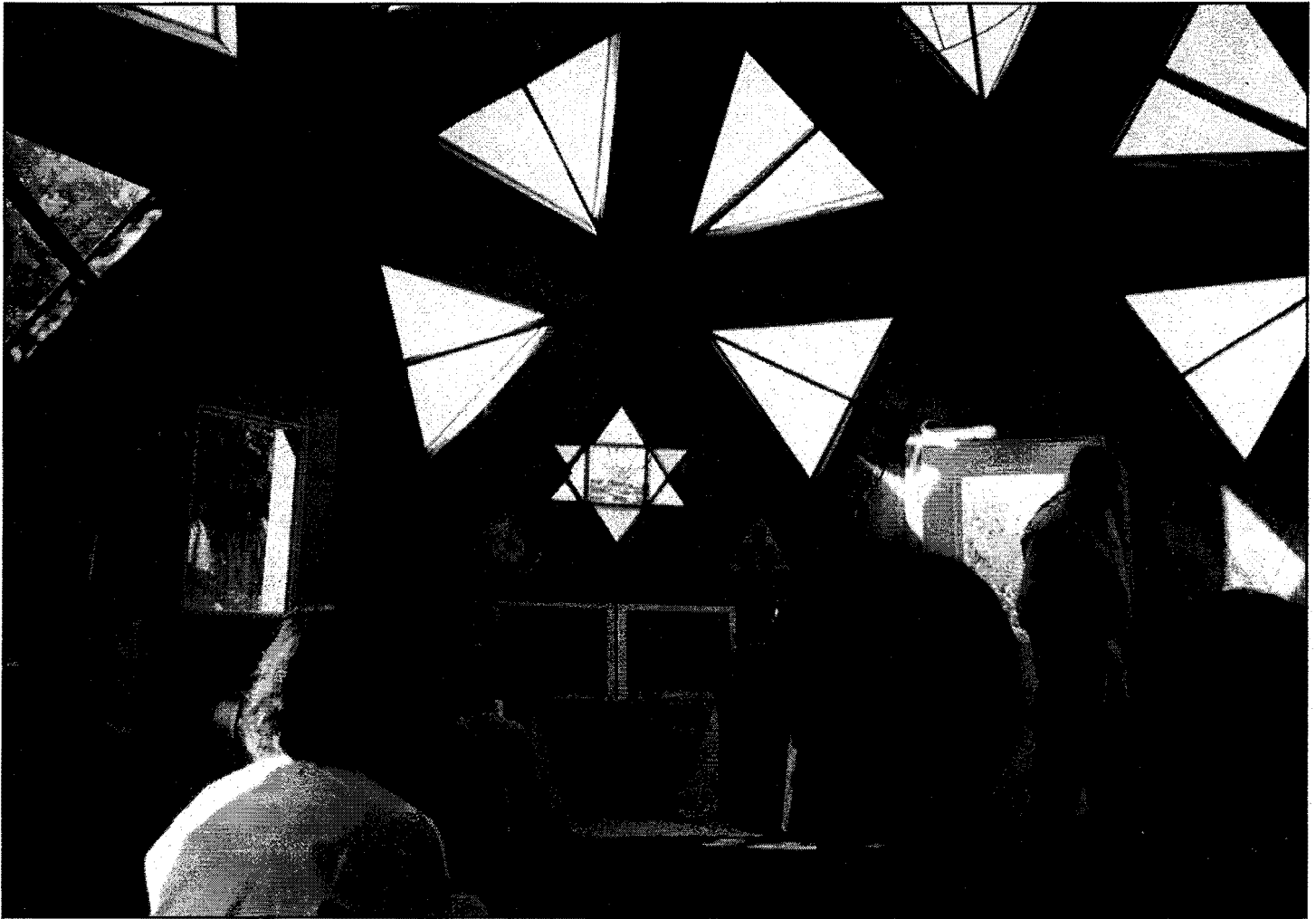


Collaboration

Summer 2002

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 27, no.1



**The history of the All USA Meeting
A special issue of *Collaboration***

OM is the symbol of the triple Brahman, the outward-looking, the inward or subtle and the superconscient causal Purusha. Each letter A, U, M, indicates one of these three in ascending order and the syllable as a whole brings out the fourth state, Turiya, which rises to the Absolute. OM is the initiating syllable pronounced at the outset as a benedictory prelude and sanction to all act of sacrifice, all act of giving and all act of ascesis; it is a reminder that our work should be made an expression of the triple Divine in our inner being and turned towards him in the idea and motive.—Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), Vol. 13, p. 475.



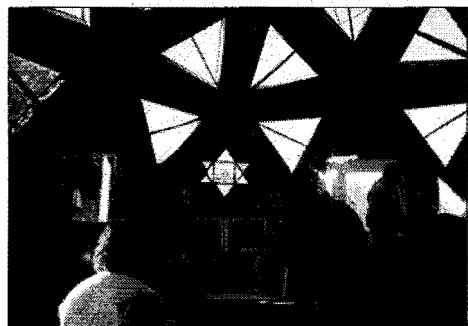
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Today the ideal of human unity is more
or less vaguely making its way to the front
of our consciousness.

—Sri Aurobindo, *Human Unity and the Spiritual Age*, p. 3



About the cover

Verne Henshel's photo captures the quiet intensity of a talk by Rod Hensel in the Savitri Solar Dome at Sri Aurobindo Learning Center during AUM 1999 at Baca Grande, Crestone, Colorado.

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A record of our yoga: an introduction to this special issue of *Collaboration*

by Larry Seidlitz

This special issue of *Collaboration* features a photographic essay of the annual All USA Meeting (AUM) arranged by Vishnu Eschner together with a narrative history written by Gordon Korstange. A final piece by B (Bill Sullivan) contemplates the inner development taking place within the meetings and in our collective sadhana. For 16 years, these annual conferences have provided a focal point for the collective yoga in the United States and beyond. They have helped unite disciples and associates of the yoga from the United States, Canada, Auroville, and Pondicherry in the spirit of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They have drawn us together in silent meditation, discussion and contemplation of our ideals and aims, enjoyment of artistic expression and physical activity, appreciation of our unique personal insights into spiritual life, and in the experience of the light and love of the Divine.

The conferences have served especially to unite us inwardly by drawing us into a common experience and sharing of the divine grace with which our lives have been blessed. This inner connectivity is subtle and not easy to grasp or describe, but it is surely something essential that must develop for a true outer unity to flourish. Just as in our individual sadhana, an inner work seems to be taking place in our collective being, largely hidden behind the veil. This working does seem to become felt over time in a growing familiarity and closeness with one another, in experiences of and with each other in the Divine, and in easier and more fruitful collaborations. We can suppose as well that a more richly diversified and powerful collective consciousness centered in the aspiration for the Divine is developing that has ramifications for both our individual practice of yoga and for the larger society around us.

The AUMs also in some ways have united us outwardly in common objectives and pursuits. They have sometimes served to help focus our attention and effort and money on specific projects here or abroad. Another way they have joined us outwardly is that for months preceding the annual conferences, up to and beyond the closing circles, organizing committees have worked side by side to arrange and carry out the major activities and myriad details needed for these international events. In addition, individuals frequently have joined together in the creation of collaborative programs such as discussion panels, slide presentations, musical performances, dance, and theatre. Each individual event, whatever its nature and whoever its creator or presenter, has carried with it a consciousness, often luminous and consecrated, in which the audience has united and developed a stronger inner connection and harmony.

As the photos in this issue testify, the conferences have drawn together the separate individuals and centers into a family. Together we have witnessed individual members of our family growing up, maturing, growing older (and wiser), and some passing away.

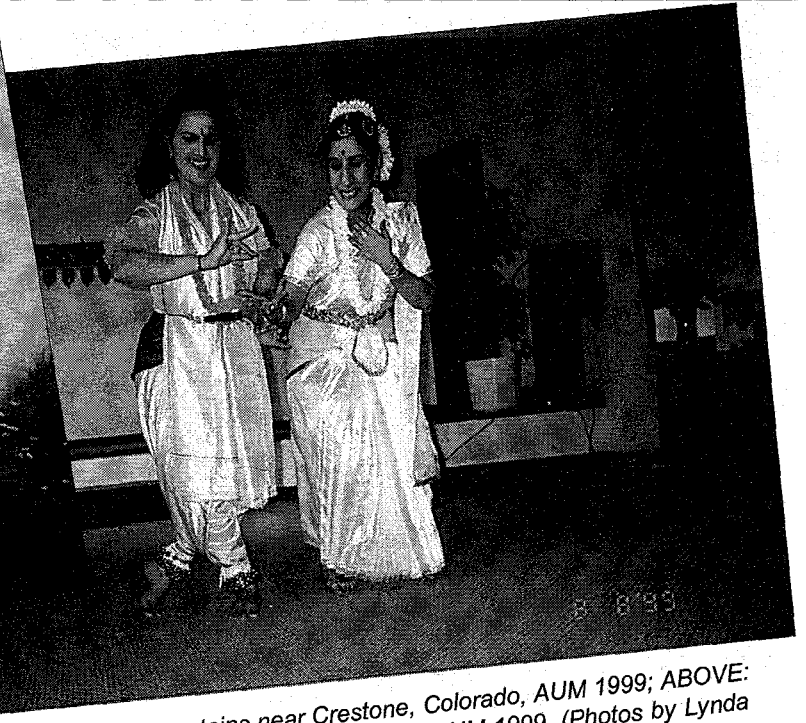


Altar and flowers at AUM 1998. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

We have forged relationships with one another as friends, fellow seekers, healers, teachers, students, and especially as spiritual brothers and sisters. The conferences have given us the opportunity to visit one another's homes, sometimes literally, but more so in terms of our different regions and localities, allowing us to meet new individuals in the yoga and experience other centers. Also evident in the photos is the love that binds us together, and with it the joy and Ananda that have always seemed to pervade our gatherings.

We hope that you enjoy these photos and appreciate the history of our meetings together. For many they will bring back fond memories. For others, who perhaps have not yet attended a conference or have not done so for a long time, we hope that these pictures will stimulate you to attend. We are still a small group, a family if you will, and the meetings generally have allowed an intimacy and freshness and spontaneity that one might not expect at such a conference. They provide opportunities for meeting and speaking with senior and with new sadhaks, for discussing questions or new possibilities, for learning about new facets and ways of spiritual life that one may never encounter in a book or in one's backyard. Integral Yoga has a collective dimension as well as an individual side: each of us has something to contribute to the collective, and the AUM conferences have served as an important focal point for the collective yoga in America.

Larry Seidlitz is the newest editor of *Collaboration*. He lives at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California. He can be contacted at Larry_Seidlitz@hotmail.com.



Larry Tepper shows the way, AUM 1999. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

TOP: The Sangre Cristo Mountains near Crestone, Colorado, AUM 1999; ABOVE: Dancers from a performance of "Savitri" at AUM 1999. (Photos by Lynda Lester)



OM or AUM

compiled by Gordon Korstange

From Harper's *Dictionary of Hinduism*

A sacred syllable which first appears in the Upanishads as a mystic monosyllable, regarded by some as the basis or 'seed' (bija) of all mantras. It is the root-syllable of origination and dissolution. Thus AUM is the one eternal syllable of which all that exists is but the development. the past, present, and future are all included in this one sound, and all that exists beyond the three forms of time is also implied in it. (*Mandukya Upanishad*, 1.1)

Vaishnavism and Shaivism define OM according to their respective theological notions. Thus Vaisnavas identify the sound-form of OM with Vishnu, whilst Shaivas claim that Siva in his form of Nadatanu, i.e., 'consisting of sound,' is the syllable OM from whose five mouths have come forth the notes of the "octave," *sa re, ga, ma pa, dha, and ni*. Thus by the sound produced from his drum Siva successively recreates the world. To the Vedantins OM is the sound-form of the atman, i.e., Absolute Sound (*Maitri Up.*, 6.5; *Mandukya Up.*, 1.1)



Inside Savitri Solar Dome, AUM 1999, Baca Grande, Colorado. (Photo by Verne)

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* (1.4,1–5) states that initially only Agni was immortal, and that the other gods, fearing that Death would ultimately destroy them, took refuge in the sound of OM which, being immortal and without fear, conferred these qualities on them. Hence the epithet of OM, 'Slayer of Death.'

From the writings of Sri Aurobindo:

OM is the syllable (the Imperishable One); one should follow after it as the upward song (movement); for with OM one sings (goes) upwards; of which this is the analytical explanation.

Now this OM is the syllable of Assent; for to whatsoever one assents, one says OM; and assent is blessing of increase. Verily one becomes a blessing and increaser of the desires of people who with this knowledge worships OM the eternal syllable.

—*Chhandogya Upanishad*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), volume 12, pp. 393 and 386 respectively.

OM is the one universal formulation of the energy of sound and speech, that which contains and sums up, synthesizes and releases, all the spiritual power and all the potentiality of Vak and Shabda and of which the other sounds, out of whose stuff words of speech are woven, are supposed to be the developed evolutions.—SABCL, Vol.13, p. 261



Bill Leon, Guy Ryckaert, Naren Bhatt, David Hutchinson, friend, and Hema Bhatt gather outside the Solar Dome, AUM 1999. (Photo by Verne Henshall)



All word and thought are an outflowing of the great OM,—OM, the Word, the Eternal. Manifest in the forms of sensible objects, manifest in that conscious play of creative self-conception of which forms and objects are the figures, manifest behind in the self-gathered superconscious power of the Infinite, OM is the sovereign source, seed, womb of thing and idea, form and name,—it is itself, integrally, the supreme Intangible, the original Unity, the timeless Mystery self-existent above all manifestation in supernal being. —SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 315

The function of a mantra is to create vibrations in the inner consciousness that will prepare it for the realisation of what the



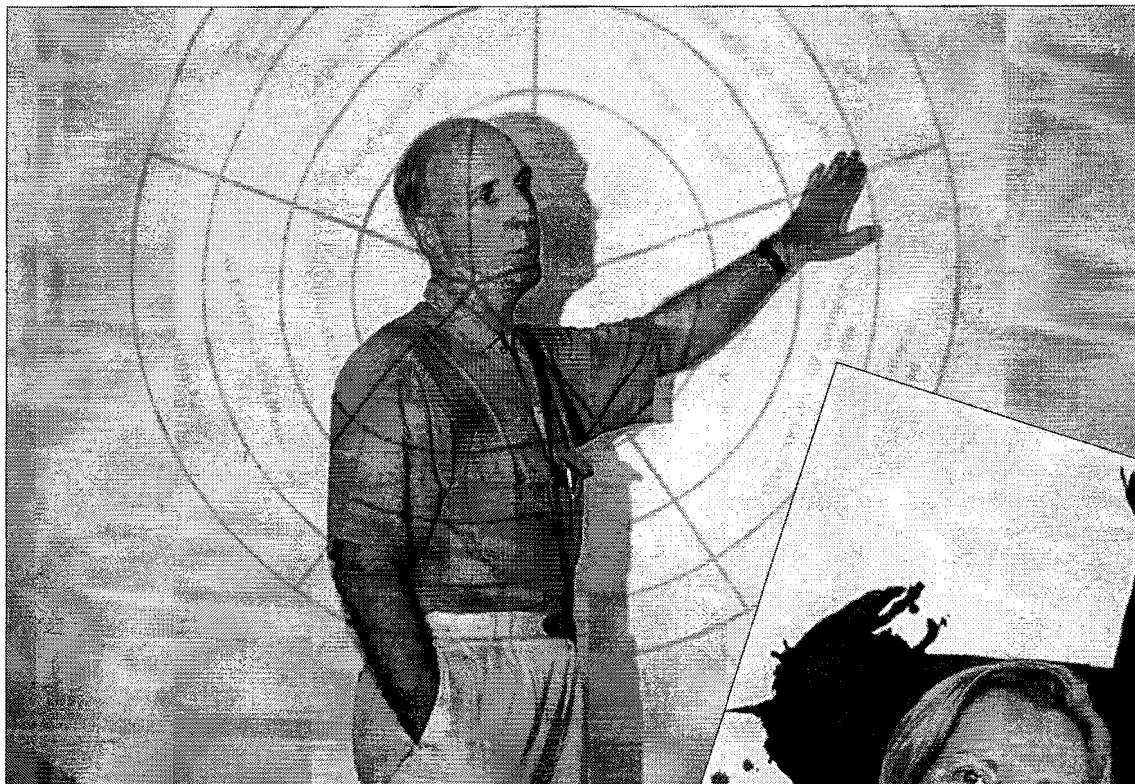
The memorial service for Muriel Spanier during AUM 1994. Middle: Lynda Lester, Muriel's sister Lois, Joan Tomb. Front row: Mira Nakashima, friend, Liz Inglis. (Photo courtesy Sam Spanier and Eric Hughes)



Savitra (Alan) Lithman prepares for the Descent; AUM 1999. (Photo by Verne Henshall)

mantra symbolizes and is supposed indeed to carry within itself. The mantra OM should therefore lead towards the opening of the consciousness to the sight and feeling of the One Consciousness in all material things, in the inner being and in the supraphysical worlds, in the causal plane above now superconscious to us and, finally, the supreme liberated transcendence above all cosmic existence. The last is usually the main preoccupation with those who use the mantra. "In this yoga there is no fixed mantra, so stress is laid on mantras, although sadhaks can use one if they find it helpful or so long as they find it helpful. The stress is rather on an aspiration in the consciousness and a concentration of the mind, heart, will, all the being. If a mantra is found helpful for that, one uses it. OM if rightly used (not mechanically) might very well help the opening upwards and outwards (cosmic consciousness) as well as the descent. —SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 745–46

Now this OM is the syllable of Assent; for to whatsoever one assents, one says OM; and assent is the blessing of increase.



Guy Ryckaert, on target, AUM 1999. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



ABOVE: Verne Henshall, abstractly, AUM 1999. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



LEFT: Margo MacLeod, Gordon Korstange, Rudy Phillips and Jean Korstange arrive at AUM 1993, Loyola Marimount College, Los Angeles, CA. (Photographer unknown)



A brief history of the All USA Meeting

by Gordon Korstange

Note: Unattributed quotations in this article are all taken from Collaboration articles written by Gordon, who was editor from 1982–1995.

"A vortex was being created, a synchronicity, a movement of consciousness greater than the sum of parts. I saw golden nets of Sri Aurobindo's vibration cast across the land, the new world universalized and resonating in the atmosphere."—Lynda Lester, *Collaboration*, Fall 1985

The history of the All USA Meeting is the story of our attempts to create something of the communities we left behind in India and the one we could see in our dreams for North America. It has served as a touchstone for the state of the yoga in this land and also as a plain old family reunion. This article attempts to summarize the main events and qualities of all the different AUMs and provide a basis for us to ponder its meaning and future. I have relied on early issues of *Collaboration* to provide facts and quotations, as well as my own memories. Much has been left out, and I refer the reader to back issues for full reports of various gatherings.

It's clear that returned Aurovilians and Ashramites provided the main impetus for the meetings and organizations which led to the first AUM. In the early eighties, when Auroville was going through a great difficulty, and when the Ashram was feeling the loss of the Mother, many Americans returned to the land of hamburgers and superhighways, television and Ronald Reagan. While

we searched for ways to integrate ourselves into this consumer culture, we needed some way to continue to work for Auroville, and we needed a way to process what we had been through. We began to meet.

The first large-scale gathering of this kind took place at Matagiri in May 1982 with about thirty people. It was at this meeting that a group of people, including myself, inherited *Collaboration* from Eric Hughes, who was devoting his energy to translating Mother's *Agenda*. David Wickenden gave an account of the establishment of Auroville International in Germany and Holland. The group discussed how such an organization could be started in the USA.

Then, in February 1983, a group of West Coasters gathered at Jughandle Creek in Mendocino, California, to celebrate Auroville's birthday. Many of those who attended belonged to the Auroville Association, soon to become Auroville International USA (AVI-USA).

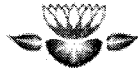
On the other side of the country, a group of people living in New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut had been gathering under the name of East Coast Nexus. This group found a home for itself in the Merriam Hill Center in New Hampshire and derived satisfaction in just being together as Aurobindonians.

It was with these gatherings in mind that one night in 1985 as I sat around Julian Lines's living room in Woodstock, New York, with Julian, Jean Korstange, and David Wickenden, that we conceived of what would become the AUM. I don't remember what specifically led to the idea, but once articulated, it clearly had a force of its own. We immediately rallied the rest of the East Coast Nexus and began meeting with George Thomas to plan what we saw as a daunting event. Suzanne MacDonald offered the Merriam Hill Center, which was already our clubhouse, and we set about inviting the American Auro-world.

David Wickenden wrote in the spring 1985 *Collaboration* about the events surrounding the first meeting: "Three major and interrelated developments have begun over the last year: the dissolution of the structure that was Matagiri and the launch of a new organization under the same name [which eventually became the Sri Aurobindo Association]; progress toward establishing a comprehensive U.S.-Auroville support group under the name "Auroville International America" that is linked to the worldwide Auroville International network; and the emergence of the Foundation for World Education as a significant funding vehicle and catalyst."



