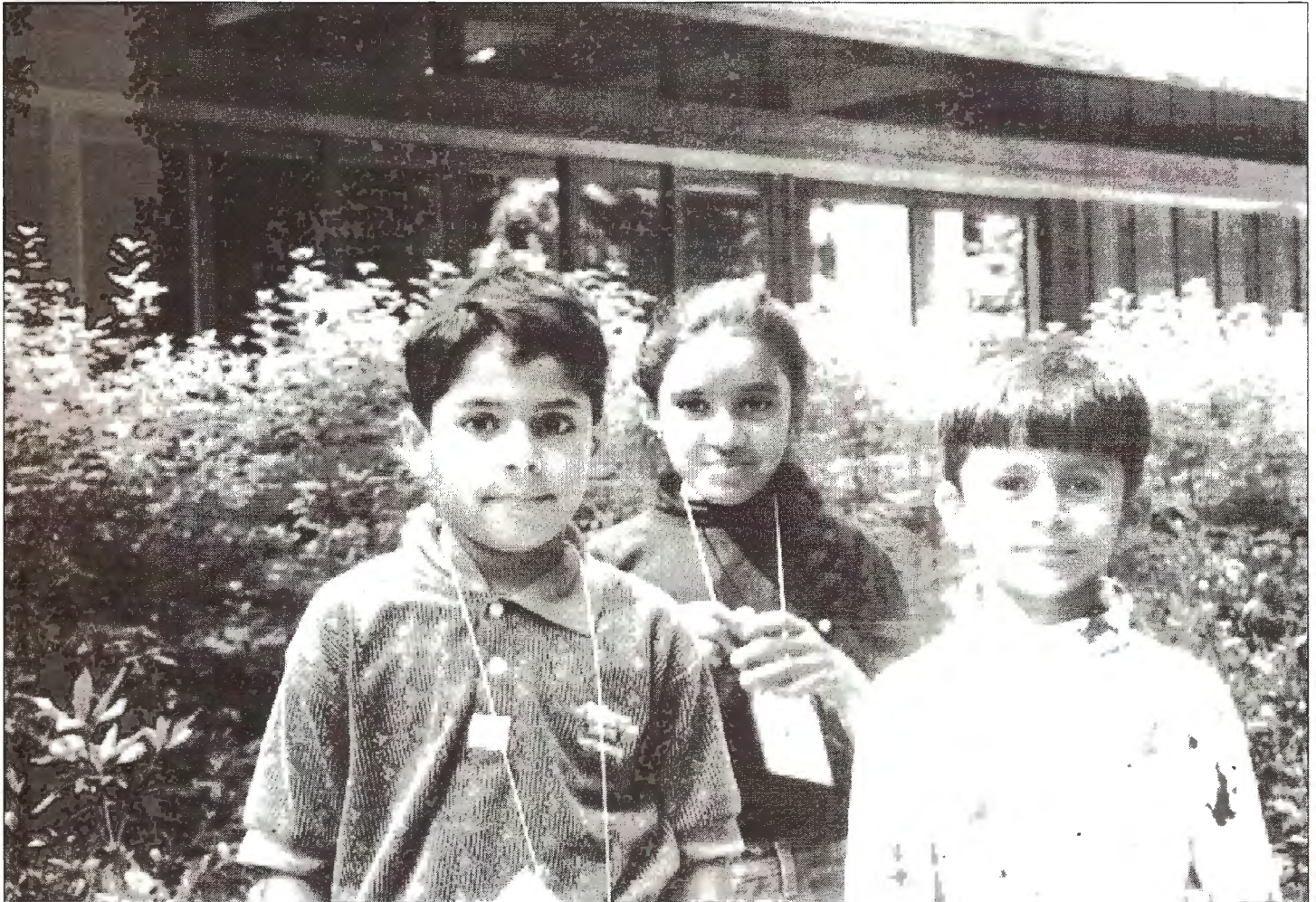


Collaboration

Fall 1998

Vol. 24, No. 3



Accepting difficulties with gusto • AUM 98 • Auroville's Village Action The transitional being • The ideal collectivity • Beyond the magic

Consciousness is made up of two elements, awareness of self and things and forces and conscious-power. Awareness is the first thing necessary, you have to be aware of things in the right consciousness, in the right way, seeing them in their truth; but awareness by itself is not enough. There must be a Will and a Force that make the consciousness effective. Somebody may have the full consciousness of what has to be changed, what has to go and what has to come in its place, but may be helpless to make the change. Another may have the will-force, but for want of a right awareness may be unable to apply it in the right way at the right place.

The advantage of being in the true consciousness is that you have the right awareness and its will being in harmony with the Mother's will, you can call in the Mother's Force to make the change. Those who live in the mind and the vital are not well able to do this; they are obliged to use mostly their personal effort and as the awareness and will and force of the mind and vital are divided and imperfect, the work done is imperfect and not definitive. It is only in the supermind that Awareness, Will, Force are always one movement and automatically effective.

—Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, p. 238

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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 artists in this issue: *Marta Belen* is a musician and artist living in Sacramento, California. *Lynda Lester*, Editor-in-Chief of *Collaboration*, lives in Boulder, Colorado, and works for the National Center for Atmospheric Research. *Vishnu Eschner* lives in Lodi, California.

About the cover: Rohit Saklecha, Juhi Babu, and Nikhil Rashinkar, were three of the many children participating in AUM '98. (Photo: Marta Belen.)



BEGINNINGS

Accepting difficulties with gusto

This selection is taken from Mother's Collected Works, Vol. 3 (1930-31).

Let endurance be your watchword: teach the life force in you—your vital being—not to complain but to put up with all the conditions necessary for great achievement. The body is a very enduring servant, it bears the stress of circumstance tamely like a beast of burden. It is the vital being that is always grumbling and uneasy. The slavery and torture to which it subjects the physical is almost incalculable. How it twists and deforms the poor body to its own fads and fancies, irrationally demanding that everything should be shaped according to its own whimsicality!

But the very essence of endurance is that the vital should learn to give up its capricious likes and dislikes and preserve an equanimity in the midst of the most trying conditions. When you are treated roughly by somebody or you lack something which would relieve your discomfort, you must keep up cheerfully instead of letting yourself be disturbed. Let nothing ruffle you the least bit, and whenever the vital tends to air its petty grievances with pompous exaggeration just stop to consider how very happy you are, compared to so many in this world. Reflect for a moment what the soldiers who fought in the last war had to go through. If you had to bear such hardships you would realise the utter silliness of your dissatisfactions. And yet I do not wish you to court difficulties—what I want is simply that you should learn to endure the little insignificant troubles of your life.

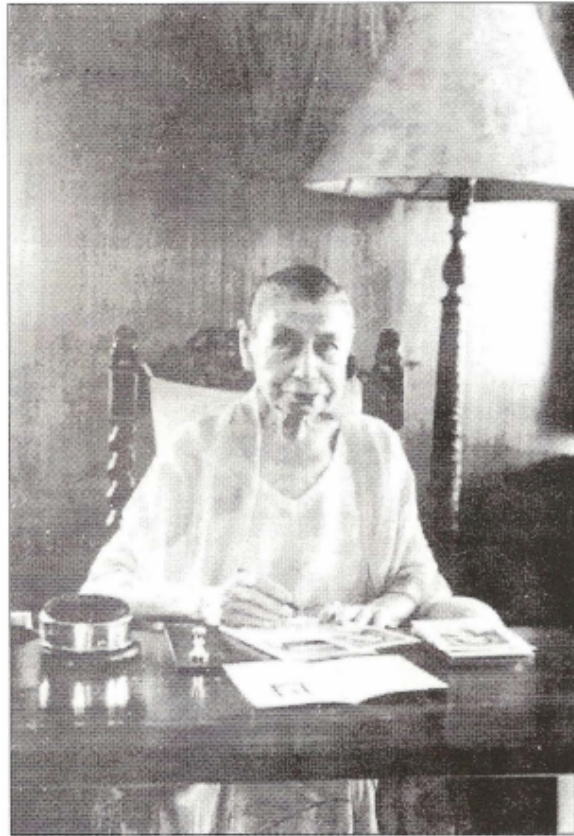
Nothing great is ever accomplished without endurance. If you study the lives of great men you will see how they set themselves like flint against the weaknesses of the vital. Even today, the true meaning of our civilisation is the mastery of the physical through endurance in the vital. The spirit of sport and of adventure and the dauntless facing of the odds which is evident in all fields of life are part of this ideal of endurance. In science itself,

progress depends on the countless difficult tests and trials which precede achievement. Surely, with such momentous work as we in hand in our Ashram, we have not any less need of endurance. What you must do is to give your vital a good beating as soon as it protests; for, when the physical is concerned, there is reason to be considerate and to take precautions, but with the vital the only method is a sound “kicking.” Kick your vital the moment it complains, because there is no other way of getting out of the petty consciousness which attaches so much importance to creature comforts and social amenities instead of asking for the Light and the Truth.

One of the commonest demands of the vital is for praise. It

hates to be criticised and treated as if it were of little importance. But it must be always prepared for rebuffs and stand them with absolute calm; nor must it pay attention to compliments, forgetting that each movement of self-satisfaction is an offering at the altar of the lords of falsehood. The beings of the subtle world of the life-force, with which our vital is connected, live and flourish on the worship of their devotees, and that is why they are always inspiring new cults and religions so that their feasts of worship and adulation may never come to an end.

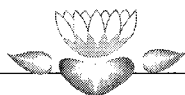
So also your own vital being and the vital forces behind it thrive—that is to say, fatten their ignorance—by absorbing the flatteries given by others. But you must remember that the compliments paid by creatures on the same level of ignorance as oneself are really worth nothing, they are just as worthless as the criticisms leveled at one. No matter from what pretentious source they derive, they are



The Mother in her room. Photo: Sri Aurobindo Ashram

futile and empty.

Unfortunately, however, the vital craves even for the most rotten food and is so greedy that it will accept praise from even the very embodiments of incompetence. I am reminded of the annual opening of the Arts Exhibition in Paris, when the President of the Republic inspects the pictures, eloquently discovering that one is a landscape and another a portrait, and making platitudinous comments with the air of a most intimate soul-searching knowledge of painting. The painters know very well how inept the remarks are and yet miss no chance of quoting the testimony of the President to their genius. For such indeed is the vital in mankind, ravenously fame-hungry.



What, however, is of genuine worth is the opinion of the Truth. When there is somebody who is in contact with the Divine Truth and expresses it, then the opinions given out are no mere compliments or criticisms but what the Divine thinks of you, the value it sets on your qualities, its unerring stamp on your efforts. It must be your desire to hold nothing in esteem except the word of the Truth; and in order thus to raise your standard you must keep Agni, the soul's flame of transformation, burning in you. It is noteworthy how, when Agni flares up, you immediately develop a loathing for the cheap praise which formerly used to gratify you so much, and understand clearly that your love of praise was a low movement of the untransformed nature. Agni makes you see what a vast vista of possible improvement stretches in front of you, by filling you with a keen sense of your present insufficiency. The encomium lavished on you by others so disgusts you that you feel almost bitter towards those whom you would have once considered your friends; whereas all criticism comes as a welcome fuel to your humble aspiration towards the Truth. No longer do you feel depressed or slighted by the hostility of others. For, at least, you are able to ignore it with the greatest ease; at the most, you appreciate it as one more testimony to your present unregenerate state, inciting you to surpass yourself by surrendering to the Divine.

Another remarkable sign of the conversion of your vital, owing to Agni's influence, is that you face your difficulties and obstacles with a smile. You do not sit any more in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting over your mistakes and feeling utterly crestfallen because you are not at the moment quite up to the mark. You simply chase away depression with a smile. A hundred mistakes do not matter to you: with a smile you recognise that you have erred and with a smile you resolve not to repeat the folly in the future. All depression and gloom is created by the hostile forces who are never so pleased as when throwing on you a melancholy mood. Humility is indeed one thing and depression quite another, the former a divine movement and the latter a very crude expression of the dark forces. Therefore, face your troubles joyously, oppose with invariable cheerfulness the obstacles that beset the road to transformation. The best means of routing the enemy is to laugh in his face! You may grapple and tussle for days and he may still show an undiminished vigour; but just once laugh at him and lo! he takes to his heels. A laugh of self-confidence and of faith in the Divine is the most shattering strength possible—it disrupts the enemy's front, spreads havoc in his ranks and carries you triumphantly onwards.

The converted vital feels also a joy in the process of realisation. All the difficulties implied in that process it accepts with gusto, it never feels happier than when the Truth is shown it and the play of falsehood in its lower nature laid bare. It does not do the Yoga as if carrying a burden on its back but as if it were a very pleasurable occupation. It is willing to endure the utmost with a smile if it is a condition of the transformation. Neither complaining nor grumbling, it endures happily because it is for the sake of

the Divine that it does so. It has the unshakable conviction that the victory will be won. Never for an instant does it vacillate in its belief that the mighty work of Change taken up by Sri Aurobindo is going to culminate in success. For that indeed is a fact; there is no shadow of doubt as to the issue of work we have in hand. It is no mere experiment but an inevitable manifestation of the Supramental. The converted vital has a prescience of the victory, keeps up a will towards progress which never turns its back, feels full of the energy which is born of its certitude about the triumph of the Divine whom it is aware of always in itself as doing whatsoever is necessary and infusing in it the unfaltering power to resist and finally conquer its enemies. Why should it despair or complain? The transformation is going to be: nothing will ever stop it, nothing will frustrate the decree of the Omnipotent.

Cast away, therefore, all diffidence and weakness, and resolve to endure bravely awhile before the great day arrives when the long battle turns into an everlasting victory.



NEW LETTERS ON YOGA

Dealing with death and grief and animal feelings

The death of a loved one, the loss of a beloved pet, and a funeral prompted the following thoughtful exchange of letters from members of the auroconf email discussion group about the significance of death and grief.

Mostly I am reluctant to speak of personal experience since it is so easy to misinterpret the intention; however, I believe the following might be interesting since it deals with universal grief.

Last Sunday I attended a cremation. The person who had died I had never met, but due to etiquette I was expected to be present at the funeral ceremony. Because I did not know the deceased person, I had no feelings of sorrow or sadness, only sympathy, making it possible for me to be the observer. At one point I began to feel uneasy, as if I felt a great grief, but since this could not have come from myself, I understood that I was experiencing the atmosphere.

I guess there were about 100 people present. Here in Buddhist Thailand it is custom that each attendant takes a flower (made of woodshavings, and quite artistic) and places it under the coffin to symbolically light the cremation fire. After this, the coffin goes into the cremation chamber. When people were placing the wooden flowers under the coffin, the atmosphere became quite tense, of deep sorrow. It really affected my emotional being, as if



I myself was sad. Nevertheless, I could remain observant of what was happening outside and inside me.

After the cremation I walked out of the temple grounds alone, and I began experiencing the gravest form of sorrow I had ever had in my life. It was so strong that it almost convinced me that the sadness belonged to me. The sadness grew so strong and to such an extent that it became palpable, like a strong force of gravity pulling down in my heart center—then it dawned on me that this grief is what people normally experience when they believe that life ends with death, that everything is lost at death. But then my psychic indicated that this is not the truth: life goes on, and only physical life ends. At this point the revelation was so genuine that I experienced the eternal consciousness of the psychic. I not only felt deeply grateful and relieved, but I also could smile about this grief, which is actually part of our human ignorance and falsehood. At the same time I realized how normal it is to be born and to die again, and that we as humanity should become more mature about dealing with death and funerals.

This has been quite a liberating experience for me, particularly when I think how reluctant I was to go to a funeral of someone I did not know—then this situation was used to teach me the truth of sorrow and death. It also made me realize that even when people believe in rebirth or heaven, it is for most of them only belief—but they are not really sure of what they believe, hence the fear of death and the sadness of losing everything.

—August Timmermans, Bangkok, Thailand

Death is always such a difficult thing to face, even if we are doing the yoga. This past summer, when I was living in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I had to face death as a person close to me died. I was afraid of looking at the body because the person had suffered a lot; but to my surprise, the body, all golden, reflected only peace. We could feel the presence of Mother and Sri Aurobindo very much. I really appreciate this topic and I thank August for sharing this experience with us. I am also reluctant at sharing personal experiences with a large group, even you all.

When I was at the Samadhi this summer, I had a special thought for all of you that I offered to the Divine. As for the cat Durga, I am sending her special love and attention. My cat Kiki died 10 years ago and she is still in my heart for ever. She was very conscious and I gave her to the Mother when she died, at an old age.

—Catherine Blackburn, Ontario, Canada

I just want to write the following lines, while thinking of Don and Christine, who have just lived through the departure of their cats. Sri Aurobindo (in talking about about *ahimsa*) says that animals feel if a person is really nonviolent or not and they approach a person accordingly. (Talk on February 25, 1940)

As their cats lived a very long time with them, I think they have a sort of consolation by thinking that their cats felt they were profoundly nonviolent and full of love and stayed with them because of it.

By the way, that remark of Sri Aurobindo reminds me of the day, many years ago, when I was walking alone in the snow in the French Alps. It was the very early morning and suddenly I saw in front of me . . . a lonely wolf ! I stopped my walk and waited. He stopped also. We were both amazed. We gazed at each other for five minutes, I tried to speak to him mentally. I don't know if he understood what I was saying to him, but after five minutes he turned back and went away slowly, very calm, turning his head from time to time in my direction.

In those days it was very unusual to meet a wolf in France. Nobody believed me when I told this story and everybody laughed at me. Only an old man in the village who also sometimes went for lonely walks in the mountain did not mock me. Recently, the newspapers have been full of stories of wolves and they said that the first ones had been seen in France in 1992. But I had met one of them a few years before.

I will never forget those five minutes alone with him. It was like a reunion of two old friends.

— Bernard Sage, bernard_sage@compuserve.com

Thanks to Bernard for his story of the encounter with a wolf.

Over the years I've met many wild animals, including a few bears, a skunk at close range, some beavers, various squirrels and other little fellows, and lots of deer. Most of them respond as Bernard has described, if one is calm. It is truly a wondrous thing to be able to spend time with another species, no matter how short, to bridge in some small measure that gap in consciousness between the human and another being. It lifts you out of the normal human mentality. I find also that strengthening that awareness of animals helps in moving toward an awareness of the Divine in all things—inanimate as well as animate.

—David Hutchinson, dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu

Kudos

I would like to congratulate you and your staff as well as the contributors to the last issue of *Collaboration* for your excellent work. It was informational, as always, and also tremendously inspirational to this reader.

Keep up the good work!

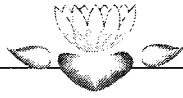
—Marjorie Kass, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Errata

I am enjoying reading the fall issue of *Collaboration*, (Vol. 24, No. 2) during my traveling to work in the morning. On page 4: is it really me who is mentioned there? (I live in Toronto, Canada, not California . . . unfortunately.)

—Catherine Blackburn, Ontario, Canada





CURRENT AFFAIRS

Money-Power Project starts new online forums

by Chandresh Patel

Center for Integral Education update

Prapanna Smith

The Center for Integral Education (CIE), incorporated as a non-profit California corporation in April 1998, is currently making preparations to inaugurate an integral school in September of 2000. We envision opening the school with two teachers and 24 children in each of four classes, from kindergarten to third grade.

The educational program at the CIE will offer: small class sizes; dedicated teachers who share a common vision; multilingual teaching in English, French, and Spanish; a highly disciplined physical education program; a strong focus on the synthesis and harmonization of the ancient aim of self-knowledge with the modern aim of world knowledge; a free progress system for the students depending on their interests and abilities; a well-balanced curriculum in the humanities, the arts, and the sciences; a beautiful and engaging learning environment; and a vibrant spiritual atmosphere.

An important aspect of the immediate work for the CIE involves the creation and implementation of a fundraising program to generate startup funds for the school. Our goal is to raise \$500,000 by the end of March 2000. Operating expenses for the CIE will come from student tuition. However, tuition will not cover the initial startup expenses that will be needed to pay for furnishings and equipment, library, playground equipment, educational materials, office equipment, computers, and lease of the school site. Help is especially needed during this crucial beginning phase when first impressions count for so much.

Sponsorship of the CIE will entitle donors to receive a twice-yearly bulletin and progress report, as well as invitations to school events and functions. All donations are tax deductible. Financial support in any amount will be very much appreciated.

Please make checks payable to the Center for Integral Education and send to: The Center for Integral Education, 95 S. Market St. #530, San Jose, CA 95113

For more information, please visit the CIE website at <http://www.integraleducation.org>.

Prapanna Smith is currently living in Pondicherry and assisting at the Sri Aurobindo Center of Integral Education. He can be contacted at prapanna@webstudio6.com.



The Money-Power Project is a collective attempt to understand the universal force known commonly as money, with the goal of subsequently working with this force within a collective. The project recently established two online forums to discuss monetary issues via email. Both forums are controlled. This means that a person must send an email to subscribe and, only subscribers can post messages.

A forum for general discussion

In the first forum, m-pp@collaboration.org, inquiry centers around the question, "How can we work within a collective setting to be the instrument for winning back the money-power for the Divine?" Participants seek to understand the money force in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's explanations, consider what it means to be a true custodian of this aspect of the Mother's energy, and learn to work positively with this force.

To Subscribe to this forum send an email to cpatel@caesium.com. In the body of your message type *subscribe m-pp*.

Once subscribed, send your postings to m-pp@collaboration.org.

A forum for personal sharing

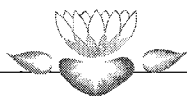
The second forum is more restricted. In order to respect privacy, anyone joining is requested not to forward or cross-post from this list to any other forum, or forward email without the prior approval of the author. It is a very personal and closed discussion group.

The group on money@collaboration.org, is a smaller subset of the group on the m-pp list.

The requirement to join is a short introductory biography describing how you were raised in regard to money as well as your present attitude toward money. Everyone who joins the forum reads these personal background essays as an initiation exercise. This helps give each one a broad perspective on the many ways people have come to feel the way they do about money; it builds tolerance and understanding.

In this forum, we discuss in the first-person singular, and attempt to share how we are proceeding in becoming more conscious about ourselves vis-à-vis money, with reflections about how we're transforming our understanding. We hope that out of this exercise will come a new way of working with money—which we expect will be reflected in the discussions, plans, and projects of the Money Power Project.

If you wish to participate in this forum, send email to cpatel@caesium.com. In the body of the message type *subscribe money*. Once subscribed, send your postings to money@collaboration.org.



News

A practical wish from Mahasaraswati

by Olivier

When visiting the western world this summer, after some years in Auroville, I was struck by the amazing abundance of wealth in the houses of the friends I'm visiting. Especially in the form of unused or discarded equipment, appliances, clothes, gadgets of all sorts in good condition which have been replaced by newer more sophisticated ones. All this wealth is often left lying in store rooms, cupboards, basements, forgotten and unused.

It is probably because I'm taking care of one of the free stores in Auroville that I wish that this unutilized stuff could be used by the Aurovilians who need them. Hence, the idea for this letter.

I imagine that among you, Aurovilians living abroad, friends of Auroville and potential visitors, you may also have in your house or in the houses of friends and relatives such a dormant unutilized wealth. This is an appeal to you for consideration: if when you come to visit Auroville—and you still have some room in your suitcases—you would take the extra little effort to bring as an offering whatever you can. The Mahasaraswati Free Store is located near the Auroville state bank in Kuilyapalayam and redistributes all kinds of odds and ends, gadgets and toys; also electronic equipment, home appliances, kitchen ware and what-nots.

Contact the Mahasaraswati Freestore; Olivier; tel: 62212 or Marie Angele at the Free Store for clothing in Auroville's Bharat Nivas.

New center opens in Puget Sound area

A new center, Sri Aurobindo Saranam, was opened in North Bend, Washington on September 27. Sri Aurobindo Saranam hosts a monthly retreat dedicated to the Integral Yoga on the second Sunday of each month yoga. Activities include bhajans; meditation; reading of the works of Mother and Sri Aurobindo; rehearsing (and perhaps performing) plays written by Mother, Sri Aurobindo, and their disciples; potlucks; and opportunities for individual and group participation in some of the numerous projects of the Sri Aurobindo Association, Auroville, and Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Initial projects will involve collaborating with Village Action Project in Auroville and The Sri Aurobindo Center for Advanced Research in the Ashram, as well as collaborating with Auromere to distribute books to Washington bookstores and spiritual centers. In the future, the center plans to host retreats with visitors from other centers, Auroville, and the Ashram.

Sunday retreats for the next six months will be on January 10, February 14, March 14, April 11, May 9, and June 13. Please join us!

For more information contact Aurela Sequoia at (425) 888-2683 or asequoia@hotmail.com.

Synthesis in Sacramento

A new study group was formed in Sacramento in October. The group meets every Tuesday from 7-9 pm, at David Hutchinson's house to study *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Each week a different person takes responsibility for the chapter, with one goal being is to give considerable freedom in the way the chapter is covered and thereby encourage innovation. Each meeting begins and ends with a meditation.

For more information, please send email to dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu.

SAA to help collect funds for work

Shyam Kumari, a longtime sadhika of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and author, is presently collecting funds in order to buy a flat in Pondicherry to house an office and storage space for her work. Currently, she is working from a small house, but now finds she needs more work space, the help of a secretary, and additional space to store twenty unpublished manuscripts.

A flat has been located, costing \$30,000.00. Shyam Kumari is most grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Association for calling for help with the funding for this project. The SAA is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation to which you may donate for purposes of supporting this project.

The flat and all of her books and their earnings will go to a public charitable trust and they are proposing to distribute free—or at subsidized rates—three children's books of English rhymes to the poor students of 50 rural schools of Pondicherry.

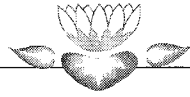
Shyam Kumari is the author and compiler of a number of books including two series: *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo* and *The Mother and Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*. Her newest book is *Musings on the Mother's Prayers and Meditations*.

Book proposed

The Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA) is putting together a book with the tentative title *Experience and Practice in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga*. The book will contain personal essays about Integral Yoga under various circumstances, showing the many forms it is taking at the turn of the millenium.

The book will highlight the multifaceted nature of the yoga in its experiential and practical aspects, and show how this path is similar to and different from other spiritual paths.

Chapters may include first person accounts of yoga in the mind, vital, and physical; bringing forth the psychic being; explorations of inner and higher consciousness; working toward self-perfection and the liberation from ego; and surrendering to the Divine.



SAA is seeking disciples of Mother and Sri Aurobindo who are good writers and have experiences in the yoga they are willing to share. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact Lynda Lester (email: lester@ucar.edu; phone: 303-497-1285).

Opportunity for advancement

Wanted: One, two, or more children of the Mother with high-level mental and interpersonal skills (editing, correspondence with multiple speakers about drafts/revisions, writing biographical introductions, formatting) to create proceedings from transcripts of the AUM 98 conference for final presentation in hardcopy and the web. Must be self-directed and skilled; willing to work for no money in order to provide this important service to the Sri Aurobindo worldwide community. Reward: possible acceleration of global and personal transformation.

Contact the Sri Aurobindo Association (email: saa@collaboration.org, phone: 916-452-4380).



RESOURCES

Sri Aurobindo Centers and Study Groups

California

- **Auroville International USA**, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816. Contact Megan Thomas, 916-452-4013.
- **California Institute of Integral Studies**, 9 Peter Yorke Way, San Francisco CA 94109. Call 415-753-6100.
- **Cultural Integration Fellowship**, 360 Cumberland St., San Francisco, CA 94114 and 2650 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94118. Contact Bina Chaudhuri, 415-626-2442.
- **East-West Cultural Center**, 12329 Marshall St., Culver City, CA 90230. Call 310-390-9083; or send email to ewcc@earthlink.net.
- **Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham**, 2621 W. Highway 12, Lodi, CA 95242. Contact Dakshina at 209-339-1342 or send email to SASP@lodinet.com.

- **Sri Aurobindo Study Circle**, 45990 Tissiak, Fremont, CA 94539. Contact Bhavi Saklecha, 510-770-1111, or send email to bhavis@ix.netcom.com.

Colorado

- **Sri Aurobindo Circle of Boulder**. Contact Lynda Lester, 303-543-9964, or send email to lester@ucar.edu.
- **Sri Aurobindo Learning Center at the Baca, Savitri House**, P.O. Box 88, Crestone, CO 81131. Contact Seyril Schochen, 719-256-4917.

Florida

- **Integral Knowledge Study Center**, 221 Clematis St., Pensacola, FL 32503. Contact Rand Hicks, 904-433-3435.

Georgia

- **Aur-ientation Integral Healing Center**, 1924 Cliff Valley Way, Suite 201, Atlanta, GA 30329. Contact Ariel Browne, 404-728-9807.

Massachusetts

- **Boston Study Group**, 91 Kilmarnock St., Boston, MA 02215. Call 617-262-6390.

New York

- **Auroville Information Office**, P.O. Box 676, Woodstock, NY 12498. Contact Julian Lines, 914-679-2926, or send email to jhl@aol.com.
- **Matagiri**, 1218 Wittenberg Rd., Mt. Tremper, NY 12457. Call 914-679-8322 before 5 pm EST.
- **New York Study Circle of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**, 124 W. 60th St., New York, NY 10023. Contact Miriam Belov, 212-965-5683.

South Carolina

- **Sri Aurobindo Center Southeast, Inc.**, P.O. Box 8375, Greenville, SC 29604. Contact R.P. Rama, 864-232-9944; fax 864-232-3627.

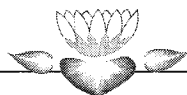
Washington

- **Lotus Center**, 2020 Roosevelt Ave., Enumclaw, WA 98022. Contact Ron Jorgenson, 206-825-3413.
- **Sri Aurobindo Saranam**, North Bend, WA. Contact Aurela Sequoia, 425-888-2683; asequoia@hotmail.com.

Wisconsin

- **Wilmot Center/Institute for Wholistic Education**, 33719 116th St., Twin Lakes, WI 53181. Contact Santosh Krinsky, 414-877-9396, or send email to santoshk@msn.com.





SRI AUROBINDO ASSOCIATION YEARLY REPORT*

(Jan 1 — Dec. 20, 1998)

RECEIPTS **\$63,212.23**

Donations **\$33,243.99**

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| Sri Aurobindo Assn. | \$ 2,876.10 |
| Sri Aurobindo Ashram | \$ 3,511.17 |
| Auroville | \$ 12,380.08 |
| Matrimandir | \$ 697.50 |
| Sri Aurobindo Centers | \$2714.15 |
| Money Power Project | \$ 10,534.99 |
| Special Projects | \$ 530.00 |

AUM 98 **\$26,078.24**

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Registrations | \$ 20,470.00 |
| Virtual Parent Fund | \$ 555.00 |
| Travel Fund | \$ 1,530.00 |
| Scholarships Fund | \$ 3,000.00 |
| Miscellaneous Donations | \$ 523.24 |

Collaboration **\$ 3,890.00**

EXPENSES **\$62,367.45**

Donations **\$20,137.76**

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| Sri Aurobindo Ashram | \$ 4,206.48 |
| Auroville | \$ 12,245.10 |
| Matrimandir | \$ 458.18 |
| Sri Aurobindo Centers | \$ 2,500.00 |
| Special Projects | \$ 728.00 |

AUM 98 **\$28,370.60**

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Site rental | \$ 17,368.57 |
| Speaker travel | \$ 8,159.30 |
| Other | \$ 2,842.73 |

Collaboration **\$ 2,182.30**

Sri Aurobindo Association **\$ 1,141.80**

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| Box rental, postage & delivery | \$996.30 |
| Office supplies | \$111.45 |
| Telephone | \$136.48 |
| Travel | \$150.00 |
| Miscellaneous printing | \$28.22 |
| Accounting & filing fees | \$325.00 |
| Bank charges (wires to India) | \$142.35 |

Fidelity Fund (Money Power Project) **\$10,534.99**

Excess of Receipts over Expenses **(844.78)**

*Unaudited Draft



THE POETRY ROOM

Pioneers

Revelation

Someone leaping from the rocks
Past me ran with wind-blown locks
Like a startled bright surmise
Visible to mortal eyes,
Just a cheek of frightened rose
That with sudden beauty glows,
Just a footstep like the wind
And a hurried glance behind,
And then nothing —as a thought
Escapes the mind ere it is caught.
Someone of the heavenly rout
From behind the veil ran out.

—Sri Aurobindo

I begin to understand. It is not saints,
Illuminates or mystics that you ask.
You ask for men, men equal to the task
of transformation. For that the one who paints
A misty inward paradise, but faints
Before the mirror and prefers the mask,
Is worthless, as are those whose spirits bask
In rays of a true sun no darkness taints.

For those who know God's bliss can rest content.
But to make this world of sorrow one of joy,
To make this world of ugliness a place
Of perfect beauty, to change but not destroy
This earth where hell and paradise are blent,
You demand the pioneers of a new race.

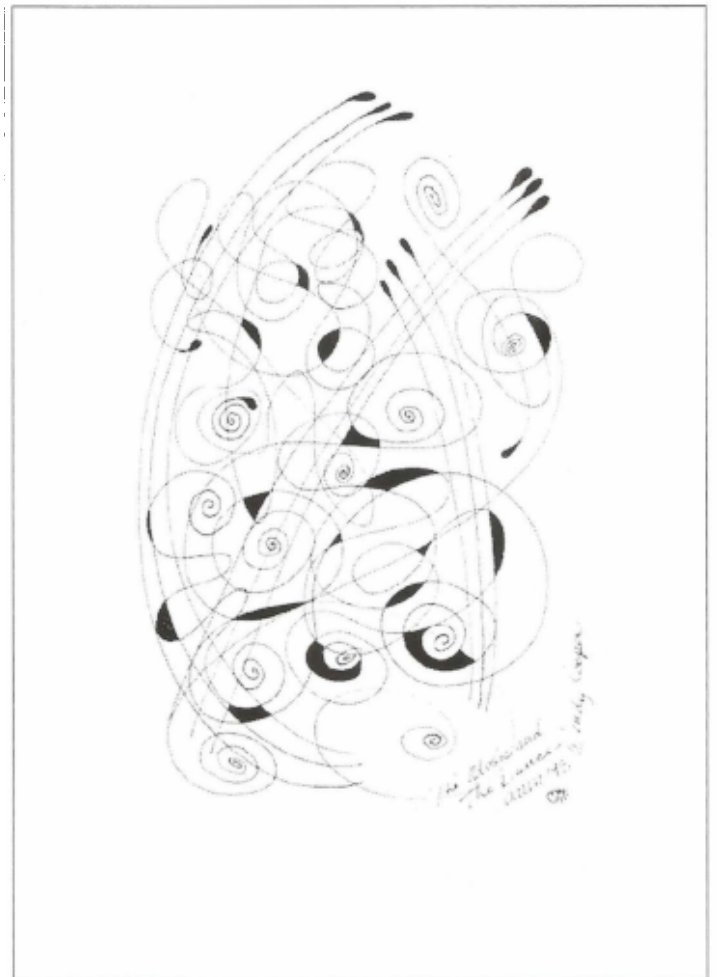
—Peter Heehs

Resignation

However low I fall, however bare
My heart becomes of sincere adoration
And utterly devoid of aspiration,
However much the mind in its despair
Repeats incessantly, "I do not care,"
I must at last say in sweet resignation:
"If this life must be spent in preparation,
This life I will do nothing but prepare."

You lifted once your veil and I, enraptured,
Gazed on the face that is eternity
And vowed I would not rest till I had captured
The body of that vision. I have failed
To seize you; it is you who have captured me
And made me serve you who have since been veiled.

—Peter Heehs



"The Music and the Dance." (Pen and ink drawing by Wendy Cooper.)



CENTER TO CENTER



Matagiri Library opens

On 15 August, 1998, the new Sri Aurobindo Library officially opened at Matagiri in Mt. Tremper, New York. In the photo at left, Eric Hughes and Sam Spanier, founders of Matagiri, lead us up the library steps. The photos below show the layout of this beautiful facility, whose collection of materials on Integral Yoga will offer guidance and inspiration to many disciples.

For more information on the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Library, please contact Matagiri, 1218 Wittenberg Rd., Mt. Tremper, NY 12457, or call 914-679-8322 (before 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, please).

*Aug. 15, 1998 - Official opening of the
Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Library*



Messages from a letter by Eric Hughes to SAA President David Hutchinson.
(Photos: Matagiri)

*Since the opening people have
donated more books (and I've
purchased some 30 new titles),
including books in some Indian
languages. (we also have some works
in French & German.)*

SPECIAL AUM98 SECTION

Editor's note: The 1998 All USA Meeting (AUM'98) was held at the Monte Toyon Retreat Center in Aptos, California. The theme for this year's conference was "Becoming Collective" and from conception to finish the effort was a collective offering of a group of individuals who came together to work towards becoming a collective themselves. The following accounts reflect that collectivity.



Janice Coker takes the mike at AUM 98.
(Photo: Lynda Lester)

AUM '98: The presence

Janis Coker

To be in the concrete presence of people totally surrendered to the Mother so that all their thoughts and movements, all their work, all their devotion, come from Her and are dedicated to Her—that is an experience that can change you. And as a

newcomer to the AUM gathering, this was my overwhelming experience. I drank in the Mother's presence, which seemed so palpable among these devotees.

Discords, frustrations, jealousies (and sometimes, some few times, moments of harmony and of inspiration) can be experienced in many collectives, such as the workplace and in various groups. But negativity or egoistic attitudes that are commonplace in ordinary life did not show themselves among this group of devotees. Something there said, "No, this is special; it is for each one to make the most of this and contribute to the harmony." For me there has been nothing like AUM '98, where the Mother's force so intensified itself that all must have felt an inner dynamization, a surge of energy conducive to an ever more intense aspiration and surrender, together with a rejection of the lower forces.

So far, as a devotee, I have tried to express my love for the Mother in whatever was my task or my situation in life. But at AUM, I saw people living their complete lives for Her, not only in their devotion, but by giving everything they have to Her: time, money, work, all their movements, thoughts, and energy.

It was so evident. It began to dawn on me that things were really different at AUM, in the shadow of the centuries-old red-

woods. Then I knew: it was the Mother's force that was embodied and at work.

Coming through so many at the gathering, manifesting through them, was a stability, a grounding, a centering. And this—together with a constant, confident flow, present not only in individuals but vivifying the group as a whole—formulated a true collectivity.

Permeating that flow was the certainty that to all who aspired would be given an intensification of self-offering, the impetus to do that special something that would allow their innate and individual talents and abilities to manifest—and at the same time, whatever was needed to carry the radiance forward and contribute to the general good: the collective.

AUM '98 has changed me. Its energy continues and is driving me to absorb more, read, more, meditate more, do more, no—do all ALL for the Mother.

Janice Coker lives in Safety Harbor, Florida. She can be contacted by email at JanisFl@aol.com.

Inside AUM

by David Hutchinson

From Friday, 28 August to Tuesday, 1 September 1998, more than 100 people gathered near the California coast for AUM 98 to explore the theme of "Becoming Collective." What did that mean? Would it be possible to create a collectivity in a short four-day gathering?

For more than a year the planning group met for a couple of hours each month at the ashram in Lodi to work through the details. Although most of us had attended a previous AUM, none of us had ever organized one. Perhaps because of that, we made large efforts and equally large mistakes. Recognizing that such a gathering can be open-ended or finely orchestrated, we decided that everything should be attended to, that the atmosphere would be as perfect as we could make it.

The Mother has said that there is "a collectivity of individuals who group together around an ideal or a teaching or an action which they want to execute, and have an organizing bond among themselves, the bond of one goal, one will and one faith." In the planning of AUM 98, we constantly reaffirmed our vision that there is an emerging movement toward collectivity in the larger Sri Aurobindo community. We brainstormed, talked, set timelines, and began to see AUM taking shape. Our greatest strength was in the diversity of the planning group, which included a broad mix of nationalities, ages, and experience. To accommodate more than 20 people in the group, we met often, sent frequent email summaries of work done and work pending, and spent

many hours discussing ideas. If the AUM had been planned by a smaller group, this might not have been necessary. But in the end the size of our group gave AUM a strength, a diversity of approach, and a depth that would not have been possible otherwise. AUM 98 was a manifestation of many harmonious voices, not the work of a few people.

About a week before AUM, I sensed a change occurring, a grace descending upon the entire enterprise, which, since I had expected sleepless nights and endless details, surprised me. During that last week it seemed as if the AUM were being done by someone else; it felt as if it had already happened, as if its success was assured. In Devan Nair's words, an "incredible orchestration" was taking place, in a very organic fashion. Obstacles that arose—such as several sore throats and other illnesses with presenters—were handled easily, thanks to the absolute dedication of the organizing group. By focusing completely on the task at hand, the mountain of work which rose to meet us in the last days was transformed into a seeming molehill. Was it mere coincidence that the first official talk was on "The Mother's Grace" by Deepshikha Reddy?

During preparations for AUM, we realized that there would be a variety of levels of awareness among the individuals—all the more so, because children would also attend. People would be coming from around the world. We couldn't assume a common understanding, much less a community of gnostic individuals. In such conditions, how does one foster a collective awareness? Further, how does one achieve unity?

An immediate answer was that people create bonds through sharing experiences such as a strenuous hike, a high-energy seminar, or an intimate discussion. Learning comes through doing. So that we would experience more than lectures, we scheduled walks, volleyball, singing, an activity with flowers, and a hands-on art room.

At a short conference, often all you get to do is get to know the external details of a person's life. We wanted to help people move beyond common emotional barriers. Some thought that we shouldn't bother with these surface emotions, that everyone coming to an AUM didn't need such help. Others said that they were working on even the most basic aspects of sadhana at that level, and were grateful to address it. A related problem is that in any group, old friends tend to gather in cliques, and when that happens, newcomers are left out. A true unity doesn't happen. In addition to opportunities for significant encounters, we wanted to create conditions such that everyone felt welcomed, part of the group, from the first moment they arrived.

Except for Didactic Duck—a hand puppet that welcomed people at the registration desk—we settled on an unstructured approach to social or interpersonal matters. Everyone in the or-

ganizing group deliberately welcomed, assisted, and made a meaningful contact with each person who attended AUM. This wasn't easy: many of us are naturally shy or quiet, and our role in the AUM required us to go beyond our natural tendencies. If we can do that, we thought, it will set the atmosphere for the larger group. More than anything else, this manifest attitude of service brought a consciousness of inclusion, which spread quickly.

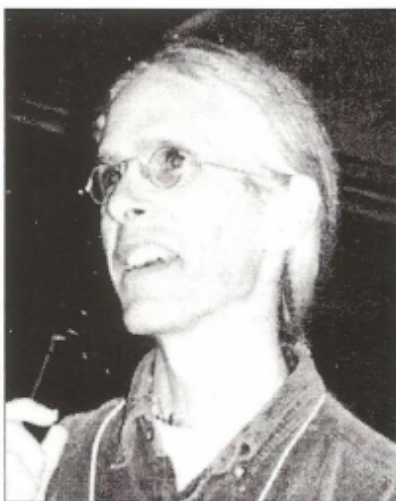
To make sure that people didn't fumble over names and faces, we printed oversize (and sturdy) name badges, then made them mandatory by doubling as meal tickets. Although it felt like summer camp, these were extremely useful in a gathering of over a hundred people. We also put together a photo board where everyone's picture was posted, along with a list of individual interests. The boards, set up around the fireplace in the main meeting hall, were very popular and created a sense of community, making it possible to see everyone together on the board. The stage was set.

Our fundamental effort was to create conditions for inner contact between people. How do you recognize, call forth, touch the spiritual consciousness in each person? We recognized that there is no single method, that everything can be used; flexibility and freedom were our watchwords. As Sri Aurobindo said in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, "This infinite and eternal Self of things is an omnipresent Reality, one existence everywhere; it is a single unifying presence and not different in different creatures; it can be met, seen or felt

in its completeness in each soul or each form in the universe. The knowledge or experience of it can begin anywhere and express itself through anything; for the Divine is in all, and all is the Divine." (p. 107)

To border the conference with inwardness, AUM began with a meditation, and Ameeta Mehra led a guided meditation at the end. Each morning at the chapel there was a meditation followed by readings from *Savitri* by Prapanna Smith and others. We also scheduled a group meditation during the day, and another in the late evening. The evening meditation was to have been distributed, meaning that we wouldn't gather people together, but rather call a general stop and everyone would participate no matter where they were on the property. This was to acknowledge that a community need not be physically gathered in order to share an awareness.

Largely because we didn't keep to the schedule as closely as we should have, the midday and evening meditations didn't occur. We also hadn't anticipated that people needed time at the end of the day to relax from the intensity of so many activities, so we weren't able to have the distributed evening meditation as planned. However, late-night campfires became quiet opportunities to reflect on the yoga, and we heard many stories and experiences in the glow underneath the redwoods.



David Hutchinson introduces the wrapup session at AUM 98. (Photo: Lynda Lester)

The most important aspect of any gathering is the living presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. How is this fostered at an AUM? For many of us, the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother point the way. To encourage the use of their words as a focus of meditation, we printed small cards with quotations. These were available throughout the conference for people to take each day, and some kept these behind their name tags, close to their hearts. Photos can also be a gateway for the spirit. Photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were placed in every meeting hall, and a special Centenary exhibit was set up in the dining hall. An oversize (five-foot tall) banner of Mother's symbol, hung next to the registration table by the central path, was a constant reminder.

During the year we asked ourselves, "What is collective yoga?" We discovered that the organizing group has a rather conservative approach to the yoga, so at AUM, aside from group meditations, we didn't try to directly practice a collective yoga. We knew that our goal was to reach beyond the surface, to allow a meeting at a deeper level, but what might occur when those meetings took place was never mapped out or directed. But presenters were encouraged to address this. Peter Heehs adopted a certain skepticism, while Ananda Reddy and S. Kandaswami sketched out what an ideal collectivity or a gnostic community might be.

For the talks themselves, we realized that a typical lecture does not involve the audience as much as it could. We encouraged the presenters to make their sessions more interactive, make time for questions, and involve the audience.

Georges Van Vrekhem spoke of past troubles, but also of the transitional being. Devan Nair spoke of the turmoil of our times: "We are right in the midst of the chaotic transition to that seminal revolution [which Sri Aurobindo talks about]"—and exhorted us to concentrate on the essential divinity alive in the world. Kosha Shah spoke passionately, and is working strenuously, for an application of Sri Aurobindo's force in the social and political structures of our time.

A common meeting point with the Divine is through music. The Mother's organ music began the conference, along with a reading of *The Hour of God*. Aurelio offered "tuning" sessions each morning, which brought people together with an extended aural exercise. Practice bhajans took place before lunch, and each evening we had group bhajans as well as a featured performer or group. Deepshika brought us to tears with her lucent devotion, and Lucy Patel taught the children a special song, which they sang on the last evening. Later that evening, the classical performance of Praveen and Darshana erupted into a cascade of group dancing, where people hugged and kissed and drank the bliss that flowed from above.

Interaction can take place in many ways, including simple communication through the written word. To allow those elsewhere to participate in AUM, we set up a computer in the children's building with a connection to the Internet. People were encouraged to post reflections or notes about AUM to the Auroconf mailing list. But the conference was scheduled so tightly, there were so many people to see, so much to do, that only a few of us had time to write.

Most of the organizers, in fact, were busy doing one thing or another throughout AUM. Dian Kiser, Theresa Boschert, Marta Belen, and Kalpana Patel were at the registration table from morning to evening. Lucy spent long hours with the children. Meyyappan Ramanathan, Vishnu Eschner, John Robert Cornell and Prapanna turned dials, recorded, filmed. Bhavi Saklecha and Meyyappan spent long hours driving back and forth to San Jose airport. Dakshina Vanzetti and Vishnu were constantly working on setting up and arranging different rooms.



Campfire circle at Monte Toyon Retreat Center.
(Photo: Marta Belen)

Others in the organizing group worked odd jobs to keep the whole conference going. The selflessness of this group kept harmony alive, and many others, responding to this attitude, spontaneously pitched in to help

with the day-to-day details. In this way, the means merged into the goal—our physical aspiration, in the form of work, called forth a like response in others, and AUM became a collective. Through physically asking the question, it was answered.

Is it possible to create a collectivity, a type of unity, in a four-day gathering? Yes, and AUM 98 is a strong example for the future. But the conference meant more than this. For many years there have been divisions, misunderstandings, or outright feuds between various groups involved in this yoga. At AUM we saw a diverse group have a profound and harmonious meeting, despite wide differences in geography, lifestyle, and experience. There does seem to be an ongoing movement towards unity that transcends specific beliefs about lifestyle or the yoga.

The group which organized AUM continues to meet at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham Ashram, and all of us are interested in a greater harmony among our far-flung brothers and sisters. AUM showed that a simple aspiration, and the devotion of selfless people, can accomplish a great deal. Even from small beginnings, the way opens up before us, and the Mother's grace brings all that is needed.

David Hutchinson is the current president of the Sri Aurobindo Association. He lives in Sacramento, California, and can be contacted by sending email to dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu.



Photo essay

by Lucy Patel and Vishnubhai Eschner

This selection of photographs from the AUM conference has been chosen and laid out by Lucy and Vishnu. The accompanying quotations were culled from the feedback given by attendees at the meeting.



Flowers are offered for private devotion in the dining hall.
(Photo: Lynda Lester)

"Flower workshops radiated beauty for everyone."



Juhi Babu, Devi Meyyappan, and young AUM attendees concentrate on creative activities. (Photo: Marta Belen)

"The activities for children are much appreciated."



Nikhil and L.K. Rashinkar, Georges Van Vrekham, Paul Molinari, Vishnubhai Eschner and other AUMers fuel up. (Photo: Lynda Lester.)

"Dining Hall conversations and connections were one of the best features."

(Photos: Lynda Lester)



June Maher in a quiet moment.

Seyril flashes a smile.



Redwoods reaching skyward. (Photo: Vishnubhai Eschner)

"The setting was beautiful, like an outdoor cathedral."

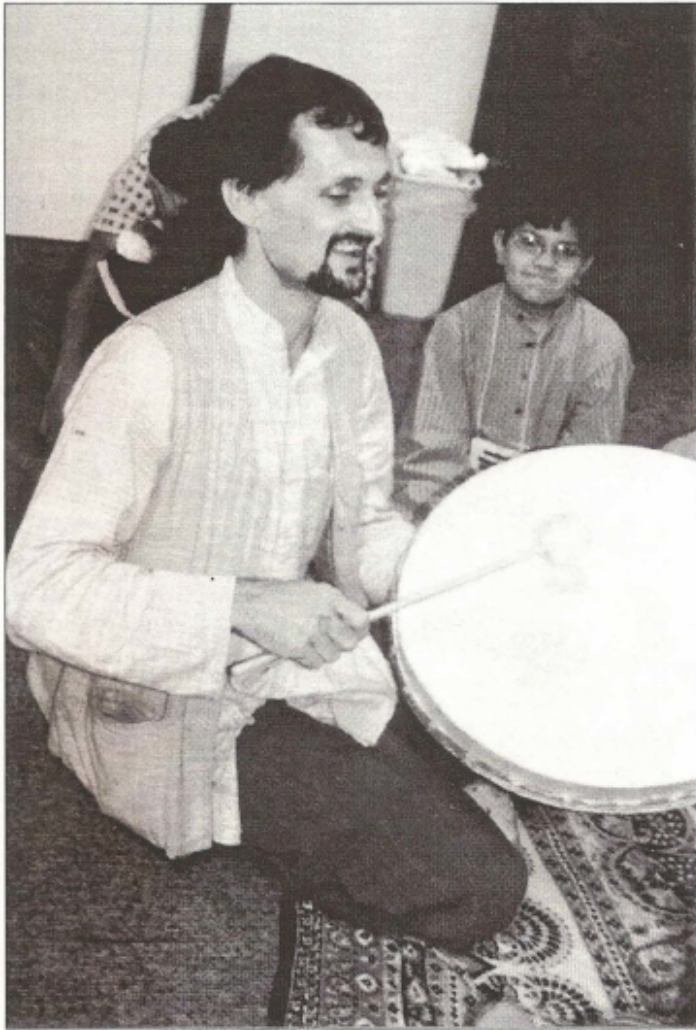


*Theresa Boschert and Dian Kiser staff the registration Table.
(Photo: Marta Belen)*

"The initial welcoming at the registration table was wonderful."



AUM attendees reaching skyward. (Photo: Marta Belen)



Aurelio keeps the beat. Photo: (Lynda Lester)



Don Salmon, Terra McPhail, Marta Belen sing in harmony. (Photo: Lynda Lester)

"The evening fires, music, (especially the 'bands') and sharing circles were bonuses."



Deepshika Reddy brings forth the psychic presence with her beautiful voice. (Photo: Lynda Lester)

"All the music was incredible."



Lucy Patel shares a hymn with "Praveen and Darshana." (Photo: Vishnu Eschner)

"There was a great sense of genuinely trying to become a collective in all facets of activities at AUM 98."



Dance, dance, dance . . . (Photo: Vishnu Eschner)

"In order to allow for more participation, the schedule should be less intense, with more breakout spaces and room in the schedule."

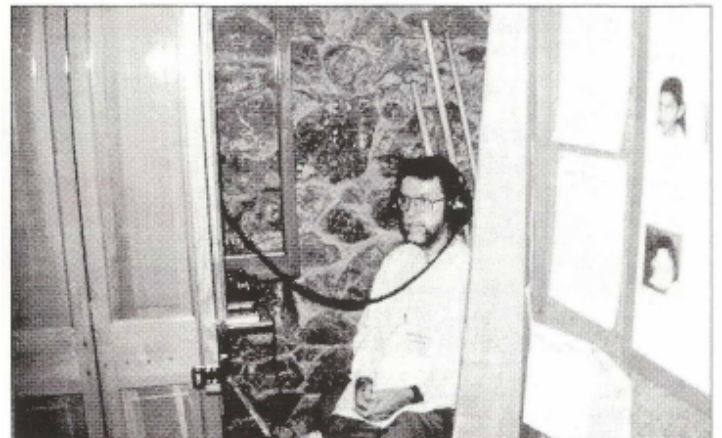


. . . Twirl and spin. (Photo: Vishnu Eschner)



Dakshina Vanzetti, Bhavi Saklecha, David Hutchinson, Dian Kiser, and Bhavana Dee discuss the Money Power Project. (Photo: Marta Belen)

"... still a lot of just sitting and listening to people talk."



John Robert Cornell helps with audio engineering. (Photo: Vishnu Eschner)

(Photos: Marta Belen)



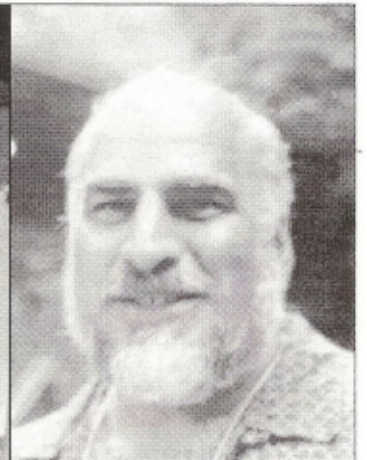
Julian Lines



David Hutchinson



Larry Jacobs



Paul Molinari



Auroville's Village Action: Unfolding consciousness

Bhavana Dee and Aurelio

This essay is a transcript of a presentation given by Bhavana and Aurelio at AUM '98 in which they share some of their experiences in working with the Village Action Program. The text has been edited for clarity, preserving its oral quality.

Bhavana: We're screening these slides and playing Indian music in order to share some of the scenes from life in India and the villages around us and I invite as many of you who can handle it to sit on the floor—sort of like a village meeting.

Aurelio: It is quite difficult in speaking, to relate what the work of Bhavana is, or what we are doing in the villages. So we are trying to create here an atmosphere of the villages, and to really tune in to what is going on there. It is such a world away from here—maybe we also can share some of what we find in the villages that as poor as they are, there's such an abundance there.

Bhavana: A lot of people actually do ask, "What does village development have to do with Auroville? What does that have to do with the yoga or with such high spiritual ideals? How does going out and getting your feet dirty and sitting on a mud floor . . . what does that have to do with beauty or the supramental future? And there is a kind of big-worded intellectual answer to that, but what I'd like to share is just how I got into it.

About 1983, I'd been in Auroville about 10 years. We had been through the great Auroville revolution, which many of you have either experienced or have read about, and that had kept us so occupied and our survival was so tenuous that there had been very little opportunity to look at our relationship with the villagers, except as employees. Now that employee relationship should not be underestimated; it is an excellent relationship. We were paying better than the average wages and we were giving, by and large, an experience of work, which—to the villagers (if they ever went to Pondy), or to people who came in and compared—was unparalleled, because we were treating the villagers as people. Whereas the tendency in the cities is for a poor, illiterate, unskilled laborer to be treated as a bullock—that is normal, I mean, it just happens like that (Not to blame anybody). But, we in our idealism actually saw people as people.

And often (and this was something I noticed that made me feel like work had to be done) what would happen again and again is that Aurovilians would come, with all their idealism, and meet the villagers who were ingenuous and simple and beautiful. And the Aurovilians would project all their idealism on the villagers and expect that that simplicity was going to be translated into the kind of common-sense honesty that we experience in the west. But it didn't happen there, because the villagers, as soon as they sensed that there was a difference, they wanted more

. . . and more. And actually, the villagers are perfectly capable of loving you and stealing from you at the same time. This was really disturbing to a lot of idealistic westerners, and they really pulled back; some of them put a big metal hard wall between themselves and the villagers.

I felt (because it needed to be felt . . . it wasn't me, it's not something I did in the West . . . I never was even part of the civil rights movement) but I felt there needed to be part of the Auroville consciousness that was actually looking at the villagers as people, and relating to their communities as communities. Not just employing them as individuals, which we were doing, and paying them good wages, and improving their self-confidence—because they were getting recognition as good workers and they were getting enormous amounts of training on the job. (These were people whose only remunerable skill had been the ability to work long hours in the sun in the fields.) But their skills of fineness in work—the things you have in your hands now, these nicely—made things—had to be brought out through a combination of the training by the Aurovillians and the willingness to work of the Tamil villagers.

But I felt (and it seemed an impossible thing at the time, because everyone was illiterate in the villages) that since we were talking about human unity, unless we were going to write off those villagers, those illiterate people, as somehow not human, I felt that the villagers should be—had to be—included in the Auroville experiment.

But as they were, it was very difficult for them to be included, except as menial labor. To this day people come from the West and arrive in Auroville and spend a day or two, and then they'll start criticizing—you know, "What is this? I only see Aurovilians—white people—sitting around drinking tea, and the people serving the tea are the brown laborers. You're neocolonialists!"

The thing is—and I've experienced it—the thing is that, as we know, when you're working collectively, you just pick up the work you can do. Well, in the situation as we found it, the villagers couldn't pick up management. They couldn't pick up the holding-the-vision type of work that needs to be done in a collective.

"I felt there needed to be part of the Auroville consciousness that was looking at the villagers as people."



Bhavana and Aurelio in a heart to heart. (Photo: Marta Belen)

Also—and this is my interpretation—I guess you’d say, in their unconscious the villagers didn’t want to change that. Their skills were as menial people; they had been that for generations, thousands of years, maybe. They have real skills, but, it takes a keen eye to notice what those skills are. They have an enormous capacity to do what they’re told—and again, they know how to . . . if you say, “Paint that blue,” they do it; and then if you change your mind and say, “Paint it green,” . . . they will do it, uncomplainingly. They also know how to drop bad feelings. You can shout at them and insult them and they will come back with a smile almost immediately. And it isn’t phony; it’s a skill!

But the other skill they have is pilfering, which westerners take very seriously. “What!? You stole from me. You can’t love me anymore.” There’s really that strong thing. Whereas, for them it’s just part of their wages; what they notice you’re not using, they take. And if you’re not counting things, well . . . it’s just like that. And this they are good at. The whole way of being at the bottom in a hierarchical situation is what they are good at and is what they instinctively want to preserve. They didn’t like it much when we tried things like, “Oh join us and drink tea with us, and be one with us and share and everything.” Many of them didn’t want it. So the status quo tended to go back to what is actually normal in India, that the people who don’t read and write and want to lead a simple life take orders, and the people who want to get things done, they give the orders.

In addition to employment, the next interaction was with children. A number of Aurovilians did a lot of good work with the kids of the village, because everybody felt that with the kids we could do something. So there were a number of schools and places where people actually took kids in and made them part of the family. Many of those young people are now 30-odd years old—Auroville is 30 years old. So many of those people are 30

or over, and are holding very responsible positions in the community. Many have joined Auroville. Actually, about one third of the population of Auroville is Tamil. Some are holding positions where they move internationally. Others tend to be holding what we call here in the States, middle-level positions. A Tamil person who came in as a boy runs both the electrical service and the telephone service.

But in about ’83 I noticed that as a community Auroville was not looking at the villages, was holding them at a distance. We were very much concerned with our own survival and we didn’t have a conscious relationship with the villages as villages. At that time I’d already been there since ’71. I’d been working in the cow barn and the green belt and casting beams at Matrimandir . . . I don’t have any problem with sitting on a mud floor and I liked the village people (I’d been almost penni-

less, hitchhiking around India living among them, befriended by them), so I thought, “I can do that.”

So we started. A group of people formed the Auroville Village Action Group, which included Tamil people from other parts of Tamil Nadu who had training. This training was important because of the initial mistake we were making—and this is really important, I want to share this: There’s an initial thing that a good-hearted person does. A good-hearted person, if they see a lot of poor people around, the initial reaction is, “Let’s give them something.” That was our feeling: “Let’s share.” We didn’t have much, but we had more than they had. It was a feeling of wanting to share.

Now this kind of sharing is called charity. It is a very good thing to do—once, in an emergency. If there’s an emergency, you give. The person feels very happy. They shower you with a whole rush of gratitude. You feel great. They feel great. Wonderful. There’s no harm in it at all. Once.

But, as a policy it is poison. Poison! Yet churches and other social services organizations regularly do it. It absolutely undermines everybody. The recipient becomes a dependent, a beggar, and just gets the habit. That’s what you’re training them to do: “Come and wag your tail and we’ll give you something.” The giver also gets into a position of considering themselves to “know better.” Everybody’s stuck in their roles and it is not an evolving, creative way of dealing with the situation. But how to get out of that, because actually giving is so instinctive and so natural? People still come to Auroville and want to do it.

What I found is that people who have been trained about this make a very clear distinction between *charity*—which I’ve just defined—and *social service*, which is what governments do, and big charitable institutions, which say, “Well, actually orphans

should be looked after, and we're going to raise money and make sure that orphans get looked after." Or old people or animals or whatever. That's a social service. You're not asking anything in return except the willingness to accept the service. Schools are run that way. Governments do it. It's a collective acceptance of responsibility.

But what we do as an independent, small NGO [Non-Government Organization], and what most NGOs do (this is not news in the developing third world) is what we call *social work*. And social work is in fact, consciousness development. It's yoga; it's yoga with the poorest. It's helping people by giving them an opportunity to become aware of their situation, aware of their strengths and their own resources as a group; and it provides a little bit of a well-timed boost so that they take action for the amelioration of their own situation as they perceive it.

This is something that you don't just walk in and do. You can walk in and give somebody a lot of food. But consciousness raising requires dedication—long, hard work. And since about '89, we've been working in this way. Our method is a little bit different than a lot of groups' methods, because what we work on is first some individuals from the villages. Each year we take in a group of about ten village youth, five men and five women, half from caste villages and half from untouchable villages. So ten young people are brought on as trainees and they have classroom instruction in the morning. But in the afternoon and the evening, they are out with the experienced staff in the villages actually doing what we call social work.

Now social work in the first instance is: organizing groups in each village. We have in each village a group of youth that have decided to come together because they would like to see their village a better place. And there's also a group of women who have decided that they'd like to come together because they think they can learn more and make the village a better place.

[In response to a question.] They are high school and college graduates. They're the development workers. They're training in skills of communication, they're learning to believe in people's participation because what I've just told you is news for them too. When they think they're going to help the village they think that we're going to give them money and they're going to give money to the village, just like that.

[In response to a question.] That's right; we make them into social workers by training them and employing them as social workers.

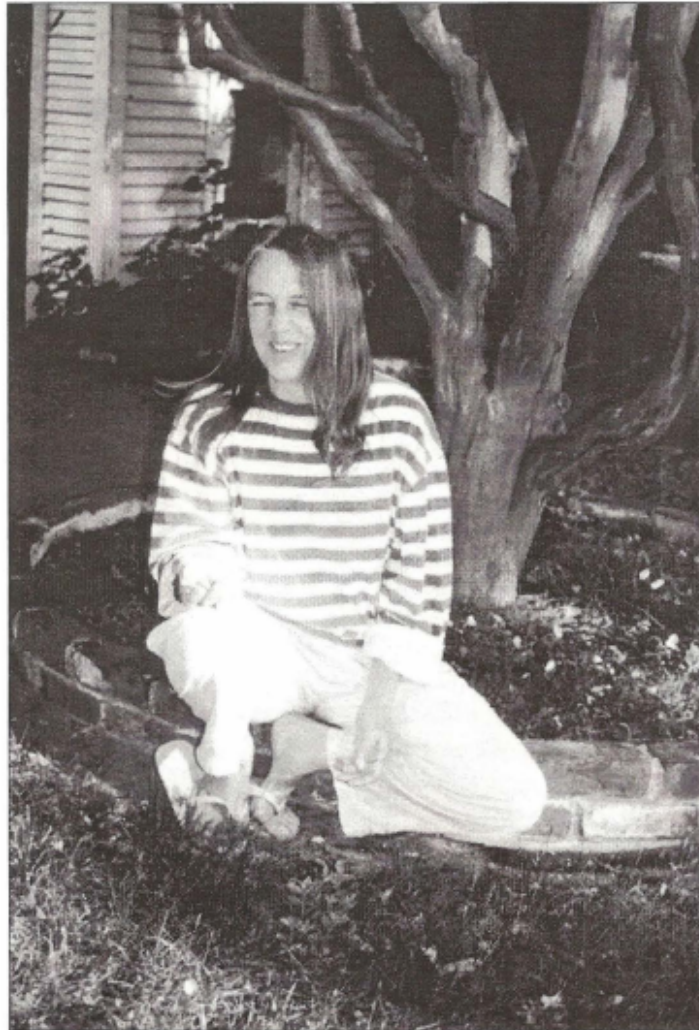
So, now in 35 villages we have 29 youth clubs and 25 women's clubs. What does a youth club or a women's club do? The first thing is that they get together and begin to talk about what could be better in their village.

What are the things that are wrong? It's quite simple; things like the roads are so uneven you can't walk down them without tripping; or the taps—There's no running water in the houses in villages, there's an overhead tank in the village. And there are lines of pipe that go down each street, and at the end of each street there's a tap where everybody goes and collects water in the morning. Now the government program that puts in the overhead tank and the taps does not provide for putting a cement column at the end, to hold the taps steady. So, you have all these pipes hanging there, and of course, they break. And there's nothing around the tap so it's all muddy and nasty, and the mosquitoes are breeding there.

Typically—and this is so typical of social service or charity—nobody in the village feels that they can actually do anything about that. They might even feel, "If I try to do something about that, somebody

might come and blame me." They aren't what we call empowered to do it. They don't feel that they can do it. They're afraid that maybe they shouldn't.

So first, the small group of social workers is trained to think differently about that; then they go out and organize youth clubs and women's clubs and get them to think about it:



Bhavana holds the light. (Photo: Lynda Lester)



"Who's going to repair that rutted street? Is there a provision in the government to do that?"

"No there isn't—There's a provision to keep the roads maintained *between* the villages but not *in* the villages."

"Is the government going to fix that tap?"

"No, they don't have any provision for it."

"So, who's going to do it? Is it going to be the elected leaders?"

"No, they're only concerned with making money."

"Is it going to be the traditional leaders?"

"No, the traditional leaders, their role is to keep the temple running," (which is a good thing; it brings everybody together once a year—but the traditional leaders don't see themselves as the custodians of the roads or taps or whatever).

"Who else? The school teacher, the health worker?"

"No."

"Could it be us?"

"Well, Yes!"

People begin to realize,
"Oh, we could do that."
And a bit of light comes on.

And as that dawns, you see consciousness rising. You're sitting in these meetings, and you see the people begin to realize, "Oh, we could do that." And a bit of light starts shining.

Life there is pretty hard. It's really hard. I shouldn't say pretty hard, that's making light of it. It's hard. There is actually not a lot of security about the next meal. Your father or your husband may have a job for awhile, but he can be fired at any time because he's dispensable labor. He's not a skilled person that somebody is going to hang onto. You know, it's "No more work, out you go." We do it in Auroville also. It's good economics from the point of view of the employer. But, from the point of view of the whole society, and the people who are living at that level—who are human, who do have lives, they have minds; they have their whole thing to do, just like we do—it's really tough. Because often there's no food.

So, that situation of always being on the edge means that there is very little time to think. It means that when we begin to introduce these ideas of, "Could we do it ourselves?"—that movement in the brain or in the mind is a new one. It's recognizable. It's like a psychedelic experience. It's like a spiritual experience. In fact, the Mother has said that a spiritual experience is an experience that takes you out of your normal consciousness into a significantly higher consciousness, so that you notice it. And they do. And you can see the light come on. It's very nice. It's the reward for the work.

Then the next step is, "Let's take advantage of the situation and do something. Let's level the road. Let's build a pillar and a platform around the taps in the streets. How can we do that?" And people start volunteering. And we're ready with our "Microproject Fund."

If you want to help people or anybody to change behavior, it's important to be able to reward them immediately. And actually, mostly in the development world, applying for a grant is a months long process. So your group gets together. It has a great idea: "We're going to level the road." Then you apply and it's three months later and the group doesn't exist. Somehow, we were very lucky. We've convinced our donors to give to the Microproject Fund.

And so the minute the group is ready . . . Mind you, they have to have their group organized, they have to have made their estimate, and the estimate must show that one-third of what they're going to spend, they themselves will put up. (They can put it up in their labor; they can put it up in materials, but they have to invest one-third of the cost of the project,) the other two-thirds, the Microproject Fund gives, for renting the tractor or buying the cement or whatever. But they have to buy it. It isn't like we're going to come in and do the project.

So the group plans carefully (already a major new experience) and presents the estimate. The money comes, and they do the project. And you have two very important results of that project. One is that the tap has been fixed or the road has been leveled or their overhead tank has been erected. It's a material thing; you can show it and everybody notices.

But the other thing, the most important in my opinion, is that the group feels, "We can do it." They're ready to do it again; they've learned how to plan and implement, and when they do it again—and they do it again and again—they begin to understand group dynamics a bit. Because they find that it isn't a question even of having one leader anymore, that when it comes to going to the government offices, maybe Arumugan is best for that, and when it comes to rallying everyone to lift all that heavy dirt, maybe it's Selvam who's really good at that, and the women really do a good job of cooking (excuse me, we do sometimes reinforce gender discrimination); but then everyone does his or her best job.

Although the women's clubs do (and we encourage it), projects on their own. Sometimes they will be the only ones who will take up certain projects, like one group I'm thinking of. A pregnant woman had fallen on the badly pitted street, and despite their going to the men for help, the repairs were always delayed. Finally, they got a Microproject grant and did it themselves. And when they finished that, the men respected them.

And it becomes a relatively easy thing then to move onto the next step,—that is, after we have the women's club going and the youth club going, taking up projects together, to suggest (because the elections have just been held) that the two meet with the elected leaders and a plan be made for the next three months. This is a Village Council, which can prioritize and assign re-

sources. Let's say for this road project we could use the budget that the elected leader has, and this well-cleaning project, maybe we could get some from the Block Development Office, and for this tap pillar project we could apply to the Microproject Fund—and begin to make the finances within the village a bit more transparent. Furthermore, they are planning—they've taken a big step in mental development, they're getting ready to join Auroville and other players in the bioregion in charting out a new future.

Aurelio: I would like to add what development work means in the context of yoga. I think we have a special situation in that the Auroville project is for an experiment in human unity, as Bhavana said. There are all those quotes from the Mother, who says that actually, the villagers on the land are the first Aurovilians. And she even says that the villagers in their simplicity and their honesty are closer to the psychic being than we are with our complexity and our mental thinking.

At the initial stages the program was running under the name of "Co-Evolution"—evolving together. I like this because, in my own personal experience of teaching the villagers English, I was always completely taken over by their quality of heart and what beautiful human beings they are.

So in one way my first reaction would be as Bhavana described, "Oh, just come in. We are building this great city for the future and we are waiting for a new being. Let's all do it together."

The problem is that they are in their span of evolution at 2,000 years ago. You realize this when you see what living conditions they are in, what problems they have with basic things: food, water, and hygiene. So as we evolve in the Yoga we integrate and try to rise to higher levels of the mind and open and harmonize our being; but their area of growing is on the material level. It seems we have already mastered that, and we are invited and challenged to offer that to them; and to make it easier for them. And so we find ourselves sometimes criticized, for doing charity.

But you hear Bhavana's enthusiasm about the development work and all those technical things you have to think of. And it actually happens, as Bhavana said, that those children who grew up and were educated at the beginning of Auroville and even came to the United States to study, some of them are the backbone of the city of the future. That means that within even one generation, they jumped through 2,000 years of evolution. And it so happens—I think in these last years more and more—that we get in touch with something else.

What Bhavana says is that this development work is a work of consciousness, it's an unfolding of consciousness. Also, it's an unfolding realization that each one of us has different things to learn and to integrate at different cycles in our lifetime. For the villagers it is those very basic things. So personally I feel there is almost an urgency to get that thing done on the material level so that we can interact as—how to say—on a basis of human unity.

Because what I—and I think what Bhavana—gets from the villagers . . . it is beyond words to describe, that opening of the heart. We can be so caught up completely in our technicalities and we rush down to the village, go to a meeting, and there are all those people sitting there developing.

It happens constantly. For them a very simple recognition is an experience and for us, the joy of participating in that. At the same time for myself there is always, constantly, the pleasurable experience of being with them, together. I think that I am progressing enormously in my sadhana, or towards finding that psychic center of being, with those people. When I travel in the villages around Auroville, I have the perception that whoever is born into those villages is part of Mother's

work, and they contribute to the supramental manifestation what they can, in their very own way. And we don't know with our high ideals if we help so much as they do with their bare hands building Matrimandir.



"Village Step." Photo: Vishnu Eschner.

So of course when we come here from India, we are very much identified with the villagers. We come to the West and we see this amazing misdistribution of goods and abundance on the planet. I say, "Come, let's do something, let's shuffle it around. Let's get some support here. Let's get money and bring it to the people."

Bhavana: So our work is actually a work on consciousness. That's why I feel that it is a Yoga. And for all the people who are involved, it is also a Yoga. Because everybody in our organization has to change. The trained development workers have to be conscious of not getting hierarchical. The foreigners have to get used to the Indian ways. The villagers have to develop this mind thing. And the kids have to grow up. There's changing, conscious evolving, going on everywhere; and we're all encouraging that in each other. This is spiritual community.

Bhavana has lived in Auroville for more than 25 years, Aurelio for 8. Presently they are living in the Auroville community of Verité.



Georges Van Vrekham and Sally Walton chat between AUM sessions.



L.K. and Nihul Rashinkar. (Photo: Vishnu)



Hasi Grandcolas and Tripat Bratch share AUM fellowship. (Photo: Marta Belen)



Constance Walker and Jack Alexander check out the lawn near the main conference hall at AUM. (Photo: Marta Belen)



Chandresh Patel and Larry Tepper talk ideas and innovation. (Photo: Marta Belen)

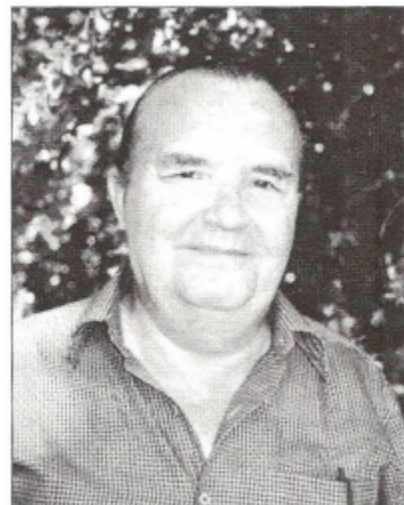


Krishna and Uma Babu take in the morning sun. Photo: Marta Belen)

The transitional being: A possibility for the new race

Georges Van Vrekhem

The following text is from a talk Georges gave at AUM 98. Georges prefers to improvise his talks, adapting them to each unique audience whose reactions and attention he senses directly. This allows for his inspiration to flow spontaneously and each talk for Georges is an adventure for him as well as for his listeners. An animated speaker, Georges uses both intonation and gesticulation in his delivery; accordingly, some points have been edited to make them more clear.

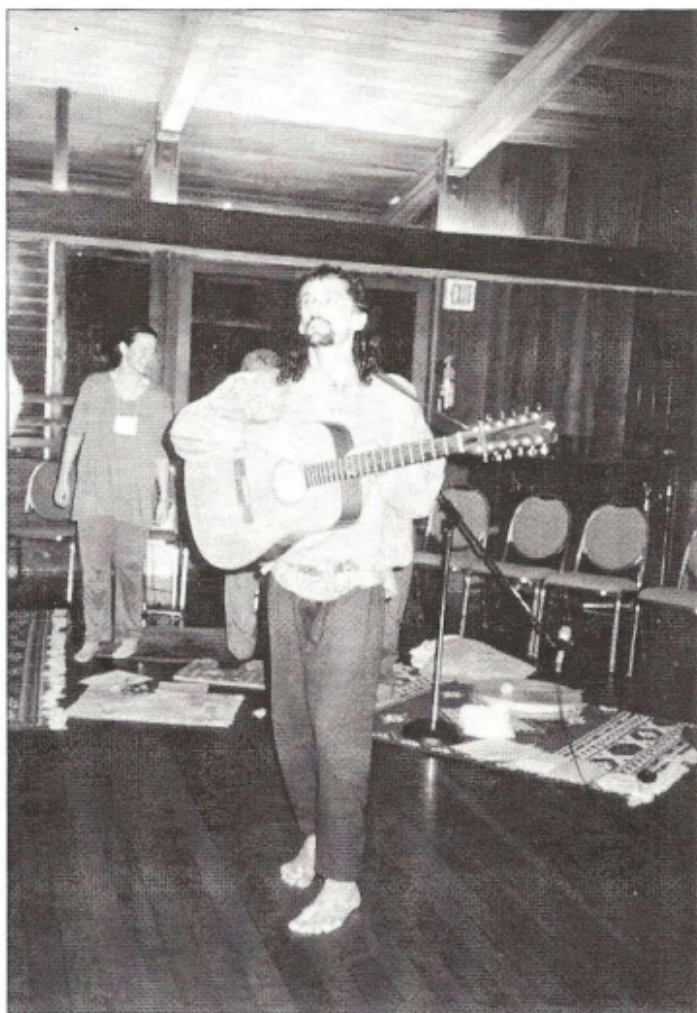


Georges Van Vrekhem. Photo: Lynda Lester

Brothers and sisters, I regret very much to keep you inside in the midst of such nice surroundings. But for me the dreaded moment has come that I have to address the AUM conference. If I say "dreaded moment" it is because I come from the other side of the globe like many here. And it is unimaginable that coming that far, almost half of the people here are well known to me—and some very well. But, from the very beginning, I have felt that there was something behind this AUM conference. It seemed as if there was—I don't know what to call it, let's say a force, behind the name itself and behind the events. And I consider it extremely important in a certain way, for reasons that I'm now going to try to explain.

I also feel a little confused because all the people before me have been reading and I never speak from a prepared text. So I have tried to scribble something down, but now I cannot decipher it. [laughter] So, now I have to dive into my speech, and I hope that I will not draw away from your presence here at this beautiful time of the day.

I am preparing a new book. I am preparing a biography of the Mother for the simple reason that she passed away 25 years ago, and when I looked around, I didn't see a single accessible book that presented her with the knowledge that we now have about her life and, let's say, a little more about her background. I had planned other things, but purely as an act of devotion, I started gathering my material and completed its compilation before I came here. From time to time, there was a kind of a metaphor that came to my mind while doing this. It is this—that the avatar



Terra McPhail and Aurelio making music. (Photo: Marta Belen)



If you read her *Conversations* you will see that '54 was a high year of her cellular realizations. She was realizing the transitional being between what we are and Superman.

comes at the time that is for him the right time. Humanity never understands anything before it happens. Neither did the primates, neither did the reptiles, neither did the fish. But you have the layers of evolution, and when a species comes to its ceiling, an intervention from outside is necessary to drive the evolution further on because the species itself cannot do that. We do not have the power to go beyond ourselves. We do not have the means.

And the greatness, one of the great aspects of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is that one can, in part, decipher where the crucial point is that had to be conquered for their mission, that they had to discover. Like they always said, "It is a discovery, a path into a virgin forest, into the unknown." It is very clear that time after time, they had underestimated the difficulty of the path. In 1935, Sri Aurobindo had the supramental by the tail. But then all kinds of things happened and he "had to fight," he says, "all the mud that is coming up from the subconscious." In 1938, they thought that the supramental would descend, but then came (and Devan Nair has talked so nicely about that) the reaction, that blow from the tail of the monster that caused the Second World War. As Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said, "It postponed our work by so many years!"

Again, Sri Aurobindo met difficulty, and not one of us understands how great it was, but it is at the crux of the matter if you read "A God's Labor." There in the subconscious, where the crucial point had to be conquered to realize their work. And as this was, for the first time in known history, a full avatar, male/female, one consciousness in two bodies, it was possible that Sri Aurobindo consciously went into death, to conquer something we do not know. Six years afterwards, the descent of the supermind happened.

In a way, this was the end of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wanted, of what they had seen as their task, as their mission: on earth was created (for she has so stated) the possibility for the new race to be realized. And this is so true that the Mother, at that time, wrote the prayer; "Lord, let me know whether the work now is fulfilled for me. I am ready to retire, you must give to me a clear sign."

In 1962, the Mother had already worked on the cells much more than one can imagine, because from 1950 she immediately, with her great force (she being the universal Shakti) had taken up the task with all her might. But the Mother didn't talk much at that time except on the Playground, and she didn't talk often about these things. But even if you read her *Conversations*, you will

see that 1954 was a high year of her cellular realizations. She was realizing the *transitional being* between what we are and the superman. For—this is extremely important and not so many people are aware of it—Sri Aurobindo and the Mother before always had talked about the superman. This means a divine being on the earth, in a material body, which is not material as we know it now, but which is divinized in every cell, which has all the powers one can imagine and others that we cannot imagine.

But I have discovered that this would not occur in a big jump, the big transition, the big evolutionary salvation, at one time. And Sri Aurobindo, in *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, has written very clearly that a *transitional being* would be necessary. The Mother repeated this in her talks on the Playground. She said that very probably evolution will repeat itself—there will not be one kind of transitional being, there will be many, like there were many beings between the primates and mankind, as we now know. So for Sri Aurobindo and Mother as for us, this was an unexpected discovery.

In 1962, the Mother went through such a crisis that everybody in the Ashram thought it was the final one. They thought she had died and everything was prepared for the entombment. But as she said herself, "I took up the body again, to continue." What she did was an incredible sacrifice all of which can be read about in *The Agenda*—all the suffering, the entering into the subconscious, and the inconscient to hasten the evolutionary process that was made possible in 1956. The descent of the supermind that year was a culmination of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the previous years to make a new race, a Divine race, possible on Earth.

This transitional being is extremely important, and you rarely read about it in what are considered to be the summaries of the "system" of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Fundamentally, there is no system. It is very clear that in the Ashram and everywhere the Mother always has said, "Everybody has his own way"—not one time but a thousand times! And why do we have our own way? Because we have our own history, not only in this life, but also in the reincarnations that have preceded this life. We are all made up in a special way and, as there is not a single leaf or a blade of grass that is similar to another, there is not a single human being who is similar to another. So you have this great diversity, and in the development of all the people who are turned toward Sri Aurobindo and Mother's yoga, everybody has his own way. There can be no talk; there can be no effort to

make a new religion. The Mother has explicitly said (and Sri Aurobindo also, of course) "NO NEW RELIGIONS! We are going towards something else." When she was watching *The Life of Ramakrishna Pramahansa*, she said, "This is an end, now something new has begun." And in '56, she said, "A new world is born, is born, is born!" It was the most lyrical talk she has ever given. "When you get up in the morning," she said to the children, "realize that the new world is born." Brothers and sisters, we are living in a new world.

If you see how every time the avatar has to intervene to make the next step in the evolution possible, then a kind of idea may come to your mind. This is called the avataric field. It's a metaphor. And by that I mean that with the coming of the avatar, and this time the full avatar (which very few people can understand, and still fewer accept, especially in India—There has never been a female Avatar as far as we know). When this happens, this coming of the Avatar, there is a preparation.

This thought has come to my mind because I was studying the background of the Mother's life, and of course Sri Aurobindo's. And if you see what happened at the end of the 1870's, 80's and '90's, you'll see that there was a real revolution in the way that mankind saw itself. You had the impressionistic way of painting, you had the psychological revolution with Freud and those who followed him. There was the scientific revolution with the Curies (Madame Curie and her husband Pierre) and others.

Then started the twentieth century, which now comes to an end and which has been such an amazing period in human history. Everybody will look back on it in a couple of years, or even now, and bookshops will be full of books that give an overview of what has happened in this incredible century. When people get habituated to something, they lose their appreciation of it. When you get habituated to the telephone, you lose your appreciation for the ability to talk at great distances. When you fly in an airplane a couple of times, you lose your appreciation for airplanes, and so on. People are very narrow in their awareness. But the twentieth century has been incredible. In fact, it has been the expression of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

If I say that, I must sound like a fanatic everywhere except here. [laughter] You see, here I can talk to brothers and sisters; when you go somewhere else you have to talk in another way. And I always say: what I have learned, and what I am learning and hope to learn much more from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is this wideness. The whole world is contained not only in their thinking, but also in their consciousness and their way of acting. The whole world opens if you go that way into their writings and sayings. And I feel so happy that it is given to me to be able to do that, to have the time to do that, and to have the motive to do it. I'm just at the very beginning. So when I see this whole possibility, then I always say to other people (except to a gathering like this), "What I am learning is the broadest possible view. But what I am practicing is the narrowest fanatical view, because we cannot have one foot on the path and another foot beside it or we would get a serious physical ailment. It is a truth that we must be able to appreciate everything and that we must be one pointed in our surrender, in our effort of awareness."

So the coming of the avatar has been prepared exactly at the right time, and it has been prepared for centuries. I will go a little deeper into that in moment. But when the Avatar comes, he is never alone.—especially in this case, as it was a matter of physical transformation. (Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said, "Our bodies are limited physically because they are the bodies made by our parents and our grandparents and great grandparents.") They did not come alone, you see all these people around them. This is one of the reasons that in my book *Beyond The Human Species* I wanted to give a little perception of the people around them. You have Sri Aurobindo's parents and the Mother's and you have his brother Barin, who played such an important role in his life. You have Motilal Roy and all the people around him, and you have the people who were with Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta, and who came to Pondicherry, and others came and so on, and the Ashram was there, and why did they create the Ashram? Actually, they didn't create it, it happened by itself. The Mother said, "The very first question I put to Sri Aurobindo was, shall we do it alone," —they would have been very well



AUMers fill the main hall, during a variety of workshops.



(Photos: Lynda Lester)

capable of doing that—"or shall we take the others with us?" But she said, "A group formed by itself."

They all were a part of it; the ones who stayed and the ones who went away. The gods and the devils are one event. (And by that I don't mean that the ones who have gone away were devils; they maybe have been a little wicked.) But I have seen very clearly that around them grew great beings. I could name a couple—Nolini, for instance, and Champaklal—one of the purest beings ever. And then there are the many that I do not know, because I am not up to their level. One can only know what one is oneself; like can only know like. But there were all the others.

You know, every time an idea descends in our world, in our mental world, it is as if it ripples out. When the idea of communism descended into our world, it rippled out in so many directions, in so many ways of thinking, in so many philosophies, social and others. There is always the pure descent, let's say in the middle, by way of speaking, and then there are always formations, deformations, and so on which are the consequence and which are in our human world the normal way of developing.

Pondicherry and Auroville are very interesting places because there you see growth of an authentic spiritual fact that is of importance for the whole earth. And you see a rippling out. You see the personalities who deviate in this sense or who stress some partial ideas in that sense. And then there are the followers. Actually, the followers make the gurus. The disciples make the gurus, normally. By this I mean the social guru/disciple groups that are there now in such a large number. So around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were all these people, many from whom I have learned so much, reading Nirodbaran, reading Amal Kiran, and so many others.

And then comes the moment that physically the avatar leaves his body. We are at that time. All phases of a revolution, especially one of that size, are difficult. But probably the most difficult is the one now, for the simple reason that the masters are not there anymore in the body and that the result of their work is not yet perceptible in the world. If you want a comparison, you can just see what happened to Christ: when he was on the cross, he

was alone; his disciples had fled, they had denied him and he had not written anything. But the force of the avatar, came down and was integrated into the global scene. It was so strong that afterwards as you have seen, Christianity as we know it today has approximately 700 million members.

We are in a transitional time now. And we have only the staff of our faith and our insight and our comprehension to lean on. So if you see what there is now, what has remained of that work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, that incredible effort which I have tried to describe a little in my book as far as I could understand it.

First of all you have the Ashram. The Ashram is in difficulty. You may not have heard that before, but I say that the Ashram is in difficulty, although they have more money than ever before. You know how much the Mother suffered from lack of money (suffered by way of speaking). Now they have much but there is not the physical guru, there is not the inspiring leadership. And most of them, in their several branches and departments, do not dare change anything. They want to go on like the Mother said so many years ago, and if someone would change things when necessary, it surely would have been done by the Mother. So by that I do not mean that there are not any people who are really making an effort, I know many of them are, but it is a problematical institution because in the way it is evolving it has closed itself off. The Ashram cannot go on like this forever.

A second institution is Auroville, and Auroville is one of the greatest absurdities imaginable. In the first place because it is a utopia. All utopias seem absurd to "normal" people. In the second place, just try to imagine what utopia could make divine people. Don't forget that the people in Auroville are free. Where on earth will you find a place where the people are free and where the person who has created the place said, "If there is any real change it can only come about in freedom"? How are people coming to Auroville? There are many present who can look inside themselves. If I look at what I knew when I came (and it doesn't mean that I know much now), it was not that much. People come to Auroville for all kinds of reasons and they stay for



(Photos: Lynda Lester)



Your part is the most difficult. Here, you live in circumstances that are all anti-yoga. The material life is just like that.

all kinds of reasons and so on and so on, in freedom, without there being any power, without any authority to direct things. Auroville has to grow spontaneously. There is only a waiting time of one year. If for one year you keep a little quiet, you are automatically an Aurovillian, so then you can become very loud. [laughter] It is such an incredible place. Still I must say that if I had to choose a place for development, I would choose Auroville, because Auroville is freer. There the most incredible things are happening. [Blank Spot] . . . Some dare even to imagine that they are the supreme incarnated. The situation is extremely complex.

But Auroville is still there, and in my humble view, this is the miracle—that it is still there! The Mother, when she decided to start Auroville, must have been very sure of her Power, the occult Power to protect it and to make it grow. So much so that she said, “Even the ones who work against it will still work for it.”

Here I will tell you a personal experience. Generally, I am rather lazy and I don’t like to go very far if I don’t see why I should. But when the first stone of the Matramandir was laid by Nolini, Dick Hawk (an American Aurovillian who many must have known, a tall fellow, a professional tennis player) said “Hey George, lets go to that function, it may be interesting.” So, at four or five o’clock in the morning, we cycled up the hill, and when we came there at that time the order was still in the hands of the Ashram people, of the captains of physical education and all that. So, I arrived at the site and I assure you I stood there like the woman of Lot, who changed into a salt pillar, as you know, because there was such a Force—like a helmet of Force that was put on my head, I was so astonished.

The Mother has said, “When there are new beings, the first thing they need is the power of protection so that they are not too much attacked and can resist attacks.” Because the attacks, as Devan Nair has said, should not be underestimated. The tail of the monster can swipe most away. This protection is there and that is the reason that Auroville is there. And Auroville has been created in impossible circumstances. The climate is really difficult to endure. The possibilities there now are much greater than when we arrived, but they are still not like life in the West. So I suppose that the people who choose to change from life in the West to life in Auroville have some problem! That is number two.

And then there is number three and that is what I wanted to say today. Number three is you, those present here. I have seen that when people come from outside, very often they are looked down upon by the Ashram and by the Aurovilians. They are visitors. They are a nuisance. After some time Aurovilians get fed up with visitors. So, many who are not Aurovilians or Ashramites and who have been there in Pondicherry and Auroville have not had a very pleasant experience. But you should not forget that the Ashram people are looking down on Auroville.

At the time I changed places from the Ashram to Auroville, it was just in the middle of some very painful events, actually on the eve of the Mother’s Centenary, and the whole of Pondicherry was in feast. And this poor fellow on a cycle behind a bullock cart was riding to Auroville, and he came there in this fanatical atmosphere of Aspiration—where you were, for instance, only allowed to read the books of Satprem, Asterix (comics) and science fiction. [laughter] I am not exaggerating. If you dared to speak about *Savitri* when eating in the common dining room, you got quite a reprimand and they would scold you for—I don’t know, whatever it would be. At one time, the whole of Aspiration shaved their heads.

But the Ashram believed that the Aurovilians were incapable of anything. “They are surely not yogis! They are surely not spiritual! When they come to Pondicherry, they are dirty. You should see how their women are dressed!” And then there were the rumors about sex orgies and so on. There was a time when journalists came to Auroville and asked, “Where can I participate in a sex orgy?” This is true; all that I am saying is true. Actually, it was much, much worse than that.

So the third item is you. And you represent the people of the whole world who are turned towards That.

When I heard about the AUM conference, it gripped me so much, because I felt that something important was going to happen—that something has been ripening and now there is something here that represents their work on an even keel with the other established institutions of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Your part is the most difficult. Here you live in circumstances that are all anti-yoga. The material life is like that.

In the beginning, when I was in Pondicherry and I received permission to go to Belgium for two weeks, first I thought, “The Mother will say no.” But immediately I got the inner reply, “Why do you think that the Mother always says no to things and is negative?” I got the permission to go and I ran. And as I walked through a supermarket in Belgium, everything was clean! And



the prices were just correct and nobody was asking more, and nobody tried to steal or to beg. You know, it was as if I was in the world of Santa Claus. At that time in India there was not very much. Things have evolved and that is another story, on the one side very good and on the other a little sad. I will tell it to you immediately, otherwise I will forget.

I often think about an Indian student, boy or girl, who might be living today in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, or Madras. (Some of these Indian students are present here among us.) On one side you have Indian traditions about which you have heard so much and which are very often imitated. What is still of value in these traditions for these young people? On the other side, you have the Coca-Cola culture, and I do not underestimate it. In my view, that kind of culture is carrying something around the world about which I will talk immediately. I saw photos when I was a very young boy of the chief of a tribe in Africa, completely naked, except for a high hat and a tie. And he thought he was dressed like a westerner! Now the young people in India put on a baseball cap and they belong to that culture—and if they have a pair of Reeboks or Nikes, still better. And jeans, of course! In that hot climate they will wear all of these things because it is the fashion.

But what about the goings-on inside the mind of my student? Because you see, if you live in India, it's not that nice a place. Its culture is incredible, especially if you see it through the eyes of Sri Aurobindo.—But don't forget that the Mother said, "If I had been an Indian, I would have destroyed so many things." Because India is still halfway, and there are all those heavy, restricting traditions.

So there is that tradition and the tradition is very strong. And the tradition does not want to look outside itself. (Inside, everything you want, there are so many races and states and religions. India is one huge problem. The world is a problem, but in India, the Mother has said, "All the problems are represented here.") What goes on in the mind of my Indian student? What values can he or she bring forward from the past? And you know there are magnificent things: in art, dance, music, philosophy etc. But, in everyday life?

As an outsider, I will just tell you something: I have been living there for 28 years, and the population of India has doubled in that time. From 550 million, they have gone to more than a billion. Do you know what this means? To give you a concrete example - every day I ride from my house in Auroville to Pondicherry. During the last 20 years, there are at least three new villages along my route, and everybody has to eat. Just imagine the consequences. So that situation is there.

What might go on in the mind of my Indian student? What can he or she take over from the past that he finds worth having and carrying over into his or her confrontation with western culture? It's a problem that goes very deep, and that is surely worth studying. Here and there it may be studied, but I have read very little about that subject.

I must add, immediately, that it is very difficult to talk about India, just as it is very difficult to talk about the United States. There are many states in the United States. There are very many kinds of Indians in India. They are a magnificent people. There are geniuses; there are beautiful people. There is everything. But those I am now speaking about are a kind of average of the common people, and there is a real problem.

So we have all of that, and you here are confronted with the world around you like they are confronted there, but you perhaps a little more consciously. You see, the Ashram has been protected. The Ashram has been excluded from the world, although it is in the middle of the town of Pondicherry and although it is meant to be a miniature world. But people are not supposed to go to the cinema in town (although some do). They are not supposed to go to the market (although some do). They are not supposed to go to restaurants (although some do). They are not supposed to do this or that. It is protected. And, in fact, the protection is very real, and it is one of the high places of the world, not so much for the people as for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's spirit that is there, in every stone and in every tile and in every plant.

A second high place of the world is the Matramandir. The people who have been in the inner chamber say that it is another world. Auroville has been able to create that. If it were only that, it would already be an incredible achievement. But in Auroville, I have seen people change. And there are very few places, I think, where one can say that one has seen people change. Because to change one's own character is a difficult thing, and can only be the result of an inner dedication.

So you are here, mostly on your own. There are individuals like you all over the world—beautiful people. One might say, generalizing a little, that if one goes to a yoga circle one meets two kinds of people. You see the ones who are searching and you see the ones who have psychological problems. [laughter] You know, if for instance someone tells me, "I would like to come to Auroville," I try to find out whether he comes because of a psychological problem or whether he comes and is ready to accept psychological problems because of the yoga. It's a big difference.

In fact, my reaction is always very simple. If you really want to come to Auroville, first come and see it for yourself, for at least a month. Then you will see India, you will see the airports in Bombay, and in Madras, and you will have your quarrels with the taxi drivers, and so on. And if you want to come, you should first come to visit during the hot season. Because—it's very typical—all at once all the visitors are gone. This happens in one week, and is the sure sign of the transition from the nice season to the hot season. And the hot season is, frankly speaking, a time in which you try to survive. At once, all the visitors are gone. Then they are coming back in November, December, January, and February. So I always say come and see for yourself.

And the second thing I say is, please, if possible, continue working for a while before coming so that you have some money to do something in Auroville, for in Auroville one needs money.



Now there are Russians too and there are wonderful people among them. I think of Natalya, and I think of Riju, who has taken a Sanskrit name, and Vladimir and Alexey. They are a wonderful people but the ruble is now worthless so they have a financial problem—which means that Auroville has a financial problem. How Auroville actually manages to survive is a wonder from one end to another.

So we come back to where you are, the individuals, the beautiful people whom one finds all over the world. Most of them are not even aware that something like the vision and the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother exists. But Paul Molinari, who is present here, and in whose house I have been staying for the last four or five days, has shown me so much about the views of the people here, and I see that here too there is a revolution occurring, even among university professors with Ph.Ds. And I have heard many things said by popular speakers, that we find also in the vision and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They are starting to see the world like Sri Aurobindo and the Mother without even knowing of them. Something spontaneous is happening here and in Belgium, and in Norway, and in Spain—everywhere. Maybe a little more in one place than in another, but surely most of all on the west coast of the USA.

So what I want to say now is what I promised to tell you. It is a kind of evolution that has struck me and that I find fundamental. In the West, everything has been growing towards individuality. You can start with the Greeks, you can start with Socrates, and then you go through the Renaissance, then through the American Revolution, which is the mother of the French Revolution: everything tends towards individualizing man and woman. This is a great thing, because Sri Aurobindo has called the individual the “dynamo of evolution.” When you are individualized, then you can go inside to discover your soul. Not when you are like the animals, a species—although at the species level there is already an extreme intelligence. (Just watch how a sparrow builds its nest. Animals are extremely intelligent—that is the spirit of the species, and they act like that under its impulse.) But mankind has become individualized.

Very probably, there have been many civilizations before our current cycle, which have made the mentalization of the human species possible. The West has done that. But with the invasion of the Germanic tribes in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries A.D. in Europe, a very much down-to-earth, materialistic force has been poured into it. Most of you have your roots there and still carry this force, this concrete material force of living in the world of the senses and belonging to that world. Spirituality remained mostly unknown to those tribes and to their descendants. It is extremely important to follow that evolution through the Renaissance, through the century of the Enlightenment, through the revolutions that were the result and so on through the nineteenth century till now. This is one side of the picture.

On the other side you have the East, especially India, which is “the heart of the East,” as Sri Aurobindo called it. What happened there, and what is still going on now in a certain way, is that India has been excluded from the rest of the world to keep the treasure it had discovered and that it spread afterwards all over Asia. Don’t forget that Buddhism comes from India. Don’t forget that the puppets in Java, Sumatra, and Borneo represent figures from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and all that. India has really spread her spiritual acquisitions in an incredible way. The whole spiritual culture of Asia comes from there, including Zen in Japan and elsewhere. But India had to guard that treasure and its experience of things spiritual. The West does not have that experience. The Catholic Church has never allowed that experience and neither have the Protestants afterwards, and neither has any other state, church or institution. When there have been mystics—because mysticism is innate in the human being it erupted sometimes, also in the West—they have been persecuted, and many have been killed. Even Meister Eckhart (who sometimes spoke like a Vedantin) has been persecuted and it was only because of his death that he did not suffer worse. You know what happened to Galileo, and his case was not about spiritual experience but about general intellectual development. You also know what has happened to Giordano Bruno, and to many Alchemists, and so-called witches, who went on an exploration of what was not officially permitted and paid for their experiences with their lives.

India has kept the spiritual experiences. One of the results, for instance, is that for a long time, and I think in orthodox circles still today, if you are an Indian and cross the ocean, you lose your caste. Gandhi lost his caste. Sri Aurobindo lost his caste, and when he married, he had to do penance. But as he said, “We found a priest, we gave some money, and the penance was done.” But he had to do it because he had crossed the ocean. The tradition had to be kept. So you see that there many apparent absurdities in history which when looked at from another angle, may be quite meaningful.

So we are at a time, brothers and sisters, that the eastern and the western lines of development are meeting. This is a momentous moment in time. If you want another illustration, just see the graphical representation of the growth of the population of the world, and it goes like that [almost flat] very slowly, and then it does that [steep upward curve]. Here [where the curve turns steeply upwards] something is happening, on this axis at this time. If you take the two together, we are living at, surely, the most important moment mankind can remember.

So you are doing something without being forced and without haven taken a vote in a group where you feel forced to behave in a certain way. You are contributing in full freedom towards the unification of these two lines of development. You know the source of your strength, but I would like to accentuate it very strongly. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the source, are That with a capital letter. And that is the way I wrote about them in my book. I say it very clearly in the introduction. I take

what they have told and written for truth, because I am not in a position to criticize their words, their experiences, their realizations. What I can do is read them attentively and if I am gifted with a little insight, I can put things together and say they converge towards my interpretation. I do not have any other pretension. When we put things together, they seem to converge towards that interpretation. But of course, you don't think like that, and you do not get that kind of insight if there is not something in the heart or in the mind that lights the spark.

So you are the people who have that something in the heart, and who have, through a kind of brotherly and sisterly feeling, come together for these days. Isn't that great! As long as we don't forget that we should never make a religion of it. Everybody is on his own. There are helpers on the way. They may be material facts. They may be events. They may be persons. There are helpers on the way. But, there is only one source to which one can direct oneself. About That I do not like to talk. Deepshika has talked so nicely about it, and Devan Nair has talked so nicely about it. That is where we can get everything we need.

But everything we need is not everything we want. We are ignorant still. The Mother said also, "I have such great admiration for the God of Thirupathi." You must know that Thirupathi is the greatest pilgrimage center and by far the richest in India. Every day, there in the *undi*, there are the lahks [100,000s], if not crores [10,000,000s] of rupees, and people who go there shave their head. The god revered there, who is an aspect of Lord Vishnu, is blindfolded. You ask of him, he gives to you. The Mother said, "I find this so great,"—and that is why one day she said, "Careful, my blessings are dangerous." You ask something, but if you get it, will it be what is best for your development? "Careful, my blessings are dangerous."

I want to conclude with an exhortation, and that is to never see Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as the head of an ashram or as a mother superior or whatever. I been studying the Mother's life a little and I see that every gesture, every movement of her little finger, was executed in what she fundamentally was, because she could not express herself otherwise. She was that great Being. Some people have a closer connection with her; some have a closer connection with Sri Aurobindo. And they project on them immediately their interpretation. [Blank Spot] Some would ask Mother the same question, hoping that she would answer them differently. She said, "Listen, when I say or write something, it is based on the past, on the present, and on the future. I will never change what I have said."

No, never think of them as a mother superior or as the head of an Ashram. Actually, once Mother asked Satprem who always said, "Mother, I want to see you, I want to see you—" She asked, "Like I am physically?" "Yes." "But," she said, "I am not like that, this is only a mud face, this is only a human body." And you know, in *The Agenda* she has also said, pointing to her heart, "This is always like a sun."

In *Conversations*, she described how some people were disembarking from the supramental ship to earth. They are here,

they are there, they are in many places, the candidates of the transitional race. And she said, "I was directing all the operations. And when I looked for a brief moment at myself, the head was like a Sun, and gradually downwards the body got a certain shape and a certain Supramental reddish color." We are addressing to ourselves and taking our strength from the Infinite That.

I want to end with a personal experience. I am not a visionary, and I do not brag about the things I have experienced, but I find that here, among my bothers and sisters, I can tell you this. Very recently a former friend (from 40 years ago when we were together in school) came to visit. And I wanted to take him around Auroville and we went to the Matramandir. Now I am a heart patient and I cannot climb the stairs to go into the chamber. I am like Moses sighting the Promised Land, I must stay outside. If I ask for it, I will be taken up in a chair carried by four people—and then I feel like the Pope giving blessings. So, I don't want to do that. I therefore said to my friend, "You go up and I will sit here, I have no problem with that." And I closed my eyes and I saw this incredible red golden color. I opened my eyes because I thought that the sun was shining into them. But the sun was behind me! And I closed my eyes again and I saw the same light. By this I mean that there is something there. And there is something in the Ashram, in the central building where the samadhi is. Everything depends on the way in which you approach it.

Brothers and sisters, you are on your own, and in the world you have to confront the world. You have a difficult task but I think it is a very fruitful one, and I think it is the task of pioneers. That is why I am so happy to be among all of you. May Mother and Sri Aurobindo bless us.

Georges is an author, translator, and Aurovilian who also lived for 9 years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. His recent book, Beyond the Human Species [Beyond Man, Indian edition] is destined to be the definitive classic in presenting the vision and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



Gloria Posso and Andrea Poor, tête à tête. (Photo: Marta Belen)



The Ideal collectivity: Its evolutionary necessity

Dr. Ananda Reddy

This is a talk Dr. Reddy gave at the All USA Meeting in August 1998.

For the past three days we've had lovely sessions, all of us focusing on the theme of becoming collective. Each one has approached the problem in his or her own way. Being a bit philosophically oriented, I ask myself the question, "Why are we speaking about collectivity at all? Were there no collectivities in the past 2,000 years? Why is there such a sudden awakening to a collective yoga? Why do we now begin to feel the necessity of a collectivity and a collective yoga and the collective approach?"

In all these approaches, we seem to be missing out on one very important point. When we speak of the collectivity and the individual, we are not able to equate them properly because we are missing out on one very crucial factor. That is the factor of the transcendental or the Transcendent. If we do not speak about the transcendent or the supreme reality, then both the individual and the collectivity have no relevance at all.

So first, we have to start right from the beginning of the beginning if we want to make any sense between the collectivity and the individual and the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. As Sri Aurobindo would say, although these are not his exact words, the universe and the individual are the two essential appearances into which the supreme reality descends and through which it has to be approached. There are two important statements: the Supreme Reality has descended into the universal and the Individual and he has to be again approached through the individual and the universal.

So, if I can give you an image—you see, later on in the same quote, Sri Aurobindo writes that the universe is the diffusion of the divine reality in infinite space and time, while an individual is its concentration within the limits of space and time. What does it mean? For example, if we think this to be the sky, then underneath it we have a whole layer of clouds. The clouds, all of us know, are full of water molecules. But how do the clouds express themselves? These clouds, if they want to manifest, or to use the word, express themselves, they drop down as big raindrops. So these raindrops are the expressions or the manifestations of the clouds. So the supreme consciousness, Sri Aurobindo would say, the Divine, translates itself, or as he uses the word, diffuses itself as the universe. But, the question here is, as the infinite extension the divine reality cannot entirely realize itself. Therefore, it created a self-concentration of the reality, through which it can aspire.

Now I think everything falls into place: that the supreme reality diffuses itself into the universe, but the universal cannot

realize it. So the Supreme takes on the form of the individual because the individual is the only person in this universe who can aspire. And through this aspiration the Supreme realizes himself.

So there's a beautiful system in the whole universe. Now you see the rationale behind the individual. Why the individual? You may be thinking that we are talking only about human

individuals. No. Every individual atom in this universe is meant for the individual expression and realization of the Divine. You may be asking the question, How about matter? Do the flowers and the animals and the insects and the birds aspire and realize the Divine? Yes, in their own way. But, as I know, in Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, it is only in humanity man that this aspiration becomes a self-conscious activity. Therefore, humanity has got the highest responsibility to aspire for the Divine. Because the Divine himself is asking us to aspire so that He may realize Himself.

In Sri Aurobindo's own beautiful words, he says: "The god, having entirely become Nature, Nature seeks to become progressively god and then in the conscious individual, world seeks of itself." Here we get the whole equation between the transcendental, the universal, and the individual.

It is a complex system. The universe is not created just at random: individuals are not asked to just live for themselves. They're asked to live to fulfill God. You know the famous sentence from *The Life Divine*, "To fulfill God in life is man's manhood". This single sentence throws an immense light on the entire yoga of Sri Aurobindo. That famous phrase, "All life is Yoga," Sri Aurobindo would explain it by this: to fulfill God in life, not out of life, not by going to heaven, not by going into nirvana, but in life, living this life on earth is man's manhood. It is not in or after death, for the existence of man is to fulfill God in life.

We may be asking ourselves, can we ever fulfill God? Are we strong enough, evolved enough to fulfill God, even enough to fulfill our own aspiration? Yes. We can fulfill God because it is the Supreme Himself who in the form of the individual is fulfilling Himself. You and I are only external instruments. The real aspiration is He and She. Thus, the question of the individual and the collectivity has to be seen always in the light of the transcendental. Then only things get into their proper perspective.

Now, having seen that, we come closer to what we have been discussing. We come closer to our social, sociological problem. This idea of a universal and the individual is innate, is inborn in



Ananda Reddy. (Photo: Lynda Lester)

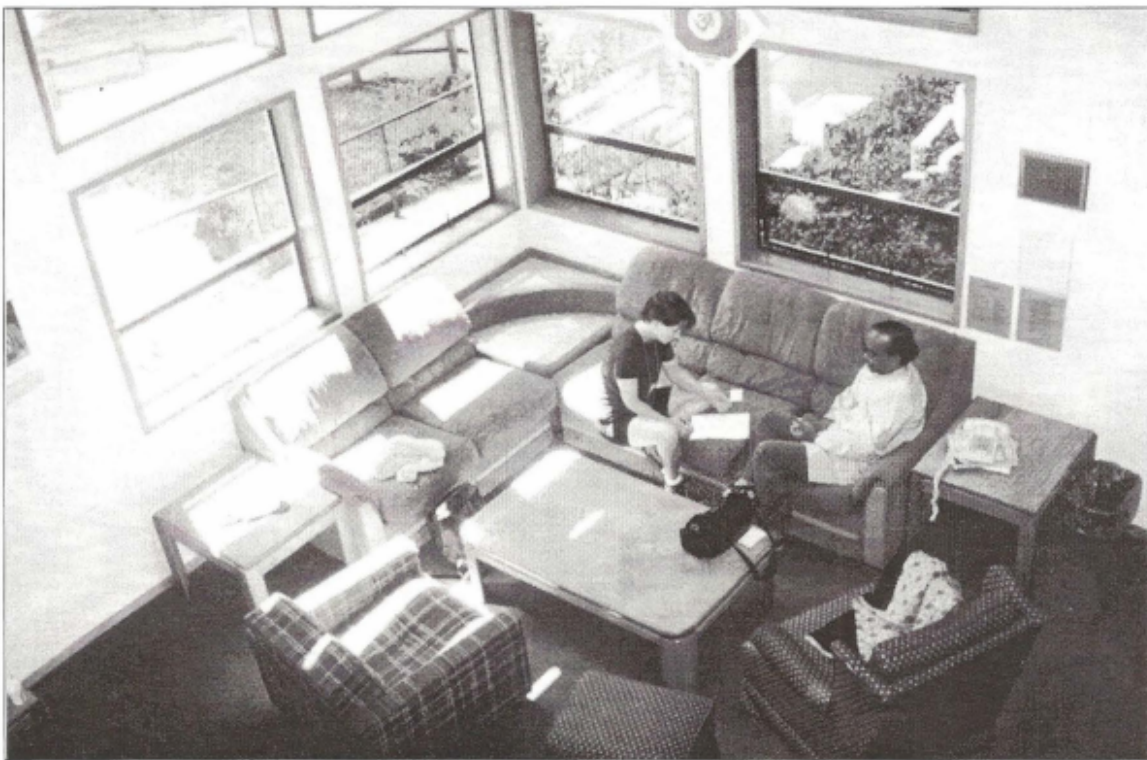


the human psyche. Therefore, we have here, on the level of life, two ideas: the society and the individual. The universal consciousness has been translated into the social consciousness, and the individual into the individual consciousness. Out of these basic ideas was born the three principle preoccupations of human ideals. What are the three principle preoccupations? They are perfectibility of the individual, which we all know to be the belief that the individual can be perfected. Then there is the perfectibility of society, which is the philosophy of socialism. And then, the perfect relations between individual and individual, community and community, society and society and nation and nation. The third ideal is the perfect relation between the two—the individual and the collectivity.

foresee the future. One doesn't have to be a great prophet once one understands the rhythm of this world, its progress and evolution. One can even foresee it.

This is what Sri Aurobindo says, that these two trends of individualism have taken two different attitudes in the West and in the East. At present we see exactly the same tendencies: the perfection of the body, the stress on the beauty of the body, on health factors, etc. in the West. In ancient times, we had in India, in the East, the stress on perfectibility - but spiritual perfectibility.

Then comes the question of the collective life where the individual is only a cell of the society; the growth of the race is all. And then comes the nation, a collective being revealing its soul



Nora Archambeau finds Ananda Reddy during office hours. Photo by Lynda Lester

It is very clear through all our philosophy or politics that this is what has come out to be known as democracy and socialism; these are the two main trends at present.

To take up the first one, its stress is on the individual; it is a stress on the perfectibility of humankind. This focus on the individual has taken two different trends: One, a free self-expression of the individual through a fine and ample life and perfection of the body. Two, spiritual perfection and liberation of the individual.

When we read Sri Aurobindo we almost begin to see the whole, as it is said, the divine plan of this world, right from the beginning of evolution. And, in the light of that plan we can even

in its culture, where individuals are only its instruments in this expression. So here comes, slowly, the stress on the society and the collectivity. This is where East has taken the greatest prominence, the question of the emphasis on society. All of us know—those of us who are Indians here and those who are living in India—the tremendous stress on social structure. In fact, to talk of the infamous thing—this is a name that is dreaded in India—the caste system. Sri Aurobindo has pointed out that the secret of Indian society's survival (it has survived for about 5,000 years) is the social structure of the four castes. Today we are misinterpreting it, misusing it, but the secret of Indian society is its structure, the four castes of Indian society. Of course, he is not blind



to the illnesses that these four castes have brought in. Certainly when the world was moving ahead, when the western world was getting into the age of subjectivism and individualism, India, because of its four castes, could not move fast. That is there. But it is also there that this is the secret of India's survival. So we have seen that in the East, the collectivity, the society was of greater importance; in the West, the individual.

But there is a strange thing happening. You might have noticed that in this collective society, the individual has an importance only to the extent of a spiritual liberation. In India, the social rules are very strong; they have been strong all along—the caste system, the Brahmins, the caste dharma, the family laws, the joint family, etc. The individual has freedom only in one respect, that is if you want to become spiritual, then no laws apply to you. You become a *sannyasi*, you are out of society, and you can do what you want. So that was the only outlet where the individual could go out of the society and turn to God. The society said, if you want to turn to God, then only I leave you; otherwise, stay in my structure, continue to do what you are doing so the society gets stronger.

In the West, it has been the opposite: the individual has had the entire freedom. But most of its art and drama is a collective activity. You see the Western music; it is the collective approach. And it is just the opposite in India. Social structure is there, but all its arts are individualistic—the song, the dance, the music, the sculpture. So we have seen the fine balance somewhere between the aesthetics and the social structure.

Now we go to the next point. All this has been, as we've said, something of the past. But what happens in the modern times? We have come to a stage in the modern times when things have all changed, at least in the West, and have begun to change in India. In the modern times the whole stress is on the life of the race, on the search for a perfect society, a scientific mechanization of the life of humankind as a whole. The individual is only a member of the collectivity, only a physical and economic creature—and not a spiritual being. I've gone around Europe and America for the last three months now and this is what I see: the extreme emphasis on the individual.

At a point, I would say, it has come to be an atomic individuality. Here we are so very completely individualized that we have become atomic, atomic in the sense that each one is absolutely separated from his neighbor. But that's what we said, the member is only a member of the collectivity. He has no other existence, only exists for the collectivity.

The stress of modern life on the material and economic life is "a civilized reversal"—these are Sri Aurobindo's words. And at present what we have done is nothing but a civilized reversing to the early barbaric state. As a stage it marks the progress of humankind, this perfection of economics and material life has a place. But Sri Aurobindo, as you know, he never rejects anything. No idea can be rejected from this world, no system is bad to be rejected, everything has its place. Although he would call the modern society an "economic barbarism," he still says it has

its place in evolution. Then where did we go wrong? When you concentrate upon it exclusively, when you forget the other side, when you forget the higher levels, the higher values, the other dimensions of human life, then this economic barbarism is full of danger. And the dangers, too, Sri Aurobindo mentioned long back in 1914, where he prophesied "a resurgence of the old vital and material primitive barbarian in a civilized form." You see the two words, "the old vital" and "material primitive barbarian". All the violence—people ask us why this violence, why this hatred, why this, why that. It's purely because of our exclusive concentration on the material and the economic ventures.

So he has told us, if we follow exclusively the path of materialism there could be a crystallization into stable, comfortable, mechanical social living, without ideals or outlook.

In the absence of a spiritual nature humanity may relapse and begin all over again or disappear like other forms of life before it as an evolutionary failure.

And that's exactly where we have reached. There is a crystallization; as we go to the super-bazaars and all the supermarkets in Europe and all the K-Marts and Wal-Marts here. What you see is a perfect crystallization "into a stable, comfortable, mechanical, social living." And Sri Aurobindo points out (a wonderful phrase for this modern society) that we will bring about "an efficient stability of a termite civilization". I think there couldn't have been a better word. "An efficient stability of a termite civilization." This is the most efficient world: more computers, more efficiency, more communications, etc. But it's also the efficiency of "a termite civilization." And then in the absence of a spiritual nature humanity may relapse and begin all over again or disappear like other forms of life before it as an evolutionary failure.

Of course, let's not say the Mother is there. You know the devotees would say the Mother is there, Sri Aurobindo is there, so no dangers, etc. But at present let us leave all that on one side.

As a rationalist, when Sri Aurobindo analyzes the problem, he says, if this is the trend that humanity is going to have, the danger is there that we may be rejected as an evolutionary failure. And the Mother, too, once referred to this. When she was



asked the question, “Will be a total destruction, a *pralaya* once again?” She said whatever happens, earth will be saved, that evolution will go on—but it is not guaranteed if this human civilization will be saved or not.

So we are really like the ostrich—putting our heads into this material world and thinking we’re all comfortable, all safe, no danger, we have all the avatars to protect us, and all that. No, it’s not that. We are playing the ostrich. We have got to awaken to the reality of what we are doing. And that is where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother come in. They bring in the essential question of the *nisus* of evolution. The *nisus* has always been a spiritual aspiration—a spiritual aspiration, which, in the beginning of beginnings took the form of earth, took the form of life, took the form of animal and man. In the past, religion, occultism, and mysticism were great signatures of our spiritual aspiration. That is what kept us going. But in the present world, if that is dead, Sri Aurobindo says, we do not have a future. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother once again stress this point of a spiritual reach and direction. And he would say that “a total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself. It is only the full emergence of the soul, the full descent of the native light and power of the Spirit and the consequent replacement or transformation and uplifting of our insufficient mental and vital nature by a spiritual and supramental Supernature that can effect this evolutionary miracle.”

So we are, as is referred to many times in *The Life Divine*, at an evolutionary crisis. And the only thing that can save this evolutionary crisis is, and he uses the word, “the supramental descent”. Why the supramental descent? Because, it is the full power of the divine consciousness. You may say Krishna has come, Rama has come, Christ has come, Buddha has come, X has come, Y has come, so many avatars, sages and saints. But nothing in the world—past and present—can save this world, except the full supramental power of the supreme. And therefore, he says, this is the only solution.

As he wrote this, perhaps Sri Aurobindo heard the grumbling voices of humanity saying, “How can it be, you’re asking for such a big thing from humanity? How can there be a supermind now? How can we have this transformation, full, total transformation of the body and the spiritual life?” He himself asks this question and says that maybe people ask if this is not too much. And then, Sri Aurobindo says “Do you think I’m asking too much of you? At first sight this insistence on a radical change of nature might put off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future for man as he is, it may seem impossible.” But then he adds, I’m not asking for too much: “For to hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational, unspiritual proposition. It is to ask for something unnatural and unreal, an impossible miracle. This change is not something alien to our existence. What has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside.” And secondly, he says, it’s a step for which the whole evolution has been a preparation. “If I’m asking for a spiritual realization or supramental-

ization, I’m not asking you to acquire something alien or foreign, or that which already does not exist. It is there already within you.”

He says, we have only to bring out what is already embedded within us, from the evolutionary point of view. From the beginning of creation, not only when humanity was created but the universes were created, it is at that time that the Supermind was embedded in our body’s cells. He says, am I then asking you for something unknown, unreasonable? Certainly not; it is an evolutionary necessity.

Now the time has come for bringing out that supramental consciousness. Why the time is now? Well, it is a different matter. Then why did it not come before? That is a different question altogether and we may have to take it in a different discussion.

But as I was saying, all the avatars, all the *vibhutis*, all the saints, all the spiritual attempts and every prayer till now has been only for the descent of the supermind. It has been as if the entire humanity for eons together aspired only for the grandiose moment that occurred in 1956, on the 29th of February, the Golden Day of the Supramental Descent. For this is the moment for which the earth itself was preparing for its millions and millions of years of existence.

Sri Aurobindo is very clear, he is not asking too much. He says, what is needed to bring this kind of spirituality is that there should be a turn in humanity itself by some, S-O-M-E. He is not asking half of humanity—but some of the people sitting here, in this hall. If we can see within us, within the very marrow of our being, that spirituality is the only solution, that’s sufficient. A feeling of its imperative need has to be felt by some or many. We’re not even asked to do yoga, we’re not asked to do *tapasya*, we’re not asked to do meditation. Forget all that, but get deeply converted by the idea: A spiritual change is the only solution to the world’s existence.

And if you can tell that to the Mother, if you can sign this new document with your heart’s aspirations, with your mind’s prayer and give it to the Mother, that’s sufficient.

And this imperative need, the sense of its possibility, it is only a word, apparently, because 99.99 percent of people think it is not possible. So if we who have come to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, at least mentally say it is not only a need, it is an absolute possibility. Leave alone the question of time. It may be 300 years or 3,000 years, I can’t say. But I know it’s going to be - like the sunrise of tomorrow. Have that confidence and faith; that’s enough.

This trend is not absent. And it must increase with the tension of the crisis in human world destiny, the feeling that there is no other solution than the spiritual.

Now this is the first thing demanded, and people knowingly, unknowingly feel the need for the spirit. Even youngsters in the university have begun to feel that there is something else, “that else,” they do not know what it means. They search here and at present there is a confusion of searches, but when Sri Aurobindo is given to them, it’s as if they are electrified. That’s because



The Mother in Japan. (Photo: Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

their inner aspiration and the outer Sri Aurobindo, they meet, and then they say, "Yeah!" Then perhaps they surmise that "this is what I have been looking for." But this has to be given. Sometimes they come to the lectures, buy a book or a photograph, perchance, and they feel the fulfillment of need.

But this is there already, the need, and Sri Aurobindo says it is not absent, it is increasing. As the world destiny is advancing, there is an increasing need in the name of Sri Aurobindo or God, some godhead without religion. It is immaterial, it is there.

The next question is about the steps in the formation of an ideal collectivity. How do we go about it? When I have studied Sri Aurobindo's writings, I have seen that there is the need of forming an ideal collectivity—there is almost an evolutionary need to do so.

There are three points where I see the evolutionary necessity of an ideal collectivity. We said that even before this time there were attempts at an ideal collectivity, but now again why are we speaking about it? They were there in the form of religions or collectivities in the past. Because, I repeat, the sense of spiritual reality should not be on the individual level. It has got to be on the collective level. But you would say "What's the difference today?" Today the need has come as Sri Aurobindo's explains in *The Ideal of Human Unity* and in *The Human Cycle*, on the progressive level of liberty, equality and fraternity. Sri Aurobindo says that we are moving toward fraternity, toward human unity. We have to move, and if we have to move toward fraternity, the most important factor is that spiritual element of oneness on the collective level.

It's no more an emphasis on individual liberty or the society of equality: it's got to be a combination of both. And for that combination, we need to have the collective effort, based on spirituality. That's why in *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo says we are moving from the subjective age toward the spiritual age. Subjectively, as we have seen before, we have to find out the truth of that thing within us. Why do they say that the western society has to go beyond the pattern of individualism? It is because it forgets that ego is not the true individual within us. The entire western society—its education, its norms, its basic principles and beliefs—tells us to increase the individual ego, to stand by the individual ego. This is what we call here "personality development." whereas Sri Aurobindo would say, the true individual is the psychic being, the soul. So when humanity turns toward this, one would say the true subjective age starts.

And then there is the spiritual. Psychic education is one in which the individual child is asked to, said to, made to, realize how to go within oneself and find the psychic being. This gives him the sense of the true subjective. The child becomes, or finds out, that this external personality is not his real personality. The psychic is the real individual. But you have to add the dimension of spirituality. Why? Isn't a psychic person a spiritual person? Yes, one can be a spiritual person in the general sense, but why has the Mother added this factor of spiritual education? Because spirituality is that dimension of existence where one becomes universal. Mother would say, tell the child; instill in it the faith that beyond the parents, beyond humanity, there is the High Spirit. It is that creative Spirit of this entire world that is looking after you. It is not the guardian angel of the individual as you may think. It is beyond the guardian angel; it is the one who has created this entire universe. So Mother would say, instill in the child, just say that there is Some Person who has created this entire world. It is not, as modern science would say, energy or nature, or this or that. No. She said, bring in the idea of this Supreme Personality.

Then as the child grows up, it will have the sense of unity, it will have the sense of oneness—oneness with other human beings, with nature, with other countries, with humanity. So, you see, very beautifully, in this age, when we are moving toward the spiritual age, Mother and Sri Aurobindo have actually brought into education the question of psychic and spiritual education.

You see how everything is converging on this point. But the most important point is the question of transformation. We have to have a collective yoga, a collective sense, for the yoga of transformation. Had it not been for the transformative element, collectivity would not have been necessary perhaps. Or as we could say, we could postpone it for the time. But if we seek any transformation of the individual even, we have to speak of the collective yoga.

Here is a quotation from the Mother: "I do not think that a single individual on the earth as it is now, a single individual, however great, however eternal his consciousness and origin, can, on his own change and realize this higher Truth which will be a

new world more true, if not absolutely true. It would seem that a certain number of individuals—until now it seems to have been more in time, as a succession, but it could also be in space, a collectivity—are indispensable, so that this truth can become concrete and realize itself. Practically, I'm sure of it.

That is to say, however conscious, however powerful he may be, ONE avatar cannot by himself realize the supramental life on earth. It is either a group in time, extending over a period of time, or a group spread out in space—perhaps both—that are indispensable for this Realization. I'm convinced of it." (*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM, Vol. 10, p. 138)

So you can see the absolute necessity, in this century, the necessity, of the collectivity when it comes to transformation. Perhaps this quotation throws a lot of light on many questions of why the Mother left her body? Why Sri Aurobindo left his body? Was their work complete? Incomplete? Why incomplete? Etc. All these questions can be answered more or less by this single quote from the Mother.

And then the last point I would like to stress is that Sri Aurobindo has also given us indications of how to form the ideal collectivity. He says, in the beginning, at a certain stage it may be necessary to follow the age-long device of a separate community, but with a double purpose. For me this was a bit new. He says a spiritual community in the beginning has got to be a separate community, but with a double purpose: to provide a sense of security—"a place and a life apart in which the consciousness of the individual might concentrate on its evolution in surroundings where all was turned and centered towards that one endeavor." And I suppose this is the *raison d'être* of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. But why has it been and why is it there at Pondicherry, secluded for long many years? It was not advertised in the beginning years. It is only now after the creation of Auroville that the Ashram also has come into limelight. But this is what he wanted, he says, to provide a secure atmosphere where the individual might "concentrate on his evolution in surroundings where all was turned and centered toward one consciousness".

So the Ashram provides that kind of one-centered consciousness where every individual at least thinks of the Ashram, of Sri Aurobindo's light and yoga. How much they do, how much they succeed or fail, is not for me to talk about. But at least the Ashram provides that secure atmosphere for the individual approach. This afternoon Peter Heehs is going to talk to you about the Ashram in detail. I'm sure the Ashram has given us plenty of individuals who have gone a long way on the path of Mother and Sri Aurobindo's yoga. For they have taken full advantage of the situation given, a secure atmosphere, everybody thinking of oneness, moving toward one endeavor.

But Sri Aurobindo is not partial. Immediately, he tells us, what about the monasteries in the past? What about the *sannyasins* in the past in India? They also had a secluded atmosphere. Like the Pondicherry Ashram, there could be other centers of yoga that will crop up in the future—an experiment in California, such as the Lodi Ashram, etc. What is the future of such

centers? It is nice to begin, but where is the end? Sri Aurobindo again foresees that. He says, yes, these experiments have been a failure in the past but they will not fail now. Why? For the simple reason that in the past it is the nature of human difficulties that have broken all the efforts of man, but with the descent of the power of the spirit, the supermind, such difficulties can be overcome. So the only saving factor of the individual ashrams, centers, whatever be the form of the community, is the supermind. Had not supermind come, the ashrams, the Lodi Ashram, the Delhi Ashram, X ashram, Y ashram, would have no future. So therefore, you can imagine now why Mother and Sri Aurobindo were so very insistent and Sri Aurobindo struggled so hard to bring down the supermind. For that was the necessary foundation, even at the common, community level for the future of humanity.

And he would say, in the beginning (he uses the word) let there be "islets" of this consciousness. I think this is where all our efforts can stand. Sri Aurobindo Association, Delhi Ashram, whatever you want to call, Lodi Ashram, all the individual associations that are sprouting up all over this country and the world are these simple "islets" of a spiritual consciousness. You see, they can be there, let them all sprout, as many as possible in different ways. Because they will all be united or are being united by the supermind itself.

One last pragmatic question: what are the binding factors of an ideal community? I have lived at Auroville; I know what is a collective living. We are all into it. But of the many binding factors, I would just point out a couple of them. One of the important factors is not to have an artificial community. What do we mean by an artificial community? A community united around a common ideal, a common realization is a completely artificial unity. It cannot last. That is the most superficial thing. That has been done a lot of times in the past. Sri Aurobindo would say, a true community can exist on the basis of an inner realization of each of its members, each one realizing the real unity with all the other members of the community. Then each one feels, not like just a member, but all as one within himself. The recent experience of arranging for this AUM conference—I was not here physically, but the reports that I read in the computer about the working of the participants, their efforts, their spontaneity, their oneness—I mean, I really felt from far the spirit of oneness that was taking place here.

It is this kind of a sense of the unity within that is needed. We can see how much we have to change our ego if we are to feel...you see it is very easy to say I'm number 22 according to this membership card. I'm not one of this community of 35 members of this Lodi Ashram; I have to have the inner feeling that all the other 34 members are myself. If each one of us feels like that, it is only then that we can form a community, not on the basis of external idealism.

And the most productive revelation I have had when I was reading Sri Aurobindo was when he said that even if there is one such spiritual soul, it reproduces itself in other souls, just as an animal body reproduces itself. A beautiful thing that really came

to my mind was an inner realization that with only one person, Buddha or Shankaracharya or Ramana Maharshi—even if there is one soul, that spiritual soul reproduces itself, that there is a so-called reproduction of a spiritual soul. So if a yogi does not have a child it does not matter because the yogi's soul, a realized soul, can reproduce itself in other children who do not have to be his own.

So this is why Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that there has got to be this question of the individual. There has got to be somebody who has got to lead. The individual is a center; the collectivity is the circumference. And the collectivity is determined by the center. If I put the center here [draws a dot], then the collectivity is here [draws a circle around the dot]. So the only way you want to become collective is touch the center. You touch the center, you touch the circumference. It is absolutely synonymous. But if you touch the circumference, you are not going to touch the center.

So if we are altogether 35 members in a collective group and we are doing all kinds of activities, meditation, this, that and that, still we can never be a collectivity. There is a small experiment that's being done at Bologna, in Italy. A beautiful community of 22 persons is there. They are really emphasizing on this collective living. Work is their worship. It is a very strong community bond. And they strongly believe in a hierarchy. This question of the hierarchy has been debated quite many times in Auroville and other places. Should there be a hierarchy or not? The Mother insists on it. Yes, there has to be a hierarchy. There has got to be a hierarchy organized in rings of one and two and four and eight and twelve, etc. But why this hierarchy? Aurovilians may be against it. Even the modern communities may be against it. They say we are all equals, this is a collectivity here, and only collective decisions take place. But the Mother insists on a hierarchy.

Spirituality does not need to be spoken in language. It speaks its own language of ideals, the peace, the quietness, the calmness. So somebody who is at the top of the hierarchy is a spiritual person. And the most beautiful thing, Mother says, is that you have to have this hierarchy because you are fulfilling an occult need of the world. You are manifesting an occult truth. So the necessity of the hierarchy. The real hierarchy is the hierarchy of consciousness. And this is a must because that has behind it an occult truth of the worlds. I understand it thus and this is what I have learned. I also did not think it was necessary, but I have seen that it is a necessity because of the occult truth of the hierarchy of the planes of consciousness ending in sachchidananda.

Secondly, I would say, work with the body is as necessary. Because although I may be a philosopher, I have to do work with my body. Go into the garden, do the garden work, do manual work, clean the floor, clean your house, clean your car etc. Because the simple thing is that work has the transformative element.

When you are speaking of the transformation of matter, matter wants the touch of matter. Mother and Sri Aurobindo could have transformed this world from their own levels of spirituality.

But they had to take a physical body because this body of earth, it would like the body of the Divine to touch it. So, similarly, on our ordinary level, we also need to touch the earth with our hands. And each time I wipe my house . . . today housewives think it's a wrong thing because they all go out of the house to work. Even a simple housewife can do as much yoga of transformation as anyone else. Perhaps, I would say, a housewife does a better transformative job because constantly she is dealing with matter, with food preparation, with house cleaning—and that too with her hands and her feet bare on the earth, touching it directly.

So work in the community, Mother would say, is of utmost importance. Because of work we all get united.

And the last one: love the Mother and (what is written in the Ashram dining room) "Always behave as if the Mother were looking at you, for She is indeed always present"—that I would call the mantra of the collective life. This is the individual thing of loving the Mother. The Mother would say, you can do anything you want in the world, but do all those things, whatever you can do in front of me. Whatever you can do in front of me, you can do. Whatever you cannot do in front of me, don't do. That is the simplest spiritual law I have ever found. Sri Aurobindo's yoga has not many laws but only one simple word: do everything, think everything, seek everything, feel everything, which you can do in front of the Mother. If you can, psychologically, mentally, imaginatively, go up to the Mother's room in Pondicherry, you can see her sitting on the chair, there you can dance around her, you can sing, you can utter all the nonsense. If you can do it, go ahead. But if you cannot do it, don't. We have these photographs in our houses, in our ashrams, in our centers. We know they are not photographs. They are only two-dimensional details of the Mother. She is in them as living as all the three-dimensional figures in front of me.

This mantra of "Love the Mother" is perhaps the best link between the individual and the collective. Perhaps, it is the best basis for an ideal collectivity.



S. Kundaswami, Dian Kiser, Devan Nair, Theresa Boschert form a spontaneous collective at AUM. (Photo: Marta Belen)



ESSAYS

The Integral Yoga: Practice and experience (Part 2)

This is the conclusion of a transcript of the talk Manoj Das gave to the AUM meeting held in Phoenicia, New York, July 1997. Part 1 appeared in the previous issue of Collaboration (Summer 1998, Vol. 24, No. 2).

Manoj Das

Synopsis of Part 1

The tradition of yoga goes back thousands of years, but the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is not even a century old. Practically we all are half-generation sadhaks of Integral Yoga. Have we done sufficiently what we understand as the yoga to exchange even our experiences about the practice of this yoga?

We are among the world's few who have tried to know what many yet do not understand.

Why is Sri Aurobindo's yoga integral? It is integral primarily because it has an integral approach to the human being. Sri Aurobindo viewed man as a total being and no aspect of the human being can be outside the influence of the *vibhuti*, the power of yoga.

It is also integral because it removes the dichotomy, the iron wall that had been constructed by mystics of the centuries, that wall between the so-called mundane life and spiritual life. Consciously or unconsciously most people believe, even when they turn to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, that there is a certain time of life that must be devoted to yoga, and the rest is for unyogic activities.

Sri Aurobindo believes there is nothing in this life or this world that cannot be turned into an opportunity for our yogic progress, whether in the individual, family, political, social, or the exclusive meditative life. This yoga is integral because the whole life is yoga, according to Sri Aurobindo.

In the glorious tradition of yoga in the world, there have been several major schools of development and each school of yoga has emphasized certain goals to be achieved.

Jnana yoga—the yoga of knowledge—believes that our ultimate salvation lies in knowing the supreme reality at the exclusion of everything else that distracts us from our knowledge of the supreme reality.

People believe in *bhakti*—the yoga of devotion, the yoga of love—because they say it is only love which makes it possible to be identified with the object of love.

Karma yogis would ask a very interesting question: "What is this world, what are we? We are all results of God in action. Since God himself is a worker and continues to work, the best way of realizing him is to participate in action as his instrument.

The compassionate consciousness of Sri Aurobindo had come down to place all these great streams of yoga in their proper perspective, and to show that none of them contradicts another. Each yoga has a truth of its own, and his great consciousness presented an elaborate synthesis of all these essential characteristics and goals of all these schools of yoga.

He formulated certain principles that might sound very simple, yet when we put these principles into practice we see that the essential goal of all schools of yoga are spontaneously realized to be the principles of aspiration, rejection, and surrender. All those who practice Integral Yoga following these three principles, in time realize that they are simultaneously doing *jnana yoga*, *karma yoga*, and *bhakti yoga*.

How is aspiration different from our ambition, our natural urge for doing something? When ambition, by the touch of grace, is turned into an urge to prove ourselves worthy before the eyes of the divine—not before any human eye, not before the eye of society—it is aspiration.

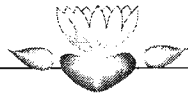
Aspiration is something that has to bloom either through accumulated experiences of disenchantment and disillusionment, or arises in those lucky who know there must be some different value system in life.

—summarized by Vishnu Eschner

Part 2

Someone was asking me; "what exactly is the reversal of values?" You all know the story of Sohrab and Rustam. Rustam was a legendary warrior in the Persian epic, Shah Namah. Once he took leave of his king (he was the king's cousin) and while wandering across the country, became the guest of a local chieftain, who had a beautiful daughter, Takhmina. Takhmina and Rustam fall in love and get married. They live happily and time passes, when one day the king's messenger comes to inform Rustam that there is a grave danger of an attack from the Turks, and requests that he return to the capital. Rustam returns to the capital and Takhmina knows in her heart that that he will never return to her. She is expecting a child at that point and Rustam bids her goodbye, leaving her with an amulet with his dynasty's symbol. "If it is a boy, put it around his arm and inform me. If it is a girl, forget about it," are his parting words to his beloved.

Now while Rustam is away, Takhmina gives birth to a boy and names him Sorab, but doesn't inform her husband that it is a boy. When the messenger comes, he is told it is a girl. Sorab grows up to be a brilliant young man, the image of his father. He grows up with tales about his legendary father, and his great desire in life is to surprise his father—he dreams about meeting



and introducing himself to his great father. And as it so happens, again there is a conflict between Persia and the Turks, and this chieftain (chieftains were often changing sides) is on the side of the Turks.

Sorab joins the Turks. The Persian and the Turk armies come face to face on the river Ormuz, and Sorab, influencing the commander in chief on the Turkish side, throws the challenge to the Persian side. "Let there be a single combat, instead of a regular battle between two armies. And in the single combat, let the best of the heroes fight the best hero from the opposite side, and whosoever is victorious, his camp will be declared victorious," he says.

Meanwhile, Rustam has picked up a quarrel with his king, and is sulking away from the capital. He is persuaded to come and accept the challenge, but on condition that his name should not be revealed, because what is the glory for him to fight with an unknown young man?

The fencing takes place, and Rustam thinks that in a few minutes he will finish off this newcomer, this young man. It doesn't happen like that—they fight valiantly for hours and hours. At one time Rustam, feeling humiliated at his inability to win easily over the youth, shrieks out "O Rustam!" just to encourage himself. At once, Sorab stops, hearing his father's name, the dearest word to him in the world—and in that very moment, Rustam's spear pierces his flank, and he falls down and says, "Do not be under the illusion that you killed me. It is my father's name that stopped my hands."

Rustam, scandalized, asks "What do you mean by using your father's name? Rustam had no son!"

And Sorab, quietly, says "Yes, that is what he believed." And he asks him to unroll his sleeve, and there Rustam finds the unmistakable symbol of his dynasty. And then he recognizes his own traits—his heroism on his son's face. This story ends there, and the sun goes down. Alone Rustam sits on the sands of the riverbed, with Sorab's head on his lap.

Now the mystic truth and the lesson that comes out of it is this: All his life, Rustam has believed in a certain set of values: heroism, valor, fighting, greatness, pain. Now as he sits with his dying son on his lap, he questions everything he has believed in, and I am sure he would have been happy to give up all his glory rather than face the tragic loss of his son and know that he is his killer.

This is the shock of disenchantment. All values suddenly, at a certain point, fall off us, our consciousness, when we leave it to nature to teach us the roots of disenchantment and disillusionment. But lucky are those who begin to analyze, utilizing the best capacity of their intelligence, their minds, their common sense. "What is the meaning of these goals, these values? Can they ever really satisfy wholly, can they ever make me content?" But if one does not do that, nothing can be done, aspiration has to come spontaneously.

Sri Aurobindo's power is not a moral teaching, it is not an alternative to any other philosophy or any other religious doctrine. It is a new consciousness.

Rejection

Then comes Sri Aurobindo's prescription for rejection. There is an inborn, instinctive, if not intuitive—in more developed human beings it is intuitive—sense of discrimination. Each consciousness (when one has turned to Yoga), turned to the realization of certain divine realities, knows the issues, and the pulls that keep him away from his pursuit. Each consciousness also knows the things that help him to go in a natural way towards his goals.

Someone today observed—someone very dear to me, a person of good will—"Don't you think that the Sri Aurobindo movement everywhere is turning a bit religious?" I did not have a lot of time to go over this very interesting observation. I did say "Look here, it may appear to be like that, because we are creatures of *samskara*. It is not that our consciousness always approves of a certain habit, but it is very difficult to get over the habit. At the moment, until certain new ways for expressing our spiritual attitude have come to the surface, the old ways will persist, they have a role to play, there is nothing to worry about. The essential question is whether one has understood Sri Aurobindo or not. Sri Aurobindo's power is not a moral teaching, it is not an alternative to any other philosophy or any other religious doctrine. It is a new consciousness. The consciousness knows how to pave its way through the multitudes in due course. It is a transitional phase that we are going through."

Sometimes I might have been convinced about the futility of a certain ritual, yet may cling to it. It is like the Punjabi story. Two friends are working near the banks of a river. The river is in flood. There is a blanket floating by. One of the friends jumps into the river to bring the blanket ashore. But it seems that both the blanket and the person are being swept by the flood. The other friend says "Leave the blanket and come away!" The other says, "I have left the blanket—it is the blanket which is not leaving me!" On a closer look one might have seen that it was a bear floating by that looked like a blanket.

We, in our consciousness, come out of certain rituals, certain *samskaras*, but the external habits persist for some time. There is nothing to worry about this. But inwardly, anyone who has come to this path should know what is conducive to his progress, and what is not.



Surrender

Then comes surrender. In one sense, very simple; in another sense, the most difficult and complex of all the three disciplines (aspiration, rejection, and surrender) because when the question of surrender comes, immediately our ego revolts. The ego, which has monopolized our consciousness, our being, our identity, doesn't like to lose ground, and suddenly become a nonentity, to be discarded. Through hundreds of subtle ways it tries to hinder the very process of our surrender.

At every moment we do surrender to certain influences, certain forces, physical or supraphysical, visible or invisible, material or occult, but we are not aware of these things. We are not even aware of very gross influences which mould our conduct, our routine in life.

A few years ago I was giving a series of talks at Bombay University. On the fourth evening of my talks (I was speaking on Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*), I became aware of a little commotion in the front row as I was about to begin. I noticed that someone very influential (a VIP) had just arrived, and everybody was eager to give him a seat. After my talk was over, I came down, and he greeted me with a smile.

He said, "I liked your talk. In fact, I wanted to attend the whole series of your talks. My son had told me, 'Father, don't miss this series.' In fact, last evening, when I was about to go out of my house, my daughter's husband's father suddenly arrived from the United States! Well, after five years absence I could not leave him immediately, just ask him to have a cup of tea—I had to spend some time with him."

"On the second evening my wife pled with me to accompany her on some errands.

"On the third evening I was about to come, and there was a phone call from Delhi. 'The Prime Minister would like to talk to you, sir, at 8:45. Be present near a telephone.' I was not sure if I could come back before that time."

"Today my son said 'Father, I never saw you in the auditorium! What happened? I said, 'My son, tonight I am definitely coming.' So I came."

When he was talking to me there was a small throng of about 20 people around us, because he was an important man. Then he asked me a question. "Look here, I accept all that you said, but one thing I doubt. You said, 'Supreme wisdom lies in one surrendering to the Divine.' If I do that, I am a cipher, what remains of me?"

I told him, "My first reaction to your question is, I have never said this, I do not even have the minimum *adhikar* ('right') to say this—it is Lord Krishna who told Arjuna, in the Gita, *sarvadharman parityajya mamekam saranam vraja*. 'Give up all your commitments, duties, your religious bonds and surrender to me'.

[Gita 18:66] I have not said this, it was Krishna."

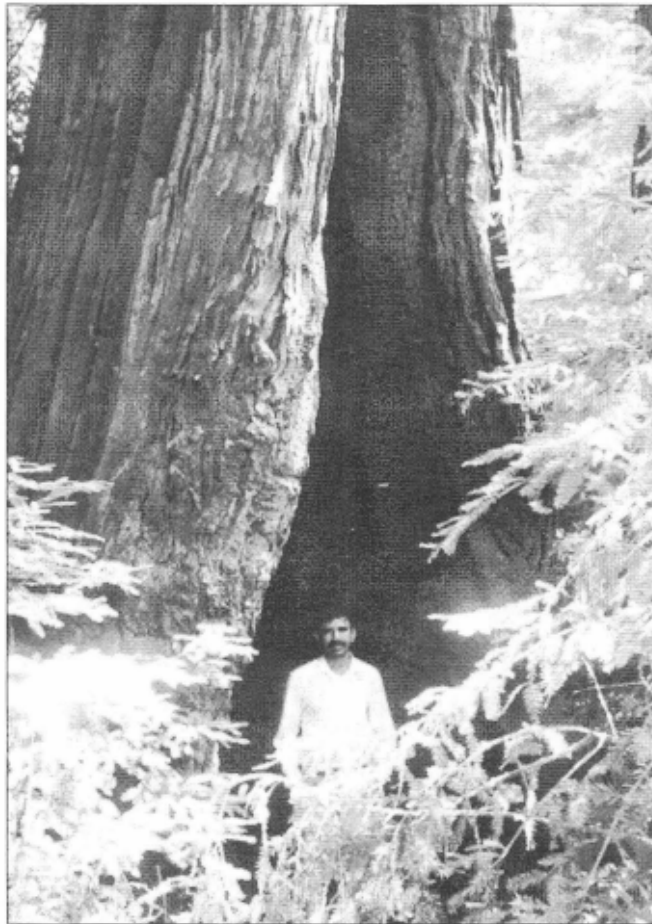
"So far as the second part of the question is concerned, whether you become a cipher or not"—and then I addressed the people listening to us—"If you don't mind, I will take him aside." And I took him aside.

I told him, "You are at least 20 years older than I. You are a mature man. I will be very blunt with you. I hope you don't mind." He said "No, no, I won't."

"Look here," I said, "The first evening you wanted to attend my talk, but because of your daughter's husband's father's influence you could not do it. The second evening you wanted to attend my talk, you could not do it because of your wife's influence. The third evening you wanted to attend my talk you could not do it because of the Prime Minister's influence on you. Today you attended my talk because of your son's influence on you. In all this you did not surrender yourself to anything. You believed

you were yourself; only when it is a question of surrender to the Divine you become a cipher, you become a zero?" As he was a mature man, he understood. "I had not looked at the situation from this point of view." I said, "No, none of us does."

In fact, at every moment hundreds of unknown factors are influencing us. And when it is a question of our surrendering to the Divine, it does not amount to our forfeiting ourselves—we rediscover ourselves. Essentially we all are the sparks of the Divine deep within ourselves, in our psychic being. So when I speak



"Shelter." (Photo: Marta Belen)



of surrendering to the Divine, it is precisely rediscovering my hitherto unknown splendor, my second self, my true self.

What is special about surrendering to the Divine Mother? In the *Gita* it says surrender to the Lord. Somebody has asked Sri Aurobindo in one of the letters, "What is the difference between your yoga and the yoga of the *Gita*?" We must remember that before Sri Aurobindo, the *Gita* was the earliest attempt to bring all the streams of the various schools of yoga into one. There is nothing beyond the scope of the Divine. Every activity of man, every aspect of life, can be turned into an opportunity for the practice of yoga. This is the daring proposition Sri Krishna placed before his dear friend, Arjuna. Even the battlefield, which represents symbolically the most gross emotions and actions of life, can be the field of one's yoga, provided one can turn oneself into an instrument of the Divine. A daring proposition indeed. Sri Krishna wanted Arjuna to practice karma as an instrument of the Divine; *jnana*, with full consciousness and knowledge of why he was doing this; and with the total surrender to the Divine through his love, through his adoration.

Elements of tantra

Undoubtedly the *Gita* is the finest prelude to Sri Aurobindo's yoga. But apart from the vision of transformation, transcendence, supramentalization, there is one other element in Sri Aurobindo's yoga which differentiates it from the *Gita*. Sri Aurobindo combines not only the principles of the major schools of yoga, but also the basic principles of tantra.

Both yoga and tantra are of hoary antiquity. While Yoga preferred avoiding certain activities of life which were considered a hindrance to spiritual progress, tantra dared to explore those very activities, for it believed that deep within it lay hidden a Divine principle. Practitioners of tantra indulged in the very lures of nature which yoga shunned. They went into such practices and habits which were considered dangerous, but they were resolved never to be lured by anything, and go to the ultimate hidden principle—the principle of power and delight. It is like this: you visualize a long tunnel, you enter it. At the end of the tunnel there is sunlight, but there are so many labyrinthine paths linked to this tunnel with false lights, with false, but inviting rays. So if a thousand people enter this tunnel of tantra, nine hundred and ninety nine are lured by these magical lights and go for small siddhis and never reach the end of the tunnel. Only one does.

The presiding deity of tantra is the Prakriti, Mother Nature. When one goes into tantra for desire of power, it is Mother Nature, the Divine Mother in her lowest manifestation that takes him in. But she begins to reveal her more and more spiritual and compassionate powers if the tantric's sincerity turns his quest for power into that for the Divine.

As we said, Mother Nature is the presiding deity of tantra, the Divine is the presiding deity of yoga. We must remember always that the supramental yoga has been done by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We are to reap the benefit of it by opening

ourselves to the Divine Mother, by surrendering to the Divine Mother. Thus, yoga and the tantra meet in Sri Aurobindo's yoga.

It is such a formidable task. No human being, even in his supreme wisdom, would ever dream of doing the Supramental Yoga. It has been done, it is being done by the consciousness of the Divine as manifested to us historically through the person of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But the moment one has really accepted the Divine as the Mother, the entire tantric tradition's help, the very faith with which the tantric sought after the Reality becomes available to the sadhak.

Obstacles on the path

Now, coming to the topic of obstacles, I believe that we today are passing through a paradoxical time, a time when obstacles and opportunities remain practically, inextricably linked together. Sri Aurobindo in the very first chapter of *The Life Divine* speaks of five goals of human quest since time immemorial: our quest after God, Light, Freedom, Bliss, and Immortality. The paradox of this quest and the result is most clearly visible in the American context. Our quest for God has led us far in science and technology, because every discovery, every invention is a revelation of the hidden splendor of God. But left to itself, as it is, it remains only a physical knowledge.

Our quest for knowledge, because of our current state of ignorance, has led to a million pseudo-mystic schools, false promises, false gurus. Our quest for freedom at the political-physical plane in the twentieth century has liberated man from colonialism, imperialism, and feudalism. But the spiritual quest for the freedom *from* the ego has undergone a certain twist and has resulted in the freedom *of* the ego. Today everywhere there is a clash between collective ego and collective ego, individual ego and collective ego. This is all pervasive—inside the family, in society, in every political party, in every setup.

Our quest for bliss, in a perverted way, has led us to drug addiction, and to myriad forms of entertainment. We are seeking bliss, but in our ignorance, we have landed on dubious ground. Our quest for immortality has resulted in a prolongation of unwanted and unwelcome span of life. Longevity has grown, but nobody wants it.

I remember in 1980 a leading American physician, Alvin Silverstein, wrote a sensational book, *The Conquest of Death*. He identified the four major killers in the United States: cancer, hypertension, diabetes, and accidents. And he predicted that by the turn of this decade, excepting accidents, cures would have been invented for all the other three diseases. His work concludes with the significant sentence, a promise: "My readers, if you can survive this decade, the 80's, you may be a member of the first generation of immortals." It was not an emotional conclusion. It was based on facts and statistics and the regular monitoring of the progress in medical science. But two or three years later, struck the unexpected, unpredictable AIDS, of which Dr. Alvin Silverstein had no foreknowledge.



We remember a small footnote in one of the later chapters of *The Life Divine* where Sri Aurobindo writes that a day may come when physical science or occult science will claim that it has found the panacea for death. Even then, death cannot be averted as long as the soul has not found an appropriate physical body for its ever-greater expression. And on one pretext or another, it will abandon the existing body and find a new one.

We find that in all the five goals of human quest—God, Light, Freedom, Bliss, Immortality—a tremendous progress or stride has taken place, but everything is beset or corroded by one element in our consciousness, which Sri Aurobindo calls inconscience. As long as this determinedly arrogant and stubborn area of our consciousness—inconscience—has not been tackled, as long as it has not been transformed, all this progress, all these marks of our great developments will remain confined to a certain limited value, a certain kind of paradoxical experience. And Sri Aurobindo says that the only power that can transform this inconscience is the supramental. Hitherto no power has tackled it, no prudence has really thought of transforming it.

Often our mind plays tricks on us and we stop short of complete surrender.

Identifying obstacles

When we think of our obstacles, we must remember that we often behave like that wolf in the African legend whose cub was trampled to death by an elephant. When the wolf went in search of the killer, the hyena told the wolf, “It was the elephant which crushed your cub.” The wolf said, “I will go and kill the elephant.” And he goes in search of the elephant, but when he sees the elephant he says “No, I have decided it was not an elephant; it was a deer which killed my cub.” And he kills the deer instead.

Now often our greatest obstacle is identifying obstacles which are not obstacles. We blame our circumstances, our environment, our neighbor, or some problems outside of us. These problems are very insignificant obstacles compared to the true obstacle, which is the inconscience. The transformation of inconscience is a project to which you can only open yourself; the project has been worked out by Them. All that one can do is to look as much as possible inward and remain faithful to oneself, and surrender to the Mother.

Surrender sounds very easy, but it is not; there come many kinds of difficulties. Often our mind plays tricks on us and we stop short of complete surrender. It is a regular discipline to surrender everything—again we go back to Sri Aurobindo’s vision

of life, there is nothing spiritual or unspiritual in our life, whether it is a physical or material problem, a social problem, a psychological problem, or a profound spiritual mystic problem. The Divine Mother accepts every problem. In her physical lifetime I remember a number of instances when we wrote to the Mother—on petty, insignificant matters—taking her time. Never for a moment did she show any kind of impatience with any kind of foolish or even stupid submission, demand, or complaint. She had equal time for the highest spiritual problem and for the most so-called worldly problem. Surrendering to the Divine Mother is the supreme dictate of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga.

Practice of Integral Yoga

What do we do in our life as practitioners of this yoga? First of all, let us never forget to be grateful to Them. Our souls have chosen this path or maybe it is the other way, They have chosen our souls for this journey. Next, we try to understand Sri Aurobindo as much as we can, without the least eagerness to convert anybody or to convert society. The consciousness does not change with quantity. Let us remember one thing: it is only two consciousnesses—Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s consciousness—which have made all of us beholden to them.

Let us try this yoga on ourselves; let us first make ourselves a laboratory for experiment instead of jumping to reform somebody else. And by the time that our consciousness has become more open to Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s light, there will be a marvel. Mother says, “Change yourself and see.” Don’t ask, “What if I change myself?” Change yourself and see what is the result.

You have to patiently wait for the hour of God. The hour of God we are living through at one plane must give way to another more significant plane. Our greatest contribution to the movement would be a supreme optimism, never to submit ourselves to the many cynical doctrines of our time! India is the very epitome of everything pessimistic today, from corruption to the various vagaries one can conceive in a social collective life. Unfortunately, India is a victim of all such developments, probably because the inconscience is most violently at work there. It has been tapped, it has woken up, and it does not want to change. This is a stubborn last fight for hanging on. And that is where we can help by remaining firm in our faith.

In one of his early poems, Sri Aurobindo said

“Rejoice and fear not for the waves that swell,
The storms that thunder winds that sweep;
Always our captain holds the rudder well,
He does not sleep.”





REVIEWS

Beyond the magic

by Dave Hutchinson

Film: What Dreams May Come, Directed by Vincent Ward, starring Robin Williams, Cuba Gooding Jr., Max von Sydow, Annabella Sciorra. Metafilmics and Polygram, 1998. From the book by Richard Matheson, 1978.

This film is a visual feast, a drama of afterlife in which the landscape is as much a character as the persons who inhabit it. Early in the film the main character dies, and must face a new environment. But he is not able to let go of his old life.

"It's all real," a friend says, trying to explain that awareness and environment are intertwined. We are in a realm of visual consciousness, rendered in mythic images by a combination of traditional painting and modern graphics. This afterlife is reminiscent of scenes from early painters of the American West, where nature came alive, expressing and embodying life, death, freedom, transcendence; where physical objects became symbols of spiritual realities. The skeletal outline of a tree evoked death, or the flight of an eagle, the freedom of the soul. Nature not dark and mysterious, but positive and vibrant. In the film, these visual symbols, their interplay with the characters, serve to inspire awe in the powers of consciousness. As the Mother said, "There is no end to the wonders of the universe." (MCW Vol. 15, p. 5)

We find ourselves in a drama of life beyond the physical, in self-created universes of astonishing beauty and complexity. Through many simple statements—"time doesn't count," or "There is a natural order to our journey," *Dreams* tries to convey a sense of these realms. The books that Matheson used in his research for the novel were mainly written in the mid-seventies, and his perspective reflects the expanded conceptions of the afterlife that emerged at that time. Instead of a static religious framework, this is a surrealistic, magical world where boundaries are overleapt with a thought, mind is fluid, time shifts according to the placement of awareness.

One sign of the emerging spiritual age, at the end of the 20th century, is this move from past materialism, through our present transitional stage, toward a clear spiritual vision. In *What Dreams May Come*, we are still in the magical realism of an intermediate zone—including its darker side, with the troubling, strangled images of Hieronymous Bosch, or the fallen angels of William Blake. Yet it strives for deeper truths. Beyond symbols, the film speaks to the heart, through the timeless struggle between love and loss.

My will is greater than thy law, O Death;
My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:

—Savitri, p. 633

Dreams is a form of art that addresses the wonders of consciousness using the multiplicity of visual tools available to the artist today. It is admittedly a first step in uncharted territory. What dreams still await us, when films search for the true soul, beyond the magic akashic screen? Can the feeling of the soul, or the flash of intuition, be portrayed visually? Wait and see . . . and meanwhile, stop at a bare tree in winter, or follow a bird's graceful arc through the sky. You may not, as Ramakrishna, fall immediately into samadhi, but perhaps your soul will rise to the front, and a bit of heaven bring to human life.

In a swift eternal moment fixed there live
Or ever recalled come back to longing eyes
Calm heavens of imperishable Light,
Illumined continents of violet peace,
Oceans and rivers of the mirth of God
And griefless countries under purple suns.

—Savitri, p. 120

The essential writings

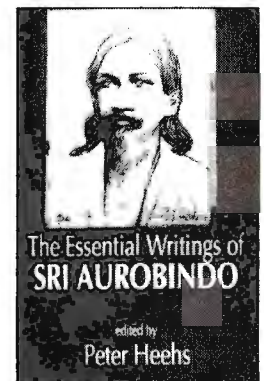
by S.R.

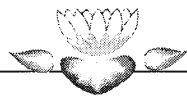
Book: The Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo; Peter Heehs, Editor; Oxford University Press, New Delhi

This review was published in The Hindu, June 23, 1998. It is reprinted here with permission from The Hindu On-Line and the author, who wishes to be identified only by initials.

Aurobindo was gifted with a mighty intellect, which made his early education in the U.K. a story of outstanding brilliance. If he had not failed in the equitation test for officers of the Indian Civil Service at the end of the assessment of their performance in the written examination in London, India would have had a most outstandingly brilliant ICS officer, rising perhaps even to the position of a Governor under the Raj. Returning to India, he served in Sri Sayaji Rao Gaekwad's College at Baroda but gravitated to Bengal to be the fountain-source of inspiration of a determined and defiant group of young revolutionaries pledged to free India from the British yoke.

Aurobindo and his brother Barindra ran a fiery journal called *Bande Matram*, which was noted for its devastatingly sharply





worded editorials exposing the numerous atrocities of the Raj. This activity led to the brothers being charged with conspiracy to destroy the Raj in India, which came to be known as the Alipore Conspiracy Case. Desabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das, peerless patriot and lawyer, defended Aurobindo successfully, hailing him as “the poet of patriotism and the prophet of nationalism.” He also predicted that Aurobindo would emerge as a great spiritual teacher.

This prophecy was abundantly fulfilled and when Aurobindo settled down in French Pondicherry to escape the attention of the Kanganies of the Raj, there came into the world a spiritual center of astonishing dynamism and power, a center which drew to itself *sadhakas* from every part of the world, all determined to sit at the feet of this new master who seemed to be a Vyasa, Valmiki, and a Yagnavalkya rolled into one. His work on the Vedas and its links, unbroken but hidden to the average eye, marks him out as a modern Madhva Sayana Vidyaranya.

He was a prolific writer. There was hardly a branch of knowledge with which he was not familiar and many of which he was an absolute master. There was hardly a sacred scripture of any religion which he had not mastered and whose teaching he had not made his own. His writings run to several volumes in the collected edition of his works, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. A devotee and archivist of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has brought out this selection of what he regards as the essential writings of the Master. These selections taken together form a kind of story of the evolution of Aurobindo’s life and philosophical mission, of the growth of a powerfully articulated system of thought. His range was astonishingly wide and his power of absorption, criticism, and exposition truly superhuman, especially in its last decisive and creative phase.

The book is divided into six parts, entitled “Nationalism and Beyond,” “The Indian tradition and the future,” “The individual, society and humanity,” [Gita 18:66] “The evolution of consciousness,” “Yoga and life,” and “Poetry of the spirit.” There is an appendix entitled “The fifteenth of August 1947”. Running through them all and linking them together is a strong, basic conviction of the spiritual reality that underlies the world. Life is an expression of it, whatever name one may seek to give it, the Divine, the Absolute, or God.

In the first section the readers are introduced to the early Aurobindo, passionate freedom fighter, who resolved along with his comrades of the Extremist Party to risk their lives and all to overthrow the British rulers and release Mother India from her humiliating and obstinate oppressions and set her on her mission of spreading the ageless message of the Vedas, that life is given to man not for sensual self-indulgence but for tapasya, conscious, unrelenting, unremitting meditation, to achieve his true destiny as a spiritual entity. Aurobindo was severely critical of those who claimed to be leading the country on the basis of a timid belief in “the inevitability of gradualness,” of slow progress through social reforms, economic and industrial development, education, moral growth with political freedom as a deferred ultimate goal, in the form of dominion self-government within the British Em-

pire. In a fiery article entitled “The doctrine of passive resistance”, he denounced the program of the Moderates “as the height of ignorance and futility.” Political freedom should precede all else as that is the life breath of a nation. The petitionary role, the political mendicancy of the Indian National Congress of the pre-Gandhian era was, to Aurobindo, a humiliation added to the manifold humiliation of foreign rule.

Although Gandhiji came on the scene and proposed a non-violent withdrawal of cooperation with the rulers on a massive scale with boycott of government offices, schools, courts of law etc., as essential elements, it did not satisfy Aurobindo. While he thought the Congress of the Pherozshaw Mehta era was not truly national, he felt that the Anglo-Indian (the English community in India) talk of the communal rift between Hindus and Muslims was designed to suppress the struggle for freedom. Muslims could not feel neglected as they were being pandered to, both by the Congress and the government. The Congress was not a mass organization but creature and servant of the Indian English-educated elite. He ridiculed the moderate leaders as still in the grip of a distressing desire for a British type of political freedom in the dim, distant future. “The English House of Commons,” Aurobindo said, “represented only the English aristocracy.” He declined the offer of the presidency of the Nagpur session of the Congress offered to him by Dr. B. S. Moonge.

It is distressing to find Aurobindo ignoring Gandhiji’s proclaimed objective of Swaraj as the goal of his Non-cooperation Movement. This blindness to Gandhiji’s objective, whatever one may think of the means employed smacks somewhat of political alienation. Gandhiji was engaged in unifying the vast, scattered and largely illiterate masses of the country into a coherent instrument for the overthrow of foreign rule. It was a vastly more comprehensive struggle than Sri Aurobindo thought it to be and satyagraha was a politico-spiritual force which very nearly achieved its objective.

To Aurobindo, Sankara’s repudiation of the reality of the phenomenal world did not take into account the fact that the universe of spirit is inevitably encased in a framework of matter and that the life one should seek to live should be one that seeks perpetually and resolutely to heightening of consciousness, that awakening of the inner soul which would transform mere physical existence into what it is truly destined to be, *The Life Divine*.

These selections reflect the growth of a mind of astounding power. The essential poet in Aurobindo helped him to see that poetry was a liberating “mantra,” not a mere manipulation of words, images, and rhythms. It is this approach to poetry that makes Aurobindo’s classic epic *Savitri* such a masterly story of the self-discovery of the spiritual nature of life that one should seek to lead.

This collection of writings of Aurobindo is not merely representative and comprehensive but reveals to its readers the truths of existence as they unfold from the mind of a true seer of our times.



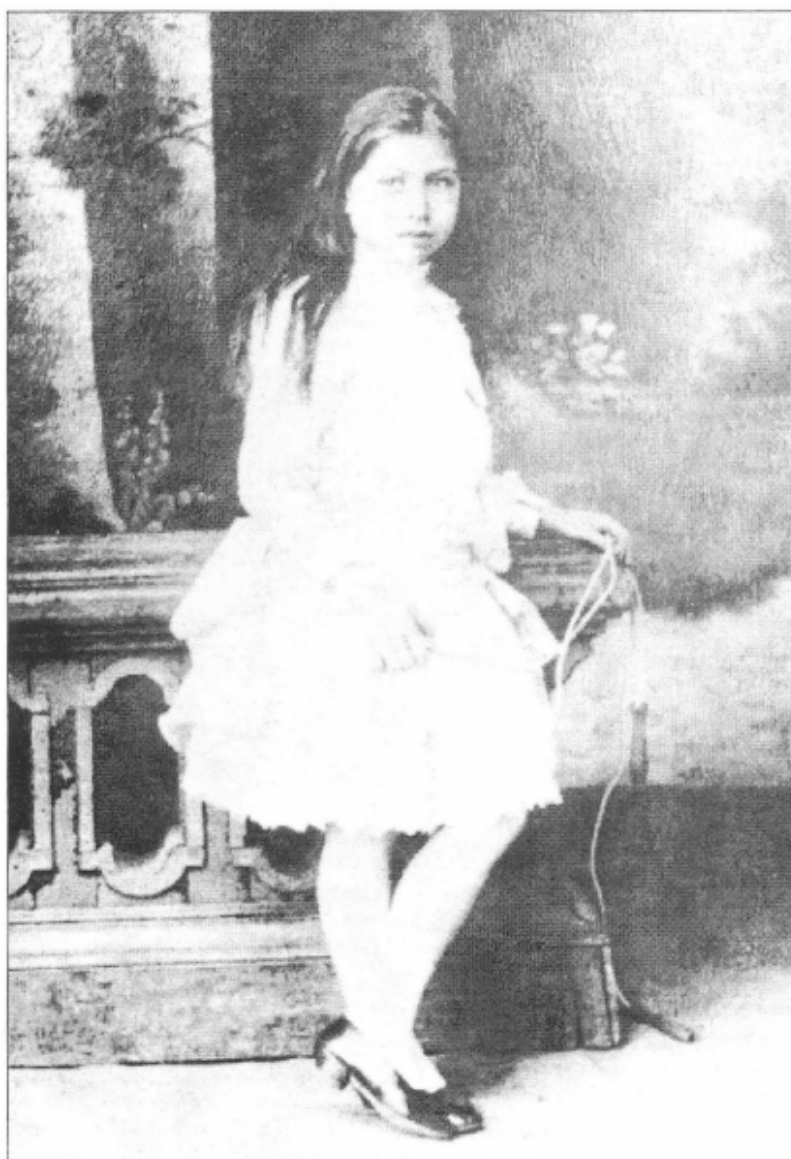


SOURCE MATERIAL

Your special mission

This selection is taken from Collected Works of the Mother, Vol 4, pp. 117-19.

One must do things with all the ardour of one's soul, with all the strength of one's will; do at every moment the best possible, the best thing possible. Never say, "So-and-so does not do this, "So-and-so does something else," "That one does what he should not do,"—all this is not your concern. You have been put upon earth, in a



The Mother at the age of eleven. (Photo: Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

physical body, with a definite aim, which is to make this body as conscious as possible, make it the most perfect and most conscious instrument of the Divine. He has given you a certain amount of substance and of matter in all the domain —mental, vital and physical—in proportion to what He expects from you, and all the circumstances around you are also in proportion to what He expects of you, and those who tell you, "My life is terrible, I lead the most miserable life in the world", are donkeys! Everyone has a life appropriate to his total development, everyone has experiences which help him in his total development, and everyone has difficulties which help him in his total realisation.

If you look at yourself carefully, you will see that one always carries in oneself the opposite of the virtue one has to realise (I use "virtue" in its widest and highest sense). You have a special aim, a special mission, a special realisation which is your very own, each one individually, and you carry in yourself all the obstacles necessary to make your realisation perfect. Always you will see that within you the shadow and the light are equal: you have an ability, you have also the negation of this ability. But if you discover a very black hole, a thick shadow, be sure there is somewhere in you a great light. It is up to you to know how to use the one to realise the other.

This is a fact very little spoken about, but one of capital importance. And if you observe carefully you will see that it is always thus with everyone. This leads us to statements which are paradoxical but absolutely true; for instance that the greatest thief can be the most honest man (this is not to encourage you to steal, of course!) and the greatest liar can be the most truthful person. So, do not despair if you find in yourself the greatest weakness, for perhaps it is a sign of the greatest divine strength. Do not say, "I am like that, I can't be otherwise." It is not true. You are "like that" because, precisely, you ought to be the opposite. And all your difficulties are just there that you may learn to transform them into the truth they are hiding.

Once you have understood this, many worries come to an end and you are very happy, very happy. If one finds one has very black holes, one says, "This shows I can rise very high," if the abyss is very deep, "I can climb very high." It is the same from the universal point of view; to use the Hindu terminology so familiar to you, it is the greatest Asuras who are the greatest beings of Light. And the day these Asuras are converted, they will be the supreme beings of the creation. This is not to encourage you to be asuric, you know, but it is like that—this will widen your minds a little and help you to free yourself from those ideas of opposing good and evil, for if you abide in that category, there is no hope.



APROPOS

Two things need to be done. Children must be taught:

- a) not to tell a lie, whatever the consequences;
- b) to control violence, rage, anger.

If these two things can be done, they can be led towards superhumanity.

—The Mother

On whatever side you gaze, you shall see my form,
Whether you gaze upon self, or the mess that is visible.

—Rumi

Only when you can be extremely pliable and soft can you be extremely hard and strong.

—Zen proverb

When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you until it seems that you cannot hold on for a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.

—Harriet Beecher Stowe

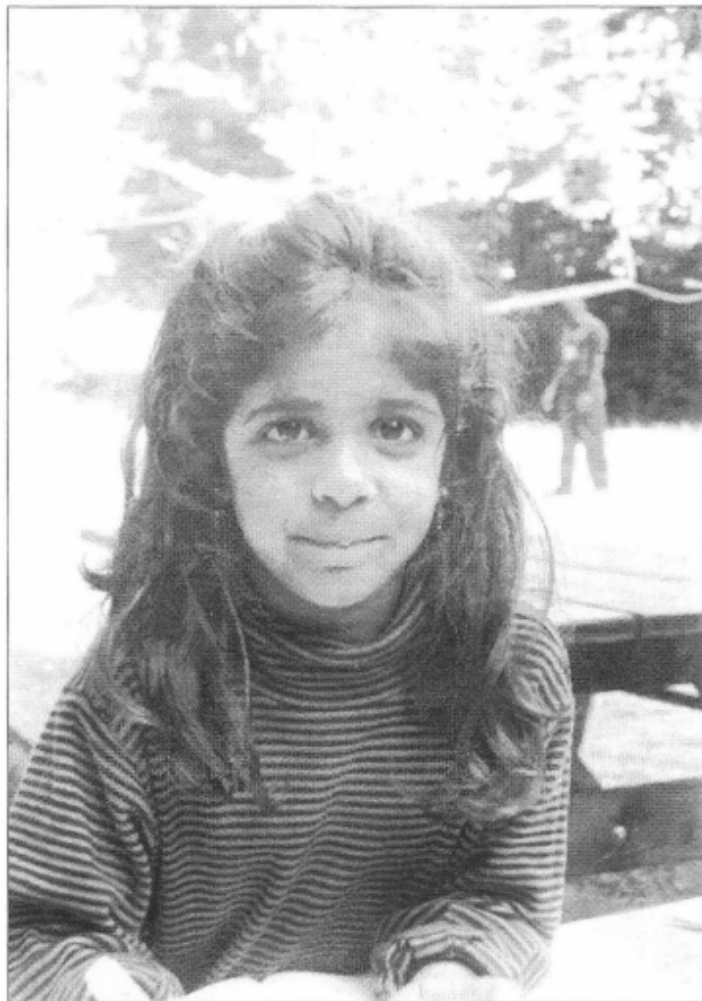
Words, words, words” commit us to positions we do not really hold, the imperatives of chatter; words are what we use for lies, false promises, and gossip. We babble with strangers; with intimates we can be silent. We “make conversation” when we are at a loss; we unmake it when we are alone, or with those so close to us that we can afford to be alone with them.

In love we are speechless; in awe, we say, words fail us.

—Pico Iyer

Only a small minority of minds can persistently suspend judgement in the face of contradictory evidence.

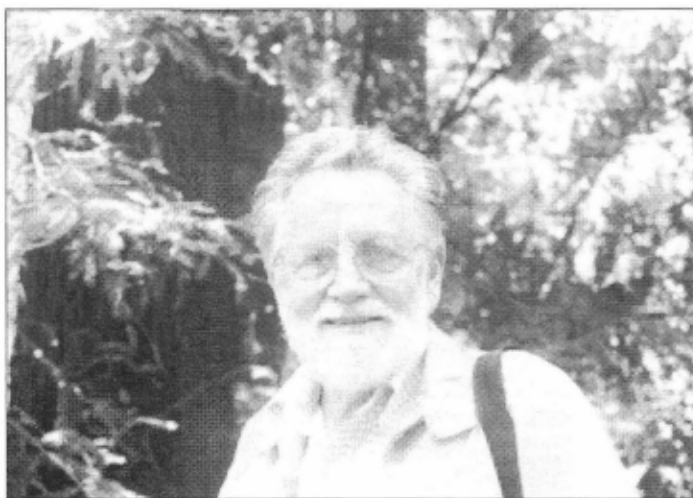
—Will Durant



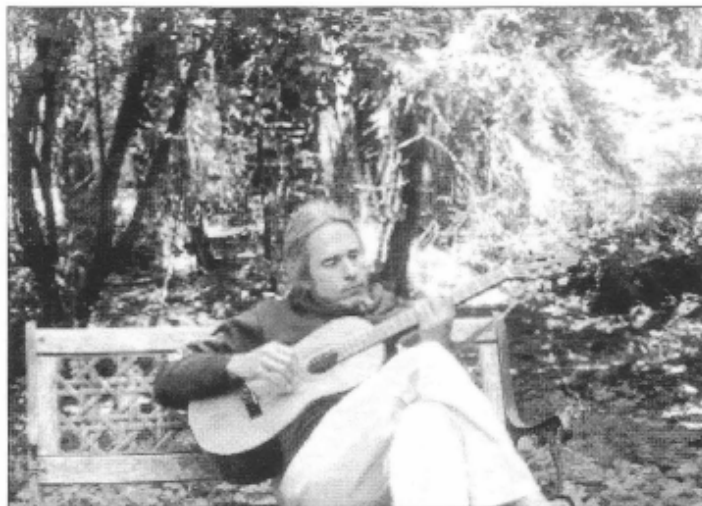
Aditi Reddy. Photo: Marta Belen.

I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness.

—Sri Aurobindo



Paul Edmonston. (Photo: Marta Belen)



Eugene Dove. (Photo: Marta Belen)