

Collaboration

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Dakshina prepares the altar at AUM 2007

- Anie Nunnally, Larry Seidlitz, and Martha Orton on the Yoga in America
- James Anderson on the deathless rose • Arun Vaidya on the eternal dream
 - Seabury Gould on beauty and singing
- Bhavana reviews three new books on psychotherapy and Integral Yoga
 - Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover photo

Photo by Julian Lines. For more of Julian's AUM 2007 photos, see <http://www.imagestation.com/album/pictures.html?id=2089829129>

The authors and poets

James Anderson works on the editorial staff of NAMAHA, a journal on alternative health published by the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry.

The AUM 2008 team includes Dave Hutchinson, Lynda Lester, and Paula Murphy. For more information, contact dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu.

Bhavana Dee (bhavana@auroville.org) is a director of the Village Action Project in Auroville and a frequent contributor to Collaboration.

Seabury Gould, an exAurovillian, is a singer, multi-instrumentalist, storyteller and music teacher. See www.seaburygould.com and contact him at seaburygould@hotmail.com.

Tayka Hesselgrave is an undergraduate student at the University of Washington who participated in a study abroad programme in Auroville.

Shyam Kumari is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and is an author, poet, editor, and director of a Sanskrit school in Pondicherry. She may be reached at shyamkumari@auromail.net.

Gary Millar (garym@auromail.net) is a long-time associate of Auroshikha Incense in Pondicherry and lives part of each year in Nepal.

Anie Nunnally (anie@comcast.net) served on the board of the Foundation for World Education and was active in the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles. She presently resides in Mississippi.

Martha Orton (morton@gmail.com), a former Aurovillian, is a clinical social worker in Charlottesville, Virginia. She recently completed a doctoral programme in Sri Aurobindo Studies.

Angelo Salerno (angelo@yahoo.com) is a gardener and resident member of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, CA.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is editor of Collaboration and facilitates online courses for Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow, in Pondicherry.

Arun Vaidya (arunvaidya1@yahoo.com) is a business executive in the field of Integral Business Management. Of Indian origin, he has lived in the U.S. for the past 36 years.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue we focus on the Integral Yoga in America. This theme was suggested to me by an American who has been living in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry for many years. It seemed like a good idea for several reasons. Since I have been editing the journal from Pondicherry for several years, I thought the focus may have shifted somewhat to authors and events in India due to their easier accessibility, whereas this is an American journal. This theme seemed to be a good way to shift the focus back to the U.S. In addition, the U.S. is vast and the various centers and the Integral Yoga community are spread out widely; many may not be aware of activities in other parts of the country. Here was a way to shed light on the various centers, activities, and opportunities that are available. It also seemed interesting to examine the nature of Integral Yoga practice in the U.S. and whether there is something unique about the way we approach the Yoga. Having various people reflect on their experience of the Yoga in America might help reveal its character. Finally, I felt that it would be useful to reflect on the status of the Yoga in America and what opportunities and obstacles it presents.

Whereas I invited numerous people to write an article on these issues, only two responded to my request, both being reliable sources for thoughtful essays. I took it upon myself to write a third article based on my long involvement with the Yoga in the U.S. The three chronicles are largely autobiographical in nature and give unique personal perspectives on the nature of the Yoga as practiced in the U.S. We start with Anie Nunnally's account of her experience which, following several years in Pondicherry, focused on her early involvement with the New York Center, with the Foundation for World Education, with Matagiri, and with the East West Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Next we present a narrative of my experiences which zigzagged from the Midwest, to Matagiri, to New England, back to the Midwest, to Rochester, NY, and then to Northern California at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham with visits to the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco, before settling in Pondicherry. We conclude this section with Marta Orton's experience, who had lived for many years in Pondicherry and Auroville and then returned with her husband to live in Virginia in relative isolation from others involved with the Yoga. She recounts her experience of the Yoga lived with her husband, her involvement with the AUM conferences, and her involvement with the Yoga through the internet. Together the chronicles provide a glimpse into some of the important centers, collective activities, and personal experiences and perspectives of the Yoga in America.

In addition to these three articles, we have three essays on other subjects. The first, by James Anderson, examines the role and relation of the psychic being with the physical in the Integral Yoga. Here too the account is based largely on deep personal experience with the subject, but is also solidly based on the writings and conversations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The second is by Arun Vaidya on the eternal dream of a human collectivity based in the spirit. Here we learn about the ideals of collective living in the Ashram and Auroville, as well as of a past attempt more than 3000 years ago that has interesting parallels to the present work. The third is a brief essay by Seabury Gould, a musician, singer, and story-teller, on the significance of beauty and singing.

We continue on the theme of spiritual collective living in Source Material with passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In Current Affairs we have Bhavana Dee's report on AUM 2007, and useful information about AUM 2008 by its organizing team. In AV Almanac, we have a report on an innovative environmental program providing work and assistance to local village women written by a student volunteer from the U.S. Bhavana Dee has also contributed an insightful review of four new books related to Integral psychology and psychotherapy. We conclude with a selection of moving poetry, and in our Apopos section, with a selection of quotes from famous Americans.

The photographers

Julian Lines (jlines@gmail.com) is a board member of Auroville International, Auroville International-USA, and Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center. He also runs a shop, Pondicherry, selling Auroville handicrafts in Woodstock, NY.

Robert Orton (mrorton@hotmail.com) lived in Pondicherry from 1970-1974 and later in Auroville for eight years. He now does hand book-binding and book and paper conservation near Charlottesville, Virginia.

Arthur Orton was born in Pondicherry; he spent his earliest years in Auroville, and now works as an engineer in the US.

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Editor: Larry Seidlitz, 39 Vanniar Street, Vaithikuppam, Puducherry, 605012, India; email: lseidlitz@gmail.com. The opinions expressed in *Collaboration* are not necessarily those of the editor or the SAA.

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About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville and supports various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: Theresa Boschert, president; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Chandresh Patel, secretary.

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Current Affairs

AUM 2007

by Bhavana Dee

The All U.S.A. Meeting (AUM) was first convened in the U.S. to bring all the various people who shared a deep interest in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's vision. This included a variety of people: hardy Aurovilians who had pioneered the international township emerging in the wastelands north of Pondicherry, scholarly introverts who had found in Sri Aurobindo the answer to their search for answers to life's deepest questions, devotees of the Mother who had been captivated by her penetrating look, graduates of the Mother's schools in Pondy or New Delhi, or expatriate sadhaks of the Ashram itself—not a very compatible crew at first glance, but sharing a common Love, for something beyond toward which Mother and Sri Aurobindo kept on pointing.

The formula for an AUM has emerged out of an attempt to serve the various needs of the potential attendees, their need to get a “booster shot” of information and inspiration from the Masters, their need to meet each other and feel the nectar of community and shared vision. Bringing several speakers from the Ashram and Auroville, whose long study and practice of the Integral Yoga, and adding workshops and presentations by others attending, has usually accomplished this. AUMs are appreciated, and for many are an anticipated highpoint in the year, and in the last years an “AUM Continuity” group has emerged to guide the process.

This year's AUM, however, feeling the momentum of half a century since 1956 when Mother had said the change was upon the earth, looked outside the Integral Yoga to others on the planet who have noticed some evolutionary changes. AUM 2007 brought in two women, white-haired women (but not quite as old as the Mother when she started Auroville in her late 80s) whose studies, observations and intuition have brought them to the same conclusions: the planet is ready for a big change, in fact, it looks as if only a radical change in consciousness could take us through the environmental and social crises of these times.

This year's AUM was organized largely by Savitra (Alan Lithman), author of *An Evolutionary Agenda for the New Millennium*, backed up by the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)—which was started in 1968 (same as Auroville) by Haridas Chaudhury who had been sent to the USA by Sri Aurobindo. It was sited at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, a leading-edge research center that astronaut Edgar Mitchell had founded to focus on interdisciplinary studies inspired by his holistic vision from space. Participants included not only the regulars, but about 35 percent new people attracted to the ideas to be discussed.

Barbara Marx Hubbard and Elisabet Sahtouris, whose vision of conscious evolution and enthusiasm for the imminent change



Elisabet Sahtouris, Charles Flores, Barbara Marx Hubbard, and Savitra in a panel discussion. (Photo by Julian Lines)

were the key speakers. Both women made stunning visual presentations drawing on their personal search and academic studies, showing how contemporary scientific findings and their own profound inspirations confirm that the present era's accelerated change and apparent chaos are indicators of challenges to be overcome in conscious evolution. Sraddhalu Ranade whose education in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram with special training by Sri M.P. Pandit, brought the depth and presence of the Integral Yoga, a connection to the ancient spirituality of India with an active engagement with contemporary science and psychology.

In addition to these presentations, which were sparkling and delightful, illustrated by well-done visuals and punctuated by the obvious conviction of the presenters, there were two panels each day, with 5 to 6 panelists addressing questions deeply significant to those who take participating in integral yoga or conscious evolution seriously. Panelists included: Craig Hamilton, former editor of *What is Enlightenment?* Magazine; Michael Murphy, the founder of Esalen and recent addition to Auroville's International Advisory Council; Brian Swimme, a cosmologist and evolutionist whose *The Universe is a Green Dragon* announced a modern creation story which stresses the importance of human consciousness which gives a meaning in the long saga; and Robert McDermott, former President of CIIS who wrote *The Essential Aurobindo*. There were many more panelists, too many to mention here, but the technique of putting six of these people together to discuss a burning topic, giving them each 10 minutes (with leeway) to put forth their major point, and then opening up for questions both among the panelists and from the audience, made for very lively discussions.