Back row: Savitra, Frederick, friends, Peter Calloway, Jack Alexander. Front row: David Wickenden, Steve Streeter, Paula Murphy, Clark Bell, Sam Graves, friend, Mario Anastasio, AUM 1987, Monte Toyon, California. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



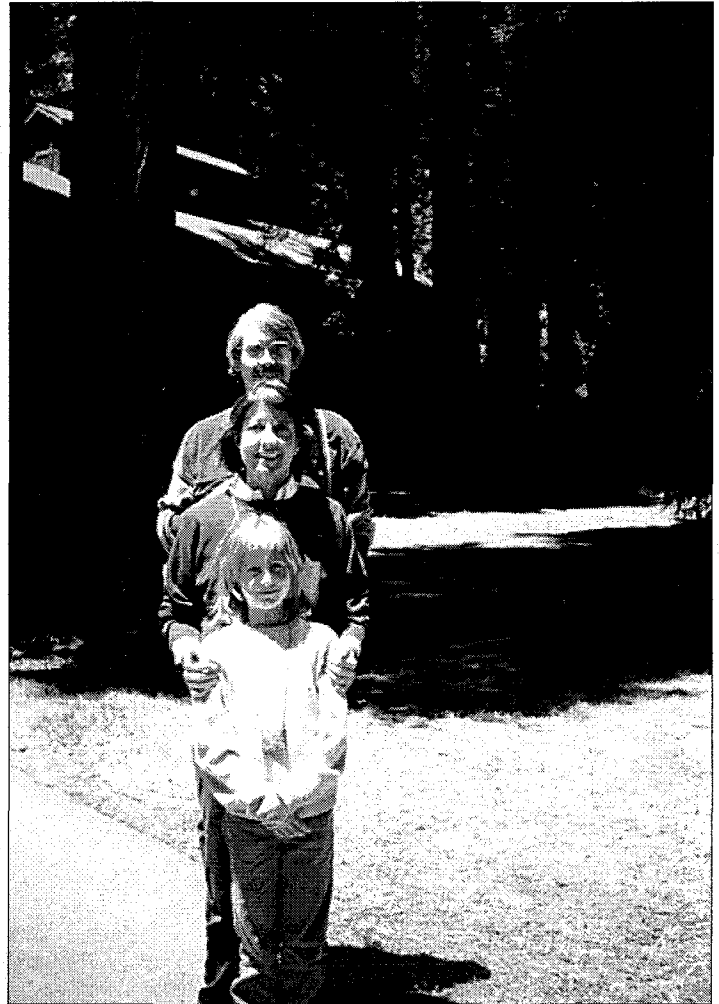
I had somehow come up with the name "All USA Meeting" for this gathering, though we knew that there would be many participants from other countries. However, our intention was to focus on what David called "a sleeping giant," the USA, and its potential for supporting work in the yoga. We knew somehow that this was the beginning of something new, something that would continue. It had to have a name and that name, I thought, was AUM.

When I announced it the next day at the first session, there was general agreement; the name stuck, although there were people who thought that a sacred name should be used only in a sacred context. I countered with the argument that using the name would help *make* the meeting a sacred context.

However, that first AUM was a contentious gathering, more reminiscent of the early "Pour Tous" meetings in Auroville. We had conceived of this meeting as primarily organizational and action oriented. We had evolved an agenda that, we thought, would enable us to harness the energies and aspirations of the participants toward identifying areas of work and then creating groups who would do the work.



Chris Gray and Jack Alexander compare notes, AUM 1987, Monte Toyon, California. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



Bryan Walton, Sally Walton, Kid Walton, AUM 1987. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

But there were too many voices, too many issues, too little time, and "the Auroville particle field," as Lynda Lester wrote, "was coming through, right up into the woods of New Hampshire. Enchantment, contagion. You have to watch those Aurovilians; they'll do it every time. They're carriers, they've got that new-world dust all over them." The plans we generated in those four days dissipated when we drifted off to our corners of the country, a harbinger of future AUMs.

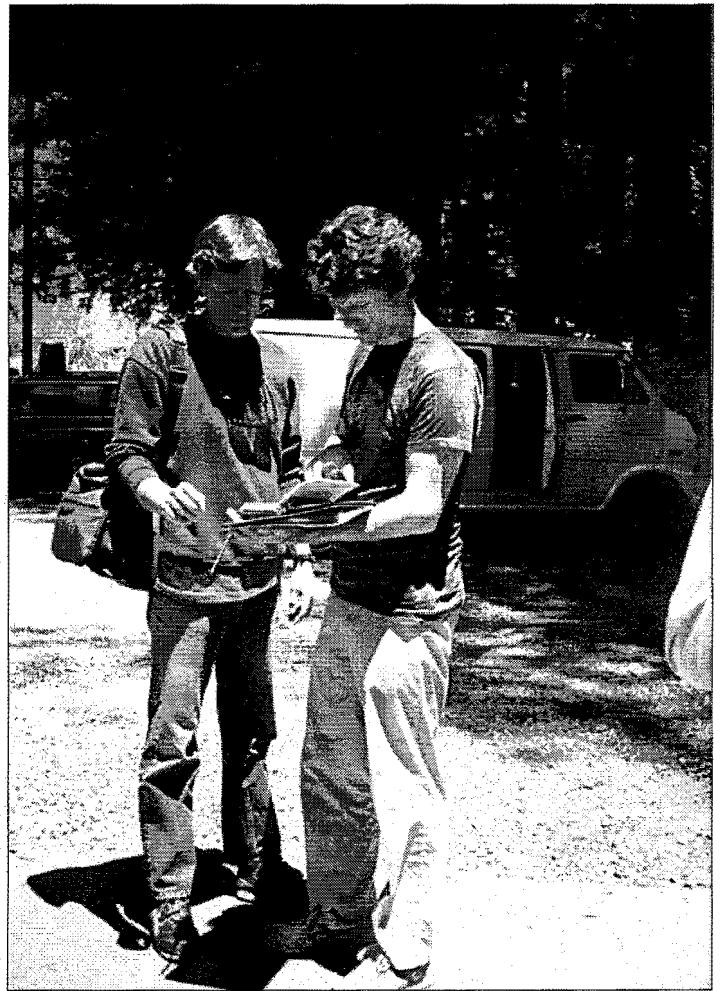
Yet that first meeting laid the groundwork for its continuation—the energy we created together just with our presence would bring us back again. Lynda also wrote: "What I'd really come for was checking out the vibes, linking up golden currents of force and light, and building a base for the transformation . . . but so far it had been Conference City, and where was the sweetness, and where was the living Divine manifest?" (*Collaboration*, Fall 1985) Future AUMs would struggle with this issue, each in its own way.



The next AUM, from 15–17 August 1986, was also at the Merriam Hill Center (cost: \$50 for room and board). This time the emphasis was on establishing connections between the attendees and establishing a better balance between the inner and outer. During the morning of August 16, in an activity that would become a staple at future gatherings, individuals interviewed and then introduced each other to an enthralled audience of AUMers. In the afternoon, groups met around “inner networking, fundraising, education, health, marketing, AVI, and national coordination. It was a time to sow ideas, debate directions, question and listen.” (*Collaboration*, Fall 1986) The meeting ended with a soon-to-be-familiar question: Where would the next AUM be? It was a time to go national.

And go, we did, for AUM ‘87—all the way to Aptos, California, and the Monte Toyon Conference Center in the middle of tall redwoods. This meeting helped establish the tradition that the AUM should be held somewhere beautiful.

The Monte Toyon meditation room was perched up among the redwoods. Since AVI-USA was coordinating the gathering, much of the focus was again on Auroville, with videos and working groups



Gordon Korstange and Julian Lines plan strategy at AUM 1987 in Monte Toyon, California. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



Ghislaine Aarsse and Bina Chaudhuri chat during AUM 1988 at University of Colorado, Boulder. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

(Auroville was then in the midst of becoming a special project of the Indian government), but the force of AUM-as-family-reunion was growing, even when the faces weren’t familiar. As Prem Sobel said, “. . . something strikes you inside. You feel like you know these (new) faces better than the people you may see every day at your job.”

This AUM left its afternoons open for exploring the forest, playing games, and talking. There were more realistic expectations for what could be accomplished in a three-day experience.

AUM ‘88 was held in Boulder, Colorado, in the halls and dormitories of the University of Colorado, which were also filled with hordes of teenage cheerleaders: “There was no retreat at this AUM. We were meditating in the western world, on a campus that allowed us to use classrooms in the Engineering Center, the University Club, and the Business building.” (Jean Korstange, *Collaboration*, Summer 1988)

The meeting included meditation (across from the “TV room” in the basement lounge), hatha yoga, presentations by organizations, discussions about the needs of each group, and lectures by in-house scholars Jaya Srivastava and Chitta Goswami. Auroville was present in a Matrimandir slide show.



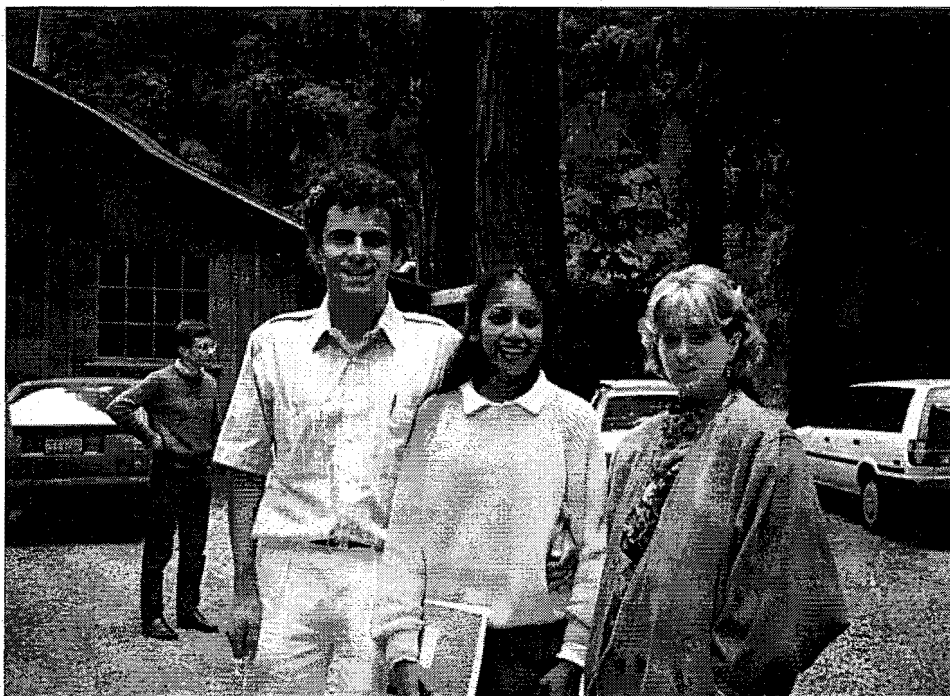
The highlight of the meeting was the celebration of Joe and Muriel Spanier and the work they had done for Auroville and the yoga. They had retired that year, and AUM gave the fifty people who attended the opportunity to visit them and express their gratitude.

AUM '89, held at the Pathworks Center in Phoenicia, New York, marked a turning point of sorts for this gathering. First of all, there was a theme: "Spiritual Life: Sharing the Teaching and the Experience of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga in the USA." The focus had moved away from the action-oriented group meetings that had characterized earlier AUMs, though there were once again presentations by organizations. Three speakers, Robert Minor, Robert McDermott, and Jahangir Chubb, had been specifically invited to speak to the gathering about the yoga.

This movement was clearly a response to those who felt that AUM should be more of a retreat/seminar where individuals could commune together and receive inspiration from the presenters. When Minor, a professor of religion from Kansas and self-styled "sympathetic outsider," told the group that they should read more of the *Life Divine* and less of *Savitri*, there was consternation in the audience, but the change in orientation was clear—this AUM was about our spiritual life in this country, not necessarily about Auroville or group dynamics. There were workshops in "Tai Chi and the Mind of the Cells," "The Sunlit Path," "Parenting in the Yoga," and "Meditative Reflections and Writing in the Study Group." AUM had come a long way from the first "Pour Tous" meeting.

Here the main concern voiced by many was that the meeting didn't need a "hierarchical, patriarchal style," that it could have been organized from within the Auro-network. Participants welcomed the beauty of the surroundings and the good food of the Pathworks Center, an essential combination for a successful AUM, but not always achieved. A new item was the "Supramental Review," in which randomly chosen groups were asked to choose some words of Sri Aurobindo/Mother and "devise a creative expression of those words, i.e., a performance." The result was "... a wonderful collage of humor, movement, whimsy, and sincerity."

AUM '90 took us back across the country to Buck Creek Camp near Seattle, Washington. Lasting from 28 June until 5 July, it was the longest one yet. Its theme, "Finding the Flame behind the Heart," continued the inner direction from the past two years. There were presentations by attendees on finding the psychic being, work, meditation, vitality, difficulty, knowledge, devotion, *Savitri*, groups, and planning. Along with these main sessions, other workshops covered topics such as "Holodynamics: Unfolding Your Full Potential" and "Quanta and Vedanta."



Top: Anie Nunnally (right) with friends. Bottom: Mary Alexander and Savitra at AUM 1987, Monte Toyon, California. (Photos by Lynda Lester)

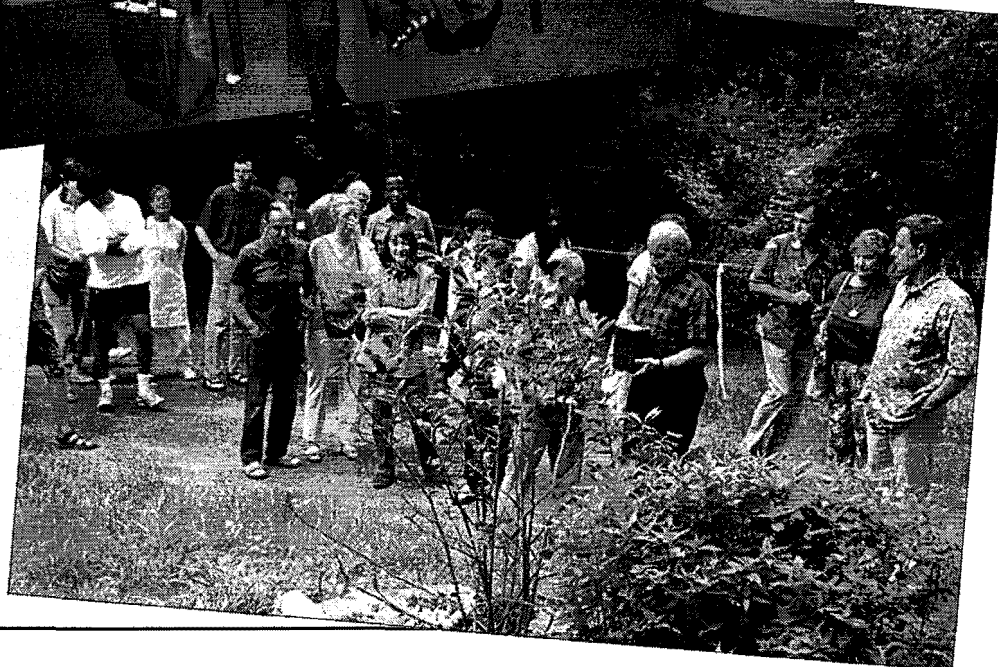


Top: Sam and Joseph Spanier confer at Matagiri, AUM 1994, during the memorial service for Muriel Spanier, Joe's wife and partner in Sri Aurobindo's work. (Photo by Gordon Korstange)

Middle: Dr. Ventkataswami and Lynda Lester in mutual dhyana. AUM 1994, Pathworks Center, Phoenicia, New York. (Photographer unknown)



Bottom: Sam passes Muriel's ashes to Joe to be scattered during a memorial ceremony at Matagiri. AUM 1994. (Photo by Gordon Korstange)





Georges Dandrimont, Soleil Righter, Savitra and Anie Nunnally model matching t-shirts at AUM 1988. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

An afternoon was devoted to Auroville and also a trip to the slopes of Mt. Ranier. AUM had become not only an Aurolfamily reunion, but also a way to present and explore the paths of the participants.

AUM '91, the seventh gathering, was billed as "AUM in the Heartland" and lived up to its expectation. It took place at the St. Benedict's Center, across the lake from Madison, Wisconsin.

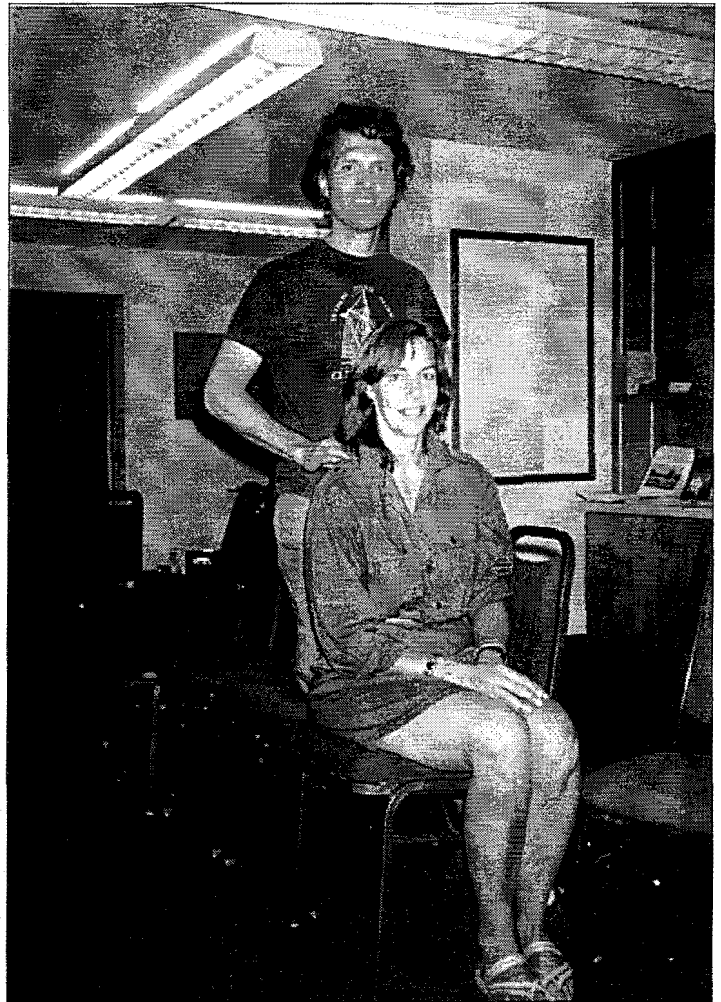
"The tone for this meeting of the hearts was struck on the very first morning when the entire group of 50-plus participants, children included, sat in council. Like the Native American tribes who developed this method of decision-making discussion, we kept silent for a moment, then began passing our version of the 'talking stick,' a small piece of rectangular marble chipped from one of the slabs now installed in the inner room of the Matrimandir . . . the atmosphere in the circle became dense with meaning and emotion, alive with humor and compassion."

The organizers had made a conscious decision to include the children in as many activities as possible: council, new games, giant-bubble making, swimming, watching fireworks, and dramatic performance. There was also the same mix of talks followed by discussion, creative and participatory workshops, and free time. By this time, there were so many presentations that participants were forced to choose which ones they would attend. The planners were a group of six who had been holding regular meetings every month and using AUM as a collective sadhana. Participants were very appreciative of this organization.

