

# Collaboration

Summer/Fall, 1991

Vol. XVII, No. 2



*Fall's first leaves flick ripples  
across bright water—like birds  
wrinkling briefly the sky*

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## A.U.M. 92

is an exciting new experiment in having the planning group based in different geographical areas. We will be connected with each other and with you via phone, fax, modem, and mail.

Already we have the place: Asheville, North Carolina, and beginnings of our program. Please send your ideas to: **Sally Walton**, 203 Yoakum Parkway, Suite 901, Alexandria, VA 22304 (703) 370-3919 fax and phone or **Vijay Raghavan**, 201 Acklaen Park Drive #26, Nashville, TN 37203 (615) 292-2481

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# A.U.M. in the Heartland

By Gordon Korstange

**F**IRST THERE WERE the granite hills of New Hampshire; then the majestic California redwoods, the sweep of the Colorado Rockies, a narrow valley near Phoenicia, New York, and the snow-capped Olympic mountains of Washington. This year, the sounds of the 7th All-USA-Meeting rolled out from the St. Benedict's Center, across the cornfields and gentle hills that stretch west from Madison, Wisconsin. They were, for the most part, sounds of the heart—quiet conversation, children's excited shouts and laughter, tears of relief and gratitude. In the open Midwest, we opened to each other and to an aspiration that created the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

*I liked - loved, the beautiful feeling of giving our very best—our highest aspirations—to this most exceptional work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.\**

*It was a wonderful experience to know that the people devoted to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, coming together, can create the intensity of spiritual atmosphere so much so that we felt as if we were in the same atmosphere of the Ashram and Auroville.*

*Very supportive atmosphere. Concrete love and acceptance allowing people to cry, laugh, hug. Mother's family.*

*I felt Their presence very clearly in all of these things.*

The tone for this meeting of the hearts was struck on the very first morning when the entire group of 50-plus participants, children included, sat in council. Like the native American tribes who developed this method of

decision-making discussion, we kept silent for a moment, then began passing our version of the "talking stick," a small piece of rectangular marble chipped from one of the slabs now installed in the inner room of the Matrimandir.

Each person could choose whether to speak or not when the chip was received. We were instructed to speak from the heart and not to prepare any words, trusting that each one of us would have 2-3 minutes, if necessary, to find words without the fear of someone else breaking in. This was an exercise in listening from the heart as well.

Over the next ninety minutes, the chip passed first to the children so that then they could leave, and then to the rest of us. We spoke of why we had come to the meeting, of the Matrimandir, of our expectations, our aspiration . . . The atmosphere in the circle became dense with meaning and emotion, alive with humor and compassion. It was a unique way to open an A.U.M. and quickly took us past the mental jousting of new acquaintances into a deeper level of trust and sharing.

*I appreciated the care and attention and love put into the children's activities and needs.*

*Without the children it would only have been half as good.*

*Invite more kids.*

*I think you should mak a baseball dimon.*

In previous A.U.M.'s that I have attended, the children and young people were often left to their own devices or to the child care provided either by the host planning group or someone from the host center. This

year's facilitators made a conscious decision that the children should be included in as many activities as possible and be able to spend time with a variety of adults.

Thus, on the first night they were paired at random, like the rest of us, with a partner to introduce so that they and we immediately felt like a member of the gathering and could speak to the group like everyone else. This provided some magical moments and alerted the adults to a process of inclusion that continued to work very well throughout the meeting.

Together with the children, we held



AUMers under the new games parachute

the council, played new games, crawled under a parachute, made giant bubbles, swam and played in the pool, sold t-shirts, watched fireworks, and created, rehearsed, and performed a wonderful play, The Enchanted Princess, on the last night of the meeting.

They were delighted. They opened like flowers. They didn't want to leave at the end. As a group of American children, Gabe, Jessica, Blake, Ian, Alexander, Arthur, Aurelia, Leo, and Christa were remarkably fresh and pure. Their infectious enthusiasm spread to the adults who, in evaluation card after evaluation card, expressed appreciation for the children's presence and recommended it for all future A.U.M.'s.

*. . . a varied and stimulating series of topics, events and modes of participation and choice among them from profound to playful, lecture to meditative, solitary to participative.*

\*These quotations are taken from evaluation cards asking for both positive comments and suggestions for improvement. They were written by the participants on the final day of the meeting.



*If anything the programs were too interesting—very difficult to choose.*

*I appreciated Devan Nair's talk: a devotee speaking eloquently from the heart.*

*Personal sharing could focus on all the issues of our daily lives.*

*We really need to keep activities centered on small group interaction rather than the presenter and listeners. Ariel's workshop was an excellent example.*

*More innovative, experimental workshops, fewer lectures.*

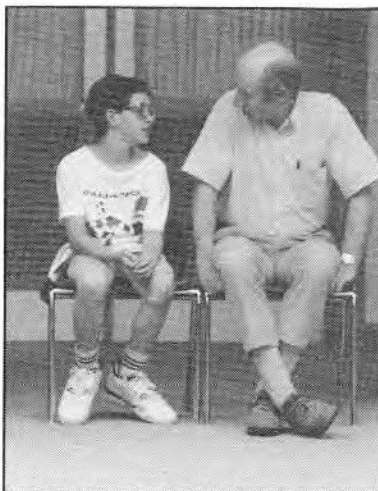
As is often the case at these meetings, participants divided themselves into three categories: (1) Those who faithfully went and enjoyed all or most of the presentations; (2) Those who were more interested in organic, creative, small-group work; and (3) Those who wanted the maximum amount of "free time" to converse and commune.

Heartland A.U.M. offered a varied menu of programs to accommodate these three groups. There were lecture/slide show presentations by participants like C.V. Devan Nair and David Wicken-den that included group discussion afterwards; participatory and creative workshops by Ariel Browne, Seyril Schochen, and Sally Walton; and a relaxed atmosphere allowing time and space for people to share individually.

At one extreme was Sally's creative drama, where we built a play based on the idea of a tribe of people who could change shapes at will. From this came *The Enchanted Princess*, about a girl who couldn't stop combing her hair.

Somewhere in the middle was Ariel's workshop, "Conscious Cells," where we told anecdotes of our encounters with the supramental force, created, with crayons, clay, and paint, an "image of our cells path," and listened to Ariel speak about her experiences with the supramental. It was a unique combination of active involvement, discussion, and lecture.

On the other end was Devan Nair



Ian Moss introducing Ron Jorgensen

who, over the course of two days, drew his listeners in with a slow, sonorous discourse that included personal experiences, extensive quotations, and reflections

on the lives and action of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

*2 hour mealtimes to allow time for talking and meeting.*

*I appreciated the balance of the schedule between activity and unscheduled time.*

*The length of the conference was just right (4 days).*

*I appreciated that the agenda was open, flowing, changeable, and receptive.*

Most of the presentations in this year's A.U.M. were submitted before the conference and the presented by the attendees. It was a cross-section of Yogic concerns, including talks on the Auroville kindergarten, Renewable Energy, and Bach Flower Remedies and Integral Yoga. People come to this meeting both for personal and public reasons—outreach and inward-search. Each year that it is held the meeting/conference becomes more of a vehicle that can handle both the organic and the formal, the spontaneous and the planned.

Scheduling the various presentations and activities always presents

the biggest problem to meeting planners. "I want to change the time of my workshop so that I can attend x's," was a refrain often heard in the Good Morning Circle. But there seems no alternative to having more than one presentation at the same time, given the number of people with something to share and the desire of others for more open, small group sharing.

*I feel that a real attempt was made in the planning to include everyone and allow each person to express themselves or contribute in some way.*

*Plaudits to the planning group for doing a superb job on a very complex task—one of the best ever!*

*I appreciated the hard work and joyful participation of the organizers.*

*I appreciated the cohesiveness and caring shown by the planning group.*

*Non-hierarchical structure. Terrific.*

*The simplicity and sincerity that pervaded the planning set a good tone that continued through the meeting.*

From the beginning of their commitment last September, the "inner," local planning group, consisting of Paula Murphy, Fanou and Brian Walton, Joel Goodman, Mira Browne, and Kevin Eggers (who drove from Iowa City) began holding regular gatherings almost every

month, delegating tasks, meditating, and sending the minutes of their meetings to an "outer" planning group who wanted to be involved but lived too far away to attend. (Three members of the outer group came one day early to join the inner circle.)

This organized preparation created a smooth-functioning, yet flexible structure for the meeting and a group consciousness that provided care and relief for its members when the inevitable stresses ("the group shadow," said Ariel, that accompanies the joy of the



Christa, Leo, Arthur, and Blake

first two days) and strains began to appear about the third day. The planners were, indeed, a heartfelt, caring group of people. The comments listed above are merely a sampling of the overwhelming appreciation that the attendees expressed toward the planning group.

The process of planning and hosting an A.U.M. can be an opportunity for collective sadhana. Certainly it was for this year's group (and, I believe, for the group in Seattle the previous year). It is also an inner commitment to The Yoga that can be individually liberating, even healing some of the scars from past experiences with the collective experience.

*quietude, beauty, breezes, views.*

*Have A.U.M. in the central area of USA more often.*

*The place was very comfortable and gave us a good variety of meeting rooms. It was very easy to get there.*

*... proximity to the airport.*

*No Christian retreat centers or other religions.*

*Food needs to be top-notch, high quality, mostly vegetarian for this group.*

The site of an A.U.M. is crucial. St. Benedicts, if it did not pass the taste or religion test, had many advantages that made it a superb selection. First and foremost, for anyone who has dealt with transportation to and from these meetings, it was 20 minutes from a major airport and yet offered a quiet,

retreat atmosphere. It had comfortable, individual rooms, enough meeting spaces, spacious grounds, tennis courts, a playing field, and most importantly for the kids, a pool.



Ida Patterson, Seyril Schochen, Devan Nair, Dhanam Nair

From the picnic tables outside the cafeteria, we looked out over Lake Mendota beyond to the beautiful capital building and low skyline of Madison. On July 4th, this meant being able to view a stunning sunset over the cornfields from one side of a hill and a panorama of fireworks, without the explosions, from the other

side. We were the only group using the place and had an entire building, appropriately named "Unity," to ourselves.

*The group was a great size—maybe even ideal. I felt like I got to meet and talk to everyone.*

*Strong sense of community, inclusion without*

*being coercive.*

*It's over! Oh no!*

On Sunday morning we closed with another council. The marble chip once more made the rounds, bringing forth the word "gratitude" from almost everyone it touched. The energy of the circle hummed in our beings as we stood at the end, holding hands, wondering how we could leave each other.



Gabe Eggers (top left in tree), Vijay Ragavan, Miriam Eckelmann, J. Raju, Gopa Goswami, Aurelea Walton, Arthur Orton, Leo Walton, and Christa

The wilds of America awaited. We raised our hands together, took a collective bow toward the center, and broke apart until next year.

## Presentations/Workshops

**Flowers and Their Messages—**Richard Parson and Kailasben Jhaveri

**Therapeutic Touch Healing System—**Joe Seckel

**Plunging into the Future/The United States and the New Creation—**David Wickenden

**Community and Why We Need It—**Mordechai Shtull

**Mother's Vision of the Cultural Pavilions in Auroville—**Kailasben

**The Auroville Kindergarten—**Miriam Eckelmann

**Giving and Getting: The Function of the Foundation for World Education—**Margo MacLeod

**Toward the Great Turning Point—**C.V. Devan Nair

**India, Tamil Nadu, & Auroville: A Current Appraisal—**Professor

Joseph Elder, U. of Wisconsin, Mandala: Toward a Sense of

Center—Bryan Walton

**Creative Drama—**Sally Walton

**Bach Flower Remedies and**

**Integral Yoga—**Bill Moss

**Conscious Cells—**Ariel Browne

**Color Slides of Auroville's Dedication Day—**Dr. Paul Edmonston

**Ideas for a 25 Year (1993) Auroville Birthday Celebration—**Julian Lines

**The Tempest in Miranda, A Dramatic Reading—**Seyril Schochen and Co.

**Renewable Energy and**

**Sustainability—**Joel Goodman

**A South Indian Dance-Dream:**

**Bharata Nthyam Dances &**

**Flute—**Dr. Judith Benade & students

**Music Workshop—**Gordon Korstange

**Dances of Universal Peace—**Kenna del Sol & Del Marshall



# Towards The Great Turning Point

By C. V. Devan Nair

(Text of a talk delivered at the gathering of AUM '91 -St Benedict Center, Madison, Wisconsin, July 5, '91)

**T**O BEGIN. Please do not expect an intellectual discourse on an arcane subject. You risk disappointment. You won't hear a candidate for a Ph.D. The world is certainly no better for its hundreds of thousands of Ph.Ds. In fact, worse — deafeningly so. We need so desperately to get out of the noisy bazaar of ideas, where a hundred thousand thoughts, theories and concepts, not to speak of the formidable egos behind them, collide with each other, and create the festering falsehoods amidst which we live, move, and continue to die our countless deaths every day. Do not expect, either, a spiritual virtuoso who will teach you how to levitate, to breathe down your spinal canal — or even how to meditate. One recalls how Sri Aurobindo told Mother one day: Only if we had given them a good bag of dubious miracles would they have been happy.

## Words

Yet, we hope to communicate, using words. But words are also, like ourselves, perfectly horrible mixtures of lights and shadows, angels and devils, mud and sky. We know that they can be very dangerous tools in the hands of the fanatic know-alls of all ideological stripes, whether political, scientific, religious, journalistic, or whatever — vicious tools of disinformation and propaganda, of anger, hatred, selfishness, greed, bigotry, intolerance — the entire grisly tribe. Worst of all, they also often serve as counterfeit currency which debase and distort the commerce of the spirit.

But tools are neutral, neither good nor bad in themselves. I can use a knife to cut vegetables for cooking. I can also use it to stab a peaceful neighbour in the back. So with words. Jesus used them one way. Judas and Pontius Pilate in another. Generally, most of us have good reason to become deeply suspi-

cious of words. But, and you may be familiar with this, a nameless gratitude wells up from deep within when we hear or read words which suddenly fling open closed windows and sealed doors inside us, words which evoke, ever so subtly, but ever so overwhelmingly, a very rare and beautiful ancient memory which quite unexpectedly surges up from deep within — a memory of forgotten vastnesses which await rediscovery, but only if we somehow manage to emerge from the infernal rackets in our heads and hearts.

Let Mother describe this Something Else which suddenly beats in the heart: something warm, tranquil, rich and very still, very full, like a great sweetness ..... It is like a reflection of something eternal on a very peaceful body of water. Or, as Sri Aurobindo put it in his sonnet *Omnipresence*:

*My dumb abysses are His screened abode;*

*In my heart's chamber lives the unworshipped God.*

May be, one day, we will all learn to live, not as now in our slippery minds or deceiving hearts, but from within this secret chamber, unshaken by outward happenings.

## Just One Seeker

Finally, don't expect any logical order in my presentation. For several of my own beginnings came in the middle or the end, not at the start. I merely hope to tell, as the spirit moves me, a tale of just one seeker among countless others, here and elsewhere. And, please, do remember that there are as many different stories as there are seekers. The tale of just one tiny rain-drop, like me, does not exhaust the numberless tales of all the myriad rain-drops which have been, or which are yet to be. For each one becomes aware of the ocean, or climbs to the summit of awareness (doesn't matter how you put it) by his or her own path.

By any method chosen, said Sri Aurobindo. And Mother added: This

habit of wanting to force others to think like you always seemed strange to me. You have your own experience—well, try to make it as true and complete as possible, but leave each one to his own experience. She gave a simple reason: Each person is a special manifestation in the universe. Hence, his true path must be his very own.

Yet, we might offer a de-hydrated biscuit or two, from our own meager stocks, to a limping, hungry fellow-pilgrim. Or, for that matter, receive one from a stronger brother or sister as we ourselves stumble along. And, you know, there is a mystery of delight in giving and receiving. Perhaps because all life is a common pilgrimage to a common Source — where we discover that all is One, and Divine. For, as only a Sri Aurobindo can, in incomparable fashion, put these things: *Earth's million roads struggled towards deity or, The bliss of a myriad myriads who are one.*

Indeed, the only incorrigible laggards of evolution seem to be the self-righteous fanatics of opinion, belief, ideology or religion. In short, those who have brought themselves to believe that they have captured and confined the Infinite Whole within their wonderful brain-boxes, neatly stacked in pathetic little capsules of formula and creed.

It may even be said that there are no paths at all. For everything is the path, or we make our own path by simply walking it. In the *Agenda* we read about a remarkable vision of the Mother's.

*I was wandering through all the human constructions, She said, but not the ordinary constructions: the philosophical, religious, spiritual constructions ... and they were symbolized by huge buildings—huge, so high that people were no taller than this footstool, very tiny compared to those giant things. I was walking around, and each person would come up to me, saying, "I have the true path." So I would go with him to an open door through which a vast landscape could be seen and, just as we would reach the door, it would close! ... I was really enjoying*

*myself, thinking, 'This is quite funny!'* You see, as *each person spoke, you could see that vastness, that bright light through the open door in front of you. It was splendid. But when I approached the door with the person—it closed! It was really interesting.*

*And there were so many of them, so many people, so many! There were constantly new people—sometimes men, sometimes women, sometimes young people, sometimes old, and from every conceivable country. It lasted a very long time.*

*I remember saying to one of them, "Well, this is all very fine, but it isn't true nourishment; it leaves you famished." Then someone came up and said—I don't know which country he was from; he had a dark robe, black hair, a slightly round face; he may have been Chinese, I don't know—he said, "Ah, not with me! Here-try this." And he gave me something to eat. It was absolutely delicious. Oh, it was excellent! I relished it. So I looked at him and said, "Eh, you're clever! . . . Now show me your path." "I have no path," he replied.*

## Taste the Truth

And yet, how many blows do we not suffer, how many phantom delusions of dogma, creed and ideology have still to crumble in our heads and hands before we become as wise as the black-haired gentleman who relied on his taste buds rather than on the erratic movements in his head. He didn't bother to theorize about nectar. He preferred to taste it. Why believe in anything at all? Why not, rather, taste the experience of Truth. Mere words can be doubted and debated. But not experience, not the taste of experience. "Why do they want to worship?" said the Mother. "Why not become?"

## A Moment of Victory

Oh, of course, there are times when all the heart's hopes and mind's beliefs crumble, as we look out from our separate mudholes at a pitiless, predatory world, where all creatures, including the human variety, claw, clobber or devour each other. One can imagine a would-be suicide, seized by a moment of terrifying perception, when he looks at himself and the world as it really does often seem to be — a

picture of unrelieved horror. At one time or another, many of us have been would-be suicides. I know. I have been one.

But if, at the very last moment, we stepped back from the dreadful plunge, it was because, suddenly, the sun peeped out for an instant between a rift in the clouds, and we achieved a moment of victory, an all too rare identification with a fundamental courage which shines in the very heart of darkness — a steady, unquenchable flame which seems to have been from the beginning of time.

**. . . a memory of  
forgotten  
vastnesses which  
await rediscovery,  
but only if we  
somehow manage  
to emerge from the  
infernal rackets in  
our heads and  
hearts.**

But let us not crow over our small or big victories. For a whole series of previous failures prepared them. In a poignant, a terribly poignant poem called *In The Battle*, Sri Aurobindo provides a rare revelation of his own journey through the ages. Listen.

**Often in the long ages slow retreat  
On Lifes thin ridge through Time's  
enormous sea,  
I have accepted death and borne defeat  
To gain some vantage by my fall for  
Thee.**

**For Thou hast given the Inconscient  
the dark right  
To oppose the shining passage of my  
soul  
And levy at each step the tax of Night.  
Doom, her august accountant, keeps  
the roll.**

**All around me now the Titan forces  
press;  
This world is theirs, they hold its days  
in fee;  
I am full of wounds and the fight**

**merciless.  
Is it not yet Thy hour of victory?**

**Even as Thou wilt! What still to Fate  
Thou owest,  
O Ancient of the worlds, Thou  
knowest, Thou knowest.**

We too have succumbed, nobly or ignobly, not once, but several times. So, no greater humbuggery than lofty denunciations of prostitutes, pimps, suicides, of men and women driven mad by hunger, deprivation, suffering and torture. For they are also ourselves, under different skins, in different guises. Look unsparingly into and around ourselves. Where, who, was or is the wretched sinner or weakling you and I have not been? If the deadly poisons which corrode the entrails of life afflict us a little less today, it is only because they first swallowed a good deal of the perilous potions. Hence the stark, stunning symbol of the dark, poison-stained throat of Lord Shiva, the Divine who figures all mankind in Himself. It is **A God's Labor**. It was Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Labor.

**He who would bring the heavens here  
Must descend himself into clay  
And the burden of earthly nature bear  
And tread the dolorous way.**

Or, as in a moving image of Golgotha, so powerfully evoked in Savitri :

**Gethsemane and Calvary are his lot,  
He carries the cross on which man's  
soul is nailed;  
His escort is the curses of the crowd;  
Insult and jeer are his right's  
acknowledgment;  
Two thieves slain with him mock his  
mighty death.  
He has trod with bleeding brow the  
Saviour's way.  
He who has found his identity with  
God  
Pays with the body's death his soul's  
vast light.  
His knowledge immortal triumphs by  
his death.  
Hewn, quartered on the scaffold as he  
falls,  
His crucified voice proclaims, "I, I am  
God.'  
"Yes, all is God" peals back Heaven's  
deathless call.**

We also recall the great words of the Divine injunction to Savitri: *Thou shalt bear all things, that all things may change.* Which was why the Mother told us: *Accept your share of the burden, and offer it..* That is the best we can do, and it's a tremendous best, if we can do it with sincerity and with a total absence of fear and trepidation. A tall order? But that's the divine wager. Accept our share of the world's darkness, and offer it — offer for transformation. "Remember and offer," said the Mother. She will do the rest. She IS doing the rest.