The first panel was on “How does one distinguish the Soul or Psychic Being in the Integral Yoga from other classical traditions?” Another panel, on “Integral Psychology” had a panel of psychotherapists, including two who have recently brought out excellent books, Brant Cortright (*Integral Psychology: Yoga, Growth and Opening the Heart*) and Arya Maloney (*Alchemy of the Soul: Integral Healing, the Work of Psychology and Spirituality*). Each panelist shared in their own way how the widened



Elisabet Sahtouris discusses the need for conscious change. (Photo by Julian Lines)

ism, then went on to list “fundamentalist episodes” which have also occurred in our midst, making it clear that they are recognised as such by the majority. Wolfgang Schmidt-Reinecke, formerly president of AVI-Germany, warned that as Sri Aurobindo becomes better known, we can expect he will be subjected to the same “deconstructive” scepticism as all spiritual thought is in our secular and scientific culture, and it would be better if we beat them at their own game in advance. Craig Hamilton, whose workshop at last year’s AUM brought this question into the open, along with Michael Murphy of Esalen, found that their major criticisms—the unquestioning acceptance of Mother and the failure of self-reflection that they had seen in the Ashram and Auroville—were effectively answered by the very fact of the panel itself. Michael actually put aside his scripted notes and focused on his intention to make available to a wider public the *Record of Yoga*, in which Sri Aurobindo’s notes on his own adventure of consciousness will be appreciated by a new generation of seekers. One of Srad-dhalu’s contributions during the discussions was to divest us of the term “Aurobindonianism.” He argued convincingly that this made us sound like cultists and that Integral Yoga was the better term. But it is still hard to find the one word that would correctly indicate regular attendees of the AUM, those who have read and taken seriously Sri Aurobindo, those devoted to the Mother, and/or those who have joined Auroville.

A young woman of Indian origin and Western education, Mytrae, dared to bring up the question of sexuality, and how its suppression in the yoga constituted a sort of spiritual bypassing and a denigration of the dark feminine and the earth. This evoked some strong clarifications, followed by a call for a true discussion—for which there was actually no time. Savitra, who had been facilitating the whole programme with a wonderfully inclusive referral of all process points to the assembly, managed to resolve

and deepened worldview of Sri Aurobindo opens up new vistas of healing for both client and therapist.

The last panel, moderated by Savitra, dared to raise the issue of fundamentalism and its challenge to the ongoing evolution of the Integral Yoga. The panel began with Lynda Lester giving a very clear and definitive distinction between spirituality, religion and fundamental-

this potentially explosive interchange with a call to go beyond our right-wrong mental reactions—to flow toward each other with acceptance, awareness and love, respecting that we are all living through the experience of subjective truths unique to each of us at a given moment in time, reminding us that we are here to model a new personal and collective behaviour, avoiding the destructive tendency in the world which judges others by one’s own truth and then seeks to impose that truth uniformly.

Besides the panels, there were 13 workshops offered, in only three time slots, so it was a hard choice between 4–5 offerings. From Wendy Lines’ yoga practice, to Margaret Phanes’ ecstatic art, to Soleil Lithman’s Hladina Method, to Jerry Schwartz’ Spirituality and Money, and many others, plus workshops with the major speakers, participants got a chance through these interactive sessions to go more deeply and share with each other.

This AUM also gave due honour to Bina Chaudhury, the wife of the founder of CIIS, whose intelligence, dynamism and deep spirituality had guided people and the institutions of CIIS and the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco for many years. In the evenings, the music of Melissa Michaels’ young troupe brought in a sense of the intrepid future, while the soulful classical devotional songs of Shri Karunamayee moved the audience to a profound and long silence before they retired on the last night.

The AUM ended with a sense of completeness. There had been a concerted effort to open the Integral Yoga to the manifestations of the new consciousness which are appearing outside the “fold.” Many minds had been happily focussing on their favourite topic, many old friends were met again, many hearts were full to overflowing with love—and the intellectual bias was already balanced by the promise of next year’s AUM in the Colorado mountains, with no speakers at all!



Jack Alexander, Rich Carlson, and Seabury Gould give a musical performance. (Photo by Julian Lines)



AUM 2008: Rocky Mountains, an Auro-family gathering

by the AUM 2008 organizing team

Location: YMCA of the Rockies near Estes Park, Colorado

Date: 1–4 June 2008

Site information: collaboration.org/aum/2008

Registration: Available 15 January 2008

Organizers: David Hutchinson, Lynda Lester, Paula Murphy

Contact: dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu, 916-452-4380

A step, and all is sky and God

AUM 2008 will take place at the scenic YMCA of the Rockies, located at 8,000 feet outside of Estes Park, Colorado, next to Rocky Mountain National Park. The YMCA is an hour and a half from the Denver airport via a convenient shuttle. The site has a spectacular view of the neighboring peaks, which rise to 14,000 feet.

There was a harmony woven twixt soul and soul

This AUM will focus on bringing people together in a spiritual consciousness, with time and opportunity to interact and get to know each other. We have reserved the “Patty Hyde Barclay” reunion cabin, which has a common area to gather and meditate and relax. Each room houses three or four persons and has a private bath. The cabin has a capacity of 60 guests; additional private single or double rooms are available in other lodges.

No words, acts!

The emphasis at AUM 2008 will be not on lectures but on activities. Choices will include meditation, readings, small-group discussions related to Integral Yoga, poetry, art, crafts, multimedia, music, dance, hikes, hayrides, ping-pong, rock-climbing, tennis, volleyball, basketball, softball, hatha yoga, and swimming.

Money is the visible sign of a universal force

Our goal is to make this AUM affordable. In order to reduce the registration fee (which will already be quite low), we are actively fundraising among individuals and institutions who may be able to help. For more information about the AUM 2008 fund, contact David Hutchinson (dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu). Donations are tax-deductible.

The registration fee will cover room, meals, and activities. Transportation will be separate, and will be the responsibility of each person.

They felt a larger future meet their walk

For photos and detailed information on the conference site, transportation, activities, and how to donate, see the Web site: collaboration.org/aum/2008.

AV almanac

W.E.L.L. and me: A new meaning of *beautiful*

by Tayka Hesselgrave

Tayka is an American university undergraduate who came to Auroville on a study-abroad programme. An important part of this programme is “Service Learning” where the students join in workplaces in Auroville to get on-the-job experience of another culture. Tayka was assigned to W.E.L.L. (Women’s Empowerment through Local Livelihood), a project of the Auroville Village Action Trust which trains poor village women in a craft which recycles wastepaper and guides them on to make their own production company with W.E.L.L. continuing to help them with administration and marketing. —Bhavana Dee

I have met nineteen of the most beautiful women in the world. They are Tamil women from three different villages who come together everyday for work. While they might not sound spectacular or look extra-special at first impression, it has been through sitting with them daily for the last two months that I have come to understand yet a new meaning of beautiful.

I was initially very apprehensive about working with W.E.L.L.-paper. I was unsure immediately, and then even more so when I met an Israeli couple in an empty disorganized room in Auroville and only one Tamil woman around. My second introduction was entirely opposite but still quite un-confirming. While all other students had met their destinations in Auroville, I was taken alone to a far village to a room on the second floor of a villager’s house full of loud Tamil women who couldn’t speak English sitting on the floor and weaving newspaper rolls into baskets. No one met us there, and I spent three days alone sitting on the floor not knowing what I was supposed to be doing, what I could be doing, or what these women were saying to or about me. I felt overwhelmingly like the new kid at school that doesn’t fit in and is doomed to have a miserable time. Finally I was able to meet with Danny, of the Israeli couple Danny and Orly who run W.E.L.L., who was able to come up with work for me to do at W.E.L.L. As an outsider not connected with the program but able to spend hours there for seven weeks, I could observe current operations in the workshops and between the women and report my feedback and findings to the program creators. For myself, it was an incredible opportunity to meet the oppressed women I’d been reading about and other local people of India, especially those native to the area we’d be studying and living in. Little did I know, it was to bring so much more.

“Good Morning! How are you!” I call when I step barefooted into the workshop room every morning. “Good Morning, Tayka!”



Takya and friends. (Photo courtesy W.E.L.L.)

the chorus of women's voices greets me. I then go and sit down, they try to offer me a straw mat and offer to turn on the fan and I always refuse. The defining interactions for all three hours I'm there each day are the smiles we constantly pass back and forth. I tried rolling newspapers to help them in the begin-

ning but mine looked so terrible I just stopped because I was sure I was just wasting their paper. Some time in the middle I picked it up again and now I roll like a pro and I'm proud to have my rolls go into their handmade baskets. We talk and they teach me Tamil, I've learned a lot, but we still communicate in a mix of English, Tamil, hand gestures, actions, and drawings on paper. They go about their business as usual, which I think proves I've done an excellent job of fitting in, and I just roll and be there, listening and smiling all the while. Though I have now the most basic Tamil language skills, it is amazing how much I can pick up about their group dynamics from just watching who does what when, observing body language, and also listening for the emotion in their words. Our relationship deepened as they invited me to stay longer with them some days for lunch, digging out of their own pails and buying some extra food to share. I began bringing photos of my family and cookies and cool drinks for snacking, and finally I was invited to a wedding of a relative of one of the ladies. The experience was incredibly intimate and turned out so well that my relationship to the group was cemented. At first I felt like an outsider but now I just feel like a younger child who doesn't quite understand all that's being said or going on, but is loved and belongs. I am so grateful to them because I've seen another side of India.