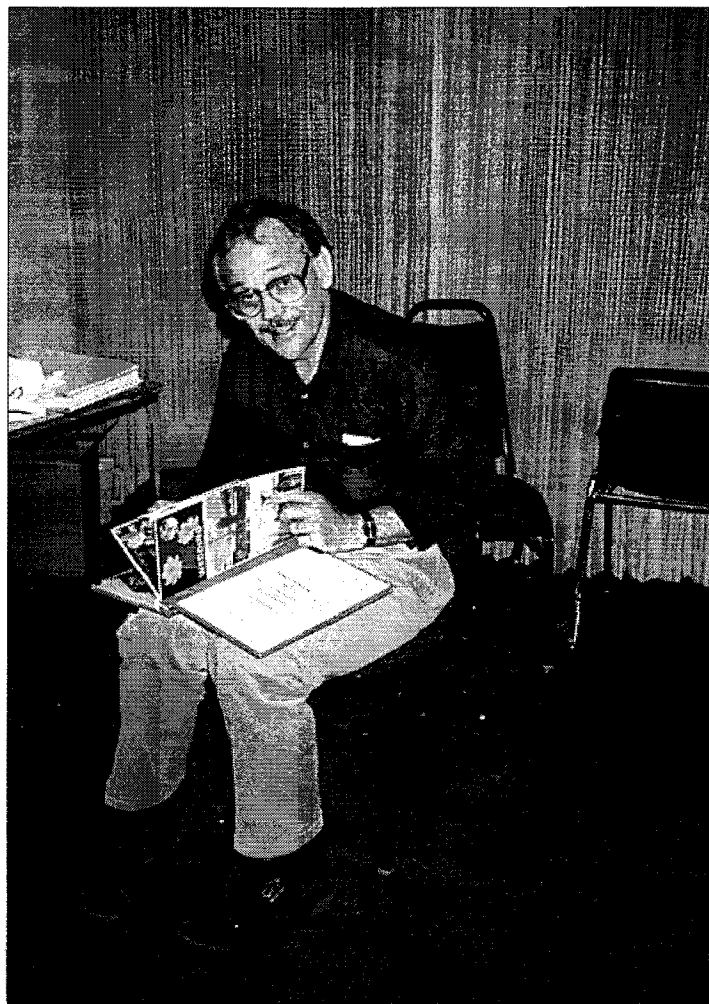
Every AUM site has had its good and bad points: "St. Benedict's, if it did not pass the taste or religion test . . . was twenty minutes from a major airport and yet offered a quiet, retreat atmo-

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

AUM spread to different parts of the country because an inspired participant would eagerly take up the task of organizing the meeting. In 1992, Vijay Raghavan, Sally Walton and Alok Aurovilian brought us to Warren Wilson College in the humid hills and mountains of South Carolina. The Rama family from Greenville, South Carolina established a meditation/book room in the basement of our dormitory. "They . . . had worked until early morning to create an atmosphere in which, as R.P. Rama later explained, Mother and Sri Aurobindo could 'witness' the gathering."



Julian Lines and Suzanne McDonald work on the physical at AUM 1988.



Wayne Bloomquist in blissful contemplation at AUM 1988. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

This AUM was spontaneously organized on the spot by the participants, led by Sally, who wrote their workshop title or topic interest and waited for people to sign up. "For the most part this worked smoothly. It created an atmosphere in which workshops could be changed and adjusted and new ones added . . . No top-down management; power to the people . . . from the early years of tightly controlled schedules to later meetings where some presenters were invited (and paid), we had come to four days of just us and what we made of it."

There were also the usual reports from the centers, Auroville, and Matrimandir (a letter was written by the group concerned about the use of freon in the inner chamber); a hike in the Blue Ridge Mountains; and a performance of Seyril Schochen's latest play.

At the end of the meeting, the marble "talking chip" was handed over to Bob Dane of the East-West Cultural Center, the site of AUM '93, which was held at Loyola Marymount College in Los Angeles. This meeting included daily presentations by Manoj Das from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, trips to the East-West Cultural Center (where a new room had just been completed to house Sri Aurobindo's relics), and a performance directed by the indefatigable Seyril Schochen's, *The Immortal Fire*.

In addition, the Sri Aurobindo Association participated in the Conference of World Religions in Chicago, the hundredth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's famous speech to that body.

AUM '94 returned to the Pathworks Center in Phoenicia, New York, and included an appearance by well-known American 'guru' Ram Dass in support of Dr. Venkataswamy's eye hospital in Tamil Nadu. Lynda Lester described his talk: "I'd seen Ram Dass the Sunday before in Boulder, holding court before a sold-out crowd of 1,000; at this conference he is maintaining a low profile. Here we are, an Aurobindo audience who (as he acknowledges) knows more about this particular yoga than he does—what can he tell us? He begins: 'My original impression of Sri Aurobindo was that . . .'" — we hold our breath—"his sentences are very long." Laughter."

Saturday morning's schedule gives a taste of what things were like: "... Prapanna led a rather strenuous hike up to the cliffs above the valley, while down below, Joan Tomb spoke about her recent experience in Auroville, and Daniel Kealy about "ETs and the Supramental." Paula Murphy, Mira Nakashima-Yarnell, Tom O'Brien, and Lucy Barbera led a workshop in creative expression using music, dance, and drawing. Lynda Lester and Suzanne MacDonald also gave a session on writing life stories."



On the porch at Pathworks Center, AUM 1994: Angel Finn, Mickey Finn, Jim Massa, Dakshina, R.P. Patel, Carolyn Vaughan. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



Alexander Lines watches© as an architect unveils the model for a proposed Matagiri meditation hall at AUM 1994. (Photo by Gordon Korstange)



Chitra Neogy and Ram Dass exchange ideas, AUM 1994. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

The group attended a memorial service for Muriel Spanier at Matagiri, where a plan was unveiled to build a road up the mountain to a meditation hall and, potentially, a retreat center. Saturday night brought a talk from Sam Spanier about the founding of Matagiri and a square dance; Sunday, a Seyril play—“. . . a fine array of local talent,” wrote Lynda, “including Richard (from the Ashram), who doubles for an ethereal Ricardo Montalban (though in his oratorical noblesse he recalls Olivier).”

In 1995 there was no official All USA Meeting. Instead, the Sri Aurobindo Association, with Wayne Bloomquist leading the way, sponsored a conference on cellular evolution in San Francisco. This was an effort to reach out to and include some of the other groups and individuals who were engaged in spiritual evolution. Many of the Auro-community attended the gathering and responded favorably to it.

Also, an Auroville International meeting was held at Merriam Hill Center, which included some of the usual AUM participants, along with representatives from worldwide AVI centers.

In 1996, once again there was no All USA Meeting.

Just when it seemed that the energy of the AUM had spent itself, two events combined to bring about the 1997 conference. The first was the impetus of a new group, the Matagiri Center for the Evolution of Consciousness, which had formed itself to take up the work of a retreat center at Matagiri and build a meditation hall; the second was the 125th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's birth.

Once more, the meeting was held at Phoenicia Pathworks Center and included presentations by Manoj Das, Devan Nair, Bill Sullivan, Debashish Banerji, Elizabeth Hin (who had impressed many people at the cellular conference), Robert Thurman (a Tibetan Buddhist monk), Ray Gombach (a sacred storyteller), and Subha Ramesh Parmar (a Bharata Natyam dancer). There were also visits to the Matagiri center.

Debashish Banerji wrote: “The psychic stimulation of the morning chanting and the transporting evening programs; the physical stimulation of the morning workouts and the long treks through the trees; the vital euphoria of connecting with old dear friends and



awakening to new relationships that seem eternal, only asleep until now, or in volunteering one's action or entering into new dynamic work-possibilities for the future . . . the profound contemplative intensity of talks by living repositories of yogic practice and its heuristics such as Manoj Das or Devan Nair; topped by occasional awakenings to that powerful divine presence of the Mother and the Master surrounding, supporting, manifesting through it all, made the four days an integral state of altered consciousness, a hint of the divine life in action." (*Collaboration*, Fall 1997)

This AUM, using practices, speakers, and presenters from past gatherings, brought together a wide sampling of Aurobindonians and made clear that what participants valued was the recharging of aspiration through meeting old friends and new seekers. It inspired the Sri Aurobindo Association to sponsor the 1998 meeting in another familiar place, the Monte Toyon Retreat Center.

The theme of AUM '98 was "Becoming Collective" and the purpose was "to explore and strengthen the body, temperament, mind, and soul of our collective consciousness." To that end, the group of twenty organizers began meeting monthly, just as the organizers had in 1991 in Wisconsin, to create a team that would help this collective consciousness flower. These meetings were a key to its success.

Dave Hutchinson's article in the Fall '98 *Collaboration*, from which the following quotes are taken, is a key resource for future organizers who seek ways to structure the event in this way.

He wrote, "If the AUM had been planned by a smaller group, this [the frequent meetings] 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."

The group addressed many perennial issues of past AUMs. How can diverse groups of people with varying levels of experience in the yoga be bonded?

"By sharing experiences such as a strenuous hike, a high-energy seminar, or an intimate discussion. Learning comes through doing. So we would experience more than lectures—we scheduled walks, volleyball, singing, an activity with flowers, and a hands-on art room."

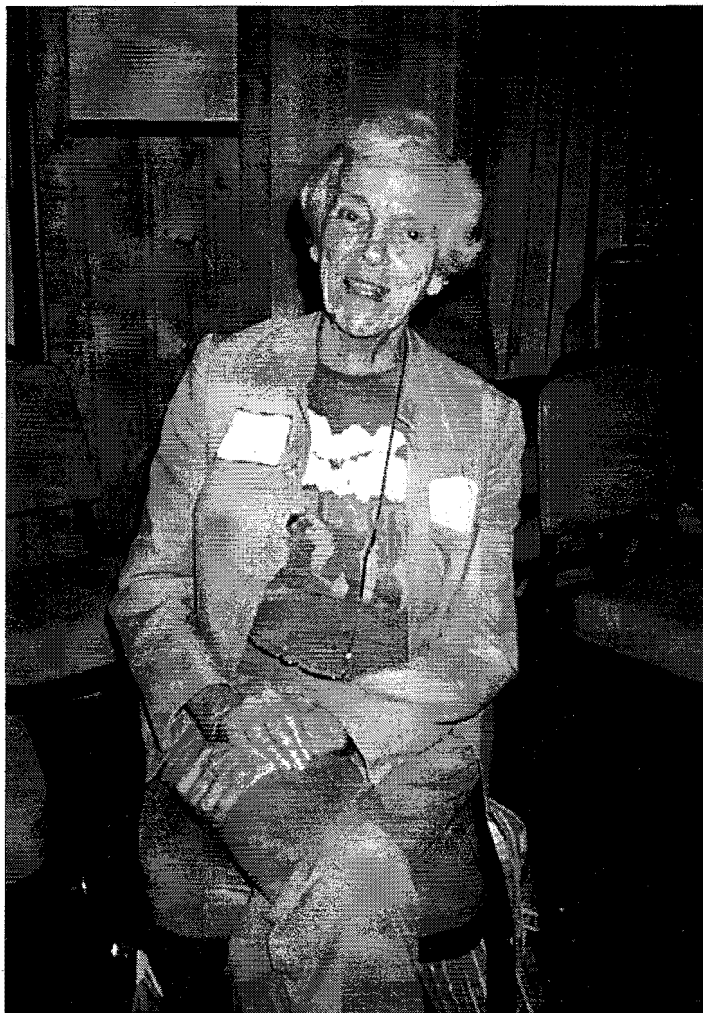
In addition, "Everyone in the organizing group deliberately welcomed, assisted, and made a meaningful contact with each person

who attended AUM. Sturdy, mandatory name badges and a photo board also helped the large group get to know each other. Three meditations were to occur each day. The evening meditation was to be at a fixed time so that everyone on the property could stop and participate, no matter where they were. Although this was not always successful, the intention behind it was clear. The organizing group did not try to make the meeting into a vehicle for collective yoga, but did ask each of the presenters to tackle the issue. They encouraged speakers to make their talks interactive and used music as a common meeting point.

"Is it possible to create a collectivity, a type of unity, in a four-day gathering?" Dave asked. "Yes, and AUM '98 is a strong example for the future . . . 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."

The 1999 AUM was held in Crestone, Colorado, where the

Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, under Seyril Schochen's leadership, has been holding its own conference on 15 August for many years. There has always been the hope that an All USA Meeting could be held there because of the grandeur and spirit of the place, nestled under the Sangre de Cristo mountains and because of Seyril herself, whose commitment to the yoga and adventurous spirit has become a beacon for many.



Eleanor Lovitt of Auroville at Pathworks, AUM 1994. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



This AUM was focused around *Savitri* and brought together many of those who love to read Sri Aurobindo's epic as their sadhana. In addition, there were *Savitri*-inspired dance performances, a presentation on Auroville land, and hikes into the mountains.

As before, the AUM inspired one of its participants, Verne Henshall, to take up the next gathering—AUM 2000, which was held at the Trinity Conference Center nestled in West Cornwall, Connecticut. This gathering focused on speakers: Georges Van Vrekham, Mangesh Nadkarni, Karan Singh, and Alan Herbert, along with yoga workshops led by Tom O'Brian and Wendy Lines. Verne led us on visits to some of the beautiful local gardens. AUM 2000 also holds the distinction of providing the most delicious meals ever served at an AUM, gourmet delights that had the participants in unyogic anticipation of dinnertime. A special fundraising campaign raised \$15,000 for the Auroville Land Fund.



Surama Bloomquist sells books at the Cellular Evolution Conference at the Clarion Hotel in San Francisco, 1995. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)

Without a guru in
the body, we have,
at least, ourselves
in our bodies.

One thing is clear from this brief history. The AUM cannot help but be successful in that it brings together the diverse group of people who have been touched, in one way or the other, by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I believe that the gathering works best when it facilitates this process by introducing the participants to each other in the beginning of the meeting, through games or name cards—some way for us to get an idea of who we are and how we got to the meeting. This opens the way for those important mealtime discussions and sharing sessions where one can dig deeper into the web of connections that binds us together.

For reports on AUM 2001, held at Mt. Alverno Retreat Center in Redwood City, California, see the last issue of *Collaboration* (Fall-Winter 2001-2002). AUM 2002, held July 31-August 1 at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, will be covered in a future issue of *Collaboration*.

Ideally, activities are organized around a theme as they have been at recent AUMs, but this focus has to be decided upon early so that there is plenty of time to plan activities and arrange presenters. And of course there has to be time allotted for the unexpected, the person who pops up unannounced and says, "I'd like to . . . if people are interested."

The AUM is a good time for various organizations, including Auroville, to give presentations about their activities and to request involvement of one form or another from the group. However, it has never been a very good place for more ambitious kinds of organizing, whether between different groups or to attempt new projects. AUM always holds up the possibility of finding the elusive secret



Deep peace in Monte Toyon, Aptos, California after AUM 1998. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)

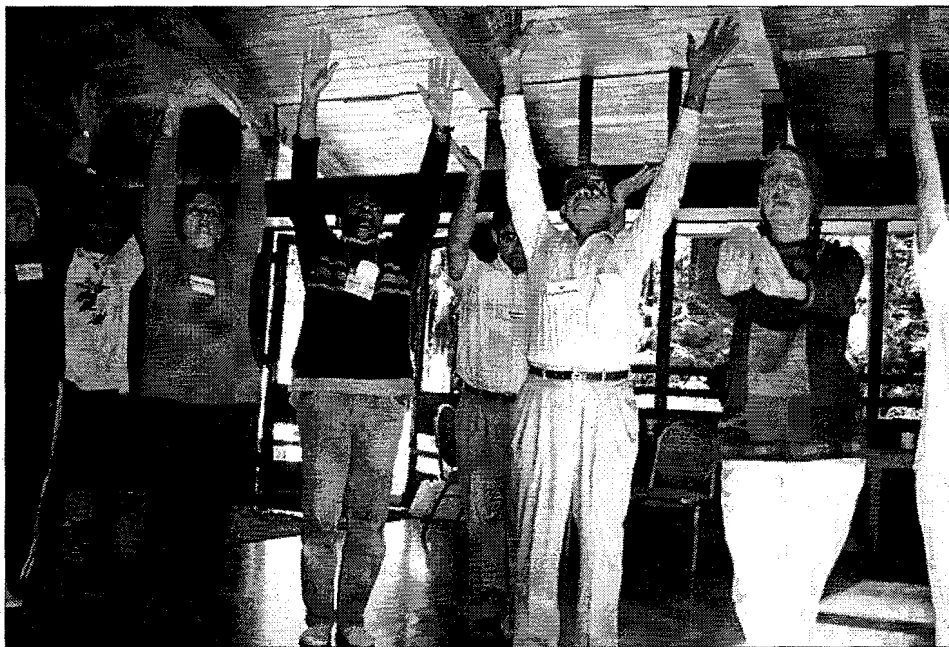


of a unity that would bind us here in North America into a more cohesive, focused group, but so far the meeting has served more as a forum for our aspirations toward a more organized collective.

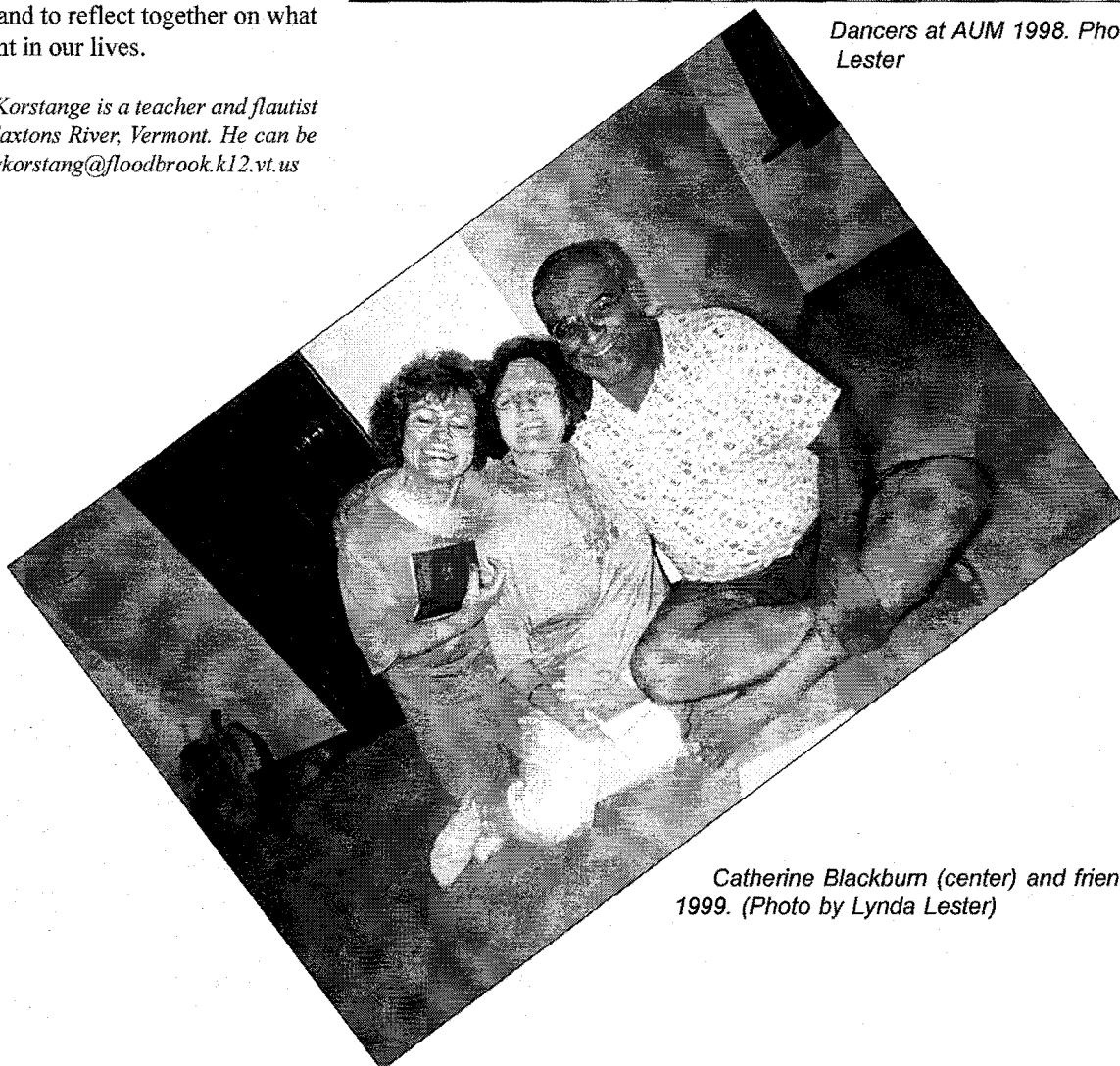
Yet the individual encounters that the AUM generates have produced a kind of unity in diversity. We marvel at the wonderful variety of ourselves, the intricate threads that have brought us together for the four days. For various reasons, I had not attended the AUM for several years until going to Crestone—had, perhaps, grown blasé about it; but the experience once again overwhelmed me with how important it is to be connected at least once a year.

Without a guru in the body, we have, at least, ourselves in our bodies. AUM provides us the opportunity to experience a little of the inner guru that each of us brings to the meeting and to reflect together on what this has meant in our lives.

Gordon Korstange is a teacher and flautist who lives in Saxtons River, Vermont. He can be contacted at gkorstang@floodbrook.k12.vt.us



Dancers at AUM 1998. Photo by Lynda Lester



Catherine Blackburn (center) and friends, AUM 1999. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



The forever view: AUM 1999

by B (William Sullivan)

In mid-August of 1999, the All USA Meeting (AUM) convened in a sense of vastness and silence in the heart of the largest alpine valley in the world. This is the Baca Grande, set aside as a refuge for world truths. The view is forever, high mountain peaks in every direction and a vast plain where the wind meets only the aspens, the piñon, and the juniper that cluster where the streams tumble from the mountains. Deer turn curiously to watch as you walk the hiking trails and the cottontail rabbits scurry into the brush as you pass.

For thousands of years, the wind has carried the sand of the Rio Grande and the San Luis Valley up against the mountains to create the Great Sand Dunes National Monument at the edge of the Baca. The dunes are higher than any in North America, adding another unexpected dimension to the scale and spectacle of the natural wonders. On the slopes of the mountains are crystalline lakes that reflect the sky and the granite cliffs above and the waterfalls that pour over those cliffs.

Here is a setting in which to appreciate and plunge into Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, the theme of the 1999 conference. Devan Nair commented in his keynote address, "*Savitri*: The Divine Promise and Fulfillment," "Receptive readers of the epic will readily admit that the total impact is at once powerful, invisible, and inexpressible." Certainly, as the Mother has told us, it has "... absolutely everything, there isn't one point he left unexplained."

There were daily readings and meditations on *Savitri* by Narad (Richard Eggenberger), David Hutchinson, and Rod Hemsell. Savitra (Alan Lithman) introduced his new novel, *The Legend of Savitri: A Fictional Tale*. Renu Ray and her dance troupe from Toronto presented "*Savitri* in 12 Acts: A Bharatanatyam Dance Drama." Paolo Pereira from Auroville did an improvisational dance based on Sunil's *Savitri* music and another on Rod Hemsell's reading of *Savitri*.

Seyril Schochen wrote a dramatic adaptation of the *Savitri* characters as contemporary Southwestern Americans in her *Savitri: A Legend for Lovers*. The narrator supplied the local background, and the players were suitably costumed but spoke the original text of Sri Aurobindo. This was performed for August 15th in the *Savitri* Solar Dome at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center.

This *Savitri* immersion effectively served the rest of the conference agenda, which focused on the securing of the land of Auroville in South India. Guy Ryckaert and Shivaya (Ruth Hauser) came from Auroville to tour America and try to raise the needed \$10 million. This conference was their first stop to refine their lectures and slides with the conference participants and work out the details



of their presentations in various cities throughout the United States. The urgency to secure the land against speculators and obtain the needed access rights for planned development came home clearly.

As *Savitri* emerges as the Veda of the third millennium for those who are ready, and Auroville secures its foundation in the land, there is the needed complementary movement of community within the Integral Yoga. Aurela Sequoia presented "Strategies for Creating an Integral Yoga Community" to synthesize the heart and the head of the people involved in this work. Aurela offered a nonverbal expression in art for all to create the atmosphere and inner opening in themselves. Balancing this was the panel discussion on networking, collaboration, and setting goals where representatives from the various organizations involved with the AUM agenda could brainstorm with the participants. These various centers and groups included the Sri Aurobindo Association, Foundation for World Education, Auroville International USA, Matagiri, and regional groups.

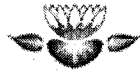
Under the umbrella of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in this place of natural splendor (with thunder showers to dramatically highlight the valley and the mountains with clouds, lightning, and rainbows), what emerged was the sense of a new beginning that would have a continuity to bring the vision of Mother and Sri Aurobindo into more manifest form.

"What we now see is a shadow of what must come." (*Savitri*)

B was a long-time resident of Auroville, and is the author of *The Dawning of Auroville*. He is originally from California, and can be reached at b4truth@juno.com.



Vishnu Eschner, Lynda Lester, Bill Leon, and B at AUM 1999, Baca Grande, Colorado. (Photographer unknown)

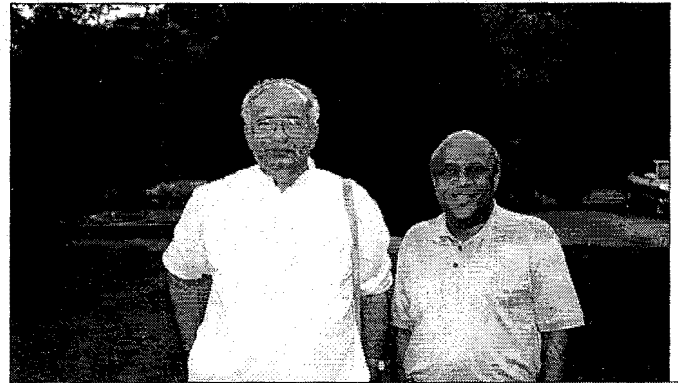


AUM photo section



Julian and Wendy Lines finding the bliss at AUM 1999, in Baca Grande, Colorado, at nearby Sand Dunes National Park. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP-LEFT: Devan Nair gives a paper at AUM 1999. (Photo by Lynda Lester) MIDDLE LEFT: Karan Singh at AUM 2000. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson) BOTTOM-LEFT: Paula Murphy raises \$15,000 for AV Land at AUM 2000, West Cornwall, Connecticut. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson) TOP-RIGHT: Dr. Nadkarni and H.P. Rama at Trinity Conference Center, AUM 2000. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson) MIDDLE-RIGHT TOP: The Ahluwalia Family at AUM 1999. MIDDLE-RIGHT BOTTOM: Guy Ryckaert, Shivaya (Ruth Hauser), Larry Tepper, and Gordon Korstange take leave at AUM 1999. BOTTOM-RIGHT: Devan Nair and Catherine Blackburn have tea at AUM 2000. (Photos by Lynda Lester)





TOP: Trinity Conference Center, West Cornwall, Connecticut, setting for AUM 2000.

ABOVE: Lucy Patel joins with the musical group Praveen and Darshana to serenade the AUM 1998 attendees at Monte Toyon Conference Center. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)

But here were worlds lifted half-way to heaven,
The Veil was there but not the Shadowy Wall;
In forms not too remote from human grasp
Some passion of the inviolate purity
Broke through, a ray of the original Bliss.
Heaven's joys might have been earth's if earth were pure.
There could have reached our divinised sense and heart
Some natural felicity's bright extreme,
Some thrill of Supernature's absolutes:
All strengths could laugh and sport on earth's hard roads
And never feel her cruel edge of pain,
All love could play and nowhere Nature's shame.

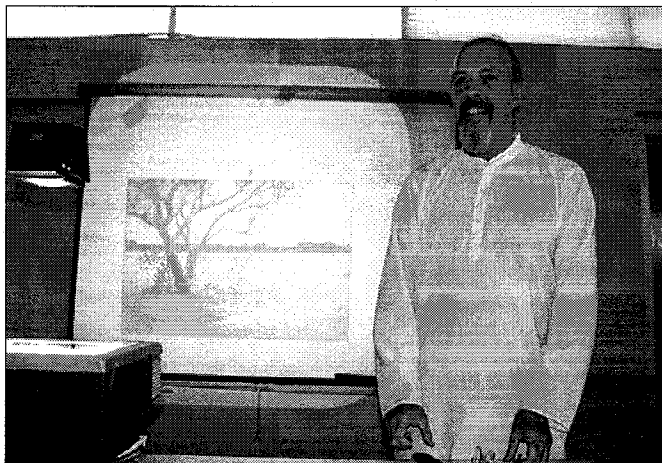
—Sri Aurobindo
Savitri, Book II, Canto III



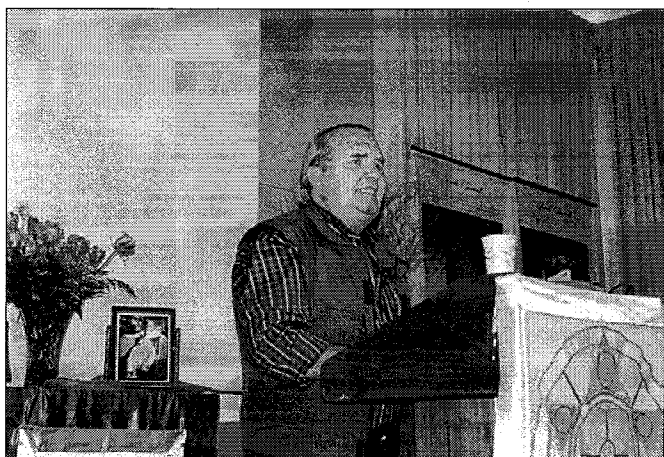
TOP: Karan Singh enlightens the AUM 2000 attendees. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson)

CENTER: A group of AUM 1999'ers relaxes at Sand Dunes National Park. (Photo by Lynda Lester)

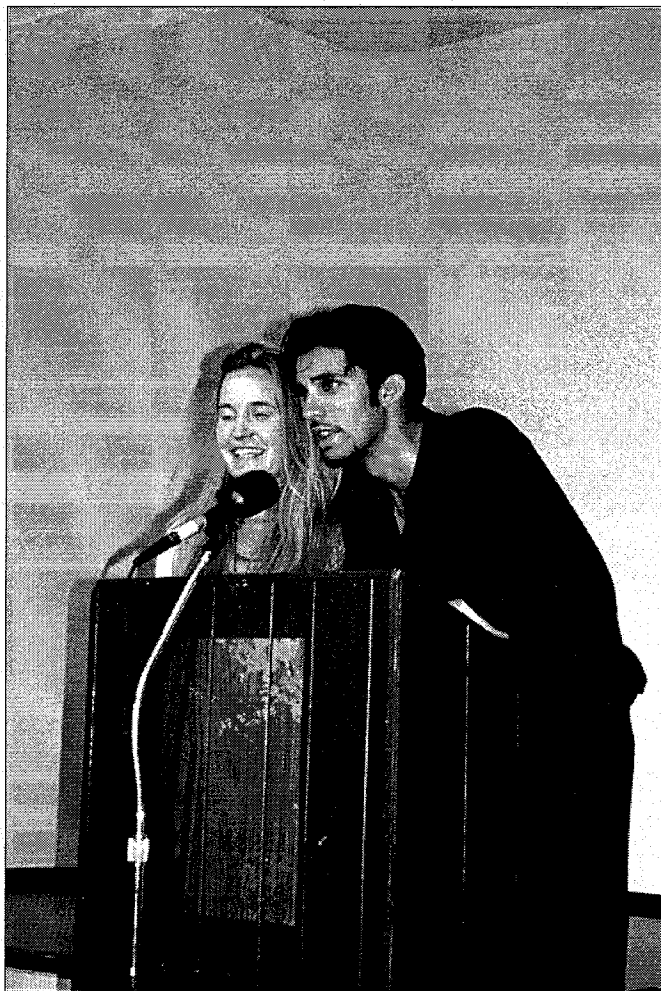
ABOVE: Face to face at AUM 1985, Meriam Hill Center, New Hampshire. (Photographer unknown)



LEFT: Rod Hemsell conducts a session at AUM 1999, Crestone, Colorado. (Photo by Lynda Lester) BELOW: Dr. Nadkami presents a talk at "The Bridge," AUM 2000, West Cornwall, Connecticut. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson)



