroville that you don't see, but sense behind the surface hustle and bustle of red dust and motorbikes, the Auroville which is a power moving like an enigmatic Being just under the ground, giving the truth and the background force supporting our feeble steps on the surface. I can notice this Being on walks at dusk around the Matrimandir or off in one of the Greenbelt areas that has become a little primeval in its density of undergrowth, where one can be quiet and inward.

This second Auroville is there constantly humming its vibration of perfection, its mantra of the future humanity that is trying to happen in the daily Auroville on the surface. They are both marvelous and I would be lying if I said speaking of them both didn't bring tears to my eyes.

*Jack Alexander is the president of Auroville International USA and lives in Sacramento, California.*

**Auroville is a power moving like an enigmatic being just under the ground, giving the truth and the background force supporting our feeble steps on the surface**

## To Be A True Aurovilian

4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put his or her consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let the consciousness organise a bit of matter by means of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself.

One should organise one's life not according to outer and artificial rules, but according to an organised inner consciousness, for if one lets life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes fickle and inexpressive. It is to waste one's time in the sense that matter remains without any conscious utilisation.

5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent.

6. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species must be, and meanwhile the best course is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.

The Mother

# Moving With Mother

By Fanou Walton

**I** LEFT AUROVILLE AS I came to Auroville: really knowing from inside that it was what I had to do. So in a way it was very easy. When I visited Auroville for the first time in 1970 for only one day, I had this very clear and surprising thought that if ever I had a child, that child should be born in Auroville. So when I got pregnant later on in Paris, I knew I had to go back to Auroville, and it was very easy to leave Paris.

A year before we left Auroville, I knew with the same clarity that we had to leave Auroville the following year. It was 1980, a time of struggles inside the community, and Bryan and I felt that our time in Fraternity (a handicrafts unit and community) was over anyway. We left thinking that we would be back in a few months, and that we would start anew in a different community. It is now more than ten years, and we have still not been back.

## Transition

We came to the USA just to visit Bryan's family and some old Aurovilian friends here and there. We visited Wisconsin where the Nelsons, who we had met first as customers in Fraternity, lived. We literally fell in love with the beauty of this splendid part of Wisconsin, and ten years later we still are in love with it.

Marion and Duane Nelson offered us a place to stay with our two young children and a job for both of us in the new, very unusual shop they were opening in their remodeled barn, selling mainly, at that time, handicrafts from Auroville and some other places of India. For us it was really Mother's gift: a beautiful place to stay, a job which in so many ways was an extension of our work in Fraternity, and a small, intentional community of seekers with whom we felt in harmony.

That was our transition from Auroville to America, an easy and fulfilling period. With the shop we could talk about Auroville through the

hand-crafts coming from Fraternity and other workshops. We also started to do ethnic festivals



Brian, Marichi, Aurelia, Fanou, and Leo outside their house in Wisconsin in 1983

during the summer. Several years in a row, we did a Festival of India which gave us a lot of joy and was well appreciated. It included flute and Krishna stories by Jean and Gordon Korstange and Indian dancers on a stage in the yard. Our children went to the local school, and we had a new child. We loved the rural life of Wisconsin.

Later on we got more and more uneasy with the way the shop was run, and finally, in 1989, we left that shop. And then what next? We knew we wanted to stay where we were because we were happy there and our children loved it too. So we found two part-time jobs, and Bryan began to work more with his lecture slide presentations on art history and world religions, some of which I also contributed to.

We still live in a way that is far from main stream, career-oriented America, and we like it. We have three children: Marichi, a junior in college; Aurelia, a 9th grader; and Leo, a 5th grader. Bryan has been working on a grant to bring artists from the USA to Auroville in January of 1995 for a period of 3 months. If the grant comes through, we will all go to Auroville, an exciting perspective for us.

## The Center of My Life

My stay in the USA has definitely been very important and fulfilling. In Auroville, where I lived for eight years, I built up my inner basis, a strong connection with the Mother and a vision of life based on the philosophy of

*karma*, progress and reincarnation, which from the very beginning of my stay in Auroville made complete sense to me. This is still the center of my life here.

In the USA I found some very efficient tools to help me deal on a psychological level with a dramatic and paralyzing event from my childhood. Something that has blocked part of me since it happened and from which at the time in Auroville I could get no help for. It took me more than ten years to resolve that, but now I feel I have resolved this part of my life, and I am not so surprised that the possibility to go back to Auroville for a few months arises now.

In my daily life my contact with the Mother stays at the center. I still feel the need to meditate every morning and my vision of life has not changed since my days in Auroville. In many ways I feel more free here to go my own pace and to do what I am inspired to do—that is to do Mother's work here in the West and to go back to Auroville for short periods of time to "refill" my inner strengths.

In 1991 we hosted the A.U.M. with a small group of "ex" Aurovilians here in Madison. It was the most rewarding and inspiring experience. I always felt and still feel, with or without rights, an Aurovilian.

*Fanou Walton lives in Spring Green, Wisconsin.*

# Dealing With the Collective

By David Wickenden

**I** LIVED IN AUROVILLE FOR eight years, from 1975 to 1983. The process then was chaotic, with constant upheavals, factional infighting and chronic instability in every area of collective life. It was a difficult time.

I suppose like most who lived there and came back, I found it almost impossible to relate the experience I'd gone through or even to describe Auroville in any way that would make sense to people. It seemed to be too exotic, too far out. Just mention the word "India" and you see the eyes glaze over; they don't have any concept. So you learn to talk about it in a general, non-threatening way: "... a kind of international rural development project . . .," or, "... kind of like the Peace Corps . . ." That's about it, about as much as most people can absorb.

But on the other hand, because it was such a major part of my life, it's made the connection with others here who share that experience very strong. You really value those with whom you share something that powerful and unique.

Even though distance and peoples' schedules here make contact irregular, the A.U.M.'s and other meetings are very important because they reaffirm not only your bond with the people you feel close to, but they also nourish and affirm a certain part of your own history, your own background, your own experience. I suppose it's like what happens to some people who've gone to college together, but in a much more profound and telling way: there's this special life-long bond with other Americans, regardless of the different paths we've all gone. I'm really grateful for that. It adds a certain richness and dimension to my life here that others I work with, for example, don't have.

## The Individual and The Collective

We often wonder why there are so few Americans, relatively speaking, who go to Auroville and stay there. Even

ten years ago, the non-Indian population was dominated by Europeans, and I believe that trend has continued. My own feeling is that there is something in the American character that resists the kind of pressure toward collectivized thinking and acting that so often gets brought to bear on issues there.

I think there's a fundamentally different relationship between the social order and the individual in Auroville than the one many of us instinctively feel comfortable with.

In Auroville, the balance between the needs of the individual for personal initiative, expression and fulfillment and the needs of the collectivity for structure, cohesiveness and conformity has always tended to weigh on the side of the collective. For Americans, whose national character is stamped by the ethic of the individualist—the pioneer, the explorer, the entrepreneur—the balance will always tend to weigh on the side of the individual.

American culture by definition is diverse and multicultural. In its more extreme moments, Auroville has attempted to define as a supreme value the uniform application of a single "correct" mode of thinking and behaving. Uniformity is not a value that goes far in U.S. society; but tolerance and pluralism, and the attitude of "live and let live," or "to each his/her own," are fundamental. The persecution of individuals and groups for supposedly wayward thinking (like the mad attempt in Auroville in the late '70's to purge the community of "Tantrism") instinctively strikes most Americans, it seems to me, as repugnant.

Anyway, I've come to think there's something built into the Auroville dynamic that is intrinsically difficult for Americans to deal with. There's

something psychologically constrictive about it. At least for me, personally, that was certainly the case.

The sense of personal suffocation came out not only in community politics, but more basically in the work itself—people not having the freedom and responsibility to simply do their

work without being subjected to the constant imposition of the mores and dictates of various committees and councils and work groups and oversight groups and so on.