The way that W.E.L.L. integrates environmentalism most directly is by using printed extra copies of unsold newspaper to make their products and give these women livelihood. Indirectly, there is a social aspect to the program that better the women's lives so they can live more healthfully and environmental-friendly, and strengthens relationships between Auroville and the villagers. Training with Danny and Orly lasted seven months for the first group, and four months for the second group. Training consists of newspaper rolling, counseling, group discussion, English classes, business classes, yoga, health classes, parenting classes, and more. Now that the women are out of the training program, the social programs are less and the emphasis is placed on running the company together. However, a woman from the Auroville Health Services still comes by every week and yesterday she was teaching the women how to use their extra kitchen water to water a home vegetable garden, how to compost waste, and many uses for cow dung.



The W.E.L.L. project works to empower village women through an environmental program. (Photo courtesy W.E.L.L.)

What I've noticed is the huge amount of trust between the Tamil ladies and the Aurovilians which spreads into each of their families and beyond. My report has been helpful in building the bridges between Auroville and the villages through this project. This is what I have given to Auroville, but what I've personally received has been even greater. I have never met such happy, playful, and light-hearted women who are in reality not care-free whatsoever. Village life is a hard life. The women's concerns are always how to afford their children's education, how to afford their daughters' dowries, how to work through the pain of sitting on the floor and bending over all day, caring for their extended family, and how to get all they do done each day. Some even walk forty-five minutes each day just to come to work. They always ask me what I ate for breakfast and when I got up, and smile softly in a "Oh that would be nice" way. One woman was even kicked out of her house by her husband for having a third daughter and still no sons.

The beauty, which I have found here, is the grace with which these women live everyday despite these hardships. The beauty is in the friendship and sisterhood these women found in each other to get through these hardships together. The company is theirs and they have made collective decisions to allow advances to women who have special situations of need. The group together confronted the husband who kicked out his wife, scolded him for doing so, and convinced him to apologize and take her back in. When I spent time questioning each of them about basic things and differences in their lives since they made the company, my last question to each woman was what is her favorite part of being part of the company. The unanimous answer was "being able to leave home and come to this loving group of women everyday." And they are so loving! Laughing, teasing, and singing everyday, in spite of their troubles of daily life, they work so hard to improve their lives all while living in an incredible faith in God. This is my new beauty.



Chronicles

Practicing the Integral Yoga in America

by Anie Nunnally

In essence, at the very core of the matter, it makes little difference, from a geographical viewpoint, where one is practicing the Integral Yoga. We are what we are and take that wherever we are. We must all face ourselves and the baggage we arrive with and aspire and work towards the necessary changes as best we can, regardless of the location, whether it is done in Auroville, Pondicherry, Paris, New York, London or elsewhere. However, the external realities are definitely to be taken into consideration.

After spending nearly four years in Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I returned to America after Sri Aurobindo's Centenary. It was 1972. Health and personal circumstances convinced me that it was time to come back to the States for treatment and save enough money to return at a later date. The Mother gave her permission and told me that I could work for Auroville in America. She had just given me my new name. The card she had given to me in her own handwriting read, "Call yourself Anie and do not cling to the past." Deep within I knew that I had to make some personal and psychological development by striking out on my own and making my way in order to grow stronger and bring about inner progress through a variety of life experiences. I felt it would and could only come about by my being back in the outside world again. Though I had lived and worked in Auroville at the Matrimandir Gardens Nursery, operated a guest house in Pondicherry, worked in the Ashram Flower Room with Sri Parichand, helped Lisa Uberle with Aurosarjan, created an Ashram exhibition for the Batik Department, and participated in



Anie in the Ashram in 1971. (Photo courtesy Anie Nunnally)

music programs, I did not feel that I had found my true work or that my swadharma had been realized or fulfilled.

By October of 1972 I was bound for New York City leaving behind the precious years spent in the Ashram with the Mother and my dear friends and spiritual family. The Mother had planted the seeds for my spiritual growth during those four years and now I carried Her within, along with the responsibility of continuing to manifest this spiritual gift in a new life in the States. All of this occurred in the light of what she had made possible for me through Her love and grace.

It was neither my ambition nor my intent to return to America and work to become wealthy and comfortable and live the bourgeois American lifestyle. Immediately I plunged myself, along with others, into the work of the newly formed Sri Aurobindo Center of New York City. This center had been first a private spiritual circle established by Mrs. Montgomery in the 1950s, but with encouragement and help from Sri Udar Pinto during his 1972 visit to America, it was opened to the public.

There were a number of other sadhaks who had returned following Sri Aurobin-

do's birth centenary. We were all faced with the search for jobs and fitting into a society with which for years we had no contact. Within a week of my return my mother suddenly passed away at the age of 60 and I was thrown into an emotionally charged family situation. She and my father had been opposed to my going to India to live and couldn't come to terms with, given their Southern Baptist background, my philosophy and spiritual beliefs. I remained for a difficult one month with my father in Mississippi and then returned to New York, determined to find my way. I was 35 years old.

I remember my initial impressions of New York City upon my return from India. Everything looked so oversized and larger than life after living in Tamil Nadu. In contrast to the small and dark-skinned people of Tamil Nadu, here they were big and pale and pasty looking. There were no tall buildings in Tamil Nadu, but the skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan loomed large across the horizon. The city buses looked too large and they weren't tilted to one side with people spilling out the windows and hanging onto the sides and backs. It all looked so strange. Supermarkets were just that—super—and overstocked with too many choices, compared to the dearth of products in Pondicherry at that time. It was overwhelming and seemed as though everything had suddenly been given a large hormone injection.

It was a huge adjustment. Finally I took a job as an administrative assistant to an account executive with a company called International Flavors and Fragrances, manufacturers of perfume essences and food flavors. I could have risen to a high position with the company but was not in the least bit interested. My life was totally involved with the Sri Aurobindo Center, hosting guests from Auroville and the Ashram and elsewhere. The center was a haven and a blessing for all of us who were disciples in the Yoga. We had visiting speakers, weekly meditations and readings, book sales and satsang. But the challenges were also there and the vital life and energy of a metropolis such as New York City required a great deal of discipline and



vigilance in order not to become totally swept away in its whirlwind of outer life and activities. One had to carefully choose one's activities and friends in order to preserve and maintain the inner poise, to keep the inner core intact and untainted, and to try and stay quiet and centered in the midst of such energies.

There were times when I felt as though I had been tossed into a den of vital and hostile forces. The streets of New York, as with any large city, were (still are) filled with all sorts of crazy people; angry, hostile, murderous, too poor and hungry, some too rich, others mentally disturbed, physically ill, aggressive, power hungry, money hungry, and overly ambitious. It was a free floating circus of almost phantasmagoric images 24 hours a day. Aspiring for the spiritual life along side such creatures took grit and fortitude and a constant call for the Mother's protection; especially after having lived such a surcharged life in the Ashram and in the physical presence of the Mother. But there was also the flip side of this situation which was the wealth of aesthetic possibilities. There were the rich cultural offerings of ballet, opera, orchestral concerts, art museums, galleries and theatre to stimulate the mind and delight the soul.

After a few months, the late Lalit Fullman (former swimming coach and art teacher in the Ashram school) and I began to share a large apartment together so as to defray the high costs of living in the city. On 17 November 1973, I received a call in the late evening from Jyotipriya from the East West Cultural Center (EWCC) of Los Angeles who had called to inform us that our Divine Mother had left her body on that day. I had had a dream experience of this harsh reality a month or so earlier which had helped to soften the blow of this shocking message. We could not speak—all work ceased, all activity stopped. We were in a state of suspension. The next day as many of us as could do so gathered in the center to meditate and silently remember. I recall how comforting it was to be with everyone.

After the Mother left her body I no longer felt the urgency to return to the



The FWE board at Matagiri in 1999. At left: Jerry, Margo, Sam, John, Gordon; at right: Anie, June, Rudy. (Photo courtesy Anie)

Ashram. I suddenly felt that she was everywhere and that leaving her body had only increased her presence in my life and perhaps also in other sadhaks and the entire world. I prayed to her to give me my true work so that I could serve her more fully and completely.

Time went on and over the next 12 years I took one executive position after another, learning how to cater to, assist, act as buffer for unwanted phone calls, nurture and manage the offices and business affairs of countless CEOs, lawyers, literary agents, and medical doctors. The last of these jobs was assistant to the Dean of Cornell University Medical College connected with New York Hospital in New York City. I learned executive efficiency in some of the testiest of situations. In each work place I kept a photo of the Mother on my desk and spoke to people about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the Ashram, and the Yoga. Some were open, others not.

The New York Center closed in 1978. As Lalit and I were living across the hall from that center, we took in all the books, continued to hold meditations in our apartment, and opened the library on Saturday afternoons by appointment. We also hosted many Ashram and Auroville guests. Eventually I moved out on my own and kept this activity going for another seven years.

In 1983, Mrs. Montgomery passed away and had turned over her Foundation for World Education (FWE) to me and had appointed me as its secretary. I had to create an entirely new board of directors and deal with some of the legal matters in connection with her death and the foundation's status. That action and period of time was a turning point in my life. I then realized the reason for all the years of my training in office management and being an administrative assistant. All was being revealed to me. My true work had unfolded and I was ready for it, finally! In the Dean's office at Cornell, my immediate co-workers knew that I was doing the FWE work and allowed me to receive phone calls and do the work there during my non busy times. This was truly a Grace from the Mother.

The next 20 years of my life were to be the most fulfilling of times. Working with the various wonderful board members of the FWE, granting the Mother's money to seed the many worthy projects in Auroville, the Ashram, centers in America and around the world proved to be most rewarding. At a certain stage, I knew it was time to leave New York City, and in the spring of 1987 I moved to Woodstock, near the Matagiri Center on Mother's Mountain. I taught music in the area, continued the work for the FWE, and participated in the activities at Matagiri until moving to Los Angeles in 1993.