ABOVE: Georges Van Vrekhem gives a talk at AUM 2000, West Cornwall, Connecticut. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson) RIGHT: Rishi Hemsell (in black) and friend at AUM 1999, Crestone, Colorado. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



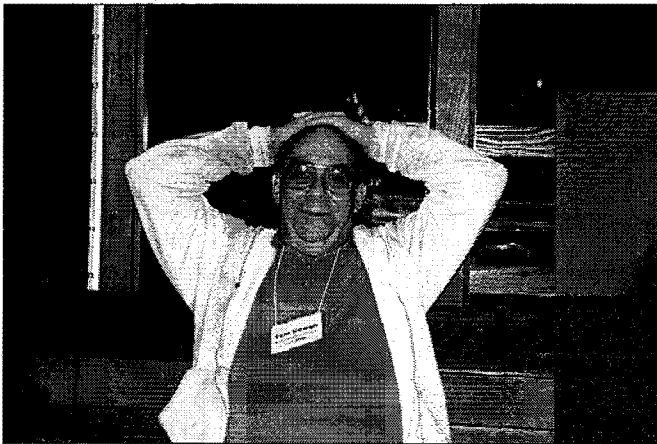
The hidden Word was found, the long-sought clue,
Revealed was the meaning of our spirit's birth,
Condemned to an imperfect body and mind,
In the inconscience of material things
And the indignity of mortal life.
A Heart was felt in the spaces wide and bare,
—Sri Aurobindo
Savitri, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo(CWSA),
Vol. 33, p. 313



LEFT: Anne-Marie Bakker, Naren Bhatt, Mike Wyatt and Alan Herbert hold a breakfast conference at AUM 2000, West Cornwall, Connecticut. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson)

Her self and all she was she had lent to men,
Hoping her greater being to implant
And in their body's lives acclimatise
That heaven might native grow on mortal soil.

—Sri Aurobindo
Savitri, CWSA, vol. 33, p. 7



ABOVE: Tom Cowan kicks back at AUM 1998, Aptos, California. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)
RIGHT: Shivaya looks up at AUM 1999, Crestone, Colorado. (Photo by Lynda Lester)





Don Salmon tickles the ivories at AUM 1998. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)



Mary Alexander flashes those pearly whites at AUM 1998. (Photographer unknown)



Tara McFail, Devan Nair, Kalpana Patel, and Dakshina Vanzetti get down at AUM 1998. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)



Paco and a little one down at AUM 1998. (Photo by Marta Belen)



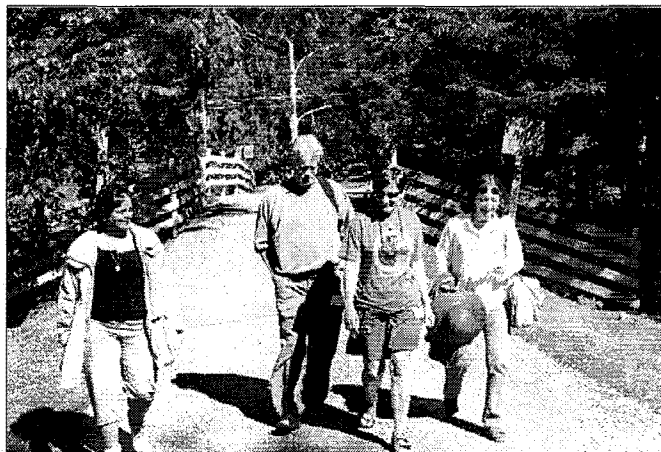
The healthy contingent practices tai chi at AUM Unknown. (Photographer ...unknown)

Translating its endless mightiness and joy
 Into delight souls playing with Time could share
 In grandeurs ever new-born from the unknown depths,
 In powers that leaped immortal from unknown heights,
 In passionate heart-beats of an undying love,
 In scenes of a sweetness that can never fade.

— Sri Aurobindo
Savitri, CWSA, vol. 34, p. 671



Uma Babu gets off a perfect serve as Julian Lines looks on at AUM 1998. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)



The veterans arrive at AUM 2000. (Photo by Dave Hutchinson)



LEFT: The Dream Team at AUM Unknown. (Photographer unknown)

Wayne Bloomquist holds forth at AUM 1994. (Photographer unknown)





Materializing the vision: Whither AUM?

by B (William Sullivan)

As the third millennium dawned, Mother would have taken the occasion, as she always did on the New Year, to send out a message. Of course, she still does. What have those who have been touched by her, heard? Heard while they listened with a silent heart? Was it a force packed into a jolt-awake phrase for the hour of God in which we live? Did she turn to Sri Aurobindo for a quotation? Did she comment to Satprem about how Sri Aurobindo has already described for us at the beginning of the last century the evolutionary crisis that requires a personal choice for our destiny?

"Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage . . ."

Sri Aurobindo examines all the solutions based in science, politics, economics and religion and finds them insufficient to meet our need to evolve beyond where we are right now. He concludes clearly: "A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself."² That alone can lift me, "to feel love and oneness" as Sri Aurobindo's Savitri expressed to the sage who wanted to know. We are being asked to move on it because our lives depend on it more than ever before. There is not another choice, "no other way," or by default, death.

"This movement of going inward and living inward is a difficult task to lay upon the normal consciousness of the human being; yet there is no other way . . ."³

Then, Sri Aurobindo anticipates the immediate objection that this is unreal and asking for an impossible miracle: "What has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it . . . It is, besides, a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation and which is brought closer at each crisis of human destiny . . . What is necessary is that there should be a turn in humanity felt by some or many toward the vision of this change, a feeling of its imperative need, the sense of its possibility, the will to make it possible in themselves and to find a way."⁴

Are we feeling it? Here is our agenda for the next millenium.

"Our agenda?" Who is the "we" here? Is it all the people who read the magazine *Collaboration* at least? Okay, next move is to be at ease with that. Over the years, the words *community*, *sangha*, or *gnostic* have been used and questioned. Let us at least settle with

the fact of being a child of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, opening to that force, working in partnership with them moment to moment and all the others who do so. Inwardly we can connect to the *we*, since we are all connected anyway, isn't it so? How strong is that connection? In the USA, it has generated some web sites, a Savitri dome in Baca Grande, a shop in Woodstock, a mountain called Matagiri, an ashram in Lodi, a cultural center in Los Angeles, an Auroville International in Santa Cruz among many other outposts around the earth. There are groups, organizations and publications. We have an umbrella in the Foundation for World Education, a Sri Aurobindo Association to call us together annually for an All USA Meeting (AUM), and volunteers to make it happen.

At the 1999 AUM in Colorado, representatives of the various associations and centers pledged to work together. There were those who tended to take the intellectual approach, and those who resonated more with a devotional way, and there were other cultural, age, and interest differences. There can be the unity in diversity when each one accepts the differences—without judgment, as a gift of the richness—and lives with them

Our every resource is to be responsibly invested in materializing the vision inherited through Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

naturally.

In the millennium meeting of AUM in Connecticut the theme was "The Bridge." It is the bridging of any gap in the consciousness about feeling the love and oneness personally and collectively. That creates a foundation to open a future. Mother described the work of Sri Aurobindo as a "sunshine radiating over the future."

Only a relatively few people will have the opportunity to be physically at the next AUM, but it is a call to everyone to be connected spiritually—for their own sake and for the sake of the Earth. It is important not just to the meeting but to what it stands for. It is part of the work to come down to the body with the practicality of our spiritual life in shaping our mortal life day to day.

We face this need, and our every resource is to be responsibly invested in materializing the vision inherited through Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Our foundation is to educate the world by first educating ourselves. We go inward and live inward to align with the Divine in fulfilling our destiny. That's not a burden, it is a sunlit path. That's coming home. There is "no other way."

End notes

1. Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*, p. 1053

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1059

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1027

4. *Ibid.*, p. 1059–60

William Sullivan (B) was a long-time resident of Auroville.



Source material

"Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change,
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage."
Wondering at her and her too luminous words
Westward they turned in the fast-gathering night.

From the entangling verges freed they came
Into a dimness of the sleeping earth
And travelled through her faint and slumbering plains.
Murmur and movement and the tread of men
Broke the night's solitude; the neigh of steeds
Rose from that indistinct and voiceful sea
Of life and all along its marchings swelled
The rhyme of hooves, the chariot's homeward voice.
Drawn by white manes upon a high-roofed car

In flare of the unsteady torches went
With linked hands Satyavan and Savitri,
Hearing a marriage march and nuptial hymn,
Where waited them the many-voiced human world.
Numberless the stars swam on their shadowy field
Describing in the gloom the ways of light.
Then while they skirted yet the southward verge,
Lost in the halo of her musing brows
Night, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven
In silver peace, possessed her luminous reign.
She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.

The End

—Sri Aurobindo;
Savitri, CWSA, vol. 34, p. 724



Attendees bid farewell after AUM 1998, Monte Toyon, California.



Parting shots



TOP: AUM 1985, Miriam Hill Center, New Hampshire. BOTTOM: AUM 1994, Pathworks Center, New York.



TOP: AUM 1997, Matagiri, New York. BOTTOM: AUM 1998, Monte Toyon, California.



TOP: AUM 1999, Baca Grande, Colorado. BOTTOM: AUM 2000, Trinity Center, Connecticut.



Gloria Posso and Seyrill Schochen getting around at AUM 1998. (Photo by Vishnu Eschner)

Apropos

The larger the island of knowledge, the greater the shoreline of wonder.—Ralph Sockman

Some books leave us free, and some books make us free.—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Coming to understand how to sift the true from the false is exceedingly subtle and important. But that doesn't mean that all pretenders to the truth should be accorded respect.—Douglas Hofstadter

Sorrow is a form of Evil.—Hermes

If dental floss had been available to Shakyamuni, he would have used it, do you not agree? It is time to put the "dental" back in "transcendental."—Tofu Roshi

The best is the enemy of the good.—Voltaire

Give up sainthood, renounce wisdom, and it will be a hundred times better for everyone. —Lao Tsu

Most people have got just enough religion to make them miserable.—Billy Sunday

Saintliness is also a temptation.—Jean Anouilh

The weakness of a soul is proportionate to the number of truths which must be kept from it.—Eric Hoffer

If people were put on this earth to help others, what are the others here for?—Tom Wilson

Man has been always speaking of the animal in a superior way. But take, for instance, the dog. Faithfulness and love are quite universal among dogs. But even when those qualities are found in some men you can't say the same of mankind.—Sri Aurobindo