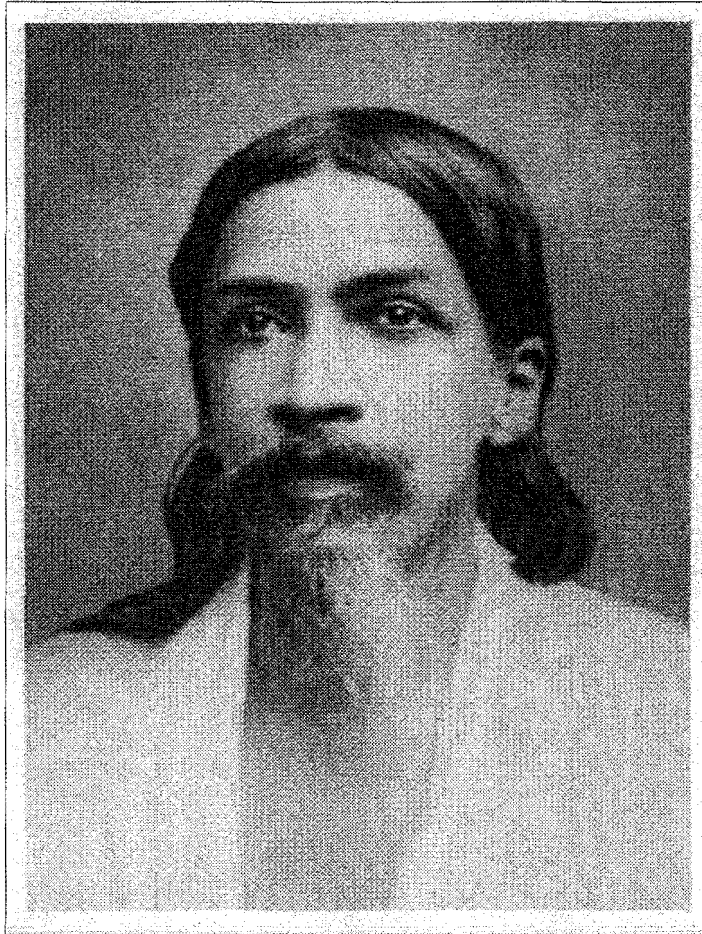


Collaboration

Summer 1997

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 22, No. 2



**Avatar and guru • Savitri by heart • How to sleep
Memorable contacts with the Mother • Four weeks in India**

You say that this way is too difficult for you or the likes of you and it is only "Avatars" like myself or the Mother that can do it. That is a strange misconception; for it is, on the contrary, the easiest and simplest and most direct way and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet, even those who have a tenth of your capacity can do it. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of Tapasya. As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer — a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent

and embody the Divine, but to represent too the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path. But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated over again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others — if they will only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others, "Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you -- if secretly, he will yet show himself in good time, — do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey." — Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, p. 463

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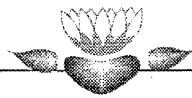
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About the artists and photographers in this issue: **Martin Berson** lives in Avon, Connecticut, where he practices martial arts. **Sonia Dyne** is the president of the Sri Aurobindo Society chapter of Singapore. **Vishnu Eschner** (SASP@mindsync.com) is a writer, artist, and director of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham ashram in Lodi, California. **Nolini Kanta Gupta** was a political associate of Sri Aurobindo who came to stay with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and was one of his first disciples. **Gordon Korstange** (gkorstange@floodbrook.k12.vt.us) lives in Vermont, where he plays the flute, teaches, and writes. **Maggi Lidchi** is a long-time member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and has written several books. **Deirdre Maguire** lives in Woodstock, New York. **Niranjan Guha Roy** lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for many years and now lives in the south of France. **Kenny Schachat** (kennys@netcom.com) lives in San Francisco Bay area where he plays Mbira, programs computers, dj's, and organizes collective dances. **Robert Shinn** lived in the San Francisco Bay area during the early 1990's. **Heidi Watts** is a professor of education at Antioch New-England graduate school in Keene, New Hampshire.

Collaboration does not mean that everybody should do the will of the man who asks for it. True collaboration is a non-egoistic union of all personal efforts to express and realise the Divine's Will.—The Mother

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About the cover: The cover photograph is a detail of a photo of Sri Aurobindo taken about 1920.



BEGINNINGS

Avatar and Guru

The following excerpts by Sri Aurobindo have been taken from Letters on Yoga (Volume 23, pp. 614-620 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970)).

The Guru is the Guide in the yoga. When the Divine is accepted as the Guide, He is accepted as the Guru.

The relation of guru and disciple is only one of many relations which one can have with the Divine, and in this yoga which aims at a supramental realisation, it is not usual to give it this name; rather, the Divine is regarded as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation, and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remolded by the Divine Hand. This is a greater and more intimate relation than that of the human Guru and disciple, which is more of a limited mental idea. Nevertheless, if the mind still needs the more familiar mental conception, it can be kept so long as it is needed; only do not let the soul be bound by it and do not let it limit the inflow of other relations with the Divine and larger forms of experience.

No, surrender to the Divine and surrender to the Guru are not the same thing. In surrendering to the Guru, it is to the Divine in him that one surrenders—if it were only a human entity, it would be ineffective. But it is the consciousness of the Divine Presence that makes the Guru a real Guru, so that even if the disciple surrenders to him thinking of the human being to whom he surrenders, that Presence will still make it effective.

All true Gurus are the same, the one Guru, because all are the one Divine. That is a fundamental and universal truth. But there is also a truth of difference; the Divine dwells in different personalities with different minds, teachings, influences so that he may lead different disciples with their special need, character, destiny by different ways to the realisation. Because all Gurus are the same Divine, it does not follow that the disciple does well if

he leaves the one meant for him to follow another. Fidelity to the Guru is demanded of every disciple, according to the Indian tradition. "All are the same" is a spiritual truth, but you cannot convert it indiscriminately into action; you cannot deal with all persons in the same way because they are the one Brahman; if one did, the result pragmatically would be an awful mess. It is a rigid mental logic that makes the difficulty but in spiritual matters mental logic easily blunders; intuition, faith, a plastic spiritual reason are here the only guides.



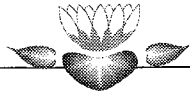
Sri Aurobindo, August, 1907

One can have a Guru inferior in spiritual capacity to oneself or to other Gurus carrying in him many human imperfections and yet, if you have the faith, the bhakti, the right spiritual stuff, you can contact the Divine through him, attain to spiritual experiences, to spiritual realisation, even before the Guru himself. Mark the "If", for the proviso is necessary; it is not every disciple who can do that with every Guru. From a humbug you can get nothing but his humbuggery. He must have something which works even if he is not in this outer mind quite conscious of its action. If there is nothing at all spiritual in him, he is not a Guru, only a pseudo. Undoubtedly there can be considerable differences of spiritual realisation between one Guru and another; but much depends on the inner relation between Guru and *sisya*. One can go to a very great spiritual man and get nothing or only a little from him; one can go to a man of less spiritual capacity and get all he has to give—and

more. The causes of this disparity are various and subtle; I need not expand on them here. It differs with each man. I believe the Guru is always ready to give what can be given, if the disciple can receive. If he refuses to receive or behaves inwardly or outwardly in such a way as to make reception impossible or if he is not sincere or takes up the wrong attitude, then things become difficult. But if one is sincere and faithful and has the right attitude and if the Guru is a true Guru, then after whatever time, it will come.

Up to now no liberated man has objected to the guruvada; it is usually only people who live in the mind or vital and have the pride of the mind and the arrogance of the vital that find it below their dignity to recognize a Guru.

—compilation by Madhu Kink and Steven Watson



NEW LETTERS ON YOGA

Successorship and other tales

The following was posted on the Auroconf Internet e-mail list a few months ago. It was part of a long discussion among many participants on the general subject of who might be the “successor(s)” to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. On a personal note I should add that for me the vision, work, being and consciousness of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are more alive and present than ever, both within me and in the world. How can you have successors when something hasn’t gone away?

What follows is not directed at anyone in particular and although it may seem a bit pointed, the course of this (email) thread has brought up some very important points and I guess I feel compelled to say things as I see them...

All of these messages about the status of the various people, “gurus” and “teachers” talked about here has emphasized to me that it’s crucial in all of these matters to refrain from judging by externals, inference, or even an encyclopedic reading of the voluminous literature on Integral Yoga and to then try and assemble and put together what “should and shouldn’t be done” and apply it to events and individuals. All we wind up with is a “put together” version of truths that are incomplete and fragmentary and ultimately become orthodoxy and dogmatic.

Another area that I consider very critical is that constantly applying the “written rules” can erode one’s own spontaneous insight, intuition and vision. This can become a form of “spiritual conditioning” and takes one farther from what is Real. Ultimately one can become so attached, mentally and emotionally to all of the words, ideas, concepts, etc. that one becomes literally (pun intended) dependent on them. A subtle fear of letting them go so as to dive into direct experience grows and can become a very difficult area to move on from. This additional conditioning becomes another layer between our sense of who we are and the spontaneous perception that is part of the psychic being.

In other words, all of that “stuff” becomes a substitute for doing Yoga. And doing Yoga, living it, applying it to “all life” is what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother came to show us. Not to follow them in the sense of adhering to the rules but to do as they did, for and in ourselves—to become Yogis in the true sense of the word! And I’ll apply this to questions surrounding all the “teachers” and “gurus,” etc. If someone truly gets help in their Yoga from anyone else, who are we to judge that? One true inner step of consciousness is infinitely more valuable and a greater honor to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother than any adherence to a rule.

All the rest of it: whether anyone has attained a specific spiritual status and how that applies to lines of successorship is just politics. It’s played out everywhere to some extent—the Ashram, Auroville, almost any spiritual path and right here on Auroconf. No one seems to be immune to it: it makes for interesting debate and it certainly is entertaining gossip but let’s

not get carried away to thinking that it has anything at all to do with Yoga or the vision and teaching of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

That all being said, I’m feeling rather mischievous so I’ll add my contribution to the Sri Aurobindo Zen/Yiddish Koan Archives:

Now quick, who is the true successor?

If you answer something like:

“the person closest to the Supramental Transformation”

or

“Sri Aurobindo, when he manifests in a Supramental Body”

or

“The Mother when she comes again”

or

“Mother Meera”

or

“Patrizia and her son”

or

“Satprem”

or

anyone you ever heard of

or

“there is no successor, they said so themselves”

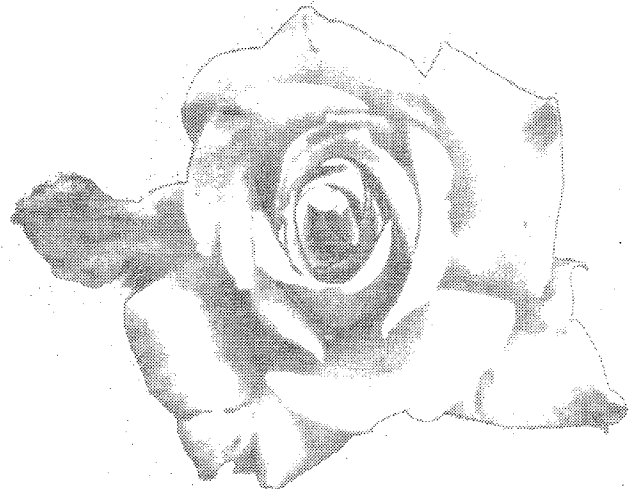
or especially if you quote anything...Then you get a deft potch (Yiddish Sanskrit for a smack) from the Zen Supramental Baal Shem Tov’s themselves.

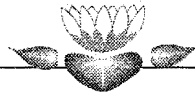
Now quick, who is the true successor?

Of course, you are the successor...and I am the successor...we are the successor. The only successorship that truly matters is the realization and transformation in our own consciousness and being. Sri Aurobindo could come and sit on our heads and that alone ultimately wouldn’t matter. Didn’t The Mother relate in The Agenda that he did just that to the whole Ashram during one Darshan after he left his body, and hardly anyone knew it!

So, let’s not look around, let’s look in the mirror. Until we see the successor there we won’t be able to see it anywhere else, either.

—Kenny Schachat (kennys@netcom.com)





NET DIGEST

Auroville Home Page Introduction

by Bill Sullivan

Auroville is now on the World Wide Web, at <<http://www.auroville-india.org/home.htm>>. The following is taken from the welcome page. Their Web site contains extensive information on the city, its history, how to become a resident, outreach programs, how to contact Aurovillians by e-mail, and a guide for visitors.

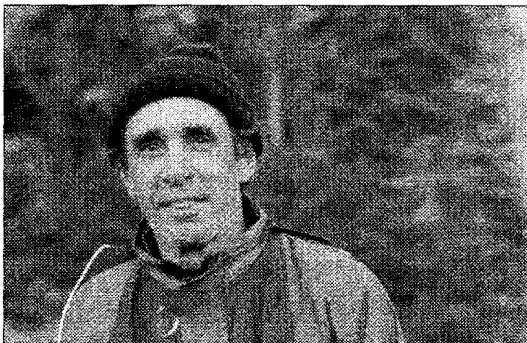
You have virtually arrived in Auroville, India. Auroville is a state of consciousness under construction. It is not exactly what you think it is because there's nothing really like it for comparison. About a thousand people are here from all over the world to work for the new world that is trying to be born on our earth.

A few clarifications may or may not help you to find out what it is. Auroville is not a religion but it has a spiritual basis. The Government of India has recognized that it belongs to "humanity as a whole" so there's no private property. The Community attempts self-organization and aims toward self-sufficiency in this bio-region.

Auroville began in 1968 on a few thousand acres of barren coastal land and has over the years restored the eco-habitat towards a sustainable future. An extreme diversity of Aurovillians make Auroville their home to create a living laboratory for the human species. Such a unique experiment has, however, been endorsed by the United Nations and many other governmental and non-governmental organizations throughout the world.

If all this makes Auroville seem even more difficult to comprehend, the secret is nobody really does know how or why it works and many "experts" said it would not work. Still, many of the processes, the projects, the on-going work can be explained and explored, but there's more to it as you can guess. The more you get into it, the more intriguing it becomes. Step inside.

Bill Sullivan, a long time resident of Auroville, has written a book about the city titled The Dawning of Auroville.



"AuroBill" Sullivan in the Sierra Mountains, 1995

Integral Yoga Web Site

by David Hutchinson

The Integral Yoga Web site has a new address: <<http://www.miraura.org>>.

This site has information on the Yoga, Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, other centers and organizations, selections from the writings by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and an extensive Sanskrit glossary. The entire listing of books published by the Sri Aurobindo Book Distribution Agency (SABDA) is available on the site, at <<http://www.miraura.org/sabda>>. This is a comprehensive list of publications by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Books can be ordered through several distributors.

Synthesis of Yoga E-mail group

by Girish Mantry

The Synthesis of Yoga online study/discussion was begun on February 29, 1996 and is currently studying the 6th chapter "The Synthesis of the Disciplines of Knowledge".

The purpose of this list is to study the Synthesis of Yoga collectively in order to gain a better intellectual understanding of fundamentals of Integral Yoga Sadhana as it is laid out in this work. Though the group primarily caters to the needs of Integral Yoga sadhaks, with emphasis on sadhana, discussion with a philosophy and research orientation is not restricted.

We study one chapter at a time on a biweekly basis. Summaries for the chapter under discussion (prepared by Dave Hutchinson) are first sent out, followed by a message on the chapter from a member of the group who has volunteered to work on the the chapter. This is followed by discussion from the members.

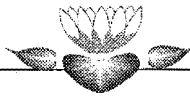
Group members are encouraged to read the current chapter before entering the discussion and to keep in mind that personal spiritual growth is the primary focus of discussion.

We encourage a lot of freedom in the contributions within the theme of the current chapter. Members may summarise, paraphrase, share experiences, or compare other writings of Sri Aurobindo.

To subscribe: Please send an E-mail message to <synthesis-request@compatible.com> with the body of the message as follows:

subscribe synthesis your-full-name.

Girish Mantry, the current coordinator for the synthesis list, is also an active member of the auroconf and savitri mailing lists. Originally from Hyderabad, India, currently living in the San Francisco bay area, Girish is a software engineer by profession. He intends to eventually settle down in Pondy or Auroville.



CURRENT AFFAIRS

All-USA Meeting (AUM) 1997 Sri Aurobindo 125th anniversary commemorative conference

The 1997 AUM conference, Practice and Experience in the Integral Yoga, will be held at Pathworks Center, Phoenicia, New York, from July 25-29. The meeting is sponsored by the Matagiri Center for the Evolution of Consciousness (MCEC), which is located in nearby Mt. Tremper.

Come and join this gathering of our extended spiritual family. Speakers, seekers, new and old friends will be converging from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville and various centers and locations from around the globe to share practices and experiences of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's Integral Yoga.

The location is beautiful and peaceful, with miles of hiking trails in the Catskill Mountains. The fee for the conference includes all lectures, workshops, slide shows, videos, and classes (yoga, tai chi, etc.); a shared room (linens and towels), three meals, and snacks; and use of the swimming pool, tennis courts, and meeting facilities. You are invited to remain after the conference at Pathworks if space is available.

Presenters

Manoj Das: Award winning author and member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where he served as a trustee. A native of Orissa and an internationally recognized essayist, he was the keynote speaker at the Los Angeles AUM in 1994.

Devan Nair: Founder of the Sri Aurobindo Society of Singapore, Devan is widely respected for his knowledge of the Yoga. Labor activist and former President of Singapore, he is at work on his memoirs.

William Sullivan: William Sullivan has spent years working on the Matrimandir and is currently involved with the Center for Scientific Research, which has pioneered Auroville's involvement with ferrocement, mud brick and other appropriate technologies. He also wrote the comprehensive history, *The Dawning of Auroville*. He lives in Verite.

Debashish Banerjee: A knowledgeable student of Sri Aurobindo and teacher of Sanskrit, he conducts weekly classes on Sri Aurobindo's major works at the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

Elizabeth Hin: Spiritual teacher and counselor residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico, she is founder of the White Rose Foundation and serves to promote the harmony of world religions.

Robert A. F. Thurman: The first American Tibetan Buddhist monk and author of several books on Tibet, he is professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies and chair of the Department of Religion at Columbia University.

Raymond Gombach: This actor and sacred storyteller presents sacred myths and legends from the "Rivers of God" including, from the Mahabharata, the story of Savitri.

Subha Ramesh Parmar: Bharata natyam artist and winner of numerous international awards, she communicates the spirit of this ancient art through lightening-fast footwork, expressive gestures and intricate postures.

Tentative presenters

Dr. Karan Singh: Scholar, author, cabinet minister and former ambassador to the U. S., Dr. Singh currently serves as a member of the Raja Sabha.

Dr. Kalaamani: Professor of English literature at Bharathidasan University, she is a scholar on Sri Aurobindo's poetry, and author of *Sri Aurobindo: His Mind and Art*.

Kala Ramnathan: A child prodigy in classical Indian violin, coming from a long line of Indian musicians, she is considered one of India's finest violinists. She toured the U.S. in 1994 with her teacher, Pandit Jasraj.

Additional Workshops and Activities:

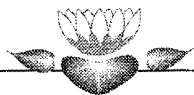
Miriam Belov (Relaxation, Wellness and Healing), **Larry Seidlitz** (Astrology, Psychology and Spirituality - bring exact birth time for charting), **Tom O'Brien** (Movement, Chanting and Meditation), **Wendy Lines** (Hatha Yoga with Mantra), **Melissa Michaels** (The Body as an Expression of the Sacred).

—Julian Lines

All-USA Meeting (AUM) 1998

The All-USA Meeting for next year will be held in California, during July 24-27. Details on the location and schedule will be published in upcoming issues of Collaboration. For more information, to be put on a mailing list, or if you wish to be a speaker at the meeting, please contact the Sri Aurobindo Association, Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816-9237. Phone: (209) 339-3710, ext.6; fax: (209) 339-3715; E-mail: AUM98@Collaboration.org

—David Hutchinson



Divine life in the process of evolution

The Center for Cellular Evolution is holding a conference on the Divine Consciousness at work in matter, Auroville, India, from Jan. 31-Feb. 5, 1998. A post-conference will be held Feb. 6-7.

In May 1968, a disciple wrote to The Mother describing her impressions of Mother's work. When Mother replied, she found herself writing in an unfamiliar and "small" handwriting. Inwardly she became aware that Sri Aurobindo, her spiritual collaborator, was replying through her. Her words of 4 May, 1968, appear in vol. 9 of *Mother's Agenda*:

"Divine life in the process of evolution; the Divine Consciousness at work in matter – here is, so to speak, what this existence represents."



Transition

We wish to thank Wayne and Surama Bloomquist for seven steadfast years of service to our yoga community through the Sri Aurobindo Association. We are sorry to see them resign from the board of directors; Wayne is stepping down as President and Surama as Secretary.

Since 1990, when the office moved from New York to California, they've packed and shipped every book sold by the SAA, guided the planning of the annual AUM conferences, and brought out issue after issue of *Collaboration*. Their lives and their home are so closely entwined with the teachings and community, that most of the last decade of activities related to Sri Aurobindo and Mother in the San Francisco area have been supported by the SAA or Wayne.

The present directors, Dave Hutchinson, Lynda Lester and I, will continue to follow the successful course of Wayne's aspiration to build up the SAA financially, enlarge its ability to present the teachings, serve the community as a liaison with the Ashram and Auroville, and involve more people in the process.

Though they're no longer with the Association, we should not expect to see any less of them. In fact, the Center for Cellular Evolution, presenting a conference in Auroville is the latest incarnation of Wayne's unceasing quest to discover ways of infusing everyday life with the practice of the yoga taught by Sri Aurobindo.

—Vishnu Eschner,
President, SAA

This year, thirty years after this communication we will gather as an international family of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, in Auroville, the city of the future which Mother envisioned. We want to investigate, research, experience, celebrate, and reconsecrate the Mother's ongoing Yogic work in matter, in our very cells. Our gathering wants to be cellular in nature: interactive, interdependent, circular, collaborative, cooperative, dancing/moving, celebrative, immersed in her; in service to her.

We will enjoy/join with presenters from all over the world who both know and love the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and who work in the realms of cellular evolution or cellular healing.

The conference will be centered at Quiet, one of three healing centers in Auroville International Township. Quiet focuses particularly on cellular and subtle healing. It is located in a pristine setting on the Bay of Bengal between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on the eastern shore of southern India.

If paid before Aug. 31, the 5-day Conference fee is \$150; after Aug. 31 - before Nov. 31, fee is \$175; at the gate, the fee will be \$200. Post-conference workshops are \$25/day.

—Wayne Bloomquist

For registration, accommodations, airfare, and other information, please contact: Wayne Bloomquist, Center for Cellular Evolution, 1790 Highland Place, Berkeley, CA 94709; Tel: 510-848-1838; Fax: 510-848-8531

Monthly collective yoga retreats

On the second Saturday of every month, Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (Lodi Ashram) hosts a retreat on the premises. Activities begin at 9:30 a.m. and continue through 9:00 p.m. Those who wish may arrive on Friday and stay overnight.

Sri Aurobindo's 125th birthday Darshan

Friday and Saturday, August 15th and 16th, 1997

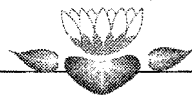
Because of the auspicious occasion, we are holding this retreat on the 3rd weekend of August.

Friday, August 15th, the evening meditation will begin at 8:00 p.m., and will be followed by a film on Sri Aurobindo's life. Those who wish to come earlier for dinner are welcome. On Saturday we will observe the day's activities and meals in collective silence, ending with a collective *Savitri* reading and a video viewing of a *Savitri* play from Pondicherry.

Please call or write if you plan to attend a retreat. For further information call 209-339-1342; Ext. 4 (day); or Ext. 5 (evening).

—Vishnu Eschner





CENTER TO CENTER

The Ideal Centre

by Nolini Kanta Gupta

Once when the Mother was asked by a group of disciples to give permission and blessings for opening a centre, she said in answer: "To open a centre is not sufficient in itself. It must be the pure hearth of perfect sincerity, in a total consecration to the Divine." This is the first motto or *mantra* that should be inscribed upon the tablet of the inner constitution of every group organization. It states the basic spirit, the true inspiration that should initiate the work and guide it through. The second *mantra* is embodied in these lines of Sri Aurobindo: "Love the Mother: always behave as if She was looking at you, for indeed She is always present." These are words that should be kept bright and blazing in the heart of each and every one. It gives the source and origin of the inspiration, the single fount of all movements collective and individual. And the third *mantra* not less living or urgent has been given by the Mother: "Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine."

Here we learn of the way, the process that is to be followed, the skill, as it were, for realizing the goal. And for a final comprehension and direction we are to remember these words of Sri Aurobindo: "All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."

In life, which is necessarily corporate life (a centre essentially means a training and a realization in corporate life) the first and last necessity is harmony, that is to say, understanding and union among the members of the corporate life. That is a self-evident truth understood and accepted by one and all. But the crux of the matter is how to achieve the harmony. It can be achieved only on a higher level of being and consciousness. On the lower ordinary level there can be only a compromise, an unstable balance, an uncertain counterpoising of diverse and divergent elements. Also, it must be noted, the higher and deeper the consciousness, the wider and more comprehensive, the more the harmony becomes natural, spontaneous, faultless, perfect: and on the highest level the harmony becomes not merely union but indivisible unity.

That is the goal towards which a dedicated centre, that is to say, a spiritually aspiring group should move and labor. And that is also the primary work, the first and foremost for which the centre stands as a field. And this work can be done and has to be achieved through the discipline enunciated in just the previous—our third *mantra*—the fundamental attitude with which the work has to be done. It is said there that the work, consecrated work or service is the prayer of the body. Mind's prayer is expressed in words, body's prayer in works. Work is the prayer in dynamic and concrete form, it is the utterance of the physical, material life, one's adoration, one's adhesion to the ideal, the deity one worships.

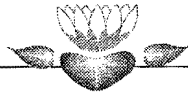
Work or service expressing harmonization needs to be based, as I have said, upon a higher and higher consciousness. Work done as prayer is the best means of effecting an ascent in consciousness. This is the lesson that each individual of a centre must learn from the very outset and ever afterwards. S/he must always try to rise in consciousness, reach another higher status of being and from there let the work flow, as it were, from a spontaneous spring. As one rises in consciousness and being, naturally and inevitably this consciousness widens and one feels spontaneous kinship and union with all others. Work or service is then only a dynamic means of achieving and realizing the sense of perfect unity of oneself with all other selves.

Work is not meant to show or express one's capacity or skillfulness or cleverness, nor is it a mere mechanical execution of outward acts performing certain duties, however conscientiously or meticulously. It is indeed a ritual of prayer and self-dedication, adhesion and surrender of the most dynamic and material parts of our being—the most unresponsive and insensible elements—to the One Divine Will.

And this brings us to the major, the cardinal *mantra* which Sri Aurobindo gives about the constant and living presence of the Mother. The very core of a centre is this Presence. A centre grows and can grow perfectly only around the Mother's Presence and Consciousness. As the ideal for the individual is to be conscious of one's central inner being and relate all parts and all movements to that central reality, organize oneself in perfect harmony around this core, even so a group-centre has to organize itself in perfect harmony around the central reality of the Mother: only so can it grow and grow harmoniously. Indeed a group, that is to say, a centre, like the individual can successfully grow into a living and harmonious dynamic Truth only when it has in its consciousness at every moment and in every movement of its life the never-failing Presence of the Divine Mother, for thus only a centre can become a divine embodiment and incarnation of the Supreme Mother for the expression and realization of her truth upon the earth.



Puja day at Prashant's incense factory, Pondicherry.



THE POETRY ROOM

The Psychic Being

It is the inner wing that quivers undislodged by sorrow.
It is the delicate thing that smiles untouched by joy.
It is the shimmering undefined by colour,
The song that cunningest throat can never even utter.

It sheds its gladdest, strongest rays through total darkness;
And by no darkness can it be extinguished.

It walks on water, walks on air;
Unlike the apple knows not how to fall.
It seeks for nought nor lacks for ought.
All lies within its calm dominion.

Of all the myriad things in life it is the one
To which it blithely can be said,
"Tomorrow you'll be there."

—Maggi Lidchi



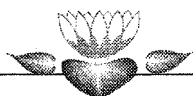
A Lonely Flute

In the hush of the soul listening,
A deafening crash of cymbals announced
The apocalyptic fall and final demise
Of the moribund Asura, blind lord of this world of matter.
Riotous winds shipped up the sea, a thousand violins
In ecstasy, presto, crescendo, ripped the veil to ribbons
Between the devotee and the dazzling splendour of Mahashakti.
The waves gone mad, danced in frenzy, foamy hands lifted
high,
Thundering, a choir mingled with the voices of a hundred
nations,
A huge roaring cosmic harmony, an eruption of laughter,
A volcanic outburst of soul's release from death and pain,
A giant symphony of orchestras from the East and the West.
Warriors on horseback descended galloping, brilliant,
From the high plateau, the hooves clanging, ringing.
In rhythm with a legion of timpani and drums,
Trumpets striking terror into the guts of demon hordes
Who infest the earth and feast on human misery.
An entreating flute came floating from some Wonderland.
Gods and angels, the Devil and his brood, man and beast, fish
and fowl,
Felt an irresistible charm invading their distinction.
All barriers softly melted, revealing an eternal single Vibration.
Om Douce Mere, Om Sri Aurobindo.

—Niranjan Guha Roy

The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit, the chosen medium of the soul's self-expression, and any profound modification of the inner habit of the soul, its thought atmosphere, its way of seeing, its type of feeling, any change of the light in which it lives and the power of the breath which it breathes, greatening of its elevations or entry into deeper chambers of its self must reflect itself in a corresponding modification, changed intensity of light or power, inner greatening and deepening of the word which it has to use, and if there is no such change or if it is not sufficient for the new intention of the spirit, then there can be no living or no perfect self-expression.

—Sri Aurobindo,
The Future Poetry, p 255



Listen, My Friend

Listen, my friend—
I've been wondering,
wondering
if I could truly love
an apple:

not for its pungent whiteness
(guilted with
red or
yellow or
green)

as it meets the cut
of knife

nor for its winy-tartness
as it stings my tongue
to life

not even for THAT
which drove Cezanne
to paint.

Listen: if I could not
love an apple

(or an otter
or a bee)

simply because it IS . . .
how then, my friend,
could I love thee . . . ?

—Deirdre Maguire



AUROVILLE ALMANAC

Four Weeks in India Saying "Amazing!"

by Heidi Watts

Heidi Watts is a professor of education at Antioch New-England graduate school in Keene, New Hampshire. Her connection with Auroville began when Miriam Eckleman, a kindergarten teacher there, spent several months taking classes at Antioch and visiting local schools. Miriam invited Heidi to Auroville to give workshops to any interested teachers. Heidi had never been to India, but after reading Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on education and realizing how closely their pedagogy corresponded to her own, she accepted. She traveled with her friend Peggy Leo, who has also been part of the Auroville-Antioch teacher exchange.

December 18: Departure Day

It's come, the day of the big setting off. It furthers one to cross the great water. I hope so.

December 19: Madras

Tania recommended the Broadlands Hotel and gave us their card while we were in Lewes. We rang them from England, got through, managed to be heard over the echo, made reservations and here we are. And, there is a lot of great water between then and now.

The descent into Madras was also not as bad as I feared, perhaps for having been warned, certainly for having Peggy to share the tasks, and for knowing a driver was waiting. It reminded me of some of my landings in the Caribbean—rather grungy amenities, but all there. In fact, our trip to Mexico keeps coming back—I have been in a third-world country before. The Broadlands is reminiscent of the hotel we stayed in in Guadalajara, and the dirt streets in that city or in Barra de Navidad are as crowded and dirty. Peggy waited for the luggage; I got the money. If you are fearful of leaving your place or your luggage unattended traveling in twos is an enormous help.

As we came out of the concrete damp and dark of the baggage room at the airport into the intense sun and heat and a clamoring line of prospective guides, drivers, beggars, there was indeed a taxi driver just for us, holding a sign which said "Watts." He led us through the swarm, helped us pay off two beseeching and unwanted helpers, loaded us and all our gear into his taxi and shook his head uncomprehendingly as we tried to indicate the hotel we wanted.

"Auroville?"

"Yes, yes, Auroville—tomorrow. Today hotel. Broadlands hotel."

"Hotel?"



"Yes, yes, hotel. Broadlands Hotel" We waved the hotel's card at him.

So we set off through the incredible chaos of a city street in India and in a few minutes he pulled in triumphantly through the portals of a large, white anywhere-in-the-world, smells-of-money hotel. The Trident. Could have been the Hilton or The Grand View.

"No, no, Broadlands hotel. Not this hotel."

Much pointing to address, sign and gesture language back and forth. Sigh. He got back in the taxi, drove out through the portals and back into mass confusion. After about ten minutes he pulled up by the side of the road, indicating a long row of shops across the street selling or not selling everything imaginable to passing bicyclers, children, old men, saree-clad women and cows. In a little more broken English and much arm waving he indicated his intention to get something to eat and marched off, leaving us in the taxi. Wide-eyed we opened the doors, and I stepped out, right into a pile of cow dung. Welcome to India.

Sign on Hotel room wall:

ATTENTION!
Guests Are-Advised
To be CAUTIOUS
of Strangers at Hotels Around
Who Coax you for
A Dance-Party-or-Something Like
They are Troublesome
Management
BROAD LANDS

December 20: Auroville

Peggy sits astride on the blue wicker bed in our room in our house in Samaste and I sit nearby in a blue wicker chair. The wind has been blowing boisterously through the room, cool, fresh and noisy, rattling curtains, blowing papers, making itself felt. There are almost floor-to-ceiling windows in this room on two sides, and even on a third side the top of the wall is a strip of windowing, under an overhanging roof. The large windows slide to open in front of a fine mesh black screening; there are venetian blinds of the hanging variety as well. In the fourth wall we have the room's entrance, a nine foot door painted the same glossy blue as the furniture and the two closet doors set into the remaining section of wall, divided by a teak-edged dressing table. The floor is composed of large black tiles, smooth and cool to the foot, and covered with a tan and striped grass rug at one end, where also are the two blue wicker chairs and a small wicker table. The wall space which remains—not much of it—is painted a soft blue-green and is unmarred by pictures. The ceiling rises in a modified four-paneled tower shape to a small skylight, now covered. Above the closets on the inner wall there appears to be another built-in closet with teak doors. We are on a second floor, looking out over lawn, and gardens, into trees. Everything about this room is pleasing: light, airy, comfortable. What a wonderful place to land!

This morning we awoke in the Broadlands hotel, in a room perhaps a little larger, but less gracious. Two beds, high-ceiling, painted an orange pink with a large fan revolving in the center, the walls an institutional blue; two small tables, one panel of light switches for the fluorescent lamp over the bed and a few other small yellow bulbs. Our two beds, next to each other, look into the concrete box which is the toilet, shower and washbasin room combined in one. No windows. The double doors which open into the room, high, wooden, green, have louvers and lead us in off a balcony which runs around a central courtyard containing a rubber tree higher than my living room and other large green things; there are rooms similar to ours off the balcony all the way around on this, the second floor, and on the floors above and below.

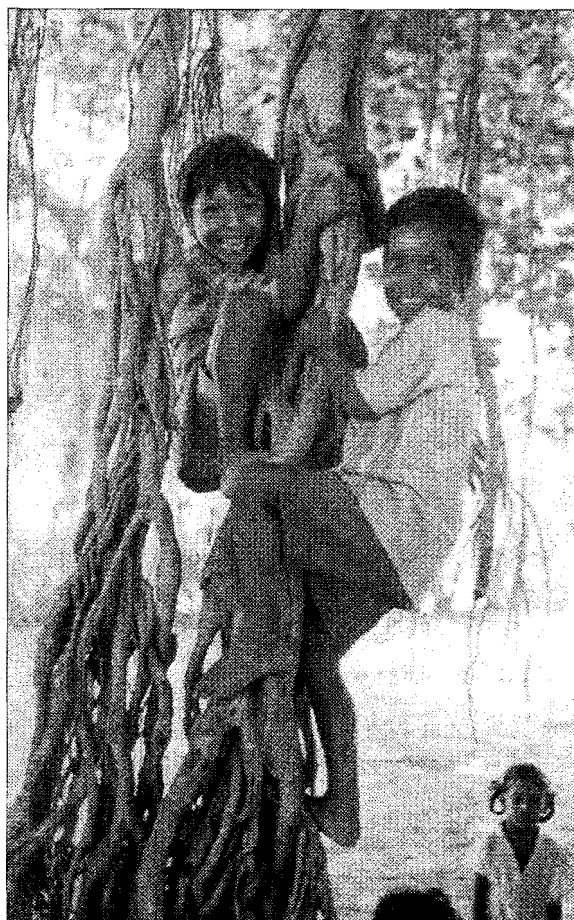
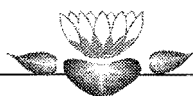
We ordered tea, which comes strong, white and sugared in a thermos from a passing boy—5 rupees and drank it in bed, gathering strength for the day. Around 8:00 a.m. we gathered our forces and walked to the beach which we had located on the hotel's map, then back to sign-out and take off in our faithful taxi, which waited for us through the night. I presume the driver sleeps in the taxi for its protection and his shelter.

India—the roads of Madras, the road from Madras—is it possible to describe it all? In Madras the main roads were paved but all the side roads were dirt and in any case, there are few sidewalks so that the road sides are dirt. Shops and people spill out onto the streets, not so much selling as hoping to sell, not so much buying as on the move. On the streets, in the streets, are people of all ages on foot, cows and bullocks wandering at will, rickshaws pulled by bicycles, a few pulled by horses, small yellow three wheeled taxis, a few larger rounded fendered taxis like our own, many buses and quite a few large trucks. The traffic wheels around madly, replacing caution with reliance on the horn or bell. The bicycles have mirrors, fortunately, as no one gives consideration to anyone else unless forced to—wherever you can push to or into, you do. The roadsides are littered with garbage and feces, human and animal, by the end of the day, but appear to be swept and cleaned in the morning.

At 8:00 this morning there was much less traffic than at 8:00 in the evening, shops were setting up, some people were washing out of pots as described in *The City of Joy*, women were sweeping their dismal patches, and a crew with a truck was doing major clean-up, the men scooping up trash, feces, food leavings, etc. in baskets. The author of *The City of Joy* says Indians are the cleanest people in the world. They wash thoroughly every morning as part of a ritual purification, even those who live in the most abysmal situations. Perhaps this contributes to the fact that in spite of all the overcrowding, dirt and dust, the people are so beautiful.

December 22

The Auroville kindergarten starts at 9:00 with all the children in a circle on mats in a large rectangular room with a vaulted ceiling of wooden beams and thatch. The room [*This description is of the old kindergarten buildings. Since then, a new building has been erected—Ed.*] is cool and rather plain. There are a few children's



*New Creation Kindergarten
(Photos in this article by Gordon Korstange)*

paintings mounted on some bulletin boards above our heads, and three large white metal cabinets, locked. There are also a few shelves, and at one end two low tables, perhaps, but most of the work here, and in Miriam's room happens on or close to the floor.

There are 8 teachers. Miriam says there were 10 but in conversations about the design of the new kindergarten and about curriculum they were always in disagreement with the others and eventually decided to leave. (To my mind, 8 teachers for 30 - 40 children is still a very good ratio.

The group then splits in three, going off to separate buildings with their teachers. We follow Miriam to one of the nearly circular thatched-roof buildings where the children sit on cushions in a circle and Miriam introduces us and asks them to tell their names to us. Once the tables are produced and the children are given a choice of working in their books or drawing they settle down very well, and work with pretty solid concentration for over an hour, even, or perhaps, especially Geo. The work books are big plain-paged notebooks in which Miriam has written work for each particular child. Today most of them are doing writing exercises, making loops and circles etc., but some are connecting numbered dots to make stars, and in some of the books there are math

problems. Those who are not working in the books make simple books by folding and cutting paper and then draw. I go out and when I come back Peggy is writing sentences for them to go with the stories. They draw boats, a Christmas tree—this from one of the little Tamil boys—a tree that was laughing and a tree that was crying, laughing because the birds came and sat in it and crying because it didn't like anybody. Dyvila drew a person swimming

After about half an hour of this table work, Sanjeev begins reading to one boy on the floor. He reads in a wonderfully soft, mellow voice with the child resting against him, and gradually others begin to join in with their conversation about the book or drift over to listen, until by 10:30 most of the children are clustered quietly around him, engaged in the story.

After snack, while all the children ran out to play on the swings or in the sand, the teachers talked for awhile about the morning and about what they would do next, because after snack there is another rug meeting, followed by cross group divisions—some to sports, some to gymnastics, and the others choosing clay or a color song with Miriam. So for the first half of the morning—the academic half? they are divided into age groups, but in the second half by activity or interest. Each teacher decides what she will do for the activity/choice and they arrange it then and there.

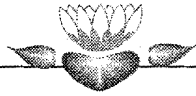
Later in the day—after Peggy and I tried to find the post office and I fell off the bike—Li came to visit. She spoke very well and intelligently about her work with the children. She does “topics” theme work with her group of 12 eight- to ten-year-olds, half boys, half girls, and a similar mixture of cultural backgrounds but she has, she says, one child who does not speak English at all. The topics they have done this year include Egypt, birds, and the one they are now engaged in, fish. Her descriptions of all she is doing with it, for over three weeks, sounds like classic integrated day. I shall be interested in seeing it tomorrow when I visit.

Li had no training but liked so much working with the children that she went to the Ashram in Delhi to learn more, but there she was given project work to do with ten-year-olds which did not prepare her, she says, to work on the initial teaching of reading and writing. She seems to be interested in learning more about that, and about English phonics so as to be able to teach the sounds to the children correctly.

December 23

Today we rode our bicycles to the Transition School and visited four classes. What I have seen to admire: In Ruth's class—the aquarium mural with different kinds of fish, and the mosaic trees. Art here seems a strength. With Mary and Josselyn's class—children's writing displayed, colorfully written and illustrated and some of it very literate. Also the play rehearsal, children working seriously and creatively and creating something delightful.

In Li's class—the whole lesson with the poem from beginning to end, the evidence of the fish project. With Miriam's classes—the songs with motions, both the river song and the color song, and the table work. I admire the teacher-made lessons, which can be varied to the needs of the child and avoid the cultural stereotyping,



and I admire the way the children worked with concentration. I **also** loved Sanjeev's reading and the flow of conversation, so **respectful** and engaging with the children which went on around the reading. With Patricia, everything about the clay work out there under the trees. With Adele, being reminded again about the usefulness of the game pick-up sticks, the teacher made workbooks again, and most moving of all, the ceremony for A.

In general I admire the physical arrangement, the buildings inside and out, the freshness and spontaneity of the children, the comfortable relationship between the children and the adults, and the arrangement of the schedule which seems to flow between teachers, buildings and types of activity.

On the roof overlooking the garden. Have I described the gardens of Samasti? Lotus growing thickly like overgrown water lillies, leaves like huge nasturtiums, in a curving water bed where little fishes, tadpoles and insects swoop about. A mortar bridge off the ocher dirt from here sculpted in a fashion reminiscence of a Japanese garden rises over a part of the lotus pool and leads one onto a path of large rocks set in the green grass. Before and after are planted beds of things we try to raise as house plants which here grow thick and lush, with white, or yellow, or pink flowers at different heights. Although they are too small to see from here, when one walks on the grass one can see that the grass is flowering with tiny pink or blue floweretts.

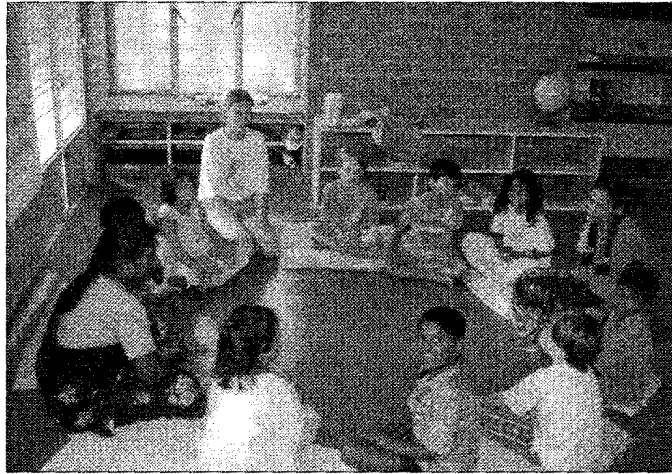
Lunches at the Guest House consist of a buffet which always includes soup, rice and at least six other dishes. Several of these are vegetables cooked until soft and delicately flavored, a salad of green leaves and lettuce with a yogurt dressing, and something else like tomatoes cut up or grated carrots—always carrots. There is usually also an Indian bread—chappattis or a pancake—and of course some chutney. These tend to be sweet chutneys and none of the food is very spicy, though the gentle blend of unusual spices in the soups and on the vegetables is always delicious.

Lunches at New Creation [a school/community which works with children from the nearby village of Kulapalayam and with Tamil Aurovilians—Ed.] cafeteria-style, though less genteel are much the same. We hold out our big shiny metal plates and get a large spoonful of rice, then a ladle of a mild but tasty sauce made with dal, vegetables and Indian spices like cardamom, coriander, cumin, and/or cilantro, next raw carrots grated or sliced with a dressing, finally a "chutney" which is another sauce, spicier and

hotter, and occasionally a sweet—some flour and sweetner confection. Filtered water is the drink. (They have had tea mid-morning and will have tea again in the mid-afternoon, the strong, cardamom flavored sweet milk tea which one gets all over India. We Westerners eat with a spoon but the Indians all around us eat with the right hand, with enthusiasm. After lunch at New Creation we file into the kitchen to run our plates through a basin of hot soapy water and another of rinse water. They are then stacked in the sun to dry, and perhaps to sterilize.

For breakfast at home we rustle up cereal and/or toast, and for supper bread, cheeses, salad, soup... Soups again, yummy. Ammas do the washing up, the house cleaning and laundry, and much of the cooking. So Western money helps to support the economy of Indian villagers. There are worse ways.

S. had a lot to say about the discrepancy in wealth, and about the non-teaching of Tamil in the Auroville schools. I don't know yet about the rich/poor split, but it seems to me sensible to concentrate on one language for common use with this international community. And they do teach Tamil in the schools. The trouble is that the Tamil students remain weak in English and the Europeans remain weak in Tamil. Well, for heaven's sake, what happens to them outside of school, the more than 70% of the time they aren't in school? The Tamil children are not speaking English at home and the Europeans are not speaking Tamil. So...



Auroville Kindergarten with Miriam and Amudha

December 27

A lovely Christmas. Immediately following dinner we attended the sacred dances in Pitanga until dusk, when we finished dancing on the roof. I loved it! The last event of the evening was a children's homemade performance, based on Miriam's colors tape at Illa's house. Five medium-sized little girls and one younger one, skipping around and around, with or without scarves, to the gentle mellow voice of an American folk singer, taking their cue from the music. Very well-organized and seriously intent on their charming production.

On Boxing Day we went to Pondicherry on the bus, leaving at 8:30, returning at 12:30. After lunch and a quick siesta we were about to set out for the Matrimandir when, fortunately, Li arrived and offered to accompany us. There were so many tourists we would never have gotten in without her presence as guide. After a walk through the rose garden and the nursery we went into the Matrimandir, sat in the meditation room for 20 minutes, and then Li escorted us through the larger nursery. I walked home through



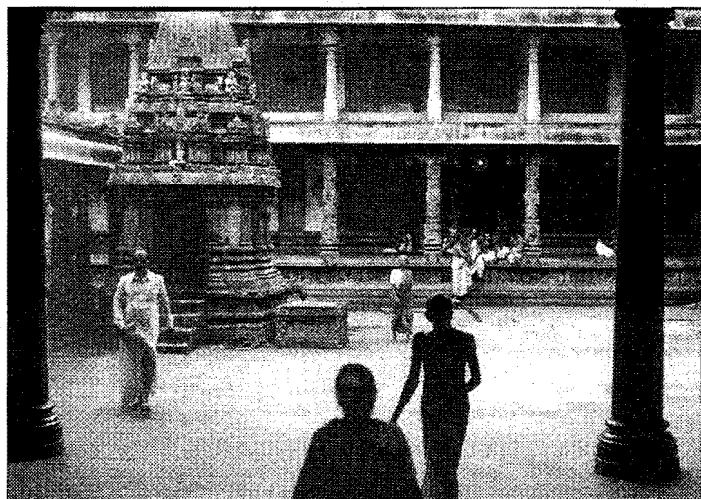
the sunset, Li and Peggy rode their bicycles. We got home to discover Miriam had arranged moped rides for us to the concert of her choir at Bharat Nivas; I rode with the wind rushing through my hair, the air soft and cool; a sliver of silver moon riding in the deep dark sky and the outline of Eucalyptus trees against the horizon just barely visible.

December 28: Visit to New Creation

Sylvie appeared and invited us to roam at will, beginning with her class. Sylvie's class has about 15 Tamil children, ages 11 to 14. They were sitting at desks, working on an exercise from a math book on place value. Each child has what would be called a rough book in England, or an exercise book and they copy the problems from the workbook into their own books, doing the problems as they go along. Sylvie circulated, asked children at different times to demonstrate on the board the solution to a problem, checked work, offered explanations, etc. Some children were clearly understanding and doing the problems, at least one boy, to the right in the front row, was looking confused and uncertain, but dutifully copied the problems into the book—without doing the exercise at all.

From this room we were commandeered by Roy who then led us to each room, talking the while, gave us a chance to peer in, and led us on. When he discovered I was the Expert of whom G. had talked he became much friendlier and began insisting that the teachers must come to an workshop with us. So it was agreed, over the teacher's tea, that we should return on Wednesday and Thursday this week to do workshop sessions with the teachers—this being their normal time for such work, and that in the holidays we would do an afternoon session from 2-4, and beyond that all teachers are also welcome to come to the sessions at Centre Guest House if they wish to join the teachers from Transition and the Kindergarten.

All classrooms need books, but New Creation needs them most. I will encourage the teachers to make their own books. Perhaps we can effect a children's book exchange between the schools.



December 29

I am weary, tired, faintly depressed, thinking of the pleasures of living alone, of being at home. All these people! Three meals a day with a group of people who must be talked with. Streams of people to meet and chat up. Children to see and talk to. I'm ready to go into hibernation for the winter!

December 31

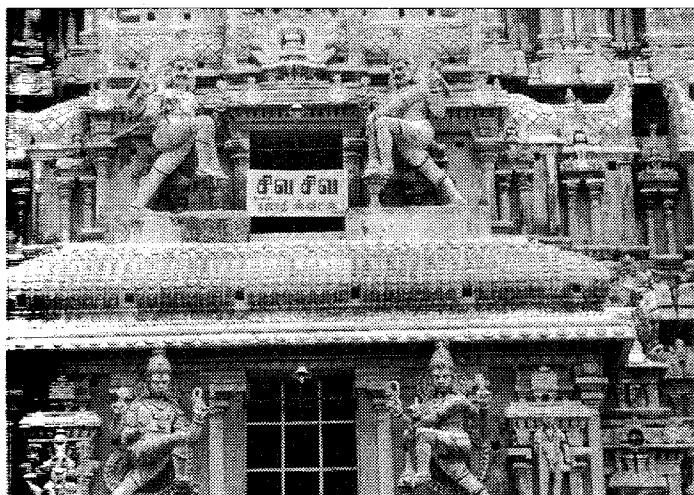
Last day of the new year. We managed the second day of workshops with the New Creation teachers and, when we got into making books they had a great time. They were very proud of their own accomplishments and pleased to take their books home. The materials we gathered from the Auroville Press made very nice books. The memory of all those brown feet and bright saris mingled together on the floor of G's room with paper, scissors and glue flying about will be vivid in my memory for quite awhile. Those shy round friendly puzzled dark faces—the men particularly unguarded and cheerful, the women shier, quieter, obliging.

Sacred dancing on the roof of Pitanga—the sun already down when we climbed up, but the whole horizon suffused with soft muted strands of color which slowly turned to glowing red and then faded into a blue, a darker blue, a near black, black. As the red diminished, first the moon, then one bright star and soon another appeared. The next time I looked up Orion and all his friends were points in a darkening sky. We swayed, put right foot back, left foot back, right, sway, right together round and round until the pattern came from the body not the mind and I could stop thinking about my feet in favor of breathing and taking in the night. We were a small group tonight, but in tune, swaying in a circle with a small bowl of flowers in the center of our circle and only the roof of the world us.

January 1, 1993

On the first day of the new year we must have said Happy New Year a million times. In Mahabalipuram, where we had come by taxi to see the sand carvings and the temples, the town was as crowded as St. Ives on an August Bank Holiday: throngs of Indians dressed up and in a holiday mood. There were families of mama, papa and two children, and the usual ragamuffin crowd of loose children and old men, but most noticeably there were bands of young men laughing and chattering, matched by clusters of young women in rainbow assortments of sari, flowers and face jewels. The young men would stop us to say Happy New Year, grinning broadly, extending a hand. Then: Where from? America? What state? and again, Happy New Year! sometimes, See you again, Come back next year, or Happy New year in Tamil.

At the beach the same groups clustered on the edge of the beach watching the water, but the waves and surf were alive with young men splashing, jumping waves, laughing, throwing coconuts, playing, simply playing boisterously in the water clad only in their underwear usually, though a few had bathing suits. The girls, more modestly, stood in the shallow surf in their saris which grew wetter and wetter as the waves caught at hem. They



too laughed, giggled and occasionally said Happy New Year.

A young urchin of nine years “picked us up” and accompanied us as a semi-guide through the temples. He never asked for money, unlike the men and some of the beggar children, and his English was quite good. We took his picture and bought him an ice cream, and I said I would send him a copy of the photo if he would give me his address. With painstaking slowness he wrote his name, then asked me to finish writing the name of the town, then he supplied the rest. He knew what should be in an address and he was anxious to get it right. Then, to my surprise, he asked for my address, and wanted to know about the road name. He was as bright and engaging as the children in Li’s class I have been enjoying so much. (At the bon fire this morning Ladine came up and gave me a hug—made my day, and it was only 6:00 a.m.)

The ride to Mahabalipuram was wonderful. Once off the main road to Madras and roaring down the easterly road to the coast the road got even narrower and ran through a succession of emerald green rice paddies. The rice seems to be planted and harvested under some system of managed rotation. In each section there would be some paddies of just mud, some being plowed, some with small clumps of stalks standing in water, some with the stalks planted at regular intervals to make a “field”, small paddies of thick rich green grasslike stalks. The harvested rice was piled on the narrow road and the rice threshed from the stalks on the pavement. At times the piles of straw or mounds of grain were so deep we had to go around them but usually our taxi and all the other forms of transport: bicycle, bullock cart, or pedestrian just went right through and over. Presumably our passage helped the threshing out? I am surprised it didn’t scatter or destroy, but apparently not. The dried stalks, looking like the hay, were gathered up by men and women in bundles or carried like loose hay stacked on the head. There were hay ricks abuilding by the side of the road, and trucks and carts overflowing with hay. “You see South India at its best,” said Miriam. *Lungis* and shirts on the young men, little girls in bright dresses, little boys in shorts, all

were out on the roads or in the fields working with the rice harvest. The fields themselves, small roughly rectangular or square patches of brilliant green, edged, often with palm trees or bushes, flowering vines, other trees pulled the eye toward them. In the distance, palm trees shimmered in a haze on the horizon, interrupted by an occasional odd-shaped hill rising from the flat plain. Hills. They were cut so strangely and rising so abruptly as to look like a giant sculptures, a somnolent elephant perhaps, or a boa constrictor which has eaten an elephant.

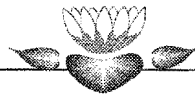
We celebrated New year’s Eve by 1) doing sacred dances on the roof of Pitanga at sunset on the 1st day of the old year, 2) eating soup with Ursula at her house, 3) snoozing until just before midnight, 4) listening to some special “new age” music made just for the occasion while sitting on the floor of the dance studio in silence with most of the other residents of Samasti, 5) arising in the dark and hassling with the bicycles to get to the pre-dawn bonfire in the amphitheater of the Matrimander, 6) cooking up a two egg breakfast for ourselves, and 7) hiring a taxi for the day to go to Mahabalipuram. I think we’ll remember this New Year’s celebration for a long time.

January 3

The Vedantangal bird sanctuary was an other-world experience. I knew at once I was somewhere I had never been before and felt rather like pinching myself to be sure that being in India was really for real. Flashes of other bird sanctuaries I have known, the island off the coast of Wales, Flamingo Lake in Culebra, Hog island in Maine, Indian island in Nova Scotia...images of these places came back but none of them, not even the lake in Culebra was like this.

With the mist rising off the water under the urging of an increasingly sunlit world we saw across a short expanse of green water, small clumps of grass and clumps of green trees in shades of lime, emerald and forest. There were herons, grey blue with long pink legs themselves clumped together in some of the nearer trees, and flocks of white-winged, long-necked storks in the further trees. There were also egrets, ibis and other varieties of heron and stork turning the trees almost white under the sheer numbers of them in some places. Sometimes in the water but more often in the air were small gatherings of cormorants, a long way from home to my way of thinking. Nearer to us but much less visible were smallish brown-backed paddy herons or pond herons, fishing by sitting or standing very still and watching for any faint movement. Standing on a concrete outcropping Miriam spotted a smirking frog, head barely out of the water, not moving at all, with one brilliant yellow eye in a brilliant green head gazing up: another watcher and waiter. We saw one bird of prey, a fish hawk of some kind, soaring through the sky, and small coveys of ducks adabbling. One, a kind of coot, was actually called a dab chick.

I had great trouble at first seeing the birds even though they were not far away, and though eventually the visibility got better for me as I learned to adjust the binoculars and as the sun rose higher and shone more intensely it was never very good. I think



my cataracts are really showing their presence, and this may explain why I find bird watching less attractive even with my own better quality field glasses. Nonetheless I was dreaming about coming back, with my own binoculars, and staying at the nearby hotel so as to be able to come out to the viaduct in the early morning and again at sunset. Knowing what I now know of South India's sunrises and sunsets, I am sure the sight of birds coming in and out of the roosting places at the break and close of day would be spectacular.

On the other side of the viaduct from which we looked out at the birds the flat land was divided into small fairly regular rectangles for rice growing. Here some men and boys were plowing up one field with two pair of water buffalo, cows and men scrunching through mud to mid-thigh. In another field a pair of bullocks drew a horizontal wooden blade to smooth the previously ploughed field of mud, and two men with the familiar short handled scraper shovel (*mumpti*), which I have seen used in many different ways, were cutting a deep furrow around the edges. In a third and fourth field a man and several boys were setting out rice transplants in a field of water and in yet another field, this one not mud but brown earth, a man scattered seed. Surrounding this evidence of industry were fields and fields of green plants in various stages of height and ripeness. I am told they can do two harvests a year, so presumably the men I saw ploughing were preparing a harvested paddy for a second crop. Running in a ragged line from north to south and east to west, thus creating larger boxes across the grid of small fields were the main irrigation ditches. Water was let in as needed from the sanctuary side, which, Miriam explained, was made so rich by the bird droppings that no other fertilizer is needed. The farmers, understanding this, have refrained from the usual practice of killing birds, and have actually promoted and supported the sanctuary. Nothing like enlightened self-interest. Vedantangal Bird Sanctuary.

January 4

This was the Madras day for book buying. Stores turned out to have very little, though the best of them—Landmark—had some usable items. I forgot to look for books for teachers, but I don't think there was an education section. Also, I didn't go to the book fair so perhaps there was something there—but I think a call for "your favorite books on teaching" at the workshop will elicit whatever there is.

I find the heat, dirt, noise, evidence of poverty and misery, confusion, unfamiliarity and importuning of these Indian cities not only overwhelming but unbearable. I would come back to Auroville—an Auroville which includes villages and Tamilians—but not to India. I guess I could also return to the India of sunrises and sunsets, of green rice paddies and long surfy beaches, but not to the India of fingerless beggars, shit in the streets—what streets?—and a continuous din.

January 5

Today's workshop on relaxation techniques was a good beginning for this body work. What does one need to do to get

better at sitting cross legged, or at lying on the back? I need to ask Ursula. However, in spite of some pain, as Loka would say—agony, I said to myself at the time—in spite of some agony occasioned by sitting cross-legged and from lying on my back through various breathing activities, there were some wonderful relaxing activities and some I may perhaps be able to relay and repeat at home. Better yet, to put forth the idea of hiring someone to lead us—the Antioch New England staff—in a morning of relaxation activities before one of our all-day retreats. Or perhaps between us we could pool our ideas and do something.

At the end Loka got us in a circle for what I would call a debriefing. She said, "It is to mentalize it. To fix it in the mind. At another time she said, "It is very normal that the mind wanders away. It is his specialty."

Taking in of the breath is what we do to meet an emergency, letting it out is a sign of release.

When you have a tight muscle, think of a scrunched up piece of paper, then unscrunch it and smooth it out.

January 9

I have spent four weeks in India saying, 'amazing.' One experience after another is just that—amazing. Take the temples in Chidambaram we just visited. Consider the antiquity of the temples, built about two centuries before Christ, with garish neon lights and chalkboard signs put up on exquisitely carved pillars; consider the carvings in granite, one of the hardest substances, garlanded with fragrant, brilliant flowers; or the priests, with white dhotis, strangely knotted hair and bare chests running around in the middle of a throng of devotees, beggars, children, pilgrims and a few white folk. The bells, the incense, all of us in bare feet walking from temple to temple over rough paving, dirt paths, worn steps, ghee slicked granite floors, or tiles...people below, and everywhere one looks Gods, carved in the pillars, painted in the shrines or presented as statues, hanging in cheap poster form, Gods ranging in size from immense to tiny, and the lord Shiva, at last, in every possible position: 204 dance positions and more for the pictures.

The towers of the four temples were visible on the flat horizon long before we reached the town, and later, as we walked through the courtyard in the fading light they were silhouetted in their amazing height and carved shapes as black against a glowing red sky...a few enlivened and enlightened by strings of bright-colored oversized Christmas lights.

We walked in through a long covered mall to reach the temple entrance lined, of course, with vendors. Some to keep our sandals, most to sell flowers, offerings, pictures of the Gods, bangles and bracelets, and all the bright frippery of India—a nation of bead and shell traders. As we walked out, in the now-dark, my mind half on the overwhelming sights and sounds from inside the temples, my eyes moving from one side to the other, scanning the wares, ignoring the beggars and pleas to buy, suddenly Carel pulled me to the side and I looked up to see that I was 6 inches broadside to a huge grey bulk of elephant. As I shrank back the elephant lowered his trunk, waved the curly pink tip over my head and



lowered it beseechingly? menacingly? toward my hand. "He wants a coin," said Carel, and Miriam pulled out her purse. I could now see the man on top of the elephant as the trunk coiled and uncoiled itself again and held it out like a beggars hand for Miriam to lay the rupee in it.

We saw a priest performing a puja in the antechamber of the shrine of the dancing Shiva. He sat cross-legged on a box, a cloth laid ceremoniously underneath him, in front of a round metal tray with a collection of bowls on top of it. An attendant rinsed everything by sloshing water out of a big urn over the contents and onto the floor, then laid out supplies on the side, flower heads, a leaf with some small white seeds or shredded pieces of something, various metal containers. The priest, well fleshed, wearing a white wrap-around garment below and bare above, his hair twisted into a tight side knot, murmured incantations or prayers of some kind while these preparations continued and occasionally glared at the crown. He did many things with the water and pyramid of bowls before him—putting in flowers, murmuring, putting in bits of the white things, holding a small clump of reeds above the bowl and to one side of his face.

After perhaps five minutes of this he got up, went over to the image of the black bull near by—a symbol for Shiva—unwound the orange and gold scarf around the neck of the bull and threw it over a post, murmured something more, took a dish of water from the attendant's hand and poured it over the bill, then took a dish of sour milk and poured that over, then another bowl or two of water, all of this now sloshing around on the stone floor, then wiped the figure and tenderly put something from his other bowls onto the face in three places. The final act was to replace the scarf, knotting it around the neck of the bull. He then returned to his place, draped a red cloth carefully over his knees this time, and returned to various ceremonial gestures over the crystal which represents the phallus coming into the vagina—another symbol of Shiva—fertility and creation.

It's interesting that once the teacher workshops started in earnest the journal keeping diminished. The workshops are being successful, I feel, and in spite of many reservations I had. One fear was language, and though not good we seem to be able to function because 1) we have some English speakers and some Tamil translators, and 2) we have been doing such hands-on activities. This leads to hope that I could work with other non-western teachers in other situations. Who knows what cultural no-no's we

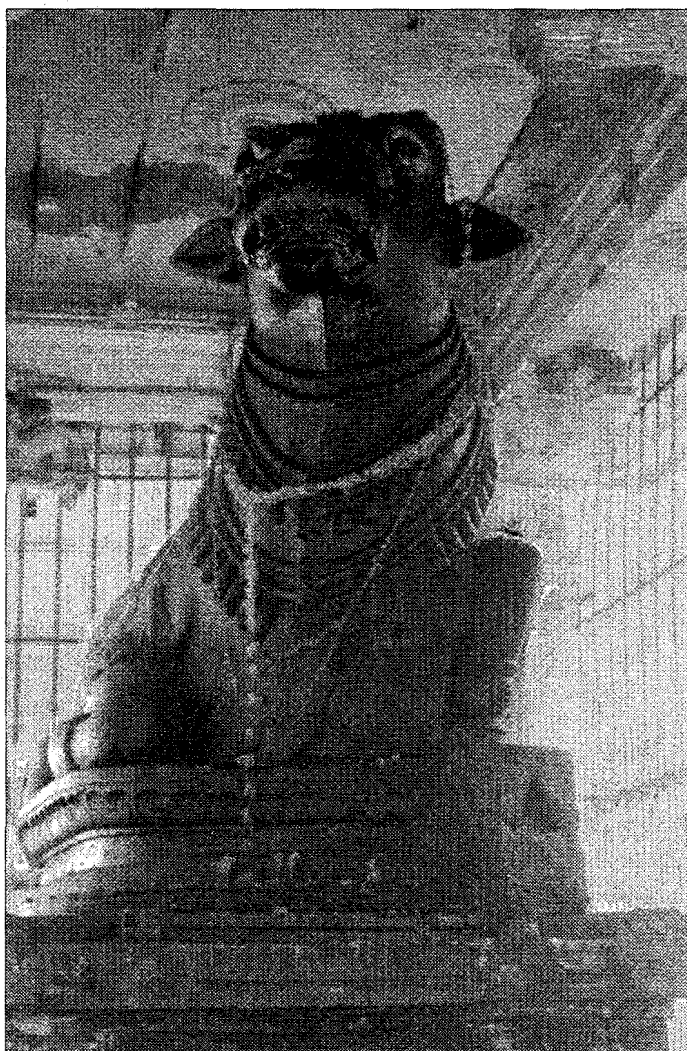
commit, but they seem willing to forgive or overlook—I suppose that happened when they decided to come to New Creation to begin with. The afternoon group is, in fact, a delight, the teachers so open and young and friendly and ready to take in anything. And so beautiful to look upon.

January 10

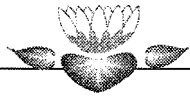
Aurogreen is very green. We sat on the brick terrace, underneath the spreading branches of a transformation tree, and just out of sight of the barn where Charlie was mostly working with a sick cow and ate a delicious Suzie-prepared lunch of red rice, vegetables cooked with a few curry spices and curd, and fruit salad. After lunch here at the community kitchen Suzie took us to her own house for tea and offered us each half of a bullock's heart as well. This is a fruit which is soft and sweet inside, with a white custardy consistency and a faint memory of pear. It has black seeds in the white custard which one discards.

Talk with Charlie, running from farm chore to quick lunch and back was talk with a very busy man—a hundred things

to do, great diversification with cows, chickens, orchards and fields. He told us that his parents had sent him to India at 17 to keep him out of trouble. In 1970 this apparently meant drugs and revolution. But, he said, he wouldn't have gotten into revolution because he was essentially not for violence, and drugs, well, what do you know. Anyway, after getting kicked out of his catholic military school at home, and also rejecting the rigid academicism of the Indian school where he was sent through the agency of an



Nandi, Lord Siva's vehicle (Photo by Vishnu)



Indian stepmother, he made his way to Auroville, and it sounds like exactly the right match.

Aurogreen operates its five houses and all the farm work with alternative energies. Suzie showed us proudly the methane tank where the manure and slurry get dumped, and the gas stove in the kitchen which is fueled from the tank. Solar panels in the roof provide the rest of the energy, though they do need electricity for the deep well which provides all the water for the farm, and is actually the deepest well in—India? Certainly in more than all of Auroville.

January 14

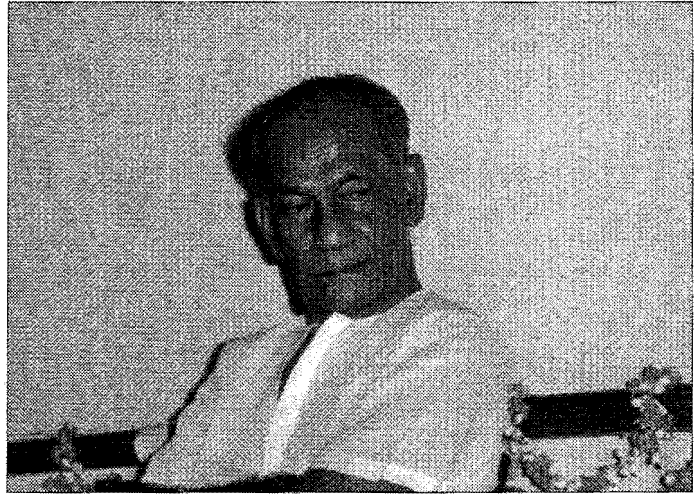
As always, the pace quickens as we near the end.

Yesterday's staff review of a child was quite extraordinary, though for this experience in Auroville quite ordinary. I led a staff review of a student who was born in India, has a French and German birth-parents and an Italian step-parent. The teachers with whom I work follow a similar multicultural, multilingual pattern. Of the 14 teachers participating in the review only two are native English speakers: the first languages represented in the group include Hindi, Flemish, Tamil, Dutch, German, French.

What has been important for me about this experience: the amazingness of Auroville—the mixtures of people, languages, endeavors, the ideal itself, the intentionality of Auroville and its inhabitants; Auroville hospitality; the fact that I was able to offer something useful and the opportunity to practice improvisation; the sheer fun of working on educational issues of importance to me with people who share my values and who have—in my view—far fewer obstacles than most of the teachers I know. The gift is to the giver.

Through this runs my fascination with Auroville—I feel under a spell of enchantment...grief at leaving, a sense of being, again, wonderfully cared for and made much of—experiences which keep happening to me—feeling there is no way I can reciprocate, still feeling overwhelmed by all the sights and feelings and sensations and experiences of the last four weeks. One does not return from India without being changed. I wonder about the changes in me which will be occasioned by Auroville. What Auroville wants, obviously, is that I should become a convert, or so Carel said jokingly this morning. I have been given so many works of Sri Aurobindo and mother, clearly I must honor this by reading some (not all!)

Since her first trip in 1993, Heidi Watts has returned to Auroville each December to give workshops, and Auroville teachers have come to the USA to stay in her New Hampshire house, take classes at Antioch-New England graduate school, and teach and visit in local classrooms. The teacher exchange has also included Antioch graduate students who have done internships in Auroville at the New Creation school.



Nirodbaran. (Photo courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.)

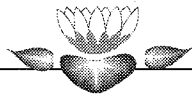
CHRONICLES AND REFLECTIONS

One word about discipline

by Nirodbaran

The following incident took place in 1961. The gymnastics Group in the Playground were reorganised. A propos of it a point was raised about the need of a certain degree of compulsion for those who joined them. This was especially in the case of those above the age of forty, I believe. It was decided by the captains one day in a week, preferably Monday, there should be compulsory marching for the "Blue Group", i.e., the senior most male members. On other days the members were left free to do exercises as they liked. The word "compulsory" raised a small storm of indignation among us. Why should we, responsible sadhaks, be treated like school-children? This was the burden of the controversy. Some of us left the Group on this account. I was one of those who had a dislike for any sort of compulsion. All the same, I thought I would take the Mother's views on the matter, though I suspected that she had already been consulted before the step was taken.

It was the usual morning Pranam time and people who had gathered, among whom were Nolini, Amrita, Pavitra, Champaklal, Madhav and others. The Pranam being over, the Mother was on her way to her room on the top floor, when I asked her, "Mother, what should I do? Shall I join the Group?" The question led to a discussion lasting nearly half an hour, the entire assembly listening with rapt attention and the Mother standing all the while. She replied, "That was what A was telling me about. He said that he had been doing regular exercise; so he need not join the Group. Beside, he said, all his friends were keeping out. Of course, he can't carry the flag (During the Darshan and 2nd December March Past, the Groups are led by standard bearers.). P says March Past



will be done without the flag. Well, what I want is that everyone should do regular exercise, not doing it one day only to drop it the next. It must be done regularly to keep the body fit. There is also a provision made for those who don't want to join the Group. All the facilities will be given to them except the March Past on special days. That also does not matter very much since it is held only four or five times a year.

Myself: People are making two objections to the scheme, one about the "Mass Drill". It is neither interesting nor useful.

Nolini: (suddenly raising his voice) Why, I find it very interesting.

Myself: It seems more like some amusement; that was the impression given by our captain.

Mother: I don't know why he gave that impression. The drill is meant as a preparation for the December show. If one starts learning it very early, then there is a chance of its being perfect. The previous ones had many defects. Though I am not an expert judge of these things, I have seen the photographs taken of them and there the defects can be seen. So they want to give training very early.

Myself: Next is the point of compulsion.

Mother: Compulsion is necessary. If you want to remain in the Group, you have to obey the Group discipline. That is quite reasonable. I will tell you one thing: without discipline, strict discipline, no progress can be made in life. No yoga is possible without it. You can't take one step forward without strict discipline. You may utter a *mantra* for a hundred years, but without discipline you won't be able to see beyond the tip of your nose.

Another point is about the uniform. You know it costs quite an amount of money. Those who won't join shall not have uniforms. They don't need them, besides. Not that a few uniforms cost much, but when it comes to a big number the expenses become quite heavy.

No, I have read the whole program; it is quite reasonable. You have a choice: you can go to the Non-Group. But once you have made your choice, you have to stick to it till the end of the year. If you can't follow any discipline yourself, well, then submit to the discipline of those who have some experience of life. So make your choice. *Au revoir!*

With those words, the Mother went up, leaving us stunned in an atmosphere charged with force and silence. As soon as I had touched upon the last question, that of discipline, the tempo of her voice had begun to rise in a crescendo till it reached its peak at the end of her advice. All the while, her gaze had been fixed on my eyes and the words hit like bullets my vital nature's self-will in the name of freedom. The entire assembly had listened,

standing still like statues. Many years have passed since then, but I am continuing my compulsory Monday attendance, so much force had been generated in that dynamic utterance. We named it "Black Monday", a la Charles Lamb.

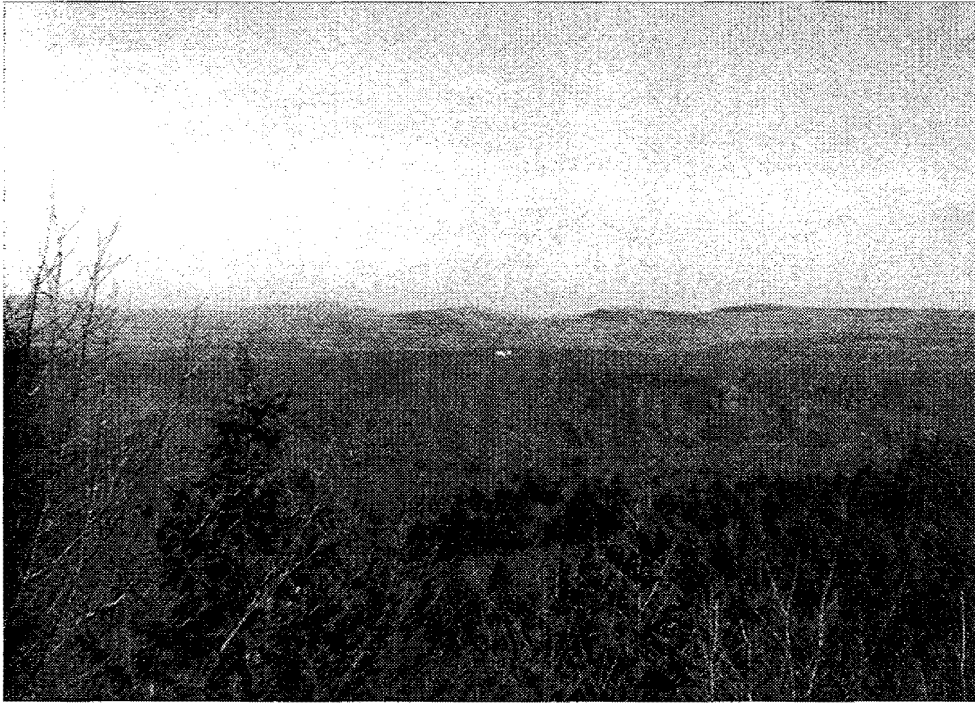
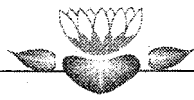
Nolini who was one of the listeners was also in our Group; he did not, of course, need any such compulsion from outside, neither was Monday black for him; it was golden. But Nolini is Nolini. He joined also the Mass Drill which, as he said, he found interesting, and attended both the items regularly till he retired due to age. There were others too who had left for other reasons, but somehow, however reluctant and antipathetic I am to this Black Monday, when the day arrives some force drags me on to the Playground.

We hear very often that the Mother has given us freedom. Freedom and discipline are therefore contradictions and people justified their free ways by quoting the Mother's authority. When it was referred to her, she vehemently protested and said, "Where and when have I supported indiscipline?" Well, this strong admonition should now dispel all such wrong ideas still going about in the Ashram.

Nirodbaran is a long-standing member of the Sri Aurobindo, and has written several books about Sri Aurobindo. This excerpt is from his book Memorable Contacts with the Mother, pp. 82-85.



The Mother in Japan. (Photo courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust)



The View from Hartley Hill. (Photos in this article by Gordon Korstange.)

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Up on Hartley Hill

by Gordon Korstange

*For years, copying other people, I tried to know myself.
From within, I couldn't decide what to do.
Unable to see, I heard my name being called.
Then I walked outside.*

—Rumi

Every year I go along with a group of students on an outdoor winter week in the Adirondack mountains. There we stay in one of the "great camps," built by 19th century railroad magnate, W. W. Durant. We spend most of our daylight hours skiing, hiking, and doing ropes course activities, but the highlight of each day comes at 9:30 p.m. Then, exhausted from a day spent entirely outside in the cold, when we would all like to tumble into our sagging bunk beds, we bundle up in layers of wool and synthetic clothing, get into line and march out the door for a night hike.

The night may be cold. -20 F. was the coldest one I've been on. It might be pitch dark. It might be raining. Whatever the conditions, we go—single file, wordless, down the path past the snug, lighted cabins, past the deer-feeding area, and into the woods. Silence is strictly enforced. After 10 minutes we stop. The "swish, swish" of our movement subsides. We listen. Then we move on, further into the woods.

On the last night, after we are well out in the woods, the leader of the line motions each of us, one at a time, to get off the path and to sit in the woods. There we remain, for at least 20 minutes, gazing up at a full moon, listening to the wind, feeling the cold. This past January, after a warm day, the sap was re-freezing and the woods were echoing with sharp cracks almost like gunfire.

All of us, students and adults, never fail to be affected by this time.

After returning from this unforgettable experience, I tell myself that I will continue to do night hikes. After all, there are trails just five minutes down the road from my house. It would seem rather easy to step outside—but as soon as I lift my eyes to the door, a host of demons throw up a barricade of fear, sloth, and comfort. The older I get, the higher the barricade seems to grow. On my first night hike, the one in -20 degree F, the full moon was almost too brilliant to look at. But while we two adults stood

there in a meadow filled with a quality of light we had never seen before, wondering what response was appropriate, the kids (13-year-olds), simply flopped down into the snow, spread their arms out, and lay there silent, "moonbathing." It felt like a spontaneous act of homage, of surrender, one which wouldn't have occurred to us old ones.

The Persian poet, Rumi, loved to write about this:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

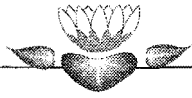
Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep.

How does one step outside? Sri Aurobindo stepped outside in a prison cell. "Shaking with the terror of being overcome by insanity...I called upon God with eagerness and intensity and prayed to him to prevent my loss of intelligence. That very moment there spread over my being such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful such as in all my life I had never known before. Just as a child sleeps, secure and without fear, on the lap of his mother, so I remained on the lap of the World-Mother. From that day all my troubles of prison life were over." (*Tales of Prison Life*, p. 61)



Mirabai, the 16th century Rajput princess, Stepped outside her palace to spend the rest of her life singing love songs to Krishna on the road:

Dancing before him!
To whirl and to spin!
Charming his artistic passions,
testing old urges—
O Dark One, beloved, I fasten my anklets,
true love is drunk.
Worldly shame! family decorum!
who needs such virtues?
Not for an instant, one eyeblink,
do I forget him—
he has seized me and stained me,
that Dark One.

(For the Love of the Dark One,
Translated by Andrew Schelling, Shambhala)

In fact, stepping outside is really stepping inside—turning away from the thousand-and-one snares of the flesh and mind, turning toward the unknown, unworldly, dark mystery.

On our night hikes there is a sense of danger, accentuated by the imposed silence—a fear of getting lost, perhaps, or getting frostbite, hypothermia, moon-madness...I do not like to be the leader on these hikes, because I want to give myself up to the night, the moon and the shadows, to abandon that conscious, decisive state of mind which I would need to lead 10 people out and back in. Twice I've gotten us temporarily lost, even in brilliant moonlight. That is the danger: to lose oneself, either into madness or the unknown.

Another night without sleep,
thrashing about
until daybreak.
Friend, once I rose
from a luminous dream, a vision
that nothing dispels.
Yet this writhing, tormented self
cries out to meet
her Lord of the outcast.
Gone mad, gone crazy,
mind and senses confused with unspoken secrets—
Oh the Dark One
holds life and death in his hands,
he knows Mira's anguish.

(For the Love of the Dark One, op. cit.)

For some, like The Mother, stepping outside simply happened of its own accord. Nirodbaran recalls the times, while he was attending Sri Aurobindo after his "accident," when Mother would suddenly go into trance during a conversation with Him, and



Sri Aurobindo would patiently wait for her to come out of it so that they could continue. For one, like Herself, so attuned to inner callings, "stepping outside" was natural.

For me, however, stepping outside must be a conscious act, a deliberate rejection of the temporal ties that grip tighter as I age. "So many (books, movies, articles, phone calls, discussions, etc.) so little time." I can stay on that path into the woods for a while, but then comes a twinge, an alarm bell from my ordinary mind that says, "Here is something calling me; there is duty, ah comfortable duty."

This might explain why even in a community oriented toward the spirit, like Auroville, people feel the need to go off on retreats and pilgrimages. I tried a Vipassana (Buddhist meditation) retreat once, while a resident of Auroville. Ten hours a day of sitting meditation, each session 50+ minutes long. Ten days of no talking. Focus on the breath, on the body. But even though I attained a state of heightened awareness and energy, I wasn't able to step outside my normal range of consciousness. The focus on the physical was intense, as was the atmosphere in the room where fifty people sat like myself. During breaktimes, I looked longingly at the fields and hills beyond the retreat center.

Walking in the woods, up on Hartley Hill, I feel the daily obsessions slip away, feel myself wending my way toward a grateful forgetfulness, not attentiveness. This has been the path of the Pulitzer Prize winning poet, Mary Oliver, since she began skipping her high school classes to walk alone in the woods.



No one yet has made a list of places where the extraordinary may happen and where it may not. Still, there are indications. Among crowds, in drawing rooms, among easements and comforts and pleasures, it is seldom seen. It likes the out-of-doors. It likes the concentrating mind. It likes solitude. It is more likely to stick to the risk-taker than the ticket-taker. It isn't that it would disparage comforts, or the set routines of the world, but that its concern is directed to another place. Its concern is the edge, and the making of a form out of the formlessness that is beyond the edge.

(From "Of Power and Time," in *Blue Pastures*, by Mary Oliver, Harcourt and Brace, 1995)

In the evening now on Hartley Hill, the sun is poised above the western rim of the valley, about to disappear. I have been walking for forty-five minutes, and, at last, realized what I should have said to Janet this morning during class and what I will have to do about it tomorrow. I'm hungry. I have yet more work to do at my desk tonight.

This is now a time for me to decide to step outside—after I have exhausted my small mind's story—to keep walking into silence and forest noises, to risk losing (and loosing) myself in a night hike among the trees. Who is interrupting me from doing this? Only myself. My small self.

As Mary Oliver says in that same essay, "The most regretful

people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power or time."

Lesson plan for a poem

Now class ...
you have to listen
for its whisper
out there
beyond
the playground of thoughts
pushing and shoving each other,

beyond
the field trip—back in time for school's end,
the lure of an 'A' from a teacher's red pen.

If you wait and pretend to do something else,
a calling card appears
with a first line, a phrase.
Then the hard part—leaving the door open
for a few minutes, hours, days, years
until the poem appears
like a deer on the edge of the clearing,
testing the air.

—Gordon Korstange

The use of conscious exercise as a tool in sadhana

by Martin Berson

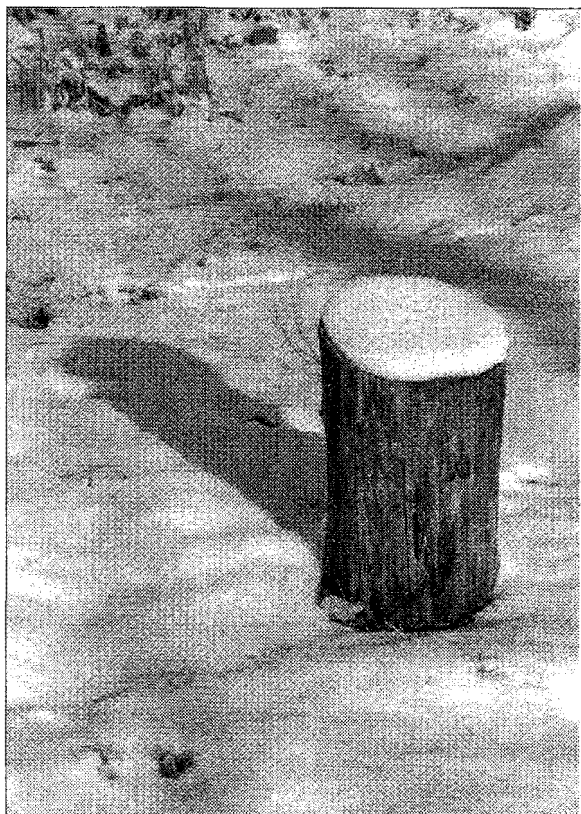
Mother's note to the Athletics Competition, 1962:

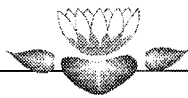
We are here to lay the foundations of a new world. All the virtues and skills required to succeed in athletics are exactly those the physical man must have to be fit for receiving and manifesting the new force. I expect that with this knowledge and in this spirit you will enter this athletic competition and go through it successfully. My blessings are with you.

—Mother, *Education*, Part Three, pp. 56-57

While examining sections on will and aspiration in Sri Aurobindo's *Integral Yoga* I noticed some surprising parallels to a particular physical discipline (martial arts) I have been involved with for twenty-two years. The body. What to do with it? The obstacle to our progress? Exactly. Not!

For most of us, exercise and physical activity are a necessary evil. We know we should do it to stay healthy, and we know the longer that our "temple" of consciousness (body) holds out, the better chance for progress in Sadhana. The problem is that





there just doesn't seem to be enough time for exercise, etc., etc.; plenty of reasons and excuses to not do it.

But, what if there were a way that any physical activity (even brisk walking) could be used as a potent tool to penetrate the subconscious levels of one's being? That might put a whole new perspective on the concept of exercise. Well, it happens that there is at least one way, and I'm sure that there are many more; all that is required of the Sadhak are a couple of easy-to-understand mental concepts and a little self-effort. Whether you are preparing your vessel for the Descent of the Divine Force, or it has already begun its descent, and is working on you, I feel that practicing or even experimenting with these concepts can make an immediate difference in your Sadhana, and a very large difference within six months to a year.

Although these concepts are somewhat simplistic, they are very powerful. The end result of utilizing them is that powerful conscious mental formations will be established in the subconscious layers of being. Direct channels from the mental to the subconscious, consciously carved out. Outposts where the Divine Shakti can flow in an undiluted, undistorted form to do its work more powerfully and effectively on the lower levels of our being.

If we follow Sri Aurobindo's Yoga to its conclusion we will have to address the subconscious layers of our being sooner or later. There is much the Sadhak can do prior to that time to prepare. It can be a kind of mental "Lewis and Clark" trail blazing. A conscious clearing of the rubble of the subconscious and replacing it with fresh new organized conscious mental formations, that, even though they originate from the mental, rather than the Divine, forge a way for the Divine to penetrate more deeply into the lower subconscious layers of our being.

Some of you may recognize the concepts presented and may already be actively using them. View this as another perspective, or confirmation of the reality of them. These concepts are extremely old.

The information I am going to transmit to you, (slightly colored by my own experiences and perspectives, of course) comes to us from Bodhi Darma (Daruma Dachi), the monk who first brought Buddhism from Tibet to China about 1400 years ago. Some things I read in Sri Aurobindo, especially a section on Raja yoga, indicate to me that these concepts were actually taken by Bodhi Dharma from Raja Yoga, making them quite a bit older than 1400 years.

After establishing a monastery in China, Bodhi Dharma found that his monks were meditating all day, but their bodies were wasting away. He became extremely disturbed by this. He devised a series of exercises for them to strengthen their bodies and provided them a certain 'mentality' with which to practice the exercises.

The first step in this process is to determine what the "self set" physical limits of our physical bodies are. The human body is a most marvelous instrument. It is far stronger than many of you realize. We've all heard of tiny women lifting automobiles off their children to save them, so the strength is most



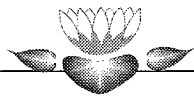
Auroville vs. Punjab

certainly there. How can we tap into that strength under controlled conditions, without having to place ourselves in a life-threatening or crisis situation? How can we find and direct that strength into our sadhana? We can do it the "old fashioned way," using the same concentration techniques we use in our meditation practice. The only difference is, that the consciousness is turned "slightly outward" rather than "inward." The body and its activities become the object of meditation.

How do we determine our physical limits? The first step is easy. Do whatever physical activity you happen to enjoy until you are tired from doing it and want to stop. This is your "self set limit." It is by no means your actual limit. Far from it. We'll use brisk walking as the example of a physical activity. Briskly walk as far as you are able until you start to breathe heavily, feel tired, and want to quit. This is your baseline "self set limit." It's not your true physical limit; not even faintly close to your actual limit. You could briskly walk for miles and miles if your life depended on it. But it's ok. That's where you start measuring this practice from.

The next day you walk the same distance, only this time you go right up to that limit and at the point that you want to quit and stop the activity, you "tighten your mind and push yourself harder" instead of giving up. The next thing you know you have "pushed" beyond your so-called "limit." What you are actually doing is making a conscious penetrating entry with your mind and your will force into the subconscious levels of your being. "Tightening your mind" is actually a gathering and focusing of the will. That "gathering" is directed at the "mental block" or self-set barrier, and pierces through it. Exercising the will in this way is like exercising a muscle. It just gets larger and stronger the more you use it.

The further you push past your limit, the deeper into the subconscious you penetrate. This is a gradual process, so it is important to set realistic goals for yourself. Remember, whatever "distance" you go, that is your new "limit," and you must at least go up to that limit the next time. You have the choice whether you want to push through the limit, but you must go at least up to your



current limit each time, and not less than it.

This technique is a double-edged sword. If you fail to go at least to your limit, you will actually weaken your resolve and slide backwards. It is better not to do it at all if this is the case. If this event happens, only you will know about it. It's called "cheating oneself." It can create some extremely deep negative feelings and depression in the sadhak. But, fortunately, there is a cure for the condition. The next two sessions you must push even harder than you usually do and go even further. That takes care of any negatives and puts you back on track. Then, there will be days when you just don't feel like doing your physical practice. We all have experienced that in meditation and yoga practice. While it is good to take time off occasionally to rest from sadhana and refresh oneself, these types of days should actually be perceived as exceptional opportunities to make great strides forward. Why? Because if you can drag yourself to do your physical activity when you don't want to do it, you will be piercing an enormous mental tamasic streak of laziness we all have, and your reward will be ten times as great. The more rigorous the physical activity, and the more you push yourself, the quicker and more dramatic the results.

The body is a paradox. It wants you to test its limits. It will complain at first, but then it will become extremely pleased and reward you in many ways. It takes 30,000 to 50,000 repetitions of a physical movement to train it into the nervous system as a reflexive action (a pro's golf swing, for example). 30,000 repetitions if you're a professional athlete and have a "smart" body, 50,000 if you're like the rest of us and have a "dumb" body. This amounts to 100-200 repetitions daily for about one year. Fortunately, it takes far less time to train a new mental formation. Daily practice yields measurable results when training a mental posture. Over the course of six months people see major changes in themselves. After one year, the changes are dramatic enough for others to notice.

This "tighten your mind and push yourself harder" mentality begins to spill over into the rest of your life activities. Before you know it, every time you encounter a problem or obstacle, or your intuitive mind senses a "false limit," you will find yourself reflexively "pushing through it." This mentality has served me well over the years and really helped me pick myself up, dust myself off, and keep moving forward whenever I have been knocked down by the events of life, especially helpful during those times of wanting to give up on the sadhana.

There is one phenomena to be on guard against when doing this practice. It is common to all practices, actually. It is allowing the activity to become mechanical. This is like losing consciousness. When one becomes proficient in any activity, eventually it can be performed while the mind daydreams away. Driving a car is a great example. Sometimes we arrive at our destination and don't even remember the trip getting there. Performing any practice in this fashion makes it virtually worthless and a waste of your time. It is better to do something else.

In meditation, we attempt to focus on something, or the silence, and when our mind drifts, we gently bring it back to the meditation. Same in the physical practice. We hold our mind on

our body's activity. When the mind drifts off to daydream, we do exactly as we do in meditation and bring our awareness gently back to the body and its physical activities. Once again, an effort must be made using the will to perform "conscious exercise" or it's a waste of your time and you might as well be doing some other activity like sleeping.

Conscious exercise strengthens the will rapidly. Sri Aurobindo has this comment on the will: "If there is a constant use of the will the rest of the being learns however slowly to obey the will and then the actions become in conformity with the will and not with the vital impulses and desires." (*Bases of Yoga*, p. 106)

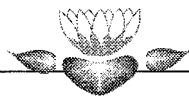
As one's body becomes stronger and more healthy through exercise, certain urges (usually worse in spring) may (and probably will) rise to the surface as is natural for healthy, living, bodies. These times should be viewed as excellent opportunities for working with these natural forces and vital urges. Dealing with these energies face-to-face on a conscious level is much more effective than trying to deal with them on a subconscious level where they exert their influences subtly. It is much harder to reach them there and transmute them.

It is very important during any exercise and physical activity to "control" one's breathing. This is *pranayama*, and another very potent subconscious penetration tool (See Raja Yoga in *Synthesis of Yoga*, page 514.) When the body is exerted, oxygen is depleted and carbon dioxide levels rise. The body wants to hyperventilate and one breaths shallow and rapidly. This is "unconscious" breathing. At these times, focus on the breath and take long, slow, deep breaths, Filling the naval area first, the lower chest next, and then the upper chest. Exhale slowly, pushing from the naval. Do this until the urge to breath shallow and rapid passes.

This is very similar to *ujjayi* breath in Hatha Yoga. *Ujjayi* breath is "conscious" breathing. You can use *Ujjayi* breath if you want. By controlling the breath, you are focusing the mind and the will to control an autonomic nervous system reflexive action. This penetrates the subconscious very powerfully and strengthens the will quite effectively. When you are gasping for air due to heavy exertion, that is the most potent time to exercise control over the breathing. Don't worry, you won't suffocate. I believe Satprem called *pranayama* a "scientific method of choking." This practice isn't choking, but the same control used in pranayama is used here.

Something else I would like to add is that it seems (in my personal experience, but I suspect it is general) that the Divine Shakti can do its work more effectively if there is an organized, balanced Ki (Chi) (Physical Prana) flow in the body. This comes about as a result of doing conscious exercise. When you exercise consciously, Ki flow in the body becomes stimulated and extra Ki drawn into the body from the Earth becomes stored in the Manipura chakra, like electricity in a battery. Eventually the body becomes literally "saturated" in Ki and is always "ready," always "awake."

My feeling is that this provides an excellent environment for the Force to perform its work on the mental, vital and physical layers. I can tell you that although Ki is a form of Shakti, it is a



contracted, more narrow form (but still extremely powerful) because it can be manipulated using the mind and will. It has no intelligence.

The Divine Force, on the other hand is completely intelligent and no one can tell it what to do. My personal experience with the Divine Force and the Ki force is that larger amounts of Ki, and balanced Ki flow in the body seem to allow for easier reception, assimilation, and integration of larger amounts of Force into the body over shorter periods of time. The Widening is accelerated.

For those who are Descending, the Ki force comes up out of the earth into the body, through the feet and into the Manipura chakra. I believe Ki to be an ascending ray of Shakti ascending upwards towards the Divine. I am going to make a leap here and conjecture that it is rising from, and anchored into, the nescience, and may be useful as a means of descending deeper and more rapidly. The Ki-line Express, if you will.

During those times when the sensations of the Force become somewhat overwhelming, physical activity helps me to diffuse and integrate the Force within the body. Exercise wakes the body up and allows the force to integrate evenly and more smoothly with less resistance. I have begun to understand the logic of a "step by step" ascension towards *samadhi*, rather than shooting up there like a rocket, like we all want to do.

Twenty years ago, a yogi threw me into *samadhi* four different times. The experience for me was being wide awake and conscious, no body, no weight, soaring freely and rapidly upwards, in an infinite golden, luminous expanse, with an ecstatic feeling. Sounds great, doesn't it? Well, coming back here wasn't so great. In fact it was awful to be back, slogging around in a "heavy" awkward body, moving through the molasses of the physical. But it did show me the reality of the *samadhi* state.

I should mention that those experiences were followed by 20 years of boring sadhana without even one experience of anything. Not even a glimpse. That finally changed last August in the 25th year.

I feel that the Ki force keeps one's feet on the ground and allows for a slow gradual ascent, each level building on the foundation of the previous level as Sri Aurobindo suggests (see triple transformation). Then, you get to experience each level of consciousness on the way to *samadhi*, building slowly, firmly upwards on a solid foundation. I suspect that ascending in this fashion one might even enter into *samadhi* with eyes open and directly experience *samadhi* in the body as Sri Aurobindo and Mother did, without ever losing body consciousness. Maybe not.

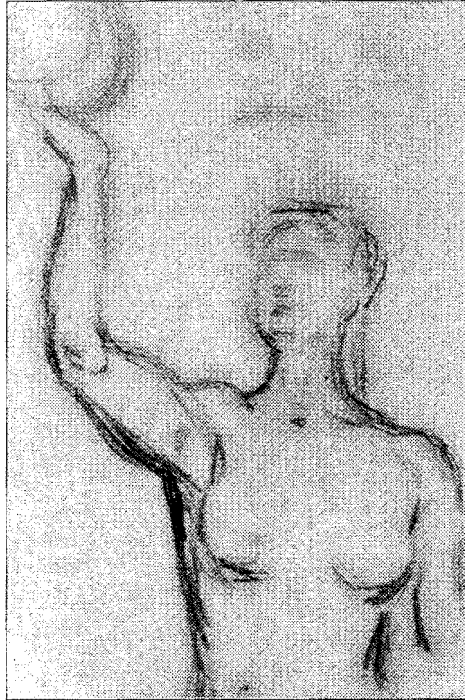
But, I would bet the border of the last level prior to *samadhi* is fascinating. It would be nice to stand there and gaze in both directions simultaneously, towards the finite and the infinite.

The other alternative seems to be what I like to call the "Yo Yo." You soar high, right into *samadhi*. Eventually your psychic momentum (*karma*) drags you back here. You crash back down into the physical and try to make sense of your experience and integrate what you learned. Unfortunately, most of the experience is just a "faint memory" that made "so much sense" at the time, but from the finite perspective is very difficult to grasp onto and integrate. You bounce up and down like a yo yo, each time rising a little higher. I believe it could be very disconcerting and disorienting, from my own limited experiences of it. Of course, I crave those soaring ascensions as much as anyone, but it looks like we have to sacrifice them for the most part in the gradual ascension method. Maybe an occasional foray above for inspiration, or to get a "birds eye" view of where one is heading, but not as permanent practice.

In conclusion, conscious exercise will:

- (1) prepare the vessel for reception of the Force;
- (2) strengthen and focus the Will force;
- (3) focus the Mind;
- (4) create powerful conscious formations in the subconscious which will help one in sadhana or any life activity, and especially in persevering in Sri sadhana; and
- (5) allow assimilation and integration of the

Force into the physical body more easily and quickly.



Sketch for Apparition, by the Mother
(Courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust)

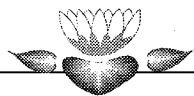
Miscellaneous exercise notes

Do not jump into any rigorous physical activity without assessing your current physical condition. See your doctor for a physical. "Jumping in" is the worst possible thing you can do to yourself.

Muscle pain is natural and OK. Joint pain is not. If your joints hurt from your activity, you are doing something wrong and making an "unnatural" movement. For instance, knee and foot should point as much as possible in the same direction whether you are walking, or going up the stairs. Otherwise you will be putting undue torque stresses on the knee joint.

If you accidentally injure yourself, ice the injury first to inhibit swelling, (use an instant cold pack) and then apply moist heat to promote blood flow and accelerate healing. Only moist heat penetrates.

Without re-injuring yourself, try to regain full range of movement as quickly as possible. It turns out that the quicker you can get up and return to your normal activities, the quicker you



will heal.

It's a good idea to do some stretching before strenuous exercise. Don't bounce or do stretching like a calisthenic. Stretching is a mental exercise. Go to your limit slowly, gradually, and then back off slightly. Then breathe to the place of resistance. It's gentle. If you bounce, the muscle will lock and you will tear the fascia and connective tissue. (ouch!)

The practice regimen: Conscious exercise, followed by asana practice, followed by meditation, followed by conscious exercise. This regimen has worked well for me. It wakes the body up and makes it more receptive to the force, allows it to assimilate and integrate it into the body more smoothly. The body should get slightly aerobic first, then calmed with asana. The last part is to help with the assimilation and integration.

On pushing oneself

If you're wondering just how far the "tighten the mind and push oneself harder" concept can be taken, let me tell you. The discipline I practice offers an intensive a couple times per year which is (thank God!) optional. It consists of 11 two-hour, non-instructional, rigorous physical practices over 4 days. The final day has only one practice, so each of the other days have 3 hour practices, and one day has 4 of them. It is called "Special Training" and it's only purpose is to create an environment to "push oneself" as close as possible to one's actual physical limit.

Each two-hour practice addresses one aspect of the discipline. By the fifth practice it feels as though one has been there one's whole life and will be there for the rest of it. Time dilates fiercely. At the point where we are truly physically exhausted, and want to curl up into a little ball of fluff and blow away in the wind, we really push ourselves even harder. The end result is that the mentality becomes "ingrained" in the subconscious. Always there, to be drawn on whenever needed. An automatic reflex.

In my 23 years of practicing, I have attended 10 of these trainings. They do not get any easier as one does more of them because there is virtually no limit to how hard one can push oneself. The longer a person has been in the practice, the more they are expected to push themselves.

When a human body reaches its actual physical limit, the person will lose consciousness. This is the body's defensive circuit breaker to avoid damage. It is extremely difficult to reach this limit and takes a very concentrated, powerful mentality and many years of training to even have a chance at doing it. In my early 20's, during the very first practice of my first Special Training, an older gentleman who was near me passed out after the first 20 minutes. I became horrified and thought he was having a heart attack. I began to wonder what I had gotten myself into. People came over and resuscitated him. I was told after the practice that the person who passed out had been training for 20 years and that if someone does pass out, it usually only happens during the first practice, and only to those who really know how to push themselves. It is an honor to pass out because it means you have actually pushed yourself to your physical limit, and that turns out to be a very rare occurrence.

Once you start Special Training, the rule is that you have to finish. You could leave, but if you do, you can never come back and practice with the group or the organization ever again. A perfect Special Training starts out from the very first technique with a strong mentality and is continuous all the way through until the very last technique. My 10th one was like that. About 4 years ago. It was exhilarating.

I have not encountered anything like Special Training anywhere. It is a good place to "meet the cells." As a result of the experience, the weak cells in the body die, but the organism is stronger and more healthy as a whole. The "cell death" memory is kept in the cell consciousness of the ones that survived and the information is passed on to new cells.

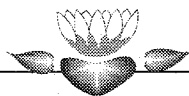
Forever after the first training, whenever one decides to do another training, a queasy feeling comes. The closer the training gets, the more intense the feeling becomes. The cells who will die know exactly who they are and start to raise a great clamor. They don't want to die. They upset the others. It can become quite a loud clamor and supersede all other activities when it gets within two days of the training.

The cells will wake one in the middle of the night. Wide awake. I recall years ago, driving to a training I had neither prepared mentally or physically for. I was going to do what we call "jumping in." No preparation. It is highly recommended to start preparing mentally and physically for the training a minimum of 6 weeks previous. The cell clamor became so great that I felt that if I did the training, I would die. This is impossible of course, but I turned around and decided not to do the training. It took quite a while to work through emotional upheaval caused by turning around.

It's been said that conscious exercise is 99% mental and only 1% physical. And you wouldn't even need that 1%, except that you need a physical instrument as a means to express the mentality. I believe that would classify conscious exercise as Raja Yoga. Interesting....

"You are not in the body, the body is in You." (Kashmir Shaivism)

Martin Berson started sadhana in Boulder, Colorado in 1972, but did not start to practice Sri Aurobindo's yoga until last April. When he found the description of the descent in Satprem's book, he began to plunge into Sri Aurobindo's yoga. It took him from August to about April to determine what was happening (beginning of descending force). He now lives in Avon, Connecticut. All his disciplines and practices are in the application stage of development, and he belongs to a non-profit, international martial arts group that teaches interested, sincere students at no charge.



ESSAYS

Sri Aurobindo: A journey into his life divine, Part 2

Part 1 of this article appeared in the Fall 1996 issue of Collaboration. It first appeared in Light of Consciousness magazine, and is reprinted with permission.

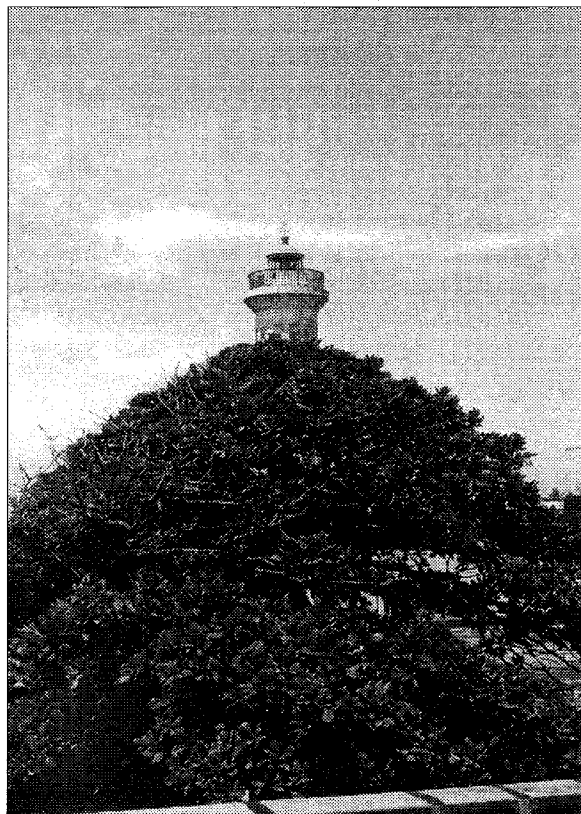
by Vishnu Eschner

When Sri Aurobindo had first taken up yoga, it was with the idea of obtaining Divine guidance and a spiritual force for the political work. By the time he reached Pondicherry, his inner realization had taken on a scope which went far beyond the emancipation of one country and was instead world-wide, concerned with the future of all of humanity. He went into complete retirement in Pondicherry, curbed his affiliation with the political life and even refused several times to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress.

Letters written to young disciples in 1911 and 1912 state that the yoga practice he embarked upon is not for attaining personal salvation or escaping from the world, but for "the work of changing the world." He named India as the center for the return of the Age of Truth, *Satya Yuga*, through the reemergence of the *Sanatana Dharma*—the eternal path of Righteousness. He sought

...to establish a Yogic Sadhana which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity. ...But what we propose just now is not to make the earth a supramental world but to bring down the supramental as a power and established consciousness in the midst of the rest—to let it work there and fulfill itself as Mind descended into Life and matter and has worked as a power there to fulfill itself in the midst of the rest. This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by breaking down her present limits...

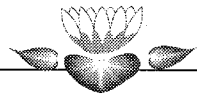
We have before us daily evidence of a transformation which seems to be acting upon the very material of our civilization, a power working from inside and from without, shattering the frail constructs of society and government, and even testing the limits of nature. We hear of the breakdown of governments, worldwide chaos, record storms and fires and floods, of random violence, organized warfare, and the eroding of the once robust values encoded in custom and tradition. At the same time we hear of the massive new-age quest for spirituality and alternatives to the status quo, of a crusade to imbue our institutions with a newer, high-minded ethic. It may be that we are experiencing the descent into the world of a force that humankind in its present state is generally unprepared or unequipped to deal with.



Lighthouse Pondy. (Photo by Gordon Korstange)

The descent of Truth-Consciousness, which Sri Aurobindo called "supramental descent," was foreseen by him as the next step in humanity's evolution. He was not referring to Darwinian evolution in which the struggle for life is worked out by the mechanical circumstances of the world. With patient logic, he makes clear in his work *The Life Divine* that the force which drives evolution responds differently to the environment in different creatures; that the numerous species can be seen to express alterations or adjustments of the same original seed. He reveals the presence of a conscious Force, playing with and developing its own Idea—"... from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind into the spirit."

The One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself, consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental.



Evolution is nothing but the progressive unfolding of Spirit out of the density of material consciousness and the gradual self-revelation of God out of this apparent animal being.

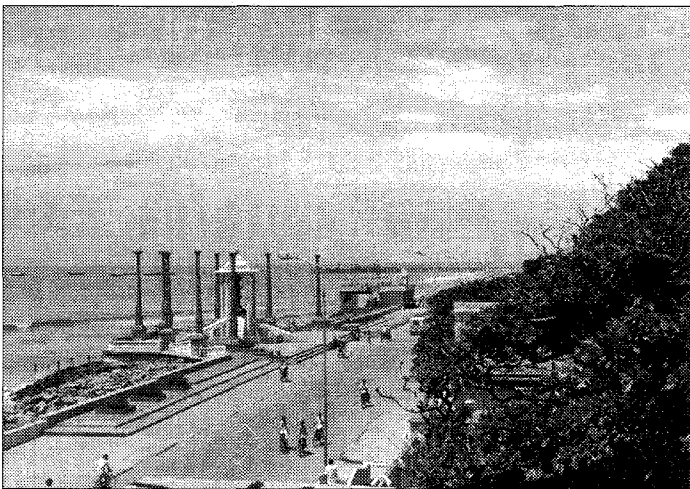
The supramental light of which Sri Aurobindo wrote has existed from the beginning as a realm of creation: “a dynamic Truth-Consciousness which is not there yet, something to be brought down from above.” But unlike the physical, vital, and mental worlds in which we move, it has the complete Truth and does not partake of ignorance. It is perfect.

The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being, For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for the life to manifest perfection.

The character of this supramental nature is a recognition and an experience of the oneness of the cosmos, through the power of Love.

It must come by a fourth status of life in which the eternal unity of the many is realized through the spirit...

Like Darwin's ape, who could not conceive of or imagine that he would evolve into man, the human mind, ignorant and limited by nature, cannot of itself discern the Truth-Consciousness which enfolds it. It cannot fathom the supramental principle or its infusion into Mind, Life and Matter. Evolution is usually a sluggish, methodical and difficult process, requiring ages to achieve a minute transformation. But human beings are unique in the creation. We can bring this process into the light. Individually, we may enhance or assist the evolution, and even cooperate with the descent of the Truth-Consciousness through the supramental yoga or other methods to purify the heart and mind.



Pondicherry Marine Drive. (Photo by Gordon Korstange)

For four years in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo lived an ascetic life, completely absorbed in the sadhana, rarely leaving his residence. By 1914, the year World War I began, a young woman arrived in Pondicherry. Born Mirra Alfassa on February 21, 1878, she had lived a silent and introspective life since childhood, showing a penetrating detachment from things of the world. In Paris, she had been the center of a group of spiritual seekers. Independently, her aspiration had developed along a similar thread as Sri Aurobindo's. Her writings in 1912, before their meeting, echo his concept of evolution:

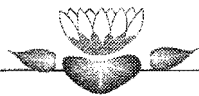
The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressive universal harmony... The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realization of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is one.

She met Sri Aurobindo for the first time and immediately recognized him as the master who for many years had been inwardly guiding her spiritual development. Later she would be known and adored by her thousands of spiritual children as the Mother, the Divine Mother in manifestation. Sri Aurobindo recalled of their meeting, “That was the first time I knew that perfect surrender down to the last physical cell was humanly possible; it was when the Mother came and bowed down that I saw that perfect surrender in action.”

Mirra and her husband Paul Richard collaborated with Sri Aurobindo to start a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. In the six years it existed, the *Arya* published most of Sri Aurobindo's important works, comprising the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of yoga: *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Isha Upanishad*, and *The Secret of the Veda*, as well as political and literary works. *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Future Poetry*, and *The Ideal of Human Unity* first appeared there in serial form along with much of his poetry. Because of the war, the Mother returned to France after 11 months in Pondicherry, and later lived nearly four years in Japan. On April 24, 1920, she returned to Pondicherry and resumed her collaboration with Sri Aurobindo. She remained in India the rest of her life. When she returned, a handful of disciples had gathered around Sri Aurobindo. Slowly, more and more came to follow his spiritual path, leaving everything behind for a new birth into a life of yoga.

Sri Aurobindo withdrew into deeper seclusion in 1926, and in November of that year commended the entire safekeeping and spiritual care of the disciples to the Mother. He maintained correspondence with disciples from 1930 to 1938. After 1938, Mother was his only link with the world.

During nearly 50 years of the Mother's attentive and patient guidance, the informal group of sadhaks (seekers) grew into a diverse community which became the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, presently consisting of about 2,000 people. The Mother's unique role in bringing Sri Aurobindo's vision into concrete form can be



understood from Sri Aurobindo's words: "The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same, the one Divine Consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play." One facet of the miracle of their working is that within the thousands of transcribed words of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—recorded spontaneously and independently over decades of growth and progress—nowhere do we find a contradiction between them, either in the broad philosophy of the yoga or in practical details.

Among the extensive volumes written by Sri Aurobindo, is a small book called *The Mother*. Contained simply and clearly in its forty-one pages are the seeds, perhaps, of his Integral Yoga:

In all that is done in the universe, the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action but he is veiled by his Yoga Maya and works through the ego of the Jiva in the lower nature.

Epilogue

What did I find in Pondicherry to answer my questions on Yoga?

* * *

Live always as if you were under the very eye of the Supreme and of the Divine Mother. Do nothing, try to think and feel nothing that would be unworthy of the Divine Presence.

* * *

... find the presence of the Divine Mother within and the psychic behind the heart and from there the knowledge will come and all the power to dissolve the inner obstacles.

* * *

You have to learn to go inward, ceasing to live in external things only, quiet the mind and aspire to become aware of the Mother's workings in you.

* * *

I had been mistaken, I was trying to do the yoga myself. I learned that it is She who must do it.

* * *

O Savitri, I am thy secret soul
I have come down to the wounded desolate earth
To heal her pangs and lull her heart to rest
And lay her head upon the Mother's lap
That she may dream of God and know his peace
And draw the harmony of higher spheres
Into the rhythm of earth's rude troubled days.

—Savitri VII.4

With gratitude to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, for the kind permission to quote passages from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Vishnu Eschner is a resident/director of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California, and president of the Sri Aurobindo Association. He most recently visited Pondicherry in fall 1994. For a complete list of sources for the quotations in this article, write to him at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, 2621 W. Highway 12, Lodi, CA 95242

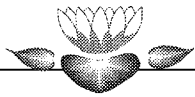


*An Early Portrait by Mother
(Courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust)*

Savitri by heart

by Sonia Dyne

A poem like *Savitri* is not a collection of "thoughts" however lofty; not an expression of emotion, however profound. *Savitri* is a living body built of sound and sense by a power of secret knowledge seizing on words and forcing them to bear a charge of meaning that cannot be apprehended by the intellect alone. How then are we to study *Savitri*? What method do we follow in order to open our minds to its manifold secrets and our hearts to its spiritual truth?



In conversation with a young sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the Mother is reported to have said: "Indeed, *Savitri* is something concrete, living: it is all replete, packed with consciousness. It is supreme knowledge above all human philosophies and religions. It is the spiritual path, it is Yoga...everything, in its single body."

When some members of our center in Singapore resolved to meet once a month to begin a systematic study of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* we wanted to work out a new approach based on what the Mother had done in the Ashram. She had chosen a few short passages from each canto to read aloud on tape. The tapes were sent to Sunil, who set himself the task of translating their content into the language of music. The Mother and Huta, a painter whose gift had been nurtured by the Mother herself, used to meditate together on the chosen verses and Huta would try to express what had come during the meditation in terms of color and line. We liked the idea of this "multi-media" approach and wondered if it could be adapted to our own circumstances, especially as we were lucky enough to have an almost complete set of tapes recording the Mother's readings and Sunil's music.

From Book One, Canto Five:

In a divine retreat from mortal thought,
In a prodigious gesture of soul-sight,
His being towered into pathless heights,
Naked of its vesture of humanity.
As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:
His nature shuddered in the Unknown's grasp.
In a moment shorter than Death, longer than Time,
By a power more ruthless than Love, happier than
Heaven,
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force
Hurried into unimaginable depths,
Upborne into immeasurable heights,
It was torn out from its mortality
And underwent a new and boundless change.
An Omniscient knowing without sight or thought,
An indecipherable Omnipotence,
A mystic Form that could contain the worlds,
Yet make one human breast its passionate shrine,
Drew him out of his seeking loneliness
Into the magnitudes of God's embrace.

My own experience over many years as a teacher had convinced me that most people approach poetry in the wrong way. This is because they have only a vague idea of what *real poetry* is, or what the poet is trying to do. Poetry is not prose in fancy dress or a cryptic message needing to be decoded with the help of a dictionary. It is true that Sri Aurobindo's vast knowledge of the English language can be daunting, but it is still a mistake to think that translation into simpler language will enable us to understand him better. We may indeed understand something—however the "something" will not be what Sri Aurobindo is trying to tell us. It will be different, for there are no redundancies, no interchangeable words in *Savitri*.

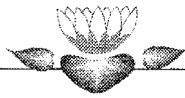
I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect: what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if for instance I indulge in a wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience. —Sri Aurobindo

Savitri is the record of Sri Aurobindo's yoga and the transcription as far as human language will permit of supra-physical realities and states of consciousness rarely if ever attained. The Mother has rightly pointed out that not even one word can be changed without changing the meaning. Reading or listening to Sri Aurobindo's poetry and trying mentally to turn it into a series of simple prose statements is a self-defeating exercise. Far better to take the Mother's advice and read "with a blank mind" than to worry over the interpretation of every line, thereby depriving oneself of everything that is most valuable, profound and significant! Much of *Savitri* is a mystery to the mind.

We needed to find an approach that would get away from the traditional search for "explanations." Once again, we took our cue from the Mother:

Read properly, with the right attitude, concentrating a little before opening the pages and trying to keep the mind as empty as possible, absolutely without a thought. The direct road is by the heart. I tell you, if you try to concentrate really with this aspiration you can light a flame, the psychic flame, the flame of purification in a very short time, perhaps in a few days. What you cannot do normally, you can do with the help of *Savitri*. Try and you will see how very different it is, how new, if you read with this attitude, with this something at the back of your consciousness: as though it were an offering to Sri Aurobindo.

"The direct road is by the heart." These words became our inspiration and guiding light. No longer would we rack our brains for meanings, or reach for a dictionary at the first sight of an unfamiliar expression. We would begin every session with a



meditation to Sunil's music and the Mother's voice on tape. And then we would read and let the ever-changing images created by Sri Aurobindo impose their own message, "stirring the blind brain," as he says, until it is ready to receive "the embodied Truth":

Its message enters stirring the blind brain
The hearer understands a form of words
And musing on the index thought it holds
Perceives bright hints - not the embodied Truth.

Sri Aurobindo is speaking of the Mantra, the utterance charged with spiritual power. The mind cannot comprehend the Mantra, perceiving only "bright hints," but still the power works on hidden levels of being, preparing for the moment when the greater revelation will come, when the ordinary mentality is overpassed and understanding merges with a vision that transcends anything language can express. *Savitri* is all mantra.

We try to see each line of *Savitri* as an embodied Truth. So we do not want to analyze the language in search of "meanings." We do not take a living body apart—that kills it. Analysis of the "form of words" will leave us with a lifeless corpse; for the soul of the poetry will have escaped us. Wherever possible, we try to read as if watching a video: trying to see what is suggested or described, recreating in imagination the images as they follow one upon the other, ever changing and evolving. *Savitri* is full of images, some elaborated in detail, others deeply embedded in the text. Someone has said: "There is a picture in every line"—and it is true.

When *Savitri* is not understood—it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or enter into a field of occult experience: it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity.

—Sri Aurobindo

The language of images is older and more powerful than the language of words. But when words are borne on the carrier wave of meter and rhythm used by a master poet, depth upon depth of meaning unfolds. We are precipitated into that highly creative and synthesizing consciousness which may have been lost in our long love affair with analytical reasoning. The final aim must be to transcend this too, moving towards the intuitive insight that alone can fully reveal the glory of *Savitri*: "Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight..." (Book Two, Canto Eleven)

It has been claimed that multi-sensory experience, which at best should include mental insight, leads to an intuitive grasp of reality that is more profound (because wider in scope) and less articulate, in the intellectual sense. We have been trying to bring imagination rather than intellect to the study of *Savitri* by an

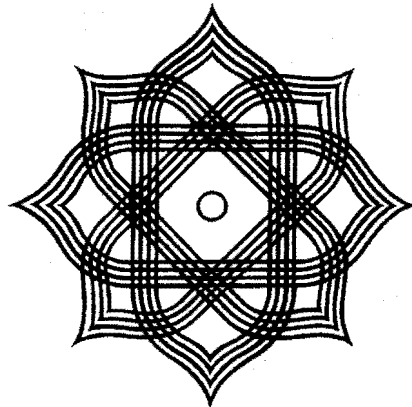
enhanced awareness of the pictorial quality of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. We do this by asking: What is he showing us? What picture emerges from these lines? What does this image suggest? rather than the more traditional question: What does it mean? We have used paintings to stimulate discussion and as a focus for meditation and, of course, the music specially composed by Sunil.

Such an approach is not easy at first. "Seeing" creates a richness of association pointing to a meaning that is not fixed and static like a dictionary definition but complex and evolving and ultimately touching the Truth-Vision that encompasses in itself all possible meanings. The poetic word, as used by Sri Aurobindo, acquires a limitless extension of significance for the receptive reader. That is why the Mother can say: "I tell you, whoever, wishing to practice Yoga, tries sincerely and feels the necessity for it, will be able to climb with the help of *Savitri* to the highest step of the ladder of yoga, will be able to find the secret that *Savitri* represents..."

Patience is needed, a willingness to wait for answers. The structure of *Savitri* is cyclic: a theme is introduced and a question arises. The theme will recur again and again, and each time the theme will receive a more complex treatment and the question a more complete answer. Really and truly, *Savitri* can be understood only in the context of our own life experience; for it demands of the reader not just a mental understanding but a recognition, the first small step towards that "knowledge by identity" referred to by Sri Aurobindo in the passage quoted above.

A few years ago I had the good fortune to be sitting near to Nirodbaran, the "scribe" to whom Sri Aurobindo dictated so much of the final version of *Savitri*. I told him very briefly about our plan to try a new approach. He commented: "Do you want everyone to learn *Savitri* by heart?" Since then, how many others have asked the same question! The answer is "Regretfully, no, we have something else in mind".....regretfully, because learning favourite passages by heart, enjoying them, meditating upon them, making them part of our lives, allowing them to inspire and guide us, is the best approach of all. Then, as the Mother said, "all that we need we will find in *Savitri*."

Sonia Dyne is the president of the Sri Aurobindo Society chapter of Singapore.





SOURCE MATERIAL

Prayers and Meditations

by *The Mother*

April 7, 1917

A deep concentration seized on me, and I perceived that I was identifying myself with a single cherry-blossom, then through it with all cherry-blossoms, and, as I descended deeper in the consciousness, following a stream of bluish force, I became suddenly the cherry-tree itself, stretching towards the sky like so many arms, its innumerable branches laden with their sacrifice of flowers. Then I heard distinctly this sentence: "Thus hast thou made thyself one with the soul of the cherry-trees and so thou canst take note that it is the Divine who makes the offering of this flower-prayer to heaven."

When I had written it, all was effaced; but now the blood of the cherry-tree flows in my veins and with it flows an incomparable peace and force. What difference is there between the human body and the body of a tree? In truth, there is none: the consciousness which animates them is identically the same.

Then the cherry-tree whispered in my ear: "It is in the cherry-blossom that lies the remedy for the disorders of the spring".

Akakura: July 13, 1917

One day I wrote:

"My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being...." Merely asleep? I cannot believe it. I think it is completely hushed, perhaps forever. From sleep one awakes, from this quietness there is no falling back. And since that day I have not observed any relapse. In place of something very intensely concentrated which for a long while was intermittently tumultuous, has come an immensity so vast and calm and untroubled, filling my being; or rather my being has melted into that; for how could that which is limitless be contained in a form?

And these great mountains with their serene contours which I see from my window, range after majestic range up to the very horizon, are in perfect harmony with the rhythm of this being, filled with an infinite peace. Lord, couldst Thou have taken possession of Thy kingdom? Or rather of this part of the kingdom, for the body is still obscure and ignorant, slow to respond, without plasticity. Will it be purified one day like the rest? And will Thy victory then be total? It matters little. This instrument is what Thou wantest it to be and its bliss is unalloyed.

From *Mother's Agenda* Sept. 15, 1962:

[Mother] " 'Prayers and Meditations' came to me, you know - it was dictated each time. I would write at the end of my concentration, and it didn't pass through the mind, it just came - and it obviously came from someone interested in beautiful form. I used to keep it under lock and key so nobody would see it. But when I came here Sri Aurobindo asked about it, so I showed him a few pages and then he wanted to see the rest. Otherwise I would have

always kept it locked away. I destroyed whatever was left - there were five thick volumes in which I had written every single day (there was some repetition, of course); the outcome of my concentrations. So I chose which parts would be published (Sri Aurobindo helped in the choice), copied them out, and then I cut the pages up and had the rest burned.

[Satprem] That's a shame!

[Mother] There are a few original fragments left from what was published - I distributed almost all of them; the ink has faded, it's practically white. I burned everything.

[Satprem] It's really a shame.

[Mother] It wasn't written for anyone and wasn't meant to be read. I showed it to Sri Aurobindo because he was speaking of certain things and I said, 'Ah, yes, that's the experience I had in' Then I showed him my notebook for that date (there was something written for each day).

Five thick notebooks, year after year.... Even here I kept on writing for a while. I wrote a lot in Japan. Anyway, everything of general interest was kept. But that's why there are gaps in the dates, otherwise it would be continuous - it was monumental, you know!

It's only here that people started wanting to keep and keep and keep. (Mother makes a gesture of throwing everything over her shoulder.) The world is moving fast, the world is moving fast, fast, fast - why keep anything?"

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Sleep

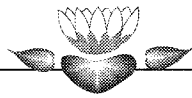
The Necessity of Sleep

The following excerpts are taken from the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL) and Collected Works of the Mother (CWM).

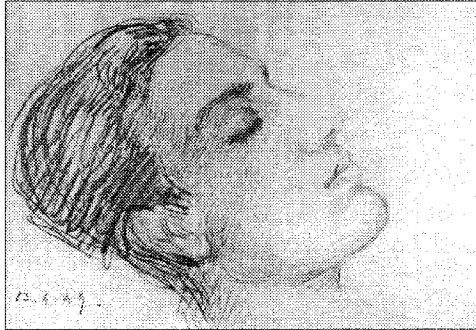
...Sleep is necessary for the body just as food is. Sufficient sleep must be taken, but no excessive sleep. What sufficient sleep is depends on the need of the body. (SABCL, vol. 24: p 1476)

It is a great mistake not to take sufficient sleep. Seven hours is the minimum needed. When one has a very strong nervous system one can reduce it to six, sometimes even five - but it is rare and ought not to be attempted without necessity. (SABCL, vol. 24: p 1477)

It is not a right method to try to keep awake at night; the suppression of the needed sleep makes the body tamasic and unfit for the necessary concentration during the waking hours. The right way is to transform the sleep and not to suppress it, especially to learn how to become more and more conscious in sleep itself. If that is done, sleep changes into an inner mode of consciousness in which the sadhana can continue as much as in the waking state, and at the same time



one is able to enter into other planes of consciousness than the physical and command an immense range of informative and utilisable experience. (SABCL, vol. 24: p 1479)



Pranab, by the Mother

What Happens During Sleep

According to a recent medical theory one passes in sleep through many phases until one arrives at a state in which there is absolute rest and silence - it lasts only for ten minutes, the rest of the time is taken up by traveling to that and traveling back again to the waking state. I suppose the ten minutes sleep can be called *susupti* in the Brahman or Brahmaloaka, the rest is *svapna* or passage through other worlds (planes or states of conscious existence). It is these ten minutes that restore the energies of the being, and without it sleep is not refreshing.

According to the Mother's experience and knowledge one passes from waking through a succession of states of sleep consciousness which are in fact an entry and passage into so many worlds and arrives at pure Sachchidananda state of complete rest, light and silence, - afterwards one retraces one's way till one reaches the waking physical state. It is this Sachchidananda period that gives sleep all its restorative value. These two accounts, the scientific and the occult-spiritual, are practically identical with each other. But the former is only a recent discovery of what the occult-spiritual knowledge knew long ago.

People's ideas of sound sleep are absolutely erroneous. What they call sound sleep is merely a plunge of the outer consciousness into a complete subconsciousness. They call that a dreamless sleep; but it is only a state in which the surface sleep consciousness which is a subtle prolongation of the outer still left active in sleep itself is unable to record the dreams and transmit them to the physical mind. As a matter of fact the whole of sleep is full of dreams. It is only during the brief time in which one is in Brahmaloaka that the dreams cease. (SABCL, vol: 24: p 1484)

How to Sleep

The rule should be to call the Mother before sleeping, to concentrate on her and try to feel the Mother's protection around and go with that into sleep. In the dream itself a habit of calling the Mother when in difficulty or peril should be formed; many sadhaks do it. Not to allow the invasion, any invasion of any power or being, whether in dream, meditation or otherwise - no force except the Divine Force, means to reject it, never to give assent, whether through attention or through weakness... (SABCL, vol. 24: p 1501)

If one is physically very tired, it is better not to go to sleep immediately, otherwise one falls into the inconscient. If one is very tired, one must stretch out on the bed, relax, loosen all the nerves one after the another until one becomes like a crumpled cloth in one's bed, as though one had neither bones nor muscles. When one has done that, the same thing must be done in the mind. Relax, do not concentrate on any idea or try to solve a problem or ruminate on impressions, sensations or emotions you had during the day. All that must be allowed to drop off quietly: one gives oneself up, one is indeed like a rag. When you have succeeded in doing this, there is always a little flame, there - that flame never goes out and you become conscious of it when you have managed this relaxation. And all of a sudden this little flame rises slowly into an aspiration for the divine life, the truth, the consciousness of the Divine, the union with the inner being, it goes higher and higher, it rises, rises, like that, very gently. Then everything gathers there, and if at that moment you fall asleep, you have the best sleep you could possibly have. I guarantee that if you do this carefully, you are sure to sleep, and also sure that instead of falling into a dark hole you will sleep in light, and when you get up in the morning you will be fresh, fit, content, happy and full of energy for the day. (CWM, vol. 04: pp 352-53)

Even for those who have never been in trance, it is good to repeat a mantra, a word, a prayer before going into sleep. But there must be a life in the words; I do not mean an intellectual significance, nothing of that kind, but a vibration. And its effect on the body is extraordinary: it begins to vibrate, vibrate, vibrate... and quietly you let yourself go, as though you wanted to go to sleep. The body vibrates more and more, more and more, more and more, and away you go. That is the cure for *tamas*.

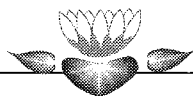
It is *tamas* which causes bad sleep. There are two kinds of bad sleep: the sleep that makes you heavy, dull as if you lost all the

effect of the effort you put in during the preceding day; and the sleep that exhausts you as if you had passed your time in fighting. I have noticed if you cut your sleep into slices (it is a habit one can form), the nights become better. That is to say, you must be able to come back to your normal consciousness and normal aspiration at fixed intervals - come back at the call of consciousness. But for that you must not use an alarm clock! When you are in trance, it is not good to be shaken out of it.

When you are about to go to sleep, you can make a formation; say: "I shall wake up at such an hour" (you do that very well when you are a child). For the first stretch of sleep count at least three hours; for the last, one hour is sufficient. But the first one must be three hours at the minimum. On the whole, you have to remain in bed at least seven hours; in six hours you do not have time to do much (naturally I am looking at it from the point of view of *sadhana*) to make the nights useful.

Two things you must eliminate: falling into the stupor of inconscience, with all the things of the subconscious and inconscient that rise up, invade you, enter you; and a vital and mental superactivity where you pass your time in fighting, literally, terrible battles. People come out of that state bruised, as if they had received blows. And they did receive them - it is not "as if"! And I see the only way out: TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF SLEEP. (CWM, vol. 15: pp 400-01)

Collected Works of the Mother Compilation by Arun Sundar



CENTER LISTINGS

California

Auroville International USA, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816. A nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation founded to support the Auroville project in India. Auroville is the first attempt anywhere to be a universal town where people of all countries can live together in progressive harmony, above creeds and nationalities. Contact Megan Thomas, (916) 452-4013.

California Institute of Integral Studies, 9 Peter Yorke Way, San Francisco CA 94109. An accredited graduate school offering M.A. and Ph.D. programs in philosophy, religion, psychology, counseling; also offering lectures, library, book sales, educational facilities. For information, call (415) 753-6100.

Cultural Integration Fellowship, 360 Cumberland St., San Francisco, CA 94114 and 2650 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94118. Draws inspiration from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as other great prophets of modern India. Offering lectures, residence facility, musical events, book sales. Contact Bina Chaudhuri, (415) 626-2442.

East-West Cultural Center, 12329 Marshall St., Culver City, CA 90230. Ideal of Human Unity study group, beginning Sanskrit, Synthesis of Yoga study group, Savitri study group, karma yoga, inquiry into collective yoga; meditation held after each study group. Classes in Indian music, vocal, tabla, and harmonium, chanting. Inquiry into the everyday aspects of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, special presentations, public addresses, movies, potluck supper, performing arts. Special programs held on first Saturday of each month. Phone: (310) 390-9083; e-mail: ewcc@earthlink.net

Sri Aurobindo Association, PO Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816-9237. Devoted to the realization of the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Facilitates visitors to the Ashram and Auroville; publishes *Collaboration*. Contact (209) 339-3710 Extension 6; e-mail: SAA@Collaboration.org.

Sri Aurobindo Center, (Formerly East Bay Center) 2288 Fulton St., Suite 309; Berkeley, CA 94704; USA. Features: Study Groups; Meditation room; Darshan and related events; Lectures; Library. Description: Devoted to the realization of the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Additional Information: Events: Every Sunday: 9:30 10:30 a.m., Study group; 10:45-11:15 a.m., Meditation. Mondays: 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. Meditation, reading and discussion (please contact Kenny@510-845-7960 - kennys@netcom.com). Darshan meditations and gatherings. Contact: Paul Molinari (510-235-6602)

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, 2621 W. Highway 12, Lodi, CA 95242. Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham provides an ashram-like atmosphere and residence for those wishing to dedicate themselves entirely to the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. In collective meditation, study groups, darshan meetings, and regular monthly retreats we explore ways to broaden participation and experience in the integral yoga of transformation. A karma-yoga/work-exchange program is also available. Meditation: 8:30 PM Sunday - Friday. Study Group: 8:00 PM Saturday. Collective Yoga Retreat: 2nd Saturday of the month. (See *Center to Center* for our next retreat.) Contact Dakshina at 209-339-1342 or E-mail: SASP@mindsync.com.

Colorado

Sri Aurobindo Circle of Boulder meets monthly for meditation and reading on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Contact Lynda Lester, (303) 543-9964.

Sri Aurobindo Learning Center at the Baca, Savitri House, P.O. Box 88, Crestone, CO 81131. Hosts conferences and events towards its purpose of becoming a collaborative center of research for a living embodiment of an actual human unity. Savitri House and the Savitri Solar Meditation Dome are the first structures in a proposed campus for a new education for a new world. Weekly meditation and readings. Contact Seyril Schochen, (719) 256-4917.

Florida

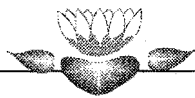
Integral Knowledge Study Center, 221 Clematis St., Pensacola, FL 32503. Dedicated to the elevation of human consciousness in the light of Sri Aurobindo. Offering Darshan gatherings, meditation, lectures, study groups, karma yoga, library, book sales, residence facilities, meditation hall. Publishes books and a quarterly newsletter. Contact Rand Hicks, (904) 433-3435.

Georgia

Aur-ientation Integral Healing Center, 1924 Cliff Valley Way, Suite 201, Atlanta, GA 30329. Hosts spontaneous Mother and Sri Aurobindo study groups. Offers one-on-one and telephone counseling based on Integral Psychology and Integral Yoga. Offers clairvoyant and cellular healing sessions. Contact Ariel Browne, Ph.D., DD., (404) 728-9807.

Massachusetts

Boston Study Group, 91 Kilmarnock St., Boston, MA 02215. Study group meeting Wednesdays at 7 p.m. Reading from Savitri, group meditation, unstructured discussion about yoga. Group on yoga in the local prison at their invitation. Contact Eugene Finn, (617) 262-6390.



New Hampshire

Merriam Hill Education Center (MHC), 148 Merriam Hill Road, Greenville, NH 03048-9729. A nonprofit organization established for the study of wisdom and community, providing opportunities for adults to increase their sense of interconnectedness with others and the environment. Located on 54 acres in the Monadnock region of New Hampshire, MHC offers comfortable accommodations in a renovated farmhouse and barn surrounded by woods. For information, call (603) 878-1818.

New York

Auroville Information Office, P.O. Box 676, Woodstock, NY 12498. East Coast branch of AVI-USA located at *Pondicherry*, a gift shop specializing in Auroville handicrafts. Sponsors talks and fundraising events. Contact Julian Lines, (914) 679-2926; e-mail: jhl@aol.com. **Matagiri**, 1218 Wittenberg Rd., Mt. Tremper, NY 12457. Maintains a library of the complete works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, with audiotapes and videotapes, photographs, and other materials. Offering Darshan observances, book shop, special programs. Weekly evening meditation. For information, call (914) 679-8322.

New York Study Circle of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 124 W. 60th St., New York, NY 10023. Monthly gatherings in Manhattan include a reading, study of a selected work, and meditation. Contact Miriam Belov, (212) 965-5683.

South Carolina

Sri Aurobindo Center Southeast, Inc., P.O. Box 8375, Greenville, SC 29604. Founded to provide an opportunity to learn about and experience Sri Aurobindo and Mother's grace and power. Offering meditation, Darshan gatherings, study group, residence facilities, book sales, newsletter. Contact R.P. Rama, (864) 232-9944; fax: (864) 232-3627.

Washington

Lotus Center, 2020 Roosevelt Ave., Enumclaw WA 98022. Synthesis of Yoga study group (Enumclaw) Sunday, 7-8:30 p.m. Synthesis of Yoga study group (Seattle), Tuesday, 7-8:30 p.m. Purpose is to further the development of yoga in all members and nourish the spiritual aspiration of visitors. Offering Darshan meetings, meditation and library room, lectures, library, book sales, workshops, retreats, musical and cultural events. Contact Ron Jorgenson, (206) 825-3413.

Wisconsin

Wilmot Center/Institute for Wholistic Education, 33719 116th St., Twin Lakes, WI 53181. Purpose of center is study and implementation of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. The nonprofit institute focuses on Vedic knowledge of all types, including Ayurveda. Offering Darshan services, meditation, extensive library, book and other sales, educational programs, meditation hall. Contact Santosh Krinsky, (414) 877-9396; e-mail: santoshk@msn.com.

Canada

Auroville Liaison Office, P.O. Box 8010, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V8W 3R7. Publishes the electronic newsletter "Attempt" to facilitate the building of Auroville and maintains the "Auroville-USA" online interactive mailing list. Contact Auro and Fidelite Arindam, (250)380-7513; e-mail: avliaison@auroville.org.

Online discussion groups

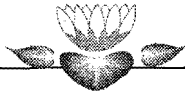
Auroconf is an electronic-mail group devoted to news and discussion of matters related to Auroville, the Ashram, and the Integral Yoga. **Savitri** and **Synthesis** are devoted to reading and studying Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, respectively. To join, send e-mail to auroconf-request@compatible.com, savitri-request@compatible.com, or synthesis-request@compatible.com.

Web sites

- <http://www.miraura.org>
(Miraura, Integral Yoga Website)
- <http://www.miraura.org/sabda> (Sri Aurobindo Book Distribution Agency -SABDA)
- <http://www.auroville-india.org/toc.htm> (Auroville, India)
- <http://www.sirius.com/~aceebro>
(Aurolink; information about Auroville)
- <http://www.auroville.org/~auro/home.htm>
(Auroville Liaison Office)
- <http://www.webcom.com/haridas/>
(Cultural Integration Fellowship)
- <http://www.earthlink.net/~ewcc> (East-West Cultural Center)
- <http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~pravir/dbdesc.html>
(Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch)



Diagram by the Mother used to explain to a child the meaning of Yoga. Man is at the bottom, the Divine at the top. The wavy line is the path of the ordinary life, the straight line of Yoga.



APROPOS

So what is this mind, what are these atoms with consciousness?
Last week's potatoes! — Richard Feynman

What happened had to have happened. But it could have been
much better. — Sri Aurobindo

I think that almost every word we speak to anyone is a way of
trying to explain to them who we are, and almost always we fail,
and that is why I would rather not try. It is a great wonder to be able
to speak a single word, your name, and be believed. — Theodore
Sturgeon

The days are gone when you could be only an intellectual, you
could be only a soldier or a hero, you could be only a merchant or
only a worker... to seek to perfect myself only in that line in which
I am specially gifted is called specialisation. It is out of tune, out
of temper with the times. — M.P. Pandit, 1974

The land is like poetry: it is inexplicably coherent, it is
transcendent of its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a
consideration of human life. — Barry Lopez

Nothing has ever so moved me as this realisation that a man
could so utterly forget time and place and the world. In that hour
I grasped the secret of all art and of all earthly achievement—
concentration, the rallying of all one's forces for accomplishment
of one's task, large or small; capacity to direct one's will, so often
dissipated and scattered, upon one thing. — Stefan Zweig, after
visiting Rodin

Most of us are only intermittently aware, even in youth, and
the occasions on which adults see and feel and hear with every

sense alert become rarer and rarer with the passage of years.

— Dorothea Brande

It is a splendid thing to live in the environment of great
students... they stir the waters. — Robert Henri

How glorious a greeting the sun gives the mountains! To
behold this alone is worth the pain of any excursion a thousand
times over. The highest peaks burned like islands in a sea of liquid
shade. Then the lower peaks and spines caught the glow, and long
lances of light, streaming through many a notch and pass, fell
thick on the frozen meadows. — John Muir

There are moments when something new has entered into us,
a something unknown; our feelings grow mute in shy perplexity,
everything in us withdraws, a stillness comes, and the new, which
no one knows, stands in the midst of it and is silent. — Rainer
Maria Rilke

Of the gladdest moments in human life, methinks, is the
departure upon a distant journey into unknown lands. Shaking off
with one mighty effort the fetters of Habit, the leaden weight of
Routine, the cloak of many Cares and the slavery of Home, one
feels once more happy. The blood flows with the fast circulation
of childhood... A journey, in fact, appeals to Imagination, to
Memory, to Hope, -the three sister graces of our moral being.
— Sir Richard Francis Burton, 1856

This is not a yoga in which abnormality of any kind, even if
it be an exalted abnormality, can be admitted as a way to self-
fulfillment, or spiritual realisation...the experiencing consciousness
must preserve a calm balance, an unflinching clarity and order in its
observation, a sort of sublimated commonsense, an unflinching
power of self-criticism, right discrimination, coordination and
firm vision of things; a sane grasp on facts and a high spiritualized
positivism must always be there. — Sri Aurobindo

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