The collective

exerted in many cases a very strong controlling force over the ability of an individual to get things done. And it did so inevitably with a lowest-common-denominator mindset. Excellence, among other things, suffered. In fact, personal excellence seemed to be cause for special persecution simply because, by definition, such individuals stood out from the rest. This kind of forced leveling became for me, after a time, terribly oppressive and personally constricting.

At a certain point I felt suffocated by that pressure, and began to feel that the individual aspect of the work—the unfolding of the psychic being with the full engagement of the mental and vital—was being held down by the needs of the collective. In retrospect, my decision to leave Auroville was less a decision per se than an inner affirmation of a need for greater space and freedom, to move and stretch and grow.

## A Certain Aspect of the Work

Auroville for me represents a certain aspect of the work—very important, but only a part. It's a process that

**I think there's a fundamentally different relationship between the social order and the individual in Auroville than the one many of us instinctively feel comfortable with.**



needs a large group of people from different countries. It's a collective *sadhana*. To be happy there, one needs to be part of the collective process. That's not higher or lower, better or worse, and it's certainly not for everyone, it's just a particular type of manifestation. That's how I view it.

Collective process aside, Auroville didn't have the infrastructure at the time to give me the chance to expand in my outer work in the ways I needed to. Since coming back, I've had the chance to do things that would have been impossible there, just because the system didn't exist to support them. I've been given a huge amount of personal freedom and responsibility in my work and have been able to grow in a truly fantastic way, both inwardly and outwardly.

## Trade Offs

Of course there are trade offs. There are certain things that were made possible by the Auroville environment that we lose here and which I miss enormously. Time, for example, is a huge issue—the feeling here that there's never enough time to do even the most basic kinds of things, not enough time to read, to think, to process information, to spend with people close to you, almost even to breathe.

In Auroville there was much more breathing time. But it's also more than that—it's almost as if the nature of time itself is different in India. When I came back after being away for so long it seemed to me that time moves differently here, that it's accelerated to an almost incredible degree. Everything moved faster, as if even the very molecules in the atmosphere were spinning more rapidly than they were in India. Things got compacted, activity got pressed and squeezed and packed into an hour or a day that would have stretched out over a much longer period of time in India.

Everything is so much faster in this time zone—fast cars, fast food, fast video, fast everything—that your own

**Everything moved faster (in the USA), as if even the very molecules in the atmosphere were spinning more rapidly than they were in India.**

metabolism and way of working have to accelerate if you're to survive. So you're pushed forward, in a sense, and that kind of acceleration has, for me in a positive way, forced a certain kind of interior acceleration of the *sadhana*. It puts a kind of pressure on to adapt and move and change and grow that in a way that's challenging and stimulating, if you can find the right balance. But that can certainly feel stressful; you miss the opportunity to read and reflect and absorb, which you could do in Auroville.

Energy, as well as time, is another thing that's different in an important way. When I first came back I was struck by the

extent to which American culture is *yang* oriented—this incredible outward-oriented, *rajasic* culture based on the expenditure of massive amounts of vitalistic energy. A certain kind of balance was being lost there.

What I missed was the *yin* side of the equation—a respect for and understanding of the need for quietude, inwardness, solitude, and other things we traditionally associate with the

feminine side of the circle. India, at least from the vantage point of the USA, seemed much more *yin* oriented in a way that I hadn't actually tuned into when I was living there. There, sitting in meditation and talking about one's inner experience is normal; here, it's still a bit wierd. I missed that supportive ambience, and still miss it very much.

I also miss watching the sunrise, watching the day begin, which was always a special time for me there: the light sparkling over this incredible landscape, the flowers coming alive, the dew on the jasmine bushes, the scent of the fruit trees and red earth and sand . . . all of that sensory experience.

The Matrimandir on New Year's or Auroville's birthday morning. The absolute quietude (except at times of village festivals!). I miss that a lot.

I miss taking walks along the Auroville dirt roads during full moon times, that giant moon hanging in the empty sky and the cool coming to the hot sand and the hot wind dying down and peace settling in. That experience of coolness and quietude at night during at moonrise.

And all the other stuff, from stopping by a tea stall for great cup of *chai* to taking a day to go to Ponds to sit quietly at the Samadhi for three



David Wickenden (right) and friends at the Chidambaram Temple, circa 1975



hours. All of those things and more.

## The Unfoldment of the Day

I miss the way the day unfolded in Auroville in a way that doesn't happen here. Everything here, at least as it's been for the past several years, is so crammed in and scheduled and blocked to the minute. My day planner is scheduled in 15 minute intervals. My entire day and night is scheduled; my entire week month is scheduled. From the moment I get up until the moment I go to bed, it's boom-boom-boom-boom, and still I can't get done half the urgent things I need to do. And friendships and personal commitments suffer.

In Auroville, the days unfolded differently. There were no day-planners, no calendars, no making appointments in micro-blocks three

experience of real austerity and the constant scrabbling for everything from paper to soap to bread to bicycle parts was sobering and, after a time, really hard to sustain.

I remember a period of a week or two when my sandals were broken and I literally did not have enough money to buy a new pair—probably about \$2.50. I finally had to ask a friend if I could borrow some money to buy a pair. It was a humiliating and degrading experience, something I still carry with me. But it did force me to

**. . .the light sparkling over this incredible landscape, the flowers coming alive, the dew on the jasmine bushes, the scent of the fruit trees and red earth and sand**

pressure to toe the line politically or intellectually, or any other way that was deemed acceptable, would become unbearable. I didn't feel that I could put myself in the position of being dependent, both psychologically and literally, on others in

that way. It was a real issue, and it certainly accelerated my decision to leave Auroville.

**Collaboration:** Do you regret spending so much time in Auroville?

**David:** No, but . . . I say it with ambivalence. It gave me an opportunity for a kind of inner growth over that time, a kind of slow unfolding of things in myself that probably never would have been possible in the United States. And so I'm very grateful to Auroville for giving me the chance to grow inwardly and outwardly in ways that were incredibly valuable and helpful. It was like an incubator in ways for me.

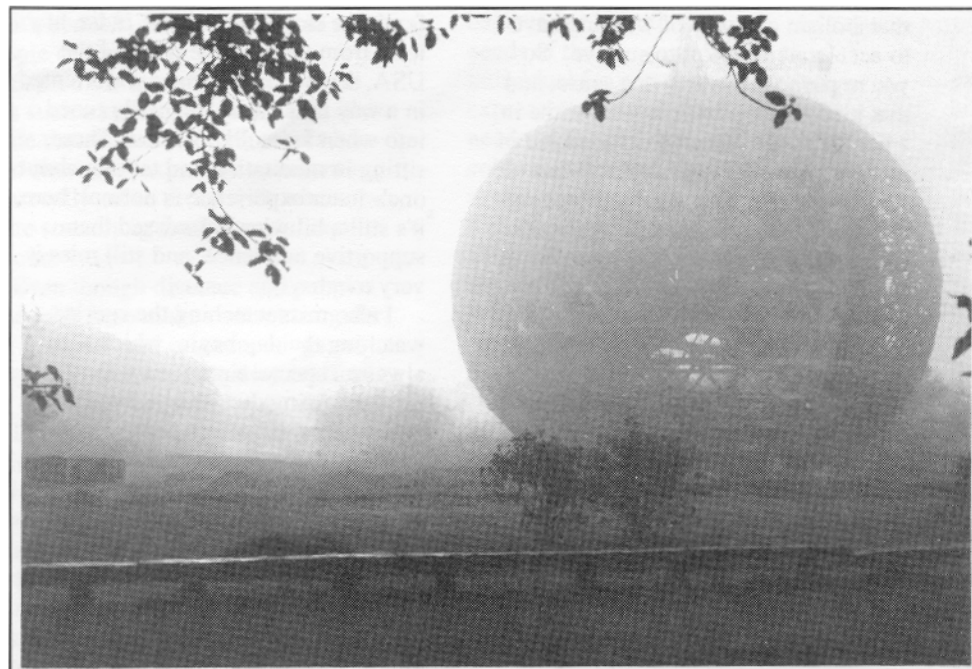
The ambivalence comes about in that I lost a lot. I was out of the work force and economy here for nearly a decade, and it set me back. As it turned out, I was very fortunate in what happened after my return, but it certainly put me in a hole financially. It put me behind the eight ball in terms of becoming an integrated member of the culture, and I still haven't made that up yet.

There were certain things that were lost, mostly from a material point of view, that you can say, "Gosh, that's too bad." That's a good chunk of my life that I can't go back and recapture from a material point of view, but the gain that happened from a spiritual point of view was so great that it makes the material loss insignificant and not worth regretting.

*David Wickenden lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

confront the truth that I had not been fully dealing with: I was living in poverty and dependent on the charity of others to eat and live and do my work. Noble in theory, maybe, but there was nothing noble about feeling impoverished and dependent.

The choice there was rather stark. If I had to depend totally on the collective or others for sustenance, then the



Matrimandir in early morning mist

weeks in advance, no incessant telephones and fax machines and beepers and cellular phones and all the rest. It was all much more organic.

Of course, there are things I don't miss, too. Like Tom and others, I had no means of independent financial support, and had to rely on the collectivity or other funding bodies for even the most basic necessities. The

# Auroville Journal: 1993

By Gordon Korstange

**S**AXTONS RIVER, JUNE 27: Returning to Auroville, to the rapacious past, I grow a mustache to put me in tune with Auroville mind, and with that young, skinny, mixed-up person I was then, that person who had stumbled into the outermost reaches of Sri Aurobindo's solar system.

It has been thirteen years since I stood on the Kottakari road with Jean, waiting for the creaky village bus to take us away from our lives in Auroville. We were returning to the USA with two backpacks and several hundred dollars to our names, after living in Auroville for seven years. We were returning disillusioned by the Auroville-Sri Aurobindo Society squabble, with bodies broken down by the heat, and unable to rid ourselves of boils and infections. We spent our first night in the USA sleeping in Kennedy Airport, our first summer living in an attic. I worked as a part-time janitor in a factory. I rode a second-hand Raleigh bicycle ten miles down the freeway to my first job

interview. When I spoke, people thought I was from Scandanavia. I felt like an immigrant. I was an immigrant.

Now I'm an American—sort of. I know how to maneuver in American culture. My monkey mind has learned how to pluck ripe bananas from off the American tree. We own a house, two cars, a TV, and (dare I admit it) a swimming pool. I am an American in midlife returning to Auroville, wondering what became of that kid who lived there, who was in love with the strange familiarity of Indian culture, in love with sunrise and the full moon, the Bay of Bengal, and, yes, the dusty roads of Auroville.

**Nothing is an accident says my Auroville mind; why else have devotees been puzzling for years over Sri Aurobindo's slip on a tiger skin.**

**Los Angeles, July 4:** Yesterday we missed the plane. I really felt like a dumb American who hadn't ever taken an international flight and didn't know that you had to be there two hours early. A huge surge of panic went through me like a cyclone. This is America—don't be late or they'll take your seat.

**Singapore, July 6, 3 a.m.:** We're on the floor at Dayanand's and Kim's. The apartment is dim, the air thick, wet and hot. Tropical air like I remember. You feel it when you move as though walking through the faintest of drizzles. Outside, the highway from the airport hums with traffic. Daya and Lawrence were waiting patiently when we arrived in Singapore. How wonderful it is to fly halfway around the world and meet someone in the Yoga!

We're on the floor in the throes of jet-lag, an occasional drift into something like sleep. A breeze whips in flapping the curtains and the fan whirrs. I reach for a musty bed cover. Suddenly with a muted bang Mother's photo falls forward when a gust of wind billows the curtain behind it. The

glass breaks but does not shatter. We set the photo upright and close the window. Just an accident says my American mind. Nothing is an accident says my Auroville mind; why else have devotees

been puzzling for years over Sri Aurobindo's slip on a tiger skin.

It begins to rain—a monsoon rain that will last into the morning, thickening the air further. I close the other window and lie down, sleepless. The red numbers on the VCR turn slowly toward morning. We're in Asia at last, but the time is still digital.

**Madras, July 17:** The ineptitude of Air India when I had hoped for so much more. In Singapore we had to wait over an hour in a line with just 7-8 people. Why? Because some of the passenger's luggage was overweight and there was complicated arguing and bargaining going on. One Indian

woman from South Africa, dressed in a trendy leather jacket, was way over the limit, so they kept her standing by the counter until she finally paid for 17 kilograms.

The flight was full of young Tamil men lugging back televisions, VCR's, boom boxes. I had seen many of them in the vacant lot next to the Singapore Little India temple. They were dressed well: jeans, shoes, nice shirts. It was a Friday night, temple night.

Singaporeans were thundering by in cars, going home for the weekend. Home for the young men are the scattered villages of Tamil Nadu. They work on the docks, in plantations, anywhere no one in Singapore cares to. I wanted them to be wearing dhoties, not levis, wanted them working their own fields not as transit laborers.

The Madras baggage claim also takes forever. It's 3:30 a.m. Gautam, from Boston, says it has to do with labor—automation would put people out of work, so they take out bags one at a time. Maybe it's that no-one can be fired. Just like a family—you learn to co-exist and accept everyone's flaws.

We end up at the Trident Hotel, paying twice what we should. But at this time of the morning we couldn't afford to be picky (we who once spent the night sleeping on a table top in a dirty meals hotel). Next morning the swimming pool makes it worthwhile—a wide, clean piece of water in the boiling sun (99 degrees F.). Welcome back to the furnace! The traffic roars by on the trunk road outside the walls and fumes suffuse the area. The smell of lorry exhaust, un-treated, is like the thick, pungent odor of Indian cigarettes.

**Auroville, July 17:** My first full glimpse of the Matrimandir is disappointing. The gold dish panels look tacky next to the cement. Maybe it's because there's so few of them, says my Auroville mind. Maybe they really are tacky, says my American monkey mind.

Amudha and Dhanalakshimi lead us up the path. It feels really good to have them take us past the watchman posted at the old kitchen and up into the chamber. They feel so much for Auroville. We pass a small group on the lawn beneath the banyan tree—one of Auroville's countless groups?

Spiritual anarchy by committee.

Up the spiral staircase with Dhanalakshmi's daughter, Achana, in front playing hide and seek in the construction niches. Halfway up we leave our sandals. The million green trees of Auroville are out there, seen between openings in the cement skin. We're silent now.

At the top, we are given strange socks to put on-of course-to keep the red Auroville dirt off the marble floor. We walk in and it's an echo chamber, "a musical instrument," someone called it. More like a microphone. The slightest sound reverberates. I put a cushion on the marble, and its "whump" roils around the walls like a rumbled whisper.

Then I look up and it's true: a thin shaft of light pierces the center of the chamber and the crystal which rests on Sri Aurobindo's symbol—or seems to rest there. It appears to be lit from beneath, or from within.

It's hot. No air-conditioning yet. Small sounds enter the chamber and ping-pong around it. I can't take my eyes off the crystal, so dark and light at the same time, like a planet in a movie. There seems to be a thin layer of dust on it. Why not, this is a construction site.

As I watch, the light fades. It's evening and overhead lights are switched on. As I watch, for a moment, the crystal seems to expand and the chamber move. My eyes have lost their focus.

I look at the pillars—a little artificial somehow alongside the exquisiteness of the marble and crystal. But hey, it's here, says Auroville mind. Let's not think about the huge contraption of cement that has been built to go around it, to protect it. Ok, says American monkey mind, let's think about it. Why couldn't they have started with just this room in a simple structure. Done. Completed. Maybe the crystal is already here for 15 years. Millions of rupees saved. No tourist inundation. Just a room to concentrate in, and gardens full of flowers.

Ok, monkey mind thought it. No lightning. The crystal didn't break. It's still there, glowing. Just sit and look ..

Later, coming back down to land, Achana is hiding again and here comes Shyamsundar, taking his nightly constitutional. The man who took my photo to Mother so I could be approved; the man who signed my official orange and white Auroville membership card; the man who is still the center of so much controversy for his role in the Sri Aurobindo Society vs. Auroville battles. Of course, says Auroville mind, he has to come along now, right after your first visit to the room.

He recognizes me. We clasp hands. "After a long time," is all I can think of to say.

**Aspiration, July 22:** In search of a past, I pause in the heat. On my bed, at mid-day, after yet another shower, letting the fan dry me, before the stickiness begins again, before the little ticks on the skin begin, the twinges that mean mosquito-or fly-or sand grain-or. .. nothing.

How did I do this, hot season after hot season, March to November; months of watching clouds roll in and roll out, hoping somehow that the magic cloud would come to drop rain that would make it cool forever? How did I make it through the heat? Somehow. Just barely. It flattened me again and again until I could hardly make it back from Pondy on my bicycle-like today, coming back.

This was my life, and I slip back into it so easily. The Tamil language returns as does the knowledge of small tricks of living in Auroville. Like shaking your towel out to clear it of red ants; or where to buy a fold-up mat in Pondy; or get the best *kulfi* (Indian ice cream).

But what doesn't return is that spark that sustained me through the heat, that spark of discovery or curiosity, or whatever it was. Before, there was always a minor epiphany, the magic of a moonlit night, the quiet of an Ashram

street, even just the onrush of the sea breeze at 4 p.m. in the afternoon, or the sight of a rice paddy—some special moment or feeling that made up for the dust and heat. Perhaps I ran through my quota of those moments. Perhaps living in the USA and "growing up" has squeezed my romanticism into a tiny corner of my consciousness. But that which formerly seemed strangely wonderful in India and Auroville no longer does so.

**July 24:** We return to "Udayam," the house we built to live in with 16 Tamil children. The compound is now overgrown, dusty jungle. Hey, did we plant that mango tree? Maybe. But where is the tree, the Bo tree that was the center of our house? Finally we find part of the cement floor, all that's left. The tree has been cut down.

This was going to be our educational environment, along with the Tibetan house next door, a place where education and life were not separated. That was before the big split, before the Aspiration school was torn apart to keep Sri Aurobindo Society people from teaching there, before our kids' parents, who were brought into Auroville by the Society, claimed the tamarind trees next door and spent three days in a stand-off with the French people who wouldn't let them harvest the sour brown tamarind fruits.

There is a bitterness here that won't go away, the taste of idealism and hard work not fully realized. I've never really forgiven certain Aurovilians for the loss of that garden and that educational experiment. And I've never quite forgiven myself for letting it happen.

**July 25:** In search of myself, it's been, perhaps, too long—I can't find me anymore because then I was a shadow looking for form. The shadow that I was didn't know how to talk in meetings and couldn't take a stand. Now I go to a teacher's meeting at Transition and am willing to talk too much. Now my American mind knows what I think about things in Auroville that, when I was here, were too new and mysterious.

In search of myself it's really two questions: (1) "Why did you leave?"—this from westerners who are

**As I watch, the light fades. It's evening and overhead lights are switched on. As I watch, for a moment, the crystal seems to expand and the chamber move.**

wondering if my answers will be the same as their own secret reasons that tug at them (Tamilians don't ask because they know why one would leave-theirs is only a sadness of a kind); (2) "Will you come back?" Come back to be "somebody in particular," as Johnny says to me, standing in his rolled up dhoti, bearded, turbaned, barefooted, plunging a crowbar into the red earth to dig yet another tree pit.

The old romantic Auroville archetype-leading a life beyond the limits of west and east, forging some new identity in the heat and dust. It's the last question that skulks in some corner of my consciousness and comes out at night, so that many of my dreams still *take* place in some strange approximation of Auroville. Even though the answer is no for now, the question will be there for as long as Auroville is.

**July 27:** The last thing I expected was to be involved in a political issue, yet I am. Asked-to play the flute at the opening of the Darshan program at the amphitheater on August 15, I agreed. Then I found out that the woman who taught me to chant "Om Namoh Bhagavate" years ago, an Ashramite, who was to lead a group of Aurovilians in chanting on the 15th, has been asked not to because... well, because she is an Ashramite and this is an Auroville affair. The guardians of orthodoxy decided, somehow, that I was Aurovilian enough to still be able to play.

Even though a friend tells me that by playing I will stand up for diversity and the right of "outsiders" to participate in Auroville, it doesn't take my monkey mind long to decide: I refuse to be a part of religious sectarianism like this that divides us into castes. This is what happened in the 70's. Aurovilians were unspiritual, materialistic westerners; Ashramites

were religious zealots; the French were fanatics. Everyone gravitated to their caste and circled the wagon trains.

Not again. I write a letter to the *Auroville News* expressing my refusal to be a part of this division between pure and impure. It's August 15th, I note, the birthday of an Ashramite, not an Aurovilian.

And there are many Aurovilians who agree with me. Yet, the decision to stop the chanting was made and accepted. Big question: who's in charge around here? There is the working committee that is supposed to make decisions, but everyone in the community is free to ignore them, and there is no enforcement. When X blocks a road saying the tourist traffic is too dangerous, the working committee goes there to convince him to unblock it. He ignores them and finally the Indian government's chief secretary for Auroville comes along, tears down the barricade, and there is a shouting match. X winds up in jail, the

chief secretary winds up insulted, and Aurovilians shake their heads and go "tch, tch."

Is this total freedom what Mother wanted for Auroville, a spiritual anarchy that would lead to the rule of a higher

consciousness? A handful of people can work their will on the majority. To my American monkey mind, this seems like immaturity, seems like Auroville not wanting to undertake the difficult task of community building, which involves compromise and submitting to an authority one may disagree with.

If you can't govern yourself, then someone else will do it for you, and that's exactly what the chief secretary seems inclined to do. Many of the Indian residents of Auroville silently appreciate his decisions and say privately that Auroville has to accept its ties to the Indian government. But a lot of westerners want to live free or die. This is *deja vu* for me, a reincarnation of some of the same issues behind the Sri Aurobindo

Society vs. Auroville confrontation of the 70's and 80's.

So we go to see Maggi Liddchi. Maggi who brought me to see Mother for the first time and who has been involved with numerous Auroville and Ashram projects. We sit in her courtyard at dusk and she looks long and deeply at us. Perhaps it's my imagination, but she herself looks more like Mother as the years pass. My monkey mind expects some conversation, but there is none. "I say less and less all the time," she explains, before we settle into a long silence. The Ashram streets are still relatively quiet at night. My monkey mind finds a branch to cling to and stay put for a while. I remember why I'm here.

**July 30:** Aurovihtis: Noun (1) The urge to drop everything and go to Auroville in order to finish some undefined things not previously completed, (2) The feeling that time spent in Auroville is more real (and yet magical) than time spent elsewhere; (3) A variation of 'Raj nostalgia'; (4) A sincere aspiration for a new consciousness.

**August 1:** Maybe I left Auroville because I ran out of reasons to stay. There are always plenty of excuses to leave. Returning, they seem to leap out at me around every curve of the road. I ran into one of these minor demons yesterday in Shamga: the curse of neo-colonialism.

Even though I will extoll Auroville as perhaps the only place in the world where first and third worlders are thrown together in a community soup, and even though I speak Tamil well enough not to be a typical Auroville *sahab*, in practice I can't tolerate having to deal with Tamilians as servants and workers. I can't quite accept the big white houses with ponds next to them (Don't I have a swimming pool? Am I a hypocrite?) and ant moats encircling them, with fair-haired, naked babies playing under the watchful eyes of Tamil ammas.

This is truly my American monkey mind at work, I know, but I can't stop it. There are 2000 servants and workers in Auroville (excluding the 700 workers who turn the Matrimandir into what looks like a set for a Hollywood Biblical epic during the

**Come back to be,  
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to dig yet another tree pit.**

day). There are about 550 adult Aurovilians. Auroville is a colonial creature pulling in more and more Tamil villagers all the time. People say that Tamilians are moving into the surrounding villages so that they can work for Auroville.

I can understand the reasons for this, can even appreciate it as potentially beneficial for the workers, but something in me can't deal with the **discrepancies** between the big houses and mud huts, can't deal with someone who's paid 30 rupees (one dollar) a day. It's just me and one more of my demons herding me toward the Madras airport.

**August 11:** Free writing: **Ahem, aham**, a hum, a throb, am off running, ranting, raving, wondering, waving, waking. . . *the* taste of all my days lingers in this evening, here on a road in Auroville, the road I've been down so many times, and the same trees go by the red parched earth so prayed over, now planted with trees, yet still barren of cover. How the rain would wash it, bathe it, prepare it; how the rain that rumbles away to the edges of the world. What can I make of time forgotten, lost on this road, scattered beside it like seeds not watered? Discarded days of drowsy heat. Discarded moments unattended. Time that throws up shapes and ghosts who flit among the trees along this road, mocking, "You were here, you were here."

**August 15:** There's a new, organized system in the Ashram this year to alleviate the long queues for entrance to Sri Aurobindo's room. You sign up for a certain half-hour time slot along with a limited number of devotees. Ours is from **9:30-10**, just before the meditation. We're here on time, sitting in a line on the mats that completely cover the street behind the Ashram, protected from the sun by canopies.

My American monkey mind is working hard, watching the elderly Tamil lady in front of us whose son went off some time ago to buy flowers to take up. She's getting anxious. There seem to be more and more Tamilians at Darshan. Is this part of a trend? 'OM Namō Bhagavate, OM Namō Bhagavate.' It's still hot. The Ashram school students who are

running this part of the system are having a good time, walking up and down, guiding people in, having urgent discussions about how the thing should work. 'OM Namō Bhagavate, OM Namō Bhagavate.'

I remember all the other queues for Darshan I've been in, all the expectations of queue life: that something of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, those two extraordinary beings, will flow from their rooms into my body as I walk through. 'OM Namō Bhagavate, OM Namō Bhagavate.'

All these faces seem so familiar, are so familiar. Even though we've never spoken, our eyes have met for a split second years ago, maybe lives ago, then again, and now. This could be the same queue I was in outside Mother's room that very first time; or the huge queue on Sri Aurobindo's centennial; or Mother's centennial. Maybe my life in India was an innumerable queue, waiting through the heat for the moment when the effect of the heat drops away. 'OM Namō Bhagavate, OM Namō Bhagavate.' Something drops away.

Here on the mat, waiting, with the help of the mantra, something drops away. 'OM Namō Bhagavate, OM Namō Bhagavate.' Monkey mind stops chewing on itself and something drops away. I'm in a wide space where everything is the same and yet not. Suddenly, everything is accepted: whatever I did or didn't do in Auroville; whatever I did or didn't do in the USA. 'OM Namō Bhagavate, OM Namō Bhagavate.' The monkey's off my back.

It stays off all morning. I file into the thronged courtyard, hand my chit to a familiar face, go up the familiar stairs, and through his room. The chair has been reappolstered, the room arranged in a way that Champaklal remembered more clearly. Before descending, Nirodbaran hands me the Darshan birthday card. On it is written, "OM Namō Bhagavate Sri Aravindaiya."

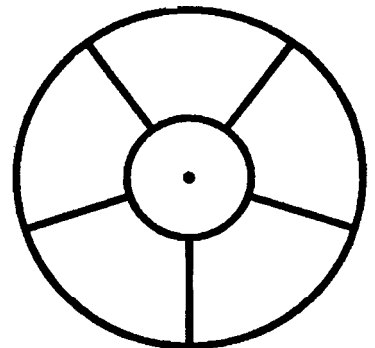
**August 16, Madras Airport:** Leaving. Innumerable security checks. The final queues. Last night they asked me suddenly to play flute on the roof at Pitanga, as part of the Darshan arts program, and I accepted, accompanied

by a wonderful tanpura and an Aurovillian couple clearly running on ecstasy plus. The lights were very bright, too bright to see the audience who remained so respectfully silent that I hardly knew they were out there. The bugs loved the lights and crawled on my neck and, at one point, almost into my mouth. Afterwards, no one said a word. In the semi-darkness I recognized barely **five** people in the place and realized that I'd been going around visiting those known from before and had missed all of these people. But it was good to play. Something else dropped away.

**Saxtons River, August 18:** I'm here, glad to be back, glad the heat's over, glad, yes, that I don't live in Auroville-for now. As for all those years . . . well, maybe we still do live in Auroville on some occult plane, the level that keeps invading my dreams with strange houses, dusty roads and familiar faces.

But we definitely live in Auroville on the human plane, when we are with people we've known for 25 years. Most of them are absent from this published version of the journal, but they are the reason we returned to Auroville and will continue to return. They are the reason we go to **A.U.M.**'s and will continue to go-they and all of that "Auroness," all that time and consciousness spent together in various stages of aspiration, that wraps around us an invisible filament too strong to ever break.

*Gordon Korstange is the Editor of Collaboration and lives in Saxtons River, Vermont.*





# The Parliament of World Religions

By Bill Moss

**T**HE PARLIAMENT OF THE World's Religions, held at the end of August in Chicago, was the 100th Anniversary of the Parliament at which Swami Vivekananda, and through him, Hinduism, was introduced to the West in 1893. This gathering consisted of an even wider diversity of religious and spiritual groups than the original, and the Sri Aurobindo Association took the opportunity to sponsor several talks and workshops, as well as to have a booth which we shared with AVI-USA.

To quote from Ariel Browne, who attended the Parliament and also presented a very successful workshop, "...It was an enormously successful, stimulating, pilgrimage-gathering of religious and spiritual people from all over the world. Six thousand people gathered in one venue, the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago. The schedule, listing all the offerings during the nine day period was a large book in itself. In addition to other events going on in the Chicago area, there was a large booth area, and there was a large exhibition of sacred art.

The groups ranged from Wiccan Earth Goddess worshipers and Native American medicine-teachers to Orthodox Jews, Kashmiri Muslims and Roman Catholic Vatican representatives. It was a huge range of perspectives and, obviously, included theists and non-theists. Conflicts developed almost immediately: old battles were remembered; old wounds were opened.

The miracle of grace, however, is that out of these potential battles and struggles many remarkable unifying dialogues were begun and explored, new bonds were formed across ancient barriers, and many miracles of healing occurred between old, and potential enemies. Somehow after that experience, when I came home to the news of the Palestine-Israeli peace accord, I could imagine the unimaginable."

In addition to Ariel's "Sacred Cells" workshop, which was so popular the room's walls were bulging, Rod



Ariel Browne presenting at the Parliament of World Religions

Hemsell gave a lecture/reading on mantric poetry in *Savitri*, and Seyril Schochen gave a powerful reading of *Savitri* to a large audience in one of the plenary sessions. The SAA collaborated with AVI-USA to enable them to present a wonderful panel discussion and slide show on Auroville. Also, the SAA hosted a hospitality hour for interested Parliament attendees and local devotees, which was very well attended. Our booth, run by Surama and Wayne Bloomquist of the Berkeley SAA office, as well as by June Maher and others from AVI, was visited by several hundred people.

The centerpiece of our SAA program, in addition to the other fine programs, was a riveting talk by our friend, C.V. Devan Nair. It is no small feat for Devan, or anyone, to squeeze an introduction to Sri Aurobindo and Mother into a 45 minute time slot, but the end result was worth it. His fine presentation, reprinted below, was both

inspired and inspiring, and very well received.

It is always very difficult to do justice to a powerful experience in the written word - more so once some time has passed. I only spent four days in Chicago [and I was not able to stay for Devan's talk], but those days were paced with an intensity, both outer and inner, which I have rarely experienced. Our group meditations, whether formal or informal, were filled with the power of Spirit-Light, and during Seyril's reading, Sri Aurobindo's Presence was tangible, filling the auditorium with a dense-packed Joy.

We may never know the full effects of The Parliament of the World's Religions - all we can truly know is that it was significant that, thanks to the Divine Grace; Sri Aurobindo, Mother, and Auroville were represented there.

*Bill Moss is President of the Sri Aurobindo Association and lives in Watertown, Massachusetts.*

# The Cry Of The Earth- The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo

(Address to the Parliament of World Religions, Chicago, September 2, 1993)

By C. V. Devan Nair

**I**M NOT THE ONLY ONE gripped by unease when expected to explain Sri Aurobindo. Asked to write a twelve page article on the subject, Satprem, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo's great exemplar, **the** Mother, had approached her **with** similar disquiet. The Mother's reply : "They want twelve pages? I would say it in one sentence: 'Because it's **the Truth** of my being.' To start writing pages on **that** is pure chatter."

**Mother** would understand if I simply read her seven-word sentence and walked off this platform. I'm afraid you wouldn't. Neither would the conveners of **this** Parliament. But I know **she** appreciates **the** singular difficulty which faces anybody who seeks to express a **truth** of experience, in the linear logic of work-a-day language. One recalls an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo's: "Science talks and behaves as if it had conquered all knowledge. Wisdom, as she walks, bears her solitary tread echoing on the margin of immeasurable Oceans."

We encounter **that** truth of **being** only on our inner roads. And there are as many inner roads as **there** are human beings. In Sri Aurobindo's words : "**Earth's** million roads struggled towards deity."

And, one sees, quite naturally, the abysmal folly of bigotries of dogma and creed which continue to blight the roads of spiritual endeavor on our planet.

## A Wind Tunnel of Gossip

**The** almost universal devaluation of words and language in our times does not make our predicament any easier. Even poetry is sometimes supplanted by sound-bytes. Some of the last words jotted down by a distinguished man of modern European letters come to mind. I quote from Ionesco's *Journal* :

"[words] no longer have any vital significance for me. Words have killed images or are concealing them. A civilization of words is a civilization distraught. . . The fact is **that** words say nothing . . . There are no words for the deepest experience."

George Steiner drove the point home : "We live in a culture which is, increasingly, a wind-tunnel of gossip; gossip **that** reaches from theology and politics to an unprecedented noising of private concerns (**the** psychoanalytic process is the high rhetoric of gossip).

. . . . . In how much of what is now pouring forth do words become the word — and where is **the** silence needed if we are to hear **that** metamorphosis?"

**Other** persons of great learning, who had **begun with** the belief **that Truth** resides in our libraries, have also ended in impotent despair. We know **that** most of our media vie **with** one another to excel as chroniclers of chaos; **they** have

forgotten how to **chronicle** anything else. We note **that** a **good number** of our **best-selling** authors cater to

an ever-growing market of connoisseurs of catastrophe - external and internal.

Or, what you had considered sublime is rendered ridiculous, as happened to me one evening. I had walked into the family room when my children were watching an American film on TV. I had come in just at the point an actor was portraying Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsamane. It turned out to be a remarkably convincing depiction of an excruciating cramp

in the stomach, as arises from severe colic, and made me feel like rushing to poor Jesus **with** a bottle of **Pepto-Bismol**.

Alas - no mould of dogma or denomination fits the Great Experience that once walked our **earth in the body** and vesture of Christ. Nor **other** such great experiences. None possibly can. **With** stunning clarity, Sri Aurobindo tells us why : "The secret of **the** lotus," he calmly observed, "is not to be found by analysing the mud from which it grows."

Mud, air, water, some rays of sun, plus a mysterious something else combine in an unknown alchemy to create **what** Satprem called a site of convergence, a point of transmutation — and the lotus blooms in an incredible harmony of form, color, beauty — a living message from an unseen Glory.

But, as is natural to specialists of mud, we revel in slush. And, not

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surprisingly, we do to spiritual experience what a herd of buffalos do to a tranquil lotus pool. They stir all the mud up, and the lotuses are thrashed in the mire.

Many of us succumb to despair. Or we spin cocoons of cynicism around ourselves as defense against a capricious Infinite. But often, **through** some crack in the cocoon, we hear **the** sound of laughter in Heaven, as in an amusing parable of **the** great Sri Ramakrishna : "Once a salt doll went

to measure the depth of the ocean. But it could not come back to give a report." We are just as transient as that salt doll.

## "A Little Soul Carrying a Corpse"

I am expected to summarize the vision and work of Sri Aurobindo. But, please, do bear in mind that there is nothing to buy or to sell on the roads of the Spirit. Propaganda is puerile. Quietly, but firmly, Sri Aurobindo held his ground against a persistent disciple, who considered himself a public relations expert. He wrote :

I don't believe in advertisement except for books etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom — and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere — or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds of thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence.

Sri Aurobindo is a vision which saw the fulfillment of the yet unaccomplished Ages. "Man is a transitional animal;" he said. "He is not final." What is as yet unaccomplished?

We recall the words of Epictetus, taken away to Rome as a slave: "A little soul carrying a corpse." It has always been so, since the first cry of Life on Earth From primal microorganisms some four billion years ago, through countless species of plant and animal, right up to modern Man, Death has been the constant companion of Life. And we continue to inherit an ever-mounting legacy of graves. All of us end up in one, or on a funeral pyre. And then, what? Does consciousness itself die? Was it ever really absent, even in inert stone and mineral?

Will the evolution of life on earth eventually result in a conscious being who will dispense with Death as the

## Does Sri Aurobindo have a Truth for us, a Truth not only with eyes closed and seated cross-legged in the classical lotus position — although that too might be part of the process — but a palpable, living Truth of consciousness, HERE, on Earth?

sole means of renewal and further growth? Not, mind you, that we ourselves, as we are, would really want immortality for relentlessly aging and creaking bags of skin and bones, hosting a horde of maladies. Nor can we bear to think that some human monsters might eternally inflict themselves on earth and men.

Desperate hearts and minds in an increasingly benighted age, in spite of all our electronic wizardries, have every right to ask : Does Sri Aurobindo have a Truth for us, a Truth not only with eyes closed and seated cross-legged in the classical lotus position — although that too might be part of the process — but a palpable, living Truth of consciousness, HERE, on Earth? A Truth of Life — please — not a Truth of Death, usually accompanied by what Sri Aurobindo called "... unprovisioned cheques on the Beyond."

We need, so desperately, some glimmer of hope that the destiny of our species is not to wriggle and rot beneath the stars.

We will not find the answer in our heads. We recall Sri Aurobindo's lines:

Or we may find when all the rest has failed  
Hid in ourselves the key of perfect change.

## The Drive To Evolve

To an extraterrestrial observer, our age must present the aspect of a tripod teetering on one leg. He will see our species as enduring evolutionary suffocation from an incredible acceleration of external and internal chaos — not unlike the extreme asphyxiation suffered by the reptiles at the end of the **Cretaceous** Age. But, as always, Mother Nature had a secret evolutionary intent in that suffocation. Not all reptiles consented to extinction by

asphyxiation.

A few came upon a magic leverage in their cells, right in the midst of their agonising lives. They evolved wings — as birds — and secured release from rapidly dehydrating swamps. The immense journey of life on our planet seems governed by a secret beatitude : Blessed are those who suffocate, for they shall have release. The walls of the most stifling prisons will one day topple — to reveal new dimensions of being and consciousness.

We are in the midst of an evolutionary Time-shift — as radical as the one from mineral to plant. Sri Aurobindo gave us the rationale, as it were, of the crisis of our Age: "The end of a stage of evolution," he said, "is usually marked by a powerful recrudescence of all that has to go out of the evolution."

The Mother put it in her own unique manner : "... the entire species seems to have reached a point where it must break through and emerge into a new consciousness, or else fall back into an abyss of darkness and inertia. We can take this as a **sure** sign of the infusion into Matter of a new principle of force, of **consciousness**, of power which, through its very Pressure, is creating this acute state."

What is this principle of power, consciousness, force? Einstein discovered a great truth :  $E = mc^2$ . All matter in the universe resolves itself into one great Energy, not two. But, something is missing. There remains a further resolution to be effected, and modern physicists are looking for the ultimate equation they call the Unified Field, and which they hope will explain everything. They will keep on looking for it, until it dawns on them that the fundamental term of that ultimate equation is **CONSCIOUSNESS** — which equals  $E = mc^2$ .

All consciousness, whether of jelly fish or of mathematicians must, **willy-**

nilly — be part of the Unified Field. Four thousand years ago the *Mundaka Upanishad* already knew that Matter was secret Energy, or what they termed

**Consciousness-** Energy. “By energism of Consciousness (*tapas*) Brahman is massed; from that Matter is born and from Matter, Life and Mind and the worlds.”

Even much earlier, the *Rig-Veda* had referred to the original and ultimate Consciousness-Fire as Agni, of which it said: “Flame with his hundred treasures. . . O knower of all things born (**I.59**).” And again: “He is the child of the waters, the child of the forests, the child of things stable and the child of things that move. Even in the stone he is there (**I.70.2**).” For Agni is also “. . . the Sun dwelling in the darkness (111.39.5) — “the One conscious in unconscious things.”

The tantrics figured and worshipped it as Shakti, or The Divine Mother. Call it what you like— but it is the one and only power.

## The Big Bang

The current favorite among physicists is the theory that the Universe began, several billions of years ago, with what they call The Big Bang. But, at least in private, some scientists muse that perhaps an all-seeing Eye not only watched, but was itself the Big Bang. Some startling lines in a poem of Sri Aurobindo’s, titled “Electron,” might nourish that wonder :

The electron on which forms and worlds are built,  
Leaped into being, a particle of God,  
A spark from the eternal energy spilt,  
It is the Infinite’s blind minute abode. . .

Atom and molecule in their unseen Plan  
Buttress an edifice of strange onenesses,  
Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man, —  
Man on whom the World-Unity

shall seize,  
Widening his soul-spark to an epiphany

Of the timeless vastness of Infinity.

Like others before him, Sri Aurobindo had known, in conscious experience, the timeless condition of Nirvana. In two memorable lines of his epic spiritual testament, *Savitri*, he captured a further marvel :

So flashing out of the Timeless leaped the worlds;

An eternal instant is the cause of the years ...

He did not choose to remain in the Timeless, to fall asleep in the Infinite, as he put it with incomparable humor. That eternal instant must be recovered in conscious life and experience, here on earth. For if eternity is not also here, it cannot be anywhere else. William Blake intuited this :

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,  
And a Heaven in a wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour.

Clearly, there is more to the adventure of consciousness on Earth than to vaporise on some supernal Height. I will echo here the harrowing cry which begins a chapter in Satprem’s latest and most powerful book, *Evolution II*: “Four billion years and sorrows to vanish on high? But that is monstrous. And all these graves are monstrous.”

**Central to Sri Aurobindo’s vision are two perceptions. First : “Nothing can evolve out of Matter which is not therein already contained.” Second : “The soul had a prehuman past, it has a superhuman future.”**

But he also knew of the unforgettable divine response to the human soul enshrined in some imperishable lines of *Savitri*:

My hidden presence led thee unknowing on  
From thy beginning in earths voiceless bosom  
Through life and pain and time and will and death.  
Through outer shocks and inner silences  
Along the mystic roads of Space and Time  
To the experience which all nature hides.

**Sceptics** may scoff, but seemingly inconscient material Nature did come out, successively, with several startling secrets it hid in that voiceless bosom. We remember the imaginary logician at the beginning of earth history, as conjured by Sri Aurobindo :

When only matter was there and there was no life, if [that logician had been] told that there would soon be life on earth embodied in matter, he would have cried out, “It is impossible, it cannot be done. What! this mass of electrons, gases, chemical elements, this heap of mud and water and stones and inert metals, how are you going to get life in that? Will the metal walk?”

The metal not only walked. It went on to run and fly, feel and think, write poetry and work out equations, and to emerge, among other humans, as Buddha, Plato, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Einstein.

## A Power that Shatters Prisons

We are all fond of our separate prisons. Throughout history, previous species have been equally attached to **their’s**. Nonetheless, a relentless evolutionary power shattered all kinds of more or less tolerable enclosures — skins, cocoons, shells — **carapaces** of all kinds. She is due to shatter still more, beginning with our



mental cages, until she finds conscious tenements in terrestrial time for the experience which all Nature hides.

Central to Sri Aurobindo's vision are two perceptions. First : "Nothing can evolve out of Matter which is not therein already contained." Second : "The soul had a prehuman past, it has a superhuman future." He also gave an uniquely non-linear response to that ancient conundrum : which came first, the hen or the egg? His answer : Both — and the cockerel!

And we land in a Simultaneity, not unknown to modern physics. We learn from Einstein's equations that a change of speed results in a change of time. We recall the familiar story of the space traveler who returns to earth having aged less than those who remained there. But at the speed of light, our human scale of time vanishes altogether. Here too, the Indian rishis spoke of the simultaneous vision of the three times — past, present and future — which they called trikala drishti. All this is mind-boggling. And God knows that our minds deserve to be boggled.

The evolutionary Future will not take shape in our heads, but where it

has always occurred since that first protoplasm — in the cells. Which is why, beginning as Pilgrims of the Light, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother also became Pilgrims of the Night. A very physical Night, nursing in its bosom that Sun dwelling in the darkness of the Vedic rishis.

"Salvation is physical," said the Mother. The adventure of consciousness which began aeons ago in a single throbbing cell in the shallows of some ancient sea is not fulfilled until, as Sri Aurobindo put it : "The high meets the low, all is a single plan."

Here's a random sampling from *Savitri's* fields of wonder:

"The truth above shall awake a nether truth."

Next : "Even the body shall remember God."

Further : "The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze

And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face."

Sri Aurobindo left only the barest hints about his own descent into Night. Obviously, the language of a new species is not yet on any linguistic

map. I might give just one hint he offered in an extraordinary poem:

I have been digging deep and long  
Mid a horror of filth and mire  
A bed for the golden river's song,  
A home for the deathless fire.

We also seem to hear the first stammerings of a new being in thirteen volumes of Mother's conversations recorded by Satprem, with the title : *Mother's Agenda of The Supramental Action Upon Earth.*

Nothing more can, nor need be said, in forty odd minutes. The work continues, consciously in a few, unconsciously in the rest of us. For Sri Aurobindo had said : "All life is yoga;" and "Nobody is saved unless all are saved."

We conclude with two lines from *Savitri*:

A few shall see what none yet understands;  
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep . . .

*C. V. Devan Nair, former President of the Republic of Singapore, now lives in Bloomington, Indiana.*

## Centers



August 15, 1993 Darshan gathering at Matagiri

**M**ORE THAN 100 PEOPLE attended the observance of Sri Aurobindo's birthday and Matagiri's 25th anniversary on August 15. They came from as far as Kansas, Canada and France, and kept appearing all day even though the event started at 11 a.m. A large number of Russian emigres attended, including a group of Russian teenagers. Since the day was warm and sunny, the meditation was held outdoors on the lookout point near the main building before a special flower-decked altar. Sri Aurobindo's poem "A God's Labour" was read followed by a tape of Ashram music and a powerful meditation in the shade of the trees facing a majestic mountain vista.

Afterwards both Sam and Eric, the founders of Matagiri, spoke briefly before introducing Rudy Phillips, president of the Foundation for World Education, which now owns the Matagiri property. He spoke of the Foundation's plans to construct a meditation and retreat facility on the mountainside and showed aerial photographs of the property and tentative plans for the new structures. The present buildings will continue to be used as a center and Matagiri still

holds weekly meditations on Thursday evenings and special gatherings as well as its library and bookstore.

After the meditation and talk, a lavish collective picnic was enjoyed under a tent behind the main house. Those attending all brought food to share. Later, John Schlorholtz from Boston gave a slide show of the Ashram and Auroville, and then Dhanya, a Dutch Aurovilian, led people in chanting on the lookout point. People visited the library where there were special displays including rare books, a photographic history of Matagiri, several albums of photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, letters from well-wishers, including Dr. Karan Singh, and a wall hanging made by the Sri Aurobindo Center in Tavignano, Italy. The bookstore and gift shop were also busy all afternoon.

It was an extraordinary day and it was gratifying to see so many old friends and former residents, some who had not been to Matagiri in 20 years.

Matagiri welcomes visitors. If you would like to visit or to be notified of special events here, please write to Matagiri, 1218 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457 or call (914) 679-8322.

**AVI-USA** is planning a retreat at Shenoah in Booneville, California on February 26-7. The cost is \$55 a night, including meals. Space is limited. Call the Sacramento office for more details.

AVI is also offering again this year the beautiful Auroville Greenwork Calendar to benefit afforestation in Auroville. The cost is \$12.90 including shipping.

### All-USA-Meeting: 1994

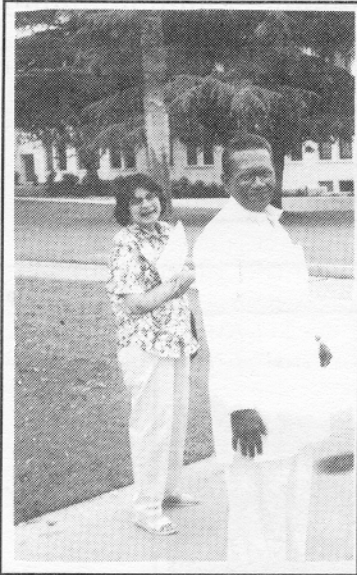
**Where:** Pathworks Center, Phoenicia, New York

**When:** June 30-July 4

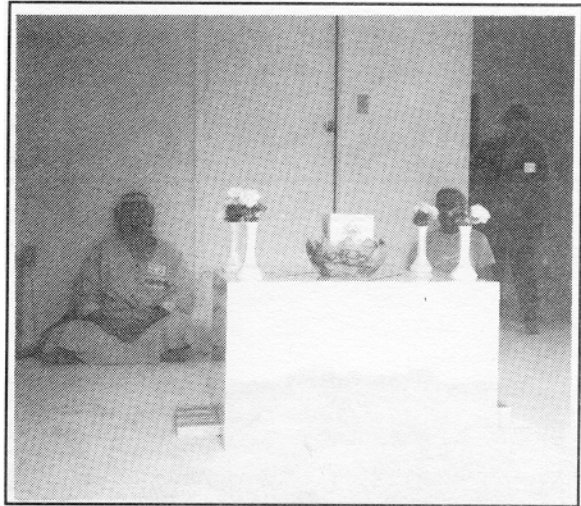
**Contact:** Julian Lines, Auroville Information Office, 23 Mill Hill Road, Woodstock, NY 12498, (914) 679-2926 for information on presenting or if you wish to come early and/or stay longer for a retreat.

## Sri Aurobindo Centers, Study Groups, Contact Persons and Affiliates, USA & Canada.

<b>AVI-USA</b> P.O. Box 162489 3112 'O' St., Suite 13 Sacramento, CA 95816 (916) 452-4013	<b>Cultural Integration Fellowship</b> 360 Cumberland San Francisco, CA 94114 (415) 626-2442	<b>Matagiri</b> 1218 Wittenberg Road Mt. Tremper, NY 12457 (914) 679-8322	<b>Sri Aurobindo Study Group</b> 25 East 21st St. Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8V 2T3 (416) 383-5743
<b>Auroville Information Office</b> 23 Mill Hill Road Woodstock, NY 12498 (914) 679-2926	<b>Dushyant Desai</b> Sri Aurobindo Center 25 Hill Street Bloomfield, NJ 07003 (201) 748-0639	<b>Pacific Northwest/Puget Sound</b> 2020 Roosevelt Enumclaw, WA 98022 (206) 825-3413	<b>Wilmot Center</b> 33719 116th Street Twin Lakes, WI 53181 (414) 889-8561
<b>Boston Study Group</b> 91 Kilmarnock St. Boston, MA 02215 (617)262-6390	<b>East Bay Center</b> 2288 Fulton St., Suite 310 Berkeley, CA 94704 (510) 848-1841	<b>Sri Aurobindo Association</b> 2288 Fulton St., Suite 310 Berkeley, CA 94704 (510) 848-1841	
<b>California Institute of Integral Studies</b> 765 Ashbury Street San Francisco, CA 94117 (415) 753-6100	<b>The Integral Knowledge Study Center</b> Sri Aurobindo Circle 221 Clematis St. Pensacola, FL 32503 (904) 433-3435	<b>Sri Aurobindo Center—Southeast</b> c/o JHM Enterprises, P.O. Box 8375 Greenville, SC 29604 (803) 232-9944	
<b>Le Centre Sri Aurobindo</b> 4125 Rue St. Denis Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2W 2M7 (514) 845-2786	<b>Jyoti Ashram</b> 1291 Weber St. Pomona CA 91768 (909) 629-0108	<b>Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, Inc.</b> Savitri House & Savitri Solar Village Baca Grande, P.O. Box 80 Crestone, CO 81131 (719) 256-4917	



Mrs. Aurora and Manoj Das, Ashram Trustee



Meditation at the East-West Center

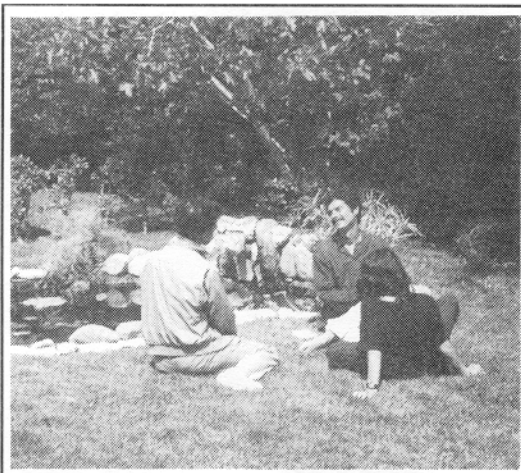
## A.U.M. 1993 Los Angeles, California



Alternative lunch by the roadside



Sam Graves, Mario Santonastaso, Bob Dane



Dennis Hargiss and friends



Jean Korstange and Bill Sullivan wave goodbye



Auroville Landscape in the 1970's

**Sri Aurobindo Association**  
*Collaboration*  
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