## Personal Turning Points

There are several turning points in all our lives, as also in the entire evolution of life on our planet, and in that of societies and nations, on the immense journey to an unknown epiphany. Let us speak first of personal turning points. These may be violent and momentous, like the apotheosis on the road to Damascus. They may be tragic, or comical. They may be anything at all. They may even be as imperceptible as a passing breeze, which wafts on invisible wings the haunting notes of an unforgettably captivating flute. And life is never the same again, once we have heard the music of the divine enchanter of souls, of whom Sri Aurobindo sang:

*We will tell the whole world of His ways and His cunning:  
He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;  
He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,  
Then lures with His joy and His beauty again.*

*All music is only the sound of His laughter,  
All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;  
Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal  
Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.*

*He is strength that is loud in the blare of the trumpets,  
And he rides in the car and strikes in the spears;  
He slays without stint and is full of compassion;*

*He wars for the world and its ultimate years.*

## The Notes of the Flute

I may relate here an extraordinarily vivid and beautiful dream I once had. I was wandering along a country lane when I heard the maddeningly sweet notes of a flute. Somehow, I knew it was the divine cowherd, and I left the dust-track, and ran after the music. I couldn't see anyone, and the music kept retreating everytime I approached it with a rending cry of intolerable

**Perhaps, somewhere  
on our tortured  
earth, the flame-child  
already moves, as  
the first solitary men  
must have moved  
amidst hordes of  
unconscious apes.**

yearning. Then I heard a voice, so gentle, so sweet, which said: "You will leave everything for me?" I cried out: "Yes, yes — everything!" quite forgetting that I had already read Sri Aurobindo: "Nobody is saved unless all are saved." (Later, Mother had also said: "Nothing is done until everything is done"). Unrememberingly, I had yielded to an earlier fascination for dissolution in the ecstasy of a great and utter Beyond. And I woke up, still crying: "Yes, yes — everything!" But the Divine flutist had come to remind me of my soul's promise. The problem to resolve is not when the individual soul will merge in Krishna. The question, as Sri Aurobindo put it, is:

*But when shall Krishna's dance  
through Nature move,  
His mask of sweetness, laughter,  
rapture, love?*

The very next day, I picked up Savitri, and once again read her response to the Divine in the most glorious poetry ever written - *The Book of Everlasting Day*. And I came out in gooseflesh. For all the pain of mortal humanity was in her cry:

*O besetter of man's soul with life and*

*death  
And the world's pleasure and pain and  
Day and Night,  
Tempting his heart with the far lure of  
heaven,  
Testing his strength with the close  
touch of hell,  
I climb not to thy everlasting Day,  
Even as I have shunned thy eternal  
Night.....  
Earth is the chosen place of mightiest  
souls;  
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,  
The forge where the Arch-mason  
shapes his works.  
Thy servitudes on earth are greater,  
king,  
Than all the glorious liberties of  
heaven.....  
Too far thy heavens for me from  
suffering men.  
Imperfect is the joy not shared by all.  
Oh to spread forth, oh to encircle and  
seize  
More hearts till love in us has filled thy  
world!  
Oh life, the life beneath the wheeling  
stars  
For victory in the tournament with  
death .....*

Then comes, reverberating through the appalling immensities of the universe, the tremendous response to Savitri's tortured cry:

*O beautiful body of the incarnate  
Word,  
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken  
with thy voice.  
My will is thine, what thou hast chosen  
I choose. ....  
My hidden presence led thee  
unknowing on  
From thy beginning in earth's  
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.  
Who hunts and seizes me,  
my captive grows:  
This shalt thou henceforth learn from  
thy heart-beats.  
For ever love, O beautiful slave  
of God!  
O lasso of my rapture's widening*



noose,  
*Become my cord of universal love.*  
*The spirit ensnared by thee force to*  
*delight*  
*Of creation's oneness sweet*  
*and fathomless,*  
*Compelled to embrace my myriad*  
*unities*  
*And all my endless forms and*  
*divine souls.*  
*O Mind, grow full of the eternal peace.*  
*O Word, cry out the immortal litany:*  
*Built is the golden tower, the flame-*  
*child born. ....*

Perhaps, somewhere on our tortured earth, the flame-child already moves, as the first solitary men must have moved amidst hordes of unconscious apes. Isn't one of the most pregnant lines in Savitri a reference to what happened on November 17, 1973 - the physical departure of the Mother? Did She really depart? For Sri Aurobindo had written:

*...A seed shall be sown in Death's*  
*tremendous hour,*  
*A branch of heaven transplant to*  
*human soil;*  
*Nature shall overleap her mortal step;*  
*Fate shall be changed by an*  
*unchanging will....*

But He, Sri Aurobindo, from that tremendous, powerful Silence in which he did everything, never wrote anything in vain. And what about Her? She, who used to say: "Death is a Falsehood. We have got it into our head and our will to conquer this accident?" What seed was sown in that tremendous hour? What branch of heaven transplanted to human soil? Sooner than we may think, we shall know. For, even now, the entire world of mental man gyrates like an incredibly accelerating tornado, towards an absolutely unpredictable future. We also hear Sri Aurobindo: "Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected."

## Childhood

If everything, everywhere, and everywhen is the path, so are beginnings and turning points. You encounter them all over the place. I can only speak with some authority about my

own. About those of others, one can only guess or speculate, more or less perceptively, or more or less blindly. Nothing earth-shaking to report, though, but perhaps good enough to share with fellow seekers. Significant, certainly, for not the least speck of dust in the universe is insignificant. "They must enter into the last finite if they want to reach the last infinite," said Sri Aurobindo. No reason, therefore, to underestimate anything, earth-shaking or not.

**But alas! Most children will soon be dragged from that enchanting dimension which lies all around our three-dimensional dungeons, and shoved into the slums and ghettos of consciousness we call schools**

My earliest memory is one which goes back to childhood, when we have not yet begun to verbalize and thereby to garble a primordial clarity of vision. Imagine the eyes of a smiling child, smiling at sun-rays playing hide and seek with waving grass under flowering trees, and you might sense what I mean. "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet," sang one of the sweetest singers of Sri Aurobindo's native Bengal.

*On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances . . . The sea surges up with laughter, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach. .... On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.*

That lovely singer knew what he was singing. For he was one of those rare adults who had not forgotten how

to play with the ocean, and with whom the ocean played. But alas! Most children will soon be dragged from that enchanting dimension which lies all around our three-dimensional dungeons, and shoved into the slums and ghettos of consciousness we call schools, where textbooks and teachers galore will stuff them with the irrefutable rules and regulations, rewards and punishments, of prison life. And once limpid eyes will become opaque and dimmed with the do's and don'ts, the yes's and no's, the likes and dislikes, the preferences and prejudices, of social convention. Few of them will ever again find their way back to that seashore of endless worlds, where the gay waters of an Infinite Ocean play with children. For if we truly aspire to recapture an ancient memory, we need to unlearn everything stuffed into us by our brilliant educators and doctors.

## Soul Memories

As the Mother explained, the only memories we carry with us from life to life are what She called "soul memories" — moments of an extraordinary transparency, when something deep within leaps out to the surface, and views the world with uncluttered eyes. It is that Great Clear Look we have to uncover from beneath layers and layers of evolutionary mud and ooze.

It was in 1928, sixty-three years ago. I don't recall what I had for breakfast or lunch that day. I don't remember anything at all, except sitting on a black wooden stairway in front of a black wooden bungalow in a rubber plantation gazing, totally rapt, at a glorious sunset over the towering trees of a dense equatorial jungle. I had hardly any vocabulary then. The nearest I can come today to describing the intensity of the experience is to say a shock of recognition. I was part and parcel of that radiant beauty. I was back at home. Oh, more than home. I was in it. It was in me. But I was soon rudely hauled back behind the bungalow's netted doors, which served as protection against ravenous anophelene mosquitoes, carriers of the dread malaria parasite, which were buzzing and stinging around me on that unforgettable black wooden stairway.

Some days later, when the tempera-

ture in the shade was around 105° F, I was seized by rigor, a terrible shivering which precedes the onset of a bout of malarial fever, and my parents anxiously plied even more insufferable blankets on top of me. They were not altogether correct. A good part of the shivering was due to an intense recapture of that sudden shock of recognition on that black wooden stairway. A recognition, as Sri Aurobindo has recorded in an immortal line, of "Eternity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm." I trembled with the same recognition when I also read of His

*Crossing power-swept silences  
rapture-stunned,  
Climbing high far ethers eternal-  
sunned.*

You would be wise to keep such experiences to yourself. Ask any expert in Harvard, Stanford, or the MIT, about a vision of beauty and, more likely than not, you will be treated to a lecture on the theory of colours. You can only share them on an occasion like this with, I hope, fellow odd-balls like you. We are here because we have dared to stray from the beaten tracks. One can only smile at the superior persons who believe you must be slightly cracked if you like to wander in enchanted forests or to fish in forbidden streams. But light can never enter a dark hole unless there is a crack somewhere! And the cracks in our own shells must widen if we seek an inundation of light, rather than one or two vagrant rays from the sun which merely light up an obscure corner here or there, while the rest of the being remains shrouded in darkness.

## Proceeding Through Contradictions

What were the turning points which led me to the discovery of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? We proceed through contradictions, often very painful ones. Contradictions which make us swing wildly between extremes, between exclusive sky or exclusive earth until, at last, we find ourselves suddenly placed before Something Else, which at once includes both sky and earth, height and abyss. What is up above also shines perfectly right down below.

The poetry and literature I read as a very young man, in particular my readings in the great eastern traditions, made me a fascinated votary of the utter Beyond. Heaven cancelled earth, which somehow we have to escape from. Life and the world were a disgusting hell. All the great religions were at least agreed on one thing. Salvation was a post-mortem affair. Then came the second world war, and the Japanese military occupation of Malaya and Singapore. And the whole picture changed.

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Incredible tortures and massacres, severed human heads stuck on poles at street corners; arson, rapine and carnage everywhere. For instance, with several others I was forced, at bayonet-point, to watch as Japanese soldiers covered the head and trunk of a man with a jute rice sack soaked in kerosene, set him aflame, and watch him writhe to death on the ground in terrible, voiceless agony. Believers and unbelievers, sinners and saints, men, women, children and suckling babes, were all alike grist for the satanic mills of torture and death. Where was God then? Where the All-Merciful and Compassionate One, the Friend of Creatures? And where the blissful Beyond? Only the communists in the Anti-Japanese Resistance Army were fighting back.

A cold, ferocious anger gripped my entire being, down to my very cells, which began to throb with an unremitting hatred of tyranny and oppression. To blazing, bloody Hell with God and the Great Beyond! My revolutionary years began, and continued into the British re-occupation after the Allied victory over the fascist powers. This time the slogan was "Down with imperialism and colonialism." I

became a member of a clandestine organization called "The Anti-British League." Once the hated colonialists were driven out, my fellow revolutionaries and I would set up a new Jerusalem in our free and independent nation. Alas, all the new Jerusalems in all the continents continue to remain like the old Jerusalem, still marked by strife, division, bigotry and cruelty.

## Imprisonment

Naturally, when the British discovered what I and my kind were up to, they locked us up. Thus began a total of five years, in two separate spells, as a political prisoner. When I was arrested the second time, in October 1956, I had become painfully aware that revolutionary ideals can also be betrayed by the revolutionaries themselves. For every man-made revolution is ultimately betrayed. But the most terrifying discovery was that the Devil was not only without. He was also very comfortably housed within oneself. In fact, not just one Devil, but several devils. For there are mental devils, vital devils, and physical devils right down to the very cells of one's body..

How often do we not wallow in self-pity, lamenting our current misfortunes, only to realise tomorrow or the day after that these mishaps had been rudely knocking at the doors of new opportunities and startling awakenings. There are blessed moments when we become aware that a divine prankster has all along been at work, for all the circumstances of life seem to link up in a silent conspiracy, as it were, to lead us to a seminal turning point which compels us up the ladder of consciousness, an up which sometimes takes the form of a plunge deep within, to find there what was missing all along in the noisy welter of confusion in which we live — a living, burning flame.

That second imprisonment, over a period of thirty-one months, was a dreadful psychological ordeal, made bearable only by an undreamed-of prison visitor, one I had never heard of before. Sri Aurobindo visited me in my cell, in the shape of an edition of *The Life Divine*. I had come across his name in the footnote of a book I was allowed to read. A family friend obliged by procuring a copy of the



book from the university Library. It was a mind-blowing experience, and God knows that the human mind can certainly do with a great deal of blowing. As I once said elsewhere, invisible to my prison warders, magical doors and windows flew wide open in that narrow prison cell, and something in me soared out and up on wings of fire. Walls were toppled, gulfs were bridged, and heights and abysses became one in the incredibly calm, flaming immensity that was Sri Aurobindo. And all this in language of unparalleled magnificence, in sentences which breathe royalty in every word.

## Asking the Right Questions

At last I began to ask the right questions, which we seldom do. "Is it not possible," Sri Aurobindo gently suggested, "that the soul itself — not the outward mind, but the spirit within has accepted and chosen these things as part of its development in order to get through the necessary experience at a rapid rate, to hew through, even at the risk or the cost of much damage to the outward life and the body? To the growing soul, to the spirit within us, may not difficulties, obstacles, attacks be a means of growth, added strength, enlarged experience, training for spiritual victory?" And He calmly asserted: "God's negations are as useful to us as His affirmations."

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oppression. To  
blazing, bloody Hell  
with God and the  
Great Beyond!**

Sri Aurobindo does not furnish us with a road-map of Yoga showing escape routes from Life. On the

contrary, he introduces one to the greatest revolution in earth-history — a sweeping, radical sedition against the entire existing natural order of things. His own words were: "It is not a revolt against the British government, which anyone can easily do. It is, in fact, a revolt against the whole universal Nature."

What happened in that prison cell was a crucial personal turning point, one which I am still negotiating today, thirty-two years later. *The Life Divine* provided lightning flashes of an incredible illumination. But there remained a stubborn egoism of the intellect, which refused to disappear. The arrogant intellectual in me prided himself on his intellectual prowess. My intellect failed to see that the book was, fundamentally, much more than a massive intellectual feat, which it also was. For it is possible to train the mind to be a limpid instrument of the Spirit. Above all, I failed to see, at that stage, that *The Life Divine* was a recordation, in terms intelligible to the human intellect, of a Great Experience. "I wrote *The Life Divine*," said Sri Aurobindo, "to help people silence their minds."

However, at my absurdly superficial intellectual level, it was still largely a case of one great intellectual appreciating another. But the time would come when the Mother would, in Her infallible way, knock the great intellect silly. Oh, that incident must have been occasion for huge laughter in Heaven. For it was high comedy. Listen.

## "Good Work, Mother"

In 1964, I visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for the first time. I had little patience in those days with absurd Hindus falling over each other to touch the feet of some holy man. I remember that once in Calcutta I went to call on an illustrious swami of the Ramakrishna Mission, the late Swami Nikhilananda, whose writings I admired. Hundreds of Indians were waiting in line for his darshan, as they call it, and to reverently touch his feet. Not the great Devan Nair, who had strutted to the place in a three-piece suit, and was allowed to jump the queue. If I may stretch a simile, it was all rather like His Holiness the Pope making a courtesy call on His Holiness

the Dalai Lama. The swami received me, took my proffered hand, and shook it. I congratulated him on his latest book, one on Vivekananda. But I was slightly discomfited by his smile of greeting. It was a mysterious smile. I wasn't quite sure whether he was smiling with me, or at me.

Arriving in Pondicherry, they arranged for me to meet the Mother. I enquired about the formalities, and was told that I could, if I liked, offer Her some flowers. That struck me as a very gentlemanly thing to do. So I asked for some flowers to offer.

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It was about ten in the morning when I found myself part of a line of about twenty odd people waiting in front of the Mother's room. I was slightly irritated, because nobody this time thought of inviting the Pope to jump the queue. However, I had already rehearsed in my mind what I would do when introduced to the Mother. I would present her the flowers, shake her hand, and say: "Good work, Mother. Congratulations!" Or something to that effect.

To this day I cannot explain what really happened when I stood in front of that frail old woman, seated humped in Her chair. "Poor old lady", was my first gentlemanly thought. Then my eyes fell on an extraordinarily radiant face, with a vibrant, golden glow. Words are totally, hopelessly inadequate, to describe what happened next. I will only say this. I presented the flowers, which She took, and suddenly found myself looking into a pair of the most incredible eyes I had ever seen. There followed a convulsive inner and



outer movement. And suddenly, inexplicably, I found myself on my knees, with my head on Her lap. I felt a soft and gentle hand on the crown of my head. I got to my feet in a daze. Not a word was exchanged. She gave me a red rose, which I took, and left the room. Somehow, I walked back to the guest house, and lay on my bed. I don't remember anything else, for I woke up only at about seven in the evening.

It was a formidable inner turning point. The intellect was humbled. The emperor realized that he was quite naked. He had no clothes, and he occupied a quaking, collapsible throne. For the first time, I began to appreciate what the poet Shelley was driving at in his powerful poem: *Ozymandias of Egypt*. You may like to hear it.

#### *Ozymandias of Egypt*

*I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said : Two vast and trunkless legs  
of stone*

*Stand in the desert. Near them on the  
sand,  
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies,  
whose frown*

*And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold  
command*

*Tell that its sculptor well those  
passions read  
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these  
lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the  
heart that fed;*

*And on the pedestal these words  
appear:*

*'My name is Ozymandias, king of  
kings :  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and  
despair!'*

*Nothing beside remains. Round the  
decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and  
bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far  
away.*

Today, an even more colossal wreck is in the making — the modern world of science and technology. The Ozymandias of the Mind are already, visibly, beginning to reel on shaky pedestals.

There were other turning points, of which it would be even more difficult to speak. Perhaps it is wrong to speak

at all. For words, as I said at the beginning, are often counterfeit coins, unacceptable as legal tender in the supermarkets of the Spirit. But the Mother's power continued to work in me.

## The Nightmare's End

To give just one more instance. She worked even in my disturbed sleep. It was one of those recurring nightmares, which began in childhood, and repeated itself at intervals, right up to my fiftieth year. Essentially the same nightmare, although the scenario kept changing. A terrifying giant of a being pursued me, up and down huge stairs, or up and down rugged mountain slopes, or along dark jungle trails, as the case might be. And as I ran, my legs became weaker, and weaker, and the monster came closer and closer, until his dreadful claws began to clutch me, when I would wake up screaming, in a cold sweat.

**And as I ran, my  
legs became  
weaker, and  
weaker, and the  
monster came  
closer and closer,  
until his dreadful  
claws began to  
clutch me . . .**

My wife will remember one night when, at the end of the usual chase, I shouted, physically got up on my knees in bed, leaped in a tremendous long jump which might have shamed a champion athlete, and crashed into a plate glass door across the bedroom, cracking both plate glass and my forehead.

I remembered reading somewhere (can't trace it now) about the Mother telling a disciple who complained about her nightmare. "A travel in the vital regions," She said. "Call me in your nightmare, and see what happens," or words to that effect. Now, how in heaven's name do you recall such advice in the middle of a nightmare? I tried telling myself before going to sleep every night that I would

remember to call Mother if I suffered the usual nightmare. Alas, I failed to remember anything, and the nightmare ended as usual in a scream. But finally, my effort to remember did pay off. Came the night when I suffered exactly the same nightmare, but this time, somehow, I remembered. I called : "Mother!" and offered Her my terror. And something extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, happened. Suddenly, all fear left me. Amazingly calm, I turned and faced the monster. When the giant came close enough, I seized him by the neck. He visibly withered in my hands. He became smaller and smaller, finally so small and pitiful that I flung him away from me with incredible ease. I woke up, remembering everything that happened, right down to the minutest detail. The nightmare never again visited me. After several decades, I was finally free of the incubus.

Make what you like of it. I can't explain. All that I can do is to repeat those famous words : "There are more things under Heaven, Horatio, than you or I have dreamed of." Or we might recall two lines in *Savitri*, that richest of all diamond mines in world literature:

*The universe is an endless  
masquerade,  
For nothing here is utterly what it  
seems.*

(End of Part 1. Part 2 will be published in the next issue of Collaboration.)

**C. V. Devan Nair** was a fierce young revolutionary against British imperial rule in Malaya and Singapore. As a consequence, he spent five years in British jails. In prison, he read Sri Aurobindo and discovered that political, moral and intellectual revolutions were merely kindergarten's of the human spirit, for the ultimate revolution is spiritual.

Devan Nair went on to serve as President of Singapore for four years and is now a visiting Fellow of Cornell University's Southeast Asia Program. (From an interview by Mary Weathersby, reprinted from The Crestone Eagle, December 1990)

# Collective Work and Yoga

*It is in the spirit of the A.U.M. '91 theme of this issue that we present passages from Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's writings and talks concerning the subject of collectives - collective work and collective yoga. All quotes have been taken from the book titled, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Collective Yoga, edited by Eric Hughes at Matagiri and published in 1974.*

*One may wonder about the relative scarcity of selections by Sri Aurobindo here. In anticipation of this question, we quote briefly from the Mother, from 1957, in which she said:*

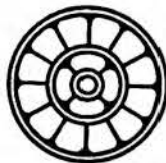
*The Mother:* For a long time the Ashram was only a gathering of individuals, each one representing something as an individual, but without any collective organisation. That lasted a very very long time.

It is only quite recently that the necessity of a collective reality began to appear, a collective reality not necessarily limited to the Ashram but embracing all who have declared themselves - I do not mean physically, I mean in their consciousness - as disciples of Sri Aurobindo, and who have endeavoured to live his teaching. In all of them and more strongly since the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and force, the necessity of a true common existence has awakened, which is based not merely upon purely material circumstances, but represents a deeper truth, and which is the beginning of what Sri Aurobindo calls a supramental or gnostic community.

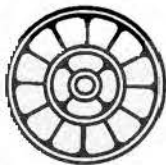
Naturally Sri Aurobindo has said that for this the individuals constituting the collectivity must themselves possess the supramental consciousness, but even before this perfection is attained individually, it has become necessary to make an inner effort to create this collective individuality, if one may say so. The need of a true union, a deeper bond is being felt and the effort has tended towards such a realization.

*This collection is dedicated to all those involved in Sri Aurobindo study circles, meditation groups, institutes and learning centers, and all the various collective organizations, work groups, Ashrams and International townships, aspiring to participate in the widening and deepening of the new Consciousness in the terrestrial collectivity.*

—Bill Moss



We all who have a common uplifting ideal shall unite; and in this union and by this union we will face and overcome the attacks of all opposing forces of darkness and devastation. In union is the strength, in union is the power, in union the certitude of Victory.



...At bottom it is always the same thing. Always the same thing: to realise one's own being, to enter into conscious relation with the supreme Truth of one's own being, under whatever form, by whatever path - that has no importance - but this is the only way. We carry, each individual carries in him a truth, and it is with this truth that he must unite; it is this truth that he must live; and like that, the path that he will have to follow in order to join and realise the truth is the path that leads him as near as possible to the Knowledge. That is to say, the two are absolutely united: the personal realisation and the Knowledge.

Who knows, perhaps this very multiplicity of approach will give

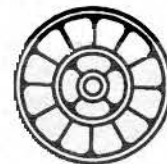
the Secret - the Secret that will open the gate.

I do not think that a single individual (on the earth as it is now), a single individual, however great he is, however eternal his consciousness and origin, can alone by himself change and realise - change the world, change the creation as it is and realise this Higher Truth that will be a new world - a world more true, if not absolutely true. It would seem that a certain number of individuals (till now it appears to be rather in time, as a succession, but it may be also in space, a collectivity) is indispensable so that this Truth may concretise and realise itself.

Practically, I am sure of it.

That is to say, however great, however conscious, however powerful an Avatar may be, he cannot, all alone, realise the supramental life on earth. It is either a group in time, arranged in a file in time, or a group spread over a space - perhaps both - that are indispensable for this Realisation. I am convinced of it.

The individual can give the impulse, indicate the way - walk on the path himself, that is to say, show the way by himself realising it - but cannot fulfil it. The fulfilment obeys certain group laws which are the expression of some aspect of eternity and infinity - naturally! It is all the same being; there are not different individuals, nor different personalities, it is all the same Being. And it is all the same Being who expresses itself in a way which is translated for us by an assembly, a group, a collectivity.



*Disciple:* What is the fundamental virtue to cultivate in order to prepare for the spiritual life?

*The Mother:* I have said this many times, but this is an opportunity to repeat it: it is sincerity.

A sincerity which must become total and absolute, for sincerity alone is your protection on the

spiritual path. If you are not sincere, at the very next step you are sure to fall and break your head. All kinds of forces, wills, influences, entities are there, on the look-out for the least little rift in that sincerity and they immediately rush in through that rift and begin to throw you into confusion.

Consequently, before doing anything, beginning anything, trying anything, be sure **first** of all that you are not only as sincere as you can be, but have the intention of becoming still more so.

For that is your only protection.

**Disciple:** Can this effort to cultivate this initial virtue be a collective one?

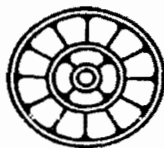
**The Mother:** Certainly it can. And it was this that used to be attempted long ago in the schools of initiation. Even now, in more or less secret societies or very small groups, the collectivity seeks to be sufficiently united and make a collective effort sufficiently complete for the result to be a group result instead of an individual one.

But naturally, that complicates the problem terribly... Each time they meet, they try to create a collective entity; but for a virtue to be collectively realised, a formidable effort is required. However, it is not impossible.



Yes, even in ordinary life there must be a control over the vital and the ego -otherwise life would be impossible. Even many animals, those who live in groups, have their strict rules imposing a control on the play of the ego and those who disobey **will** have a bad time of it. The Europeans especially understand this and even though they are full of ego, yet when there is a question of team work or group life, they are adepts at keeping it in leash, even if it grows inside; it is the secret of their success. But in yoga life of course it is not a question of

controlling ego but of getting rid of it and rising to a higher principle, so demand is much more strongly and insistently discouraged.



**Disciple:** How can persons having different values live and work together in harmony?

**The Mother:** The solution is to go deep in oneself, and to find the place where **all** differences combine to constitute the essential and eternal unity.

When we have to work collectively, it is always better to insist, in our thoughts, feelings and actions, on the points of agreement rather than on the points of divergence.

We must give importance to the things that unite and ignore, as much as possible, those that separate.

Even when physically the lines of the work differ, the union can remain intact and constant if we keep always in mind the essential points and principles which unite, and the Divine goal, the Realisation which must be the one unchanging object of our aspiration and works.



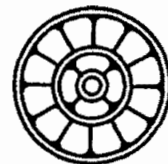
Rules are indispensable for the orderly management of work, for without order and arrangement nothing can be properly done, all becomes clash, confusion and disorder.

In all such dealings with others, you should see not only your own side of the question but the other side also. There should be no anger, vehement reproach or menace, for these things only raise anger and retort on the other side. I write this because you are trying to rise above yourself and dominate your vital and when one wants to do that, one

cannot be too strict with oneself in these things. It is best even to be severe with one's own mistakes and charitable to the mistakes of others.

What you write shows that you had a wrong idea of the work. The work in the Ashram was not meant as a service to humanity or to a section of it called the sadhaks of the Ashram. It was not meant either as an opportunity for a joyful social life and flow of sentiments and attachments between the sadhaks and an expression of the vital movements, a free vital interchange whether with some or with all. The work was meant as a service to the Divine and as a field for the inner opening to the Divine, surrender to the Divine alone, rejection of ego and all the ordinary **vital** movements and the training in a psychic elevation, selflessness, obedience, renunciation of all mental, vital or other self-assertion of the limited personality. **Self-affirmation** is not the aim, the formation of a collective vital ego is also not the aim. The merging of the little ego is union with the Divine, purification, surrender, the substitution of the Divine guidance for one's own ignorant self-guidance based on one's personal ideas and personal feelings is the aim of Karma-Yoga, the surrender of one's own will to the Divine Will.

If one feels human beings to be near and the Divine to be far and seeks the Divine through service of and love of human beings and not the direct service and love of the Divine, then one is following a wrong principle -for that is the principle of the mental, vital and moral, not the spiritual life.



Unity through uniformity is an absurdity. Unity must be **realised** through union with the multiplicity. Each one is part of the united each one is indispensable to the whole.

**Disciple:** During the **concentra-**



tion that we have here (in the Ashram playground) together, on what should we concentrate?

*The Mother:* Can anyone tell me what this concentration is and why we have it? It is a very interesting question, it concerns everybody. Can anyone tell me the difference between this concentration and a so-called "ordinary" meditation? Why do we do it and what happens here?

*Disciple:* We make an offering of all our daily actions.

*The Mother:* Yes, this is the individual side. And collectively, what is this concentration for? (He is on the way, note, he has taken half the first step.)

*Disciple:* We concentrate on our weak points and aspire for their disappearance.

*The Mother:* That is also an individual aspect.

In the meditations we formerly used to have here (in the Ashram building), when we had a morning

or evening meditation, my work was to unify the consciousness of everyone and lift it as high as I could towards the Divine. Those who were able to feel the movement followed it. This was ordinary meditation with an aspiration and ascent towards the Divine. Here, at the playground, the work is to unify all who are here, make them open and bring down the divine force into them. It is the opposite movement and that is why this concentration cannot replace the other, even as the other cannot replace this one. What happens here is exceptional - in the other meditation (at the Ashram) I gathered together the consciousness of all who were present and, with the power of aspiration, lifted it towards the Divine, that is, made each one of you progress a little. Here, on the other hand, I take you as you are; each one of you comes saying, "Here we are with our whole day's activities, we were busy with

our body, here it is, we offer to you all our movements, just as they were, just as we are." And my work is to unify all that, make of it a homogeneous mass and, in answer to this offering (which each one can make in his own way) to open every consciousness, widen the receptivity, make a unity of this receptivity and bring down the Force. So at that moment each one of you, if you are very quiet and attentive, will surely receive something. You will not always be aware of it, but you will receive something.

(In March 1964, the following question was put to the Mother.)

*Disciple:* And now that you are no longer physically present at the playground concentrations, what happens?

*The Mother:* I hope people have made some progress and do not need the physical presence to feel the Help and the Force.

## People

On May 18, 1991, Binah Shupack graduated from Skidmore College in Saratoga, New York in the school's eightieth commencement exercises. Binah graduated Cum Laude with a BA in Government. She was a member of the Periclean Club, a society that recognizes academic achievement and integrity and of Phi Alpha Theta, the International Honor Society in History.

Binah is the daughter of Jocelyn Shupack, a long-time resident of Auroville, who created a successful cottage industry business there of handcrafted, crocheted shoes and slippers.

Binah, who spent most of her 22 years in Auroville also lived for a time in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in New Delhi where she studied and became fluent in Hindi.

In September of this year she will enter into graduate studies at the American University in Washington, D.C. Her goal is to work toward the

field of development of third world countries, particularly India, and hopes to be eventually connected with one of the United Nations programs in this capacity.

*By Anie Nunnally*

J. Raju, from Auroville, completed a one year program at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage. While impressing the APU faculty with his academic abilities, he also found time to participate in snowshoe softball and appreciate the abundance of white crystalline flakes found there:

*From the Point of View of the Snow*  
*By J. Raja*

I like the feeling of falling from the sky. It feels so relaxing and calm. It is like descending directly from heaven to Earth, as a blessing to the earth.

Children love me and play with me, making me into balls and throwing

them at one another. The also make earthly figures out of me. I love to see people taking advantage of me by having fun—skiing, sledding, and snow-ball fighting.

On the other hand, people avoid me on the roads. As soon as I have fallen, a big machine moves along the road, scraping me off to the sides. I seem to be a nuisance to the roads, which is quite understandable.

It is a splendid feeling to hear the thrills and cries of joy as people slide down hills over me, since I am a child of heaven. I don't have any complaints to make of people — their pleasure is mine. I love to be on the earth and see all the thrilling and entertaining activities people do by making use of me. After all, am I not a blessing from heaven, a gift of nature?

Raju attended the All-USA Meeting, the July Peacetrees program in Brooklyn, and traveled around the country before returning to Auroville.

*continued on next page*

Another graduate, **Alok Aurovilian**, completed his B.A. at Warren Wilson College in South Carolina. He graduated Cum Laude with honors in English and math. Next year he plans on doing graduate work at Clemson University.

Three Aurovilians, **Perumal, Karuna**, and **Auroprem**, took part in a Peace-Tree program in New York City during the month of July, hosted by the Magnolia Tree Earth Center of Bedford-Stuyvesant. They joined young people from the USSR, the Netherlands, Jordan, Costa Rica, New Jersey, and New York. During the program they lived in a dormitory at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and planted trees in the area, including a Peace Park in Bedford-Stuyvesant. They also participated in activities involving team building, cross-cultural learning and communication, leadership, conflict resolution and urban forestry.

After the program, the three traveled to the West Coast to visit friends of Auroville and PeaceTrees. They all agreed that the PeaceTrees program was exceptionally well organized and that it was difficult for the participants to say good-bye to each other.

**Miriam Eckelmann**, a kindergarten teacher in Auroville, completed a 5 month stay with **Jean and Gordon Korstange** in Saxtons River, Vermont. During that time she visited many local schools, attended classes in education at Antioch New England Graduate School in Keene, New Hampshire, and presented a proposal for a new Auroville kindergarten at the A.U.M.

She wrote the following piece for one of her Antioch courses.

### *My Special Place*

When in September 1971 my father took me to India everything familiar to me was as if swept away from the earth. I was 9 then and did not return to Germany till I was 17. Our new life in Auroville an international community in a rural southern part of the country was communally oriented and as soon as I had picked up some English I was put in the care of a house mother who also had charge of 2 local Tamilian girls and

her own daughter. We lived in a thatched hut where our only private place was our bed.

The one large tree within the boundaries of this village-like settlement became my favourite haunt. It was a tamarind tree and close to my father's hut. Other children too must have played there sometimes, but I don't remember them. I couldn't encircle its trunk with my arms. I didn't go high, because the lower boughs by which I hauled myself up, were more broad and comfortable, just high enough to be out of sight. I loved to be unseen while observing people walk by on the brick path beneath which led to their huts or to the community kitchen where we all had our meals. Occasionally stray dogs wandered down the path searching for food.

Sitting up there I would observe the ants, big black ones running up and down the trunk, and if I kept out of their path they left me alone. The chipmunks, who were always very upset to find me, would start their high pitched alarm squeals which would make my ears ring. The crows too sometimes gave me away to the passers by with their excited cawing. As I sat there I would nibble at the leaves which had a sour taste.

At the beginning of the year the tree had small orchid shaped cream and brown flowers which tasted just like the leaves, and later on it developed sour pods. When these ripened they had a brown outside which was dry and brittle and easily came off. Sucking the pulp would make my gums hurt [like sucking lemon]. Each contained three or four glossy brown seeds about the size of a penny. During the fruiting season the parakeets who usually flew screeching by would descend on the tree in small flocks. They were like jewels their feathers sparkling light green and their beaks bright orange! Their white claws were used both like hands and feet, grabbing the fruit in one while balancing on the other. I watched them for a long time and found them very human, especially when in the middle of a mouthfull they would stop and cock their heads to one side and blink their small round eyes at

me or nervously walk back and forth screeching and seeming to voice their disapproval at my presence.

Often I became cramped sitting quietly for so long in the fork of a branch. The skin on my legs and feet would be as if tattooed marked by the bark of the tree. Then I would decide to go home and let myself down by hanging and letting go. The ground would hurt as it hit my feet. But it would only take me a moment as I rubbed off the flakes of bark to straighten out and be on my way.

On page 23 is a letter from Miriam to those who would be interested in getting involved with the work of the Auroville kindergarten.

## Letters

Dear Editors:

One thing that has emerged from the AUM '91 is an aspiration to facilitate an expression of the American-Soul. This could be an interesting project that could be on the agenda of future AUMs. Before an expression of the American-Soul could land in Auroville, first it must take off from America.

Punctuating the end of AUM '91, in the early afternoon of Sunday, a windstorm of 83 mph hit the St. Benedict Center, uprooting several large trees. It was funny—standing in the hall outside of Seyril's room, waiting for her to get dressed before seeking shelter in the basement.

There, several of us were in the dark hallway in the basement: Seyril, the Nairs, the Waltons—a few people early for the next conference . . . as the reading from *Savitri* began.

AUM Jaya  
Joel Goodman  
RR 193—A  
Ridgeway, WI 53582

(More letters on p. 23)

**AVI-USA**  
**P.O. Box 162489**  
**3112 'O' St., Suite 13**  
**Sacramento, CA 95816**  
**(916) 452-4013**

Auroville International USA has welcomed Michael Zelnick, a former resident of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville, as a new member of its board. He replaces Paula Murphy.

In recent months, AVI has sent over 100 pounds of books and magazines to Auroville, chiefly for the new Institute of Higher Education being organised in Aspiration. AVI also sent special sandpaper and buffing paper, unavailable in India to the Matrimandir work camp for use on the marble of the inner chamber and the columns. Auroville was also the recipient of nearly \$200,000 in donations through AVI during the fiscal year 1990-91.

In the area of outreach to the U.S., AVI has completed the transfer process (from the Indian video system to the American) for two new videos from Auroville, *Earth needs . . . (\$ )*, a general introduction to Auroville and Matrimandir 1990 (\$15.95), a 15 minute update on the progress of the structure that is the soul of Auroville.

AVI has also answered over 300 requests, by phone and letter, for information about Auroville and is in the last stages of developing a new brochure, written primarily by Lynda Lester and Larry Tepper.

On August 17, Jack Alexander, the current president, and June Maher (ex-officio president of the board) will meet with the new members of the Auroville governing board. For more information direct from India, subscriptions to *Auroville Today* (\$22.50) can be obtained from AVI at the above address.

## Center News

**Cultural Integration  
 Fellowship  
 360 Cumberland  
 San Francisco, CA 94114**

Cultural Integration Fellowship organises Sunday lectures on topics of religion, culture, and spirituality. Besides Dr. Chitta R. Goswami the resident teacher, other speakers are also invited to speak.

Seminars are offered once a week and silent meditations are scheduled on the 3rd Saturday of every month. Dr. Goswami has finished an inspiring, well-attended seminar on "The Lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the Pondicherry Ashram." On July 11th, he began another seminar of six sessions on "Integration of Spirituality with an Active Live in a Secular Society." Dr. Goswami also holds a weekly meditation with readings from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

A couple of events of June 1991 are worth mentioning: Schawkie Roth's lovely music and poetry and Celest Powell's lucid talk on spiritual community and readings from the Upanishads. Select verses from the Upanishads were sung by Shila Goswami in a very inspired way. English renderings of them were read by Celest Powell, and Dr. Goswami commented on those verses.

CIF will celebrate Sri Aurobindo's birthday on August 11th with Shila's devotional song and Dr. Goswami's talk on "Universalist Sri Aurobindo." At the end, Janet O'Shea will give a recital of Bharatnatyam dance.

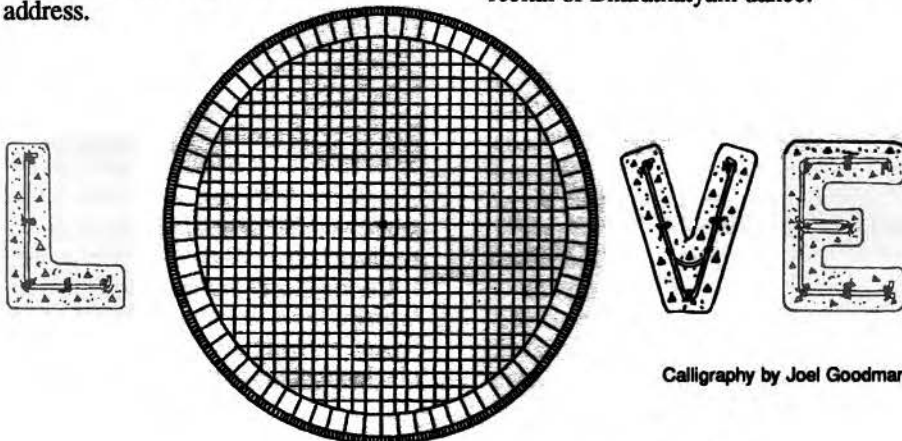
**Sri Aurobindo Learning  
 Center, Inc.  
 Savitri House &  
 Savitri Solar Village  
 Baca Grande, P.O. Box 80  
 Crestone, CO 81131**

SALC sponsored the 2nd annual Global Village Network Conference from August 15-18. The conference opened with a Native American Sacred Land Ceremony on the Savitri Solar Village site, Baca Bluffs, which included tribal elders, Kailash from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and John Milton, an ecologist.

Dr. Phillip Tabb of the College of Environmental Design, U. of Colorado, Boulder, presented a slide show on international villages and announced plans for the Vesica School of Sacred Architecture to be built in Baca. Other highlights of the conference included: the inauguration of the Savitri Solar Conference Dome by C.V. Devan Nair; an address by Dr. Sartaj S. Mathur, Minister of Education and Culture, Embassy of India, Washington, D.C. on "Indo-American Joint Ventures of Industries: Renewable Energy Products;" the world premiere of "Musical Musings on Savitri;" an electronic music work composed for Sri Aurobindo's birthday by Diane Thome, Professor of Music, U. of Washington, Seattle; "Flowers and Their Messages," a video show by Richard Pearson, teacher in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry; "A Delicate Balance: Magic Harp & Flute Concert, by RoseMarie & Stuart Garry; two slide presentations by Arvind Habbu: "An Inner Journey: Pilgrimage to the Himalayas" and "A Revolutionary Source of Energy: The New Physics; and "A New Education for a New World," a round table presentation by Rod & Kirti Hemsell of Auroville and George Smith & Kent McGregor of Baca who spoke about plans for the Savitri Solar School.

The July, 1991 issue of *Solar Today*, a journal published by the American Solar Energy Society, had as its cover a watercolor rendering of Savitri Solar Village.

Current projects underway by SALC include the Savitri Solar





Conference Dome (see above), designed on Buckminster Fuller's geodesic principles and constructed under the direction of solar engineer George Smith, Solarbridge, headquarters for the future Savitri Solar School, and a solar greenhouse extension to Savitri House.

**Sri Aurobindo Center in  
the San Francisco  
Bay Area  
2288 Fulton St.,  
Suite #311  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
(415) 848-1841**

A small group of Aurobindonians have met monthly since January, 1991, to develop a collective commitment to create a Sri Aurobindo Center for people in the San Francisco Bay area. Our goals are to provide a center at which people may come to study the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, receive personal support and fellowship in the practice of the Yoga in their every day life, and have a community to talk to or live with as they consider the broader applications of an Integral Philosophy.

Our group has selected a space in downtown Berkeley near the University and very convenient to public transit. We will be sharing space with the Sri Aurobindo Association Publications and will be able to offer access to the bookstore to our visitors and members. We have scheduled as our opening occasion a meditation on August 15th to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's birthday. After music, a short meditation and readings by members, we will dine together as a local Indian restaurant in Berkeley. Following this opening, there will be a weekly study group, meditation, and in the fall we hope to offer educational programs.

We believe there is a growing interest in this yoga, enough to support a public place where people may gather to learn and practice together. Initially the Center is being funded by pledges from our small collective. We hope to launch a space and a few activities for six months or more to see

if more develops. If support for programs grows, we will consider a permanent Center.

We welcome any support and invite those interested to indicate the nature of their interest: participation in workshops, study groups, meditations, leading a workshop or group on a subject of their choice, volunteering for office support at the Center, and/or financial contributions. Contributions are tax-deductible and should be made out to the Sri Aurobindo Association along with a note that it is for the Sri Aurobindo Center.

All response may be directed to Sri Aurobindo Association, 2288 Fulton Street, Suite #311, Berkeley, CA 94704 (415) 848-1841. We hope that you will join us in spirit or kind to make this collective dream a manifest reality.



**Matagiri  
HC 1, Box 98  
Mt. Tremper, NY 12457  
(914) 679-8322**

Sri Aurobindo's birthday was observed at Matagiri in Saturday, August 17th starting at 12:00 noon. A meditation with music and a reading was followed by a cooperative picnic lunch.

The message given was: *Sri Aurobindo came to tell us 'One need not leave the earth to find the Truth, one need not leave the life to find his soul, one need not abandon the world or have only limited beliefs to enter into relation with the Divine. The Divine is everywhere, in everything and if He is hidden, it is because we do not take the trouble to discover Him.'*

— The Mother

**East-West  
Cultural Center  
12329 Marshall Street  
Culver City, California  
90230  
(213) 390-9083**

What divine news . .

The most important event in the long history of the East West Cultural Center is about to take place: At 8 p.m. on August 15, the Darshan Day of Sri Aurobindo's birth, the Master's relics will be installed here at the Center, in a white marble reliquary in an all-white room, Sri Aurobindo's Room.

Please feel the cordial invitation which these words extend to you — to attend this rare, wonderful event and to come whenever possible to be in Sri Aurobindo's living presence . . . As you may know, the physical presence of the Divine Person may be concretely experienced when you are close to such a tangible part of Him. (If you cannot be with us in person on August 15, please join by welcoming Sri



Dr. Judith Tyberg (Jyotipriya)

Aurobindo in a special part of your meditations.)

Coming from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, India, to guide and perfect the ceremony, will be Dr. H. Maheshwari, who has had the ananda-filled experi-

ence of being the bearer of the relics for installation in India. Dr. Maheshwari is one of the Center's most revered friends, and now he brings his special light to this part of America. Maheshwarji will be with us at the Center, teaching, lecturing and guiding for an extended period of time. We are very grateful.

Has everything been said? Not if the topic is Sri Aurobindo . . . Ask Dr. C.R. Goswami, who visited the Center early this year and gave a series of lectures and discussions which covered a wide range of subjects, including Basic Integral Yoga, The Soul's Journey and the Problem of Rebirth, The Theory of Avatarhood, and The Ideal of Human Unity, all in the light of Sri Aurobindo. We warmly thank Dr. Goswami as we say that his knowledge and devotion stimulated us all and continues to be an inspiration.

On May 12, the Center celebrated the birthday of its founder, Dr. Judith Tyberg, who left her body in October, 1980. Sri Aurobindo named her "Jyotipriya," which means "Lover of Light."

The feature of this delightful program was a loving talk by her lifelong friend, Dr. Vasant Merchant of beautiful Flagstaff, Arizona. Dr. Merchant, a wonderful speaker, is publisher/editor of *The International Journal of Humanities* and a Professor Emeritus at Northern Arizona University; she remains the close, loving and supportive friend she has been for all these years.

The program started with a taped radio broadcast. In it, Jyotipriya is being interviewed, and she relates the joyous, inspiring history of the Center, from Mother's guidance of its birth in 1953, through its growth and development, to the current moment of divine work and fulfillment.

Many who were there recalled, both audibly and silently, their fond memories of the outstanding spiritual light that was Jyotipriya.

We endeavour to carry on her high aspirations, to study and live the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Established regular meetings continue, and several new weekly meetings have recently been started. Interest is running high: on Mondays at 8 p.m., *The Future Poetry* and poetry leading up to it is read and discussed. Mem-

bers contribute their own poetry as well. The long-running Thursday 8 p.m. group continues. The current study is Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*, with Dr. Maheshwari's *Bhagavad Gita in the Light of Sri Aurobindo* for the original Sanskrit and its translation. On Saturdays, there are two lively groups: at 4 p.m. the Introduction to Sri Aurobindo guides new seekers and stimulates veterans. At 8 p.m., another group

walks the path to a true world union through the guidance which Sri Aurobindo so clearly gives us in 6.



Dr. C.R. Goswami

The Center library, bookshop, and other facilities may be visited at meeting times and at other special times. Please phone or write; all are welcome.

## Pacific Northwest/Puget Sound

2020 Roosevelt Avenue  
Enumclaw, Washington  
(206) 825-3413

For the first time in our twelve years of existence, we are discussing in a sustained way the possibility of acquiring a physical center. What has brought it into the clearest focus is a surprise: the idea of cohousing (originally from Denmark), a topic about which we've devoted two meetings. We are planning a third, larger meeting at the end of September when everyone is back in regular work and residence cycles again.

Cohousing is an arrangement by which people can live on a common physical site with shared dining, child care, social and other activities and

functions—including the advantages of economic collectivity—and yet have full privacy of accommodation and life in individual apartments within the same or a nearby building. The shared aspects of life together, of support and community, become as important or unimportant as the individuals wish. The attractive, well illustrated book we're using is *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*, by McCamant, Kathryn and Durrett, Charles. Berkeley, Ten Speed Press, 208 pages, 1989. \$19.95.

People of Denmark, other European countries, and here in Seattle are discovering that a cohousing creation, from the first exploratory discussion to the day of moving in, takes anywhere from two to eight years, depending on the accumulated and shared experience in any local area.

We've only had two discussions, things are still unformed, and we want you to know that anyone from anywhere is welcome to the next meeting on Saturday evening, September 28th, at the home of Caroline Cropp, 2235 Fairview Avenue E., #4, Seattle, Washington 98102. Meeting time is 7 p.m., followed by a dessert potluck at 9 offered by us locals. For details or RSVP, call Caroline at (206) 784-0622, Ron Jorgensen at (206) 825-3413, or Gennie Barnett at (206) 784-0622.

This is being written only three days before our summer Sunday picnic outing to Sunrise Point at Mt. Rainier, an all day gathering which will include meditation and spiritual study. Then, in one week, many more are expected at the Sharma family home on August 15th for a home-cooked Indian dinner graciously offered by the Sharmas, a video of Mother's Darshan (1973), and meditation during the evening.

On August 31, Dave Pook and Ron Jorgensen leave for a three week trip to the Ashram and Auroville, where they'll meet Bill Leon from Colorado. It is Dave and Bill's first visit, and the first time Ron will have been back since he moved back to the U.S. in 1978.

The Seattle group's meetings have changed. In addition to the continuing study of *Savitri*, a study of *The Secret of the Vedas* and some chanting has been included in an expanded meeting time on Tuesday evenings. Members have felt that so much reference, veiled and



open, is mad to the Vedas, in *Savitri* and elsewhere in the literature, that it's time to know more about that touchstone of yoga and even of other spiritual paths. Also, several of us feel that *Savitri* is the "Veda of the New Age," so the conjunction of study seems auspicious to us.

The Auburn group is nearly ready—on the last pages of *More Lights on Yoga*—to begin studying *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Two of its members have recently purchased sets of Sri Aurobindo's 30 volume Centenary library. We have a contact for available sets of this priceless, out-of-print publication. Call or write Ron (or Julian Lines at Matagiri) for details.

Richard Pearson and Kailas Zavera of the Ashram visited us for a few days, leaving a wonderful impress and a sadhana-inducing presentation on the significance of flowers. Especially inductive is the audio cassette written by Kailas and conveyed by Richard.

Overall it feels like the Mother is making more and more forays into our humanity. When our resistances can melt, and She can move freely in and out of us . . .

**Wilmot Center  
33719 116th Street  
Twin Lakes, WI 53181  
(414) 877-93**

The Center was pleased to host several of the monthly midwestern study circle meetings over the last 3-4 months. Each month we continue consecutive reading in Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*. The latest meeting in the series was on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birthday and took place on Saturday, August 17. People from Illinois and Wisconsin gathered for the auspicious occasion.

Various center departments continue their progressive development:

**Lotus Light Publications:** The U.S. edition of *The Life Divine* is now available and gaining recognition in bookstores nationwide. It features a photograph of Sri Aurobindo on the front cover and is available in both paperback and hardbound editions. The hardbound version features gold

die-stamping on a raw silk binding. *Rebirth and Karma* (formerly published in India under the name *The Problem of Rebirth*) has now been printed and should be available in the fall. The next book being prepared for the U.S. edition is *The Synthesis of Yoga* which is expected to appear early in 1992. Work also continues on several titles by Sri M.P. Pandit. Recently we published his fine collection of aphorisms from Sri Aurobindo entitled: *Gems from Sri Aurobindo, First Series*. Work is also proceeding on reissues of *Occult Lines Behind Life* and a new title, *Wisdom of the Gita* which combines several former books on the *Gita* into one new U.S. edition.

Lotus Light Publications has released a new complete book catalog which is available free upon request.

**Institute for Wholistic Education:** The Institute continues to develop correspondence courses. In addition to its highly successful 1st year course in Ayurveda, it has now developed a 2nd year (advanced) course in Ayurveda and a course in Hatha Yoga. In addition, education planning towards a model "integral education school" continues with the hope that an appropriate educationally minded individual will come forward to take up the funded position to start the actual on-site school for children. Two children are currently being educated in the program through volunteer efforts of the parents awaiting formal opening of the school.

Facilities, including the library, are being expanded. The library has received offerings of more than 1000 books in the last six months and continues to add bookshelves and organize the titles as quickly as possible. Of major note are the recent acquisitions in the field of tradition Chinese Medicine and Herbal wisdom. Videotapes are also being added regularly to the library at this time.

**Lotus Light Enterprises:** National development of a business infrastructure to support activity in the health food and book industries continues apace. The last six months have seen the acquisition of 3-4 companies in these respective industries and the assimilation of their activities into Lotus Light. This includes the Wishing Well Video catalog of more

than 1200 video titles which are now available as part of the work, as well as the Auro Trading Co., an importer and distributor of fine products in the health food industry. Lotus Light is attempting to develop video contacts to provide valuable information about the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and about Auroville, to the U.S. public through its newly acquired video division.

The work continues to expand consistently and has led to the decision to greatly expand facilities for the business activities of the center. A new warehouse facility has been commissioned in Silver Lake, Wisconsin (4 miles from the current warehouse) and groundbreaking ceremonies took place on August 13, 1991 at 9 a.m. The building is expected to be completed by mid-October and the move of the entire business complex should take place by the end of December. The new facility, covering 20,000 square feet initially, will permit substantial expansion of the work to take place. It sits on 5.75 acres of land, including approximately 1.5 acres of permanently dedicated tree-land surrounding it, and will allow eventual expansion to the 100,000 square foot level, thereby providing long-term growth potential.

**Sri Aurobindo Association  
2288 Fulton St., Suite 310  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
(510) 848-1841**

On August 1, the Sri Aurobindo Association's office was moved to Fulton Street. All book orders and inquiries regarding SAA should be sent to the new address.

At the same time, a local group of devotees opened a Sri Aurobindo Center at the same address at 2288 Fulton Street. This Center is separate from the SAA national organization and is operated and funded by a small local group.

However, both organizations will have the same phone number, (510) 848-1841. Everyone is welcome to visit both SAA and the Center.



## What Is the Sri Aurobindo Association, Anyway? An Update

By David Wickenden

A friend of mine who has been involved with Auroville for many years and is close to several people in Sri Aurobindo-related activities in the U.S. asked me recently, "What is the Sri Aurobindo Association, anyway?"

Hmm. Good question.

I figure if she's baffled, there are probably a few others in the same condition. And, that if progress reports from the SAA and discussions of its plans for the future are to make much sense, we should probably try to clear up the basics first.

The simplest and most direct answer to her question is, "The Sri Aurobindo Association is a few people scattered across the country who share an ideal and who are trying to keep that ideal alive."

More on that later.

But the real question, I think, is not so much what the SAA is now as what it should or could be. And that is something that, in the end, is really up to the larger community of seekers, devotees, and aspirants in the U.S. to answer.

## Background

Let's start with some history. The Association's lineage traces back to the work undertaken by Matagiri in the 60's and 70's to be of service to individuals and groups in the United States drawn to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. National book distribution was one of those services, but there were others, including:

- answering questions about Sri Aurobindo, the Ashram, and Auroville
- receiving guests
- connecting people with others who shared an interest in the teaching
- answering letters
- being a resource for scholars studying Sri Aurobindo
- organizing visits and speaking opportunities for travelers from India
- helping people going to India
- serving as a conduit for donations and contributions to the Ashram

and Auroville

- providing support for study groups and centers
- serving as representation to organizations like the Indian Embassy
- networking with other centers and groups around the world
- organizing collective meditations, darshan events, and other Sri Aurobindo community activities.

As time moved on, those most directly involved in that work no longer felt able to continue. Book distribution was moved to the nearby town of High Falls, the name of the non-profit organization (not the physical place) was changed from Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, Inc. to the Sri Aurobindo Association, and various individuals tried to keep things going on a substantially reduced scale. The focus turned largely to the Northeastern U.S.

A period of vision-seeking ensued with intensive questioning of identity, purpose, and rationale for operational functions. Eventually, about two years ago, faced with numerous and seemingly intractable issues, one board resigned and another was formed. That board is still functioning today, still gradually untangling the issues faced by earlier boards, and looking toward the next steps that must be taken if the organization is to have a future. The board members are Bill Moss (MA), Martha Orton (VA), Wayne Bloomquist (CA), David Wickenden (DC), and Julian Lines (NY).

The spark that brought these people together is the belief that the service and spirit represented by Matagiri 10 years ago is as important, valuable and necessary today as it was then, and that it is worth making an effort to find a way to revive it under the changed conditions the Sri Aurobindo community in the U.S. faces in the 1990's and beyond.

That's not a task that can be undertaken by a small group of people by themselves. But a small group can serve as a focal point, initiator, and facilitator. Over the next year, the SAA (such as it is, which is to say, in essence, the board and a few volunteers) will attempt to move this agenda forward and determine whether there is sufficient support in the country to keep the effort going. If there is not, we will dissolve the board and probably disband

the organization.

It's safe to say that the current board found the difficulties of conducting business by long-distance telephone, of resolving emotional and complex organizational issues, and of simply finding the time needed to get anything done, to be far more challenging than anyone anticipated. But we've made some progress, including moving to an all-volunteer basis; shutting down the High Falls office and shifting the book distribution function and office to California; focusing the work of the SAA on a national rather than regional level; ensuring that the A.U.M. continued without interruption; and that ongoing projects were maintained, including publication of *Collaboration*, book distribution, and handling correspondence and inquiries.

But much remains to be done. The matter of a property donated to the organization several years ago still is in the process of being resolved, and must be resolved if the work is to truly advance. The board is working in collaboration with the original donor of the property (which is a boarding house in Connecticut), with the Institute for Wholistic Education in Wisconsin, and the Foundation for World Education to arrive at a satisfactory solution. We are optimistic that arrangements will be completed within the year under which the Association would relinquish ownership of the property for modest compensation to a Sri Aurobindo-related educational foundation currently being established in Connecticut. Full details will be shared in *Collaboration* as the situation moves toward final resolution.

In July, the board held its first face-to-face meeting, in Wisconsin prior to the A.U.M. Our principal concern was to cover several key issues including board process and operation, finances, and identity/mission. We also participated in several other meetings during the conference, including a long discussion with Santosh and Doris Krinsky of Lotus Light exploring areas of mutual interest.

We also wanted, on a more personal level, to arrive at a sense of rejuvenation, unity of purpose, and direction for the next year in a spirit of sincerity, openness, trust, and respect. Everyone (I think I can say) left feeling recharged and good about the process

and about the work that was accomplished.

It became clear very early on that it is much easier to progress when meeting face-to-face than by conference call! We'll make a concerted effort to meet together at least twice a year.

A few of the highlights:

**Mission:** The board reaffirmed and restated its commitment to what we understand the mission and identity of the Sri Aurobindo Association is. The mission statement: The Sri Aurobindo Association aspires to be of national service to the vision and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by: serving as an authentic, ecumenical voice of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the United States; empowering the growth and harmonization of new and existing Centers, study and work groups, disciples and seekers; increasing access to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through book distribution, newsletters, speaking tours, conferences and other outreach activities.

The Association is not a "center" as such, although it maintains an office and book distribution outlet in Berkeley, CA. It is—or should be—a transparent, broadly representative body of people who try to reflect the views, needs, and interests of the larger community of aspirants and Sri Aurobindo groups across the country. If, in the view of the greater community of Sri Aurobindo devotees in the U.S. there is no need for the kind of services provided earlier by Matagiri and which the Association is trying to revive and sustain, then there is no reason for the SAA to exist.

The Association in principle, then, is more than the particular people who are currently serving on the board. It is, or should be, the expression and vehicle and support service for all Sri Aurobindo devotees and groups in the U.S. If it is not that expression, it should be changed or dissolved.

The Association can only be effective if its mission is generally supported and if people contribute volunteer labor to make services happen. If people do not step forward to work, nothing will get done. One of the primary objectives of the SAA board over the next year is to provide a list to all U.S. - based

devotees of tasks that need to be undertaken and how people can participate.

**Operations:** Berkeley Office: The operation of the office in Berkeley is going well and now is in the process of moving to a new location near the University. Plans are now underway to establish a center/study group there. We had considerable discussion about the proper reporting relationship between the people working on site and the board—that is, agreeing on which decisions need to be "authorized" by the board before they can proceed and which can go forward on a routine basis. We agreed to establish one person from the board as a "point person" for Wayne to talk to for key matters rather than having four or five people all calling him with their ideas.

**Matagiri:** There also was discussion about the relationship between the SAA and work at Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mt. Tremper, NY (Eric and Julian are providing a modest level of volunteer support services such as answering correspondence, receiving visitors, providing information, etc.)

The board supports in principle any individual or group that wants to help with networking or other activities on behalf of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the U.S. In the case of Matagiri, we agreed to the following: The work of Eric, Sam, and Julian can be seen as a dual operation—one aspect covers Sam and Eric's expenses for darshan observances and book room operation as a private center (as with Berkeley and elsewhere); the other covers general networking and information services. Donors who want to support Matagiri as a private center, and receive a tax deduction, may send a check to the Berkeley SAA office with "Matagiri" on the memo line, and Wayne will write a check to Matagiri. General donations for "work on the East Coast" will be entered on the general ledger of the SAA accounts in Berkeley, and expenses incurred by Eric and Julian for postage, phone, etc. will be reimbursed from that account. This approach would apply equally to any center or study group activity in the U.S.

**Legal Status:** Regarding the legal status of the SAA, the board agreed that, although the current legal status ("Religious Non-Profit") is not perfectly

suitable to our aims and goals and spiritual self-definition, there are more pressing matters to attend to at present, and that we will continue under this status until such time as conditions permit/require the change to a more suitable form (perhaps "Educational Non-Profit").

**Collaboration:** The board expressed gratitude, appreciation, and support to Gordon and Jean for all their work in continuing to edit and publish *Collaboration*. Both the board and editors are concerned that the subscription list is too small (less than 200) to warrant the kind of effort and time that has gone into it, and question whether the current format is the best one for the readership. *Collaboration* also cannot break even with such a small subscription base under its current format. However, it is adequately capitalized through the next year, during which time the editors and board will evaluate whether and what kind of changes are needed. The board expressed strong support and encouragement for the regularity in publication, and expressed the feeling that regularity was more important than length if there was a choice between the two. Finally the board will make an effort to increase circulation.

**Board Operation:** We also discussed the composition and functioning of the board itself. There was considerable sentiment that the nature of the board operation should change to improve its efficacy—perhaps changing the number of people on the board and more clearly delineating specific areas of responsibility for each board member. The subject will continue to be discussed over the next few months. We encourage any and all ideas or recommendations, and we are very receptive to anyone who would like to become a board member or more directly involved in the process.

**Finances:** Considerable time was spent reviewing and discussing the SAA's financial situation. We agreed that, in the future, Wayne will provide quarterly reports of cash flow, as well as short anecdotal reporting of the various activities and events related to the Berkeley office. We also agreed that Wayne will provide end-of-year reports, including assets/liabilities as well as cash flow, and that there will be a year-end review by an outside

accountant Finally, we agreed that double signatures were cumbersome and ultimately futile, and dropped the idea in favor of the above measures. The general principle we followed was "trust, but verify (!)"

The SAA operates on a bare-bones budget with a monthly cash flow from book sales and donations for operations of approximately \$300. Following is a complete accounting as of July 4, 1991.

### **SAA Financial Statement**

#### **Assets**

|                            |          |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Book inventory (wholesale) |          |
| Berkeley                   | \$5,162  |
| Matagiri                   | 2,460    |
| Computer                   | 1,000    |
| Shelving                   | 250      |
| Answering machine          | 140      |
| Cash                       | 13,473   |
| Total Assets               | \$23,085 |

#### **Accounts Receivable**

|                       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Repayment for incense | ~\$3,860 |
|-----------------------|----------|

#### **Accounts Payable** (including designated funds)

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| Lotus Light Books  | \$107           |
| SABDA  | 838             |
| Evolutionary Research Books  | 114             |
| MinuteMan Press  | 3,210           |
| Reserved for <b>Collaboration</b>  | <b>6,113</b>    |
| Reserved for accounting/legal  | 1,500           |
| Projected expenses: general mailing, moving costs, phone, additional shelving, updating the mailing list, cards for book insertion | 1,000           |
| Total  | <b>\$12,882</b> |

Collaborative and Upcoming Projects: The board met at some length with **Santosh** and Doris Krinsky of Lotus Light. Lotus Light not only distributes but also has begun publishing Sri Aurobindo's books in the U.S. There was agreement in principle that there are areas of mutual interest and activity between LL (including its businesses, the Institute for **Wholistic** Education, and the Wilmot Center) and the SAA where it would make sense for both to collaborate for the good of the whole and the work in the United States.

Both sides expressed some concern about future collaboration based on past experience. However, both sides voiced goodwill to put the past behind and to seek tangible ways of making the aspiration for collaboration and

unity-in-diversity a reality.

The SAA will return to LL with a marketing plan and proposal for a joint publishing agreement for the book **Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Practice** as a first step toward advancing a more integrated and cooperative approach to the work in the U.S.

The Future: We discussed numerous other potential projects, including several publishing opportunities, development of support materials and information kits for individuals and study groups, insertion of information cards in all books distributed in the U.S., establishing and maintaining a national directory of individuals and organizations connected with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, providing information and how-to support for individuals who would like to be active in their local area, writing articles and book reviews for target publications,

and establishing (carefully and with discretion) an advertising support program for special book titles.

To make any of these or other projects a reality, it will be necessary for people across the country to volunteer their time and labor. The SAA, through at least one major national mailing, will try to determine level of interest and support for these.

Does the effort of the current board to move things along in the direction suggested here strike a chord-one way or another? Is it worthwhile or futile, on-target or off-base? Over the next year we hope to find out. Let us know what you think. David **Wickenden** (301) 588-2350; Bill Moss (617) 926-3 114; Martha **Orton** (804) 589-1202; Wayne Bloomquist (415) 848-1838; Julian Lines (518) 678-9690; Jean & Gordon Korstange (802) 869-2789.

### **Dear Friends of Auroville,**

**The** Auroville Kindergarten is where the children of Auroville between the ages of 4 and 7 spend their mornings. It is at present situated in a large, idyllic garden between the Center Guest House and the Mauimandir. Amongst the palmyras and neem trees are 5 huts to shelter the 40 of them.

Every morning around 8 o'clock they begin to trickle in from every corner of Auroville. They are brought by their parents, take the school bus, or a few daring ones already come cycling on their own. We soon settle in for another day: communicating, planning, trying to understand each other and find the rhythm of that morning.

As teachers we endeavor to give each child a stable framework in which they can interact with us, the other children, and the environment. We try not to impose on them, but instead to foster, nurture, and allow them to grow. These children are the future of Auroville. The relationships, attitudes, and consciousness they develop in the kindergarten are the roots for their growth into Aurovilians.

The kindergarten has to have more space to **accomodate** an increasing number of these children. We are planning a new kindergarten in 2 phases. The first is to fulfill the basic needs just mentioned and the second to have the possibility of improving our educational program. We envision a central hall surrounded by 4 classrooms, a room for arts and crafts, and a dining room in the first phase. In the second we will build a dance/drama hall, a silence/relaxation room, a small kitchen, a nature/science room and an office for teachers. The building will be designed to serve 60 to 100 children.

In order to build this new educational center, we need your help. You can contribute to both the present and future kindergarten by sending quality children's books; articles, books, and information about early childhood education; or a monthly sum to help with construction and upkeep.

If you interested in the kindergarten and want to be on a mailing list to receive a bi-monthly letter with stories about the children and updates on the growth of the project, send your name and address to **Collaboration** or myself.

Thank you,

Miriam Ecklemann  
Certitude-Auroville  
605101-Tamil Nadu-India





**All-USA-Meeting Participants, Madison Wisconsin, July, 1991**

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