Special opportunities and challenges in America

Americans are truly explorers and experimenters, always ready to expand the consciousness in search of new ideas and possibilities. We are very open to change and I think that is a good thing so long as it is kept in proper perspective and that one doesn't go off on some tangent. In the Ashram, the sadhana is one-pointed and carried out in a small contained spiritual community. There are less vital distractions in the Ashram than here in America. Everyone in the Ashram has a specific assigned work, specific disciplines, a daily routine and planned timings for activities, meals, etc. Here it is loosely structured.



One can easily become tamasic or too rajasic because there is always a mixture of pulls. Sri Aurobindo has said "The ways of nature are full of snares; the disguises of the ego are innumerable and the vital always tempting us to follow any alluring call." In the Ashram there is support from the Force in the atmosphere uplifting interpersonal relationships. When one meets fellow sadhaks on the street in the Ashram, there is always a joy in the greeting of one another with a "Bon Jour" or an "A bientot." There is the immediate experience of the presence of the Mother just from the mere expression of these words in French. In the Ashram all are bound by this inner connection to Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In the cities in America, one feels the unhappy inner state of people on the streets who have not found a spiritual path and who live only in the material/vital world. It has its effects and one can easily absorb the negative vibrations of others if one is not always consciously calling the Mother or stepping back into the witness consciousness and observing these forces before they have time to enter. The challenge is much greater here to protect oneself from such energies. It is much more conducive in the Ashram for doing sadhana from my perspective. While living in New York City, it was always spiritually restoring to go to Matagiri for retreats and to attend the four darshan programs each year. Even now I continue to go there for all the above reasons.

Collective yoga in the U.S.

The status of the collective yoga in the states has gone through a series of evolutions. Of course it began with the major centers such as the EWCC in Los Angeles founded by Dr. Judith Tyberg, The Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco begun by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri and his wife, Bina, The New York Center



Anie talks with Dr. Nadkarni at the East West Cultural Center in Los Angeles in 1998. (Photo courtesy Anie Nunnally)

founded by Mrs. Montgomery, Matagiri founded by Sam Spanier and Eric Hughes, and some of the later centers like The Center for Integral Knowledge in Florida founded by Rand Hicks, The Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, Colorado founded by Seyril Schochen, and the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Northern California run by Dakshina and Vishnu. There are also many study groups across the country.

Each of these centers has functioned through the years independently of one another with programs of visitors from Auroville and the Ashram, darshan observances, book sales and study and meditation sessions. However, with the re-establishment of the FWE in the mid 80s, and the beginning of the AUM in 1985, there is now an active national collective network through these annual conferences and interconnectedness among centers that sometimes includes shared projects and programs. With the formation of Auroville International Centers worldwide, there are now also national and international meetings pertaining to that organization.

The FWE sponsored the first AUM held at the Merriam Hill Center in New Hampshire in 1985 and has provided yearly scholarship funds up to the present date for these gatherings. The AUM programs have expanded to now include a host of international speakers from all over this country and India. So now the AUM, like

everything else, has become global! The U.S. centers also coordinate and share expenses so that speakers can visit the individual centers either before or after their engagements at the AUM. There is always a lovely collective psychic presence that emerges from these conferences and the shared satsang.

In keeping with the expansion of consciousness and the emergence of the New Age, there are many new institutions in America offering courses in transpersonal psychology, the healing arts, the new sciences,

all levels of self help, integral psychology, cellular and body transformation, as well as classes, workshops and lectures by many so-called "American Gurus." Some of these institutions are The Open Center in New York City, Omega Institute in up-state New York, The California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco (founded by Dr. Chaudhuri), and there are many more.

The AUM 2007 held in the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Petaluma, California during the end of June featured a fresh new wave of lecturers and speakers from other yogic practices and professional fields such as the new sciences, the environment, and other schools of thought. This is a huge leap from our humble beginnings of a small meditative group of disciples who met in that converted barn in New Hampshire back in 1985 where we all read Sri Aurobindo together at the first AUM. But Sri Aurobindo has said "All Life is Yoga," and the Mother was always looking to the future, encouraging change, embarking upon unknown paths and breaking new ground. So, I suppose we cannot allow ourselves to become fixed and stuck in a box about how we should practice the Integral Yoga. We must flow with the many changes that the evolution of the supramental consciousness is bringing about in the earth's atmosphere and maintain that American open-mindedness.



Centers and study circles

Being directly involved with a center or other collective organizations on a regular basis always holds up a mirror to oneself revealing patterns of behavior and manner of settling disagreements or confrontations. We are constantly beseeched with the recalcitrant parts of our being that need purification and transformation when dealing with others. We are all still so pitifully human at times (most of the time). However, there is always that place of harmony that we can tap into if we can get beyond the mind and ego, personal agendas, our desires and try to see what is best for the overall collective. I always say to myself "How would the Mother handle this situation? What would she say? What would she do?" Then I pray to her for guidance in expressing viewpoints and coming to decisions. No centers or institutions, it seems, are without their political problems and difficulties. Even Auroville still continues to struggle with its collective issues. It seems to be a necessary part, somehow, of our individual and collective process leading towards growth.

Our study circles in New York were never conducted by a learned teacher unless we had a visiting speaker from the Ashram. We stumbled through our readings trying to interpret on our own, but just reading the words were a mantra and being together a special grace. This is one of the reasons it was such a special privilege living in the Ashram where we were surrounded by great minds, scholars, and teachers whose knowledge was easily accessible. It was only when I moved to California and attended the EWCC that the study groups became more effective and expanded my knowledge and understanding. First I attended Jyotipriya's Thursday night classes on *Savitri* in 1968, and then, later on, when I moved again to California in 1993, I participated in the classes at the EWCC with Debashish Banerji. His classes were very inspiring and opened up many doors of understanding for us, especially given his knowledge of classical Indian literature, Sanskrit language, and his ability to teach Sri Aurobindo's works.

But study circles can often be difficult as well. Not everyone who attends has been initiated into Sri Aurobindo and Mother's works and yoga. Some come just for intellectual and philosophical discourse, and without proper monitoring, discussions can diverge onto subjects unrelated to the readings such as politics, current events, and the like. We would often have to rein in those who went astray. People want to be heard and often do not know how to listen or get centered in a quiet mind in order to be able to learn something. Some would come from other gurus and would challenge Sri Aurobindo's words by piping in with "Well, my guru says this . . ." Another pitfall that has been often discussed from New York to California is the serving of food after darsans, meditations, and study circles. Many feel that it lowers the consciousness, becomes too much of a social gathering, and that something of the Force is lost when food is served. But on the whole my consciousness and awareness of the yoga has greatly expanded through attending study groups. At this stage in life, however, I find reading alone more helpful and gratifying. The need for both is there and each has its season.

Present practices and recent life changes

After having lived in California for nearly 14 years where I experienced a very active involvement with the EWCC, fund raising for Auroville, participating on the EWCC board, and a variety of other activities, my life radically changed since I lost my spiritual companion and good friend, Stuart Schoen, who passed away on 7 August 2006. Stuart and I had also been host for 11 years to many visitors to our home from the Ashram, Auroville and around the world. After Stuart's passing, due to the high cost of living in California and other personal reasons, I returned to my home state of Mississippi after not living here in 50 years! There is plenty of time now for reading, meditation, reflection and taking care of my health, but I have not integrated well into the community of Meridian, the

bible belt land of my birth. My home has become my center; my ashram. I have retired from the FWE and now act only as an Advisory Board Member. I am still connected to the EWCC and have visited once for Mother's birthday, and have also made a trip to Matagiri for Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day Darshan. After a long and active history with many organizations within the Sri Aurobindo community, shifting to this reclusive, almost monastic existence has been a tremendous life change.

I often wonder in what way my yoga practice would have accelerated had I remained in the Ashram. On my trips to the Ashram in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 to complete my book *The Golden Path*, I returned to the States fully aware of the acceleration process that had taken place during those short, month-long visits. Recently a longtime and dear friend in Pondicherry was ruminating on my current situation and advised me in the following way, which has touched and inspired me to the very depths and recesses of my being. This friend said, the Mother is telling you now "Anie, my child, all these years you have given yourself to institutions and organizations, causes and ideals, to men and women, hoping that through all this you would find me. Be grateful for the wonderful ways in which your life has been enriched by these associations and contacts. Now, give yourself only to me, and I will reveal to you what is your next step in life. Be happy in me, with me and for me." What profound truths have been spoken here! It is as though the Mother herself came down to speak these words to me, and I believe she did through this friend.

So, this has been a capsule account of one woman's yoga practice in America thus far. Let us see where it goes from here. As I write this, the daily calendar of quotations of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that I keep on my desk reads for this day: "Let all circumstances, all happenings in life be occasions, constantly renewed, for learning more and ever more. —The Mother"



An American journey in the Yoga

by Larry Seidlitz

Although I have been living in India now for about three and one-half years, I became involved with Sri Aurobindo's yoga in the U.S. back in 1976 and my experience with it developed there. During that period I became involved with both the Matagiri and the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP) centers, for a time practiced on my own without any other human support, and for a time practiced together with my ex-wife Lucille, who had been involved with the yoga since before I met her. I went to the first All U.S.A. Meeting (AUM), and to a number of later ones on the East and West coasts and in the Midwest. I got to know many people in the U.S., India, and other countries associated with the Yoga through the centers and the AUMs. I also have gained some perspective on the practice of the Yoga in the U.S. by living in Pondicherry for the past several years.

On my own in Madison, WI

I first came to the Yoga through my dormitory roommate in college who had photos and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on his bookshelf. I had been seeking for about a year for spiritual meaning to life and while finding some indications here and there, when I read Sri Aurobindo, I quickly recognized that this was the path for me. This acquaintance had no further impact on my practice, and I think was not himself very involved in the Yoga. There ensued a period of about five years with no other outer support than the local spiritual bookstore which had a small selection of books by Sri Aurobindo, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison library, which had a comprehensive collection of works by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and many of their disciples. During that period I read voraciously. If one is on one's own, reading can be a great way to enter into



At home in Pondicherry in 2007. (Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz)

the stream of the yoga, and it has been a mainstay of my practice from that time forward. These are books you don't read just once, every time you can learn more and enter more deeply into the subject. Also, reading them naturally leads to meditation and inner communion with the Divine. Especially *Savitri*, "a mantra for the transformation of the world," can be profitably read daily, year after year.

Matagiri

I got the name and address of Matagiri out of one of the books from the bookstore and wrote them a letter. I had been on my own for almost five years and wanted to make contact. I made arrangements and took a bus half way across the country and got let out at the end of the driveway. Eric Hughes, one of its two founders, was there to meet me with a smile and a deeper look in his eyes than I had ever seen before. Along with Sam Spanier and Eric, there were two others living there at the time, a young man close to my age and a sweet older Indian gentleman. At some point during my visit I said that I would like to move there, and though I had no money to support myself while there, they agreed that I could come.

After a little time, I moved and settled in. Matagiri is situated in the Catskill

Mountains, a beautiful range of forested hills about two hours from New York City. At the time, Matagiri had a business which supported the center, and they put me to work to help out. It sold books on the Yoga, incense, and hand-made paper products produced in the Ashram in Pondicherry to stores and individuals around the country. We worked during the mornings on the business, and usually had the afternoon free to engage in some other activity. As part of the center activities, Eric would read on two or three nights per week from a book on the Yoga and this would be followed by a collective meditation. Eric invited me to help put together some quotes of Sri Aurobindo for one issue of the journal *Collaboration* which he edited and published at that time, an experience which perhaps planted a seed in my consciousness that sprouted over 20 years later. I became friends with the older Indian man who lived there, and we often talked and read together from Sri Aurobindo's works. The small family-like nature of the collective often presented interpersonal challenges, but also could be nurturing and comforting. There were a number of regular visitors to Matagiri, such as Julian who lived in the area, and I got to know several of them during that period. There is a special Presence at Matagiri, one can feel the nearness of the Mother, and while living there I felt involved in her work.

New England and post-graduate education in the Midwest

I soon developed a relationship with Lucille who sometimes visited the center, the sister of the young man who lived there. After about nine months at Matagiri, I moved away to live with Lucille near Boston. She had been to India three times and had had the Mother's darshan. A second brother of hers had lived in the Ashram in India for seven years and had returned to Boston. She also knew many of the other regular visitors that I had met at Matagiri, and she knew others involved with the yoga in the Boston area, such as the late Eugene (Mickie) Finn, who had introduced her and her family and many other people



into the Yoga. Mickie was a remarkable character who had worked through some very difficult issues in his personal life, could talk endlessly about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and was very generous to their work. Mickie's wife Angel still holds a meditation circle at their home.

Lucille was a little older and more experienced than me and I learned a lot from her. After some time we married. We had an Indian style ceremony, performed by my older Indian friend from Matagiri, and assisted and witnessed by many of our friends in the Yoga as well as our families. We kept in contact with Matagiri, would visit occasionally, and later formed a connection with a nonprofit organization that was associated with the center. For a short time I was an officer of this organization. This group later began working with some ex-Aurovilians and together organized the first AUM at the Mirriam Hill Center in New Hampshire. We also utilized the Mirriam Hill Center for some other gatherings during that period.

After living and working in the Boston area for a number of years, Lucille and I moved to Champaign, Illinois where I had been accepted into a doctoral program in psychology. During the ensuing five year period my wife and I were relatively cut off from others associated with the yoga. We both focused on our studies, as she also had decided to return to college to get a degree in early childhood education. While we maintained an inner connection with the Yoga and would sometimes read from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works and meditate together or by ourselves, the lack of involvement with the collective probably weakened our concentration on it during this period. However, this period was important for both of us in our personal development, especially the development of our intellectual and vocational abilities.



At Mirriam Hill Center circa 1986. Front row: Miriam, Tom. Middle row: Connie, Jean, Rudy, Anie, Gordon, Julian, Larry. Back row: Margo, unknown, Hare Krishna. (Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz)

Rochester–Matagiri commute

After I finished my studies in 1993 we moved to Rochester, New York where I had received a position as a postdoctoral fellow in the psychiatry department at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Rochester was about a five and a half-hour drive from Matagiri, but we nevertheless would usually go for the darshan days and sometimes on other occasions. Matagiri by this time had ceased to be a residential center which invited sadhaks to live, but continued as an active center attracting many visitors both from the area and from around the world. (If you wish to visit, please inquire in advance.) Moreover, Julian and Wendy Lines had by this time moved in across the road from Matagiri and were helping with the center's work, as well as doing other work for Auroville, in part through their shop which sells Auroville handicrafts. Given that the many hours of driving to and from Matagiri was exhausting, sometimes my wife would opt out and I went alone. These trips were highlights in my life and I felt close to the Divine during these visits. During the long drive, we often listened to tapes of the Mother reading, her music, Sunil's music, or sometimes chanting. Sometimes we would stay overnight, sometimes return the same night. Usually it would be for a

darshan and there would be a short reading and meditation in the room holding Sri Aurobindo's relics. Afterwards there would be an opportunity to connect with old friends and meet others in the Yoga, and often we would hike up to the top of the mountain and down again. Sometimes there would be some cleaning, gardening, or other work to help out with.

It was some time during this period that the building for the library was renovated. While this project was still just an idea, I took it upon myself to make an initial cleaning and general ordering of the contents of the building, which was

then being used as a storehouse and junk-room. I don't know, but I think this initiative may have helped Sam to decide to move forward on the big task of fundraising and seeing the project through to its completion, which he started soon afterwards. I mention this because I believe that when we take specific actions to contribute to a collective work in the Yoga, it often leads to surprising results because the Mother's Force is behind it. In this case, the library turned out beautifully, with the financial support of many contributors, the ideas of several, and the diligent efforts and oversight of Sam.

Lucille and I found out through Matagiri about someone else living in Rochester who was also interested in the Yoga. She was a Ukrainian lady who had immigrated to the U.S. with her husband and daughter after facing hardships in Russia before and after the fall of the Soviet Union. We started a weekly reading and meditation session at our home and also used the occasions to talk more freely about the Yoga as well as about our personal lives. During this period she went with her daughter to the Ashram in Pondicherry, and upon returning gave us some precious items from the darshan they had attended. Her descriptions of the Ashram and her experience there was very moving to me as I had never been there.



I think the sessions were especially valuable for her because my wife and I had each other whereas she had only us who could understand and appreciate her interests and experiences in the Yoga.

After living and working in Rochester for some years, my wife and I began to have serious trouble in our marriage and we decided to separate. While considering whether to separate, we had an interesting experience while attending a darshan weekend at Matagiri in which we both simultaneously felt Sri Aurobindo's presence and sanction to separate. I decided that after separating I would give up my developing career in psychological research and move to the SASP in Lodi, California. She decided that she also would like to start out her new life elsewhere and chose to move to a town in southern California where her older brother was living. After agreeing to the separation, the tension in our relationship dissipated. While still working out the practical arrangements, we decided to go through with a plan that we had made earlier to visit the Ashram in Pondicherry, my first visit. We were present for the Mother's birthday darshan, Auroville's birthday ceremony, and for the anniversary of the supramental descent. This was in the year 2000. We stayed for a month and had a peaceful and enjoyable time. It was a wonderful finale to our marriage. Ever since our separation we have remained close friends and continue to support one another in various ways.

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham

I arrived at SASP in time for Sri Aurobindo's birthday darshan. SASP is located in the central valley of California and is largely surrounded by vineyards. It has long hot and dry summers, and cool, damp winters with lots of fog. The old farmhouse and several outbuildings are cloistered under a grove of shady trees, and there is a



Dakshina entering the main house of the Ashram in Lodi. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham)

refreshing swimming pool well-suited for hot summer afternoons. At that time there were just Dakshina and Vishnu living there together with two dogs and two cats. But there was and is a strong and regular group of about 30 supporters who come out for monthly retreat programs and help out with the many projects. SASP has an established business which requires much time and work. At the time I arrived, because of the demands of the business and only two people to run it, the old property with its three acres of land and several buildings was in relative disrepair. It so happened that I was reasonably handy and could take up some of the property maintenance and needed improvements while Vishnu and Dakshina concentrated more on the business. I also helped out with the business, and they and others also did much work to maintain and develop the property. At various times during my stay, a few other people came to stay for shorter periods of time extending up to several months, and also contributed to the work.

SASP is a very remarkable asset of the Yoga in America. It is presently the only Sri Aurobindo center in the U.S. or Canada where people are invited to come to live and work collectively in the practice of the Yoga. I think there also are no such places in Europe. It is a sheltered environment in

the countryside which provides an excellent opportunity for concentrated sadhana. Daily life consists mainly of karma yoga together with collective meditations each evening, and there is enough free time to develop and pursue personal interests and talents. Collective life in this type of close-knit situation has its interpersonal challenges, but these provide excellent opportunities to develop equality, to learn to rein in one's ego and desires, and to learn surrender to the Divine. In general, the collective atmosphere during my stay was harmonious

and congenial. There are also opportunities to meet and get to know others long-experienced in the yoga, including various visitors from the Pondicherry Ashram and Auroville. There is usually some coming and going of people who stay for longer or shorter periods, and this requires some adjustments on the part of all, but also keeps life interesting. There is a collective management of the center by the long-term residents which is harmonious and effective. After living there for some time, opportunities are granted for visiting the Ashram in India.

An important aspect of SASP is its faithful group of supporters who come out monthly for a day-long program focused on different themes, together with karma yoga practiced in helping out with various works around the center, sports activities, and collective meals and sharing. This group has remained fairly cohesive and stable for about the past 12 years and has contributed so much to the development of the center. Some of the members of this group are former students of the Ashram school in Pondicherry, and many come from the San Francisco Bay area, approximately one and a half hour drive's distance from the center. SASP seems to provide focus, support, and practical grounding to their spiritual aspirations, though many of these members also attend regular study



groups on the Yoga in their respective localities, not to mention their Sunday morning basketball games. In turn, they provide a great deal of energy, life, support, and purpose to the center.

SASP also serves as a center, one might say even a place of pilgrimage, for other devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who live in the area or may be passing through, and for some who visit from afar. It is not uncommon for visitors to come to spend some time in the meditation hall, to take a walk through the gardens, to browse the excellent library, and to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the place. Almost invariably, newcomers feel the quietness and peace that is there and mention it. At times there will also be visitors from the area that utilize the opportunity of the evening meditations, or of the monthly retreat program, to take in the spiritual atmosphere and to share in satsang with members of the center. Visitors are asked to inquire beforehand, because the members are often busy with work and can better accommodate guests if they have advance notice.

SASP has been incredibly productive over the years despite its limited number of residents. While donations are an important source of revenue, the center is mainly self-supported by its business Auromere, which imports Ayurvedic products from India and sells them across the U.S. and in a few other countries, mainly through health food stores. It also is a major distributor of books on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Yoga, other classic spiritual texts, and on Ayurveda. Auromere has an established niche in the market and has a faithful customer base that enjoy its high-quality products. The business is an important asset of the center, as centers in the U.S. that rely exclusively or mainly on donations are invariably restricted and hampered in their growth.

Among its many contributions to the Yoga in America, SASP presently provides space for the office of Auroville International USA, an important liaison between Auroville and its supporters in the U.S. SASP also plays an important role in the coordination of efforts of the different

centers in the U.S., a project which has developed in recent years at the AUMs. One small but tangible contribution of this work which gives one perspective of the yoga in America was a newsletter that was put together and printed in 2002. It listed and described 42 organizations, mostly centers and study groups, dedicated to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother across the U.S. and Canada. There has also developed a more active collaboration between the SASP and Matagiri, including some joint projects and visits of members between the centers.

SASP has also played a role in the publication of *Collaboration*, in that Vishnu previously edited selected issues and was a board member of the Sri Aurobindo Association which publishes the journal. He also presently maintains the subscriptions and is responsible for mailing the issues to the subscribers. I also started out editing the journal while still living there.

In addition to these works, SASP built and owns a guest house in Pondicherry called Mother's House, which is a beautiful, clean, and comfortable house overlooking the sea, about 10 minutes by bicycle from the Ashram. It is managed by Regina, a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Two remarkable features about the guest house are that it allows for long-term visits as well as short-term ones, and it optionally provides for delicious and hearty collective meals. Together, these two features engender a stable spiritual community atmosphere and support-group for new and returning visitors to Pondicherry.

In 2003, SASP provided me the opportunity to visit to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. It was a wonderful experience, enhanced by the opportunity to meet Regina and the staff and guests at Mother's House, and the hospitality of other members of the Ashram familiar with SASP whom I had met in the U.S. During my visit to India I had a discussion with Ananda Reddy about his plan to provide online courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings. Shortly after my return to the States, I asked him whether it would be possible for me to join his Sri Aurobindo Centre for

Advanced Research (SACAR) in Pondicherry, and he welcomed the idea. I gave several months notice to SASP, and prior to my departure, it seemed as if the Mother arranged for two new members to join SASP, which eased the burden of work which would have fallen on Vishnu and Dakshina, and contributed to the center in other respects. Other members also have joined after my departure, and some have left.

Near the time of my departure, planning started for a new building to be constructed at SASP that would be attached to the main house. This building is now in the final phases of finishing work. Much of the work for the building has been completed by volunteers, including the regular members of the monthly programmes. The new building will have a new, larger meditation hall as well as several bedrooms on the second storey to accommodate more residents and guests. SASP is now poised for greater expansion and development, and I hope that serious aspirants of the Yoga in America consider joining it.

CIF and CIIS in San Francisco

During the period I lived at SASP, I occasionally went to San Francisco to attend programs at the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF), and became acquainted with the late Bina Chaudhuri and several of the regular members of the group there. CIF is located in a stately building across the street from Golden Gate Park. It has a beautiful hall, a meditation room, kitchen facilities, several residential rooms above that are rented to associates of the center, and a dining/meeting hall below which can be utilized in various ways for different functions. Each Sunday morning CIF holds a program, generally consisting of a speaker on a given topic, which at that time was organized by Jim Ryan. Jim is professor of Comparative Religious Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), the graduate school that was founded, like CIF, by Haridas Chaudhuri. I gave a number of talks on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Yoga for these programs, though the topics addressed by other



speakers can vary widely. Occasionally, CIF also would have workshops in the afternoon that might run several Sundays in succession. Other types of educational programs such as hatha yoga were made available during weekdays, and occasionally there would be cultural performances and special speaking engagements in the evenings. There was a core group of regular members of the center, some of whom had been students of Haridas Chaudhuri, and most of whom had a deep connection with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Yoga.

Partly through CIF, and then through my developing connection with the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry, I also became acquainted with the CIIS. Shortly before moving to Pondicherry, Aurovilian Bhavana and I met with Joseph Subbiondo, its President, to discuss possible collaborations between our institutions. He indicated that he felt it was important that CIIS develop a stronger grounding in its roots which were based on Sri Aurobindo's teachings, and was especially interested in creating stronger links with Auroville. He expressed his wish to conduct programs in Auroville so that both students and faculty could go there and see firsthand the work that was being done. Since that meeting there has begun a regular and dynamic interchange between CIIS and Auroville, including study abroad programs and joint conferences. Also, CIIS has become centrally involved in the AUMs in recent years. While no formal association developed between CIIS and the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, I became an adjunct faculty member of CIIS and have taught several online classes for their students on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings. It may be further noted that there are several regular and adjunct faculty at CIIS that have a strong grounding in Sri Aurobindo's teachings and incorporate these into their research, psychotherapeutic practices, and teaching. Several CIIS faculty and students also contribute to the collective Yoga through their connection with CIF.

SACAR in Pondicherry

Since coming to SACAR in Pondicherry, life for me has changed considerably, especially in light of my marriage to a local woman, but in many respects it is a continuation of the lifestyle at SASP. Like there, I am here involved for many hours each day in work which is directly in the service of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. While here the type of work I do is different and mainly academic—developing, administering, and facilitating university-level online courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings—it is similar in its aims of maintaining a small collective while reaching out to a larger population. Like at SASP, there is a small group of sadhaks that live and work here together, though I and some others live outside and come to work here each day. Here in Pondicherry I go to the Samadhi most every evening for meditation, whereas at SASP there was a collective meditation each evening in the meditation hall, where one also can feel the Divine's Presence. While Lodi provides opportunities to develop personal interests and activities, in Pondicherry these opportunities for dedicated work and creativity related to the Yoga may be greater and more varied, but there are also more opportunities for dispersion, as one is in the midst of a thriving city. From the point of view of concentrated sadhana this can be a drawback, but there is an overriding and powerful Presence here which is unique and seems to counterbalance its negatives.

Other resources and opportunities

So far I have commented only on my first hand experiences and perceptions related to the Yoga in America, but there is more that is going on. There are a number of other important centers such as those in Los Angeles; Crestone, Colorado; Twin Lakes, Wisconsin; and Pensacola, Florida. Each of these centers provides other opportunities for collaboration and participation. There are also numerous other study circles around the country which are like points of light in the night, and serve to strengthen the participants' yogic aspira-

tion and concentration. There also are various study and discussion groups conducted online in an email format, and also a number of web sites that offer useful information, photos, music, and other things related to the Yoga.

I feel it is vitally important for people to contribute to these centers and groups, and that much more could be done in this regard. Each individual's contributions count for so much in this Yoga, because probably only about one in a million people in the U.S. have been deeply touched by it and respond to its call. There are about 300 million people in America, but there are still fewer than 100 subscribers to Collaboration in the U.S., and each year only about 100 attend the annual AUMs. Of those who are touched by the Yoga, too few truly give of themselves substantially to its collective endeavor. Every individual can contribute something. Just to go to a center or study group to read or meditate with others, or to make a monetary contribution, is an important act. If there is no group nearby, one can start one in one's own home or connect with others involved in the Yoga through the Internet or in other ways. Each one of us has particular talents, and these can and should be put in service of the Divine. To the extent that one gives of oneself to the Divine, in whatever way one gives, the Divine responds and supports that self-giving. Whereas the personal and individual side of sadhana is important, I feel that the best way to address this aspect is also through dedicated work for the Divine in the collective. The Mother once said to a disciple, don't worry about your sadhana, I will do that for you, if you simply do my work for me.

In summary what one can say about the Yoga in America is that there is a strong foundation and infrastructure, sufficient to support the aspirations and efforts of newcomers and old-timers alike, and that there is a great potential for further development. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother aimed not only to change individuals, but also to develop a new collective life on a spiritual basis. While the cracks in the old collective system deepen, we can find fresh opportunities for building the new.



The view from the Blue Ridge

by Martha Orton

Before describing my experience of practicing the Yoga in America, I would like to begin with a little background in order to set this in context. I had come to the Yoga while living in America and, not long after discovering its importance in my life, I felt a strong call to go to the source, to go to Pondicherry as soon as I could. I subsequently visited the Ashram several times in the early 1970s and then went there to live in 1975. From that time, I spent five years in the Ashram, returned to the U.S. for two years, and then lived for six years in Auroville. I have been back in the U.S. since the latter part of 1988.

My first visit to the Ashram felt like a taste of heaven. In reflecting on that time, I hesitate even to allude to the sense of joy and belonging that I experienced. Consequently, when it came near time to leave, I was anxious about losing what I had experienced while there. I discussed this with Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), with whom I had the benefit of developing a friendship. Amal reassured me beautifully. He told me, "If you ask the Mother to keep hold of you always, never to let go of you, that is what she will do. She will keep you with her always, no matter where you are or what may happen." In brief, this has been my experience, and I know it has been the experience of countless others in the Yoga wherever they may live. Amal went on to explain the Mother's analogy of the baby cat and the baby monkey, describing how we can be like one or the other, but still have the Mother's presence always with us. In this description, the baby monkey clings to its mother in order to stay with her, while the kitten trusts in its mother to pick it up by the scruff of its neck and carry it along to keep it close. The Mother explains that whether our attitude is like one or the other, either way, we can stay close to her.



Martha Orton at home in the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia. (Photo by Arthur Orton)

Remembering this has been a source of comfort and strength through the years.

Individual experience

For a while after returning to the U.S. in 1988, I felt the physical distance from others in the Yoga rather keenly since, after many years, we were no longer living in a community of people with closely similar beliefs and goals. This did not seem in any way like a threatening situation, however, and may have actually encouraged a more inward focus. As time passed, I began to experience greater appreciation for the similarities that do exist between my beliefs based in the Yoga and those which derive from other belief systems. I found myself mentally noting and enjoying the connections I observed. For example, driving by a Baptist church, I noticed a sign with plastic letters which read, "When we think about God, we come close to Him; but when we come to know God, we change." This can be related to Sri Aurobindo's conceptualization of the difference between the mental conception of the Divine and the actual knowledge of the Divine through spiritual realization, the realization which leads to transformation of the being. It was just a random roadside sign in rural southwest Virginia, but there it was, a beautiful confirmation of the Divine's presence and influence. Seeing this,

I also delighted in how I have increasingly noticed interest in change, both in individuals and in many aspects of society—interest not merely in becoming better, but in real and meaningful change. If you look, you see the influence of the Force virtually everywhere. It is this kind of confirmation which I find exciting and inspiring. In what we in the Yoga sometimes consider to be the "outside world," it comes with the joy of discovery, and is perhaps more striking in contrast with the apparent ordinariness of so much else.

The demanding nature of life and work in general in this country gives excellent opportunities to practice karma yoga. Of course, the key and the challenge is to be able to do as the Mother recommends, "Remember and offer." If we can do this, we can deepen our practice and make it both more vibrant and more integral. As both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have explained, through offering all our efforts, including the difficulties associated with them, we have opportunity to fully engage all the parts of the being and to transform our entire nature. Since this is true anywhere, it is inappropriate to attempt to make comparisons and to assert that sadhana is more difficult or challenging in one place than another, particularly since each individual's experience is unique. However, in general there is less external support for one's practice in the US, particularly without being a member of a nearby group engaged in the Yoga. As a result, I feel that one confronts oneself more directly in relation to the ideals and aims one sets out for one's practice. Also, there is no buffer of external communal norms which can provide some comfort that one is living according to some acceptable standard in the Yoga.

In reflecting on attempting to remember and offer life and work on a daily basis, I think at times that in working at home, as my husband Robert and I do with our book and paper conservation work, it can seem somewhat easier to offer one's efforts than in the more usual kinds of workplace. In this quiet setting, concentration can come more readily than in an office or workshop



busy with the activities of other people. In a sense, we can create and maintain our own compatible atmosphere. Even so, there are the stresses posed by trying to work diligently and with a sense of perfection. Every task can be offered, if one remembers. Then even routine work can be charged with increased meaning and purpose. Of course, the trick is to remember and not to think that it is really one's own work, something that one has to do oneself, without any help. If we can let go of the false idea that it is we who are doing the work, then we can perform our work in a truer spirit. I face the same challenge in my other role as a psychotherapist. The particular demands of that work can readily compel me to see very acutely how much I need the Mother's help. In this case, as in life in general, the remembrance and offering can be facilitated by difficulties and a sense of one's limitations. Nevertheless, there is no real difference in the nature of the attitude and understanding which needs to be cultivated, and of course this applies to all kinds of work wherever it is performed. In general, however, I feel that working here, without the affirmation and support which can come with the collective experience, necessitates reaching deeply within oneself to access one's inner resources and can drive one to realize keenly one's real dependence on the Divine.

A different experience of collective yoga

Practicing the Yoga in America also has collective aspects for me, though the collective is experienced at the material level only sporadically when attending occasional gatherings such as the annual All USA Meeting (AUM). However, I also have the opportunity to practice the Yoga

in a small-scale collective way, with Robert. Through the years I have come to see our life together as a kind of collective yoga. I also feel that, in a sense, our home with its small meditation room has become one of the many centers, albeit a quiet one. In our earlier years together in the U.S. we tried to organize a center with regular activities and, while there was some interest, it never really developed. We could have put more effort into it, but found that hard to do along with trying to meet the challenges of establishing a new life here. Perhaps this difficulty points out some of the



After years in Pondicherry and Auroville, Robert and Martha Orton share the collective yoga at their quiet center in their home. (Photo by Robert Orton)

most significant challenges of practicing collective yoga in the U.S.: (1) the great deal of time and energy that people here usually need to spend in order to maintain a viable existence on the material level; (2) the fact that for many practitioners of the Yoga, others engaged in the Yoga are often at a great distance. While our numbers may not be insignificant, this is a huge country and often we are spread far apart.

I feel that AUMs are truly remarkable events. Although they are brief, lasting only about four days, their influence resonates beyond that time. Robert and I have attended most of the AUM gatherings on the East coast, as well as one in Madison, Wisconsin, since coming here. Again, geography and financial realities have an

effect, since we have found it too difficult to attend all the AUMs, particularly those on the West coast, for these reasons. Nevertheless, it is quite remarkable that the AUM has continued for so many years and manages to move back and forth from coast to coast, in that way enabling wider participation. At these events we have the pleasure of seeing long-time friends from all around the U.S. and also some visiting from the Ashram and Auroville. In addition, we have made new friends, some of whom have been practicing the Yoga in the U.S. for years, and some of whom have come to the Yoga recently. We have found it inspiring and very encouraging to meet new devotees.

For me, and for many others, being at AUM is a powerful experience. Each time I feel an initial excitement, mixed with a sense of friction associated with adjusting to the particular physical circumstances and atmosphere. The pleasure of coming together with others in the Yoga is immense. It is the first and strongest emotion that I experience. It is like a wonderful rediscovery of an old companion and a feeling of coming

home after a long time away, all combined. After awhile, these intense feelings quieten and solidify. Then . . . ah . . . wonderful things happen. Although each AUM seems to have its own character, all develop a truly wonderful atmosphere—intense, vibrant, extraordinary. The AUM becomes a reality out of time and space. Anything can happen. The powerful collective experience of AUM carries forward into daily life. There can remain a sense of all these people one has met there coexisting, while being spread across the country and around the world. One can keep a living awareness of this and *know* that there is always a community, always a collective yoga. I really treasure taking a renewed sense of this away with me each time.



Important Links

The internet is continuously providing opportunities for awareness of others in the Yoga and developing connections among us all. For me this happens primarily through emails to friends and colleagues. The ability to communicate easily and frequently helps us to be more actively aware of each other and to feel closer. Also, sometimes I find myself looking at the Ashram, Auroville or Matagiri websites, just for the pleasure of the connection and the sense of their presence that it brings.

In addition, for the past three years I have had the exceptional benefit of being a student with Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow, studying in the Advanced Research Programme for the Doctor of Sri Aurobindo Studies certificate. This online program has provided me with an immensely valuable opportunity for focused and guided study of the literature of the Yoga, which I otherwise would not have been able to undertake. It has helped me to develop intellectually and, more meaningfully, has resulted in inner growth. In addition, it has deepened my sense of connection with the literature of the Yoga and also with others doing sadhana. The connection with the university seems to act as a concrete link with Puducherry and with so much that is meaningful to me.

Some observations

In general, it seems to me that, whether or not one is engaged in a community, one has two supports which become the core of practice—the personal relation with the Divine, and the relation one has with the literature of the Yoga. Wherever one is, it is one's personal relation with the Divine which is really all that matters. It is this that sees us through life and helps us not only survive, but to grow and develop our potential as spiritual beings. The literature of the Yoga is obviously an immense support and actually a part of our relation with the Divine. For many of us in the Yoga, reading what Sri Aurobindo and the



Statue of devotee in the Ortons' meditation room. (Photo by Robert Orton)

Mother have given us is a central means of developing our understanding of the Yoga and also our awareness and relationship with them. For me, reading is an essential part of my practice. I also feel that it is not only an individual practice, but a collective one. For example, when I read *The Life Divine*, I join a great number of others who are doing the same thing. We are not reading in the same room or perhaps even at the same time, but we are a collective of readers of *The Life Divine*. This applies, of course, to all of our endeavors which involve aspiration. The individual efforts and aspirations of all the practitioners of the Yoga, wherever they are, actually merge and form a collective Yoga. I believe that the initial sense of isolation from the collective experience which I felt in my early years back in the U.S. may have been beneficial in helping me understand the collective nature of the Yoga in a wider sense. Initially, it compelled me to discover commonalities with others not involved in the Yoga and to find joy and a sense of connection with a diverse range of people, as a result. In time it also helped me to discover a sense of a wider, more universal collective reality and to delight in this as well. The sense of place seems to have become increasingly less relevant with the passage of time.

Essays

The deathless rose

by James Anderson

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*Light, burning Light from the Infinite's
diamond heart
Quivers in my heart where blooms the
deathless rose.*

—Sri Aurobindo

One afternoon, besieged by doubt, I went to the samadhi. I felt I had reached an impasse in the sadhana and for various reasons, was wondering whether it was best to move on. I wanted to ask Mother what my next step should be. So I concentrated and emptied my mind, clearing the way for a higher illumination. To my surprise, a single command was quickly imprinted on my consciousness: “Find the psychic being.”

My state of mind had been so dispersed. I was anticipating an entirely different answer. But the message was so emphatic and clear that all the trivial doubts were immediately dispelled.

The Mother says,

The psychic being is formed progressively around this divine centre, the soul, in the course of its innumerable lives in the terrestrial evolution, until the time comes when the psychic being, fully formed and wholly awakened, becomes the conscious sheath of the soul around which it is formed.

And thus identified with the Divine, it becomes His perfect instrument in the world. (1)

These last few words were so significant for me. It is as an instrument in the world that the psychic being finally manifests. It also provided the elusive answer to the enigma of matter itself.



"The psychic influence compels the physical to turn towards the Divine." (2) Indeed, our entire lower nature can be embraced by its transforming touch if we allow it. For it patiently waits for the opportunity to illumine the surface. Finding it could give me the key to open these doors. To find my 'true person' and authentic guide would indeed be a 'great discovery.' I know that it contains the entire blueprint of earthly existence. It builds and reveals our destiny in life. It whispers and finally manifests our truth.

The body has a natural affinity with the psychic being. As the Mother explains, the psychic being "is like an electric wire that connects the generator with the lamp." (3) The generator is the Divine and the lamp is the body. It is the function of the psychic being, quite simply, to illumine the body with this divine Presence.

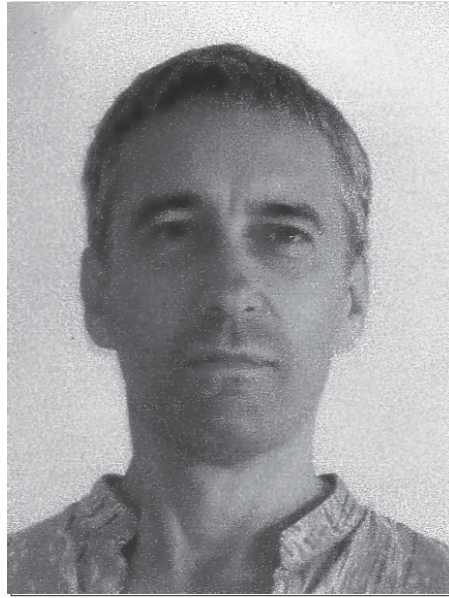
This means that if there were no psychic in Matter, it would not be able to have any direct contact with the Divine. And it is happily due to this psychic presence in Matter that the contact between Matter and the Divine can be direct . . . (4)

Beginnings

Coming to the *ashram* eight years ago, I felt quickly drawn into Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, his completely integral approach to spiritual growth. In every detail, it seemed so complete; whenever a question came forward, an answer appeared. Very significantly, the body was not shunned: it too was taken up in its arms.

It soon became apparent to me that I had to attune my practice much more closely to the body itself. To give an added spur, there were tangible physical reasons for me to do this. Previously perhaps, there had been a tendency to ignore it. But the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have taught me that the body must also be a part of the work. It too can collaborate in this task by opening to the Divine and surrendering to the influence of the psychic being.

This psychic influence is unmistakable. It carries the certitude of Truth, the



James Anderson strives to open the body to the psychic. (Photo courtesy James Anderson)

fragrance of Love. It feels like the seat of unconditional love, an adoring child of the Divine Mother. The psychic being, this 'rose of God', is but a portion of the Divine. It is like touching a spring I know to be limitless. By consciously calling the Mother or Sri Aurobindo, I simply entreat it to step forward. When I consciously surrender to them, I also yield a little more to the rule of this divine center. The aim of my practice is to change its influence into a conscious presence and for the body, a permanent imprint of its touch is essential.

Conscious presence

It is by becoming a conscious presence that the psychic influence extends over the body and the rest of the lower nature. To achieve this, something like a complete reorientation of the consciousness is required. It is by constantly referring to it that the influence grows and it is by dwelling inside that its mark becomes permanent. So I always try to summon the highest parts of my being to concentrate on bringing forward this presence within. Instead of floating uncertainly on the surface, the awareness then becomes firmly anchored inside. From that poise, it then radiates outwards to embrace the nether

regions. I believe that though the focus is within, the range of this presence will expand to the more material regions through conscious practice.

Here, I feel there are two aspects. The first is 'surrender.' To surrender seems a vast undertaking, but in essence it is so simple. Every breath we take can bring a renewal of this self-giving.

So I simply try to leave the work to Her guidance and offer all of it to Her. I endeavor to remain open and receptive, constantly seeking to widen myself, so that the darker regions can be transformed by Her inexorable illumination. Nothing should be held back in this process of self-giving. Offering through the vehicle of the psychic being, not as a mere mental activity, creates in me a dynamism for change. The Mother then assumes the *sadhana*: the responsibility is then transferred to her. The body can be offered too. The Mother once described the physical *sadhana* as akin to wading through a 'virgin forest.' But she has painstakingly done the work herself and by surrender, she takes charge of that work in this body too.

Obstacles inevitably appear and those 'unruly ministers,' the mind and the vital, constantly jostle for position, demanding abeyance from the physical. They must however be quietened. This is essential for the well-being of the body itself, as so often these two parts can exert such a pernicious influence over it. By continually bullying the body into submission, they hopelessly retard the body's progress. So I find myself perpetually offering these parts also to the Mother for her to transform.

Perhaps the key is to dwell within. If one resides there, behind the heart, the surface agitations cease. This is because, quite simply, She is permanently seated in the psychic being herself. So by constantly referring to it, the mind and vital eventually surrender to Her rule. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

This is the function of the psychic—it has to work on each plane so as to help each to awaken to the true truth and the Divine Reality. (5)



I always find that by concentrating within the heart, the mind indeed quietens. It brings forward such a feeling of adoration. This, in turn, invites the psychic being to come out of hiding. By spontaneously calling and repeating the Mother's name too, the lower nature is quietened and I become more conscious of the psychic being. I try to dwell there. But this work must be done without mental forethought. Engaging the mind undermines this important objective.

The process of surrender is one we can undertake with optimism and joy. It can be part of our 'sunlit path.' In a continual process of surrender, the body too can be offered to the Mother's transforming touch.

But it is pointless intending to inertly relinquish a dirty vessel (i.e., the lower nature) in the vain hope that the Mother will inevitably clean and transform it. This is where we come to the second aspect. Simultaneous to the surrender, personal effort is required where one observes and rejects the debris of the lower nature so that the psychic being can move into the front. The Mother says, "Not only is the positive movement of self-giving necessary but also the negative movement of rejection of everything in you that opposes this giving." (6)

Wrong movements

I feel that the body too can take part in this process of rejection. The body, so habituated to its fixed grooves, should find a way to free itself from the prejudices of the mind and attachments of the vital. A constant vigilance is required to observe the body in motion. It takes a firm commitment and unwavering perseverance. Any movement lacking in grace can be rejected and replaced by a conscious motion more in consonance with the natural and true rhythm of the being.

I say 'natural' because I feel that the body, when left to itself, is a much surer guide (though not infallible) of its own destiny than its usual masters. That is probably due to the innate psychic presence in matter itself. As the Mother says,

"The body carries within itself the sense of its divinity." (7) Deep down, concealed by inertia and unconsciousness, it usually contains that spontaneous knowledge of what is best for it.

Its innate rhythm is 'true' because it can express something of the radiance and light of the inner being. The psychic being, otherwise known as the 'soul personality,' seeks to impress its true nature on the outer form. It yearns to manifest and express its individuality in the body too. Each body has its own rhythm, its own way of expressing its own particular beauty, a beauty that is all too often suppressed inside. Sometimes, through illness or injury, this can be lost and must be recovered. In such a case, I believe the only answer is through the psychic being. The body should always be referred to its true master.

Matter and spirit

There is a force of descent and there is a force that radiates from inside. Through a process of surrender and personal effort, the surface obstructions gradually desist so these forces, now unhampered, can fully emerge. The body then becomes more confident and free. By dwelling in the psychic being and by maintaining awareness on the outer form, a connection is gradually fused between matter and spirit. The healing then automatically ensues. An inexhaustible patience is however required to see the process through to its final conclusion. Whatever that result, it is always better to leave it to the Divine.

Working inside

I always find it valuable to set some time aside each day to sit and call the Force into the body. I always begin by invoking the Mother's Presence. From that poise, I simply widen myself and observe. Sometimes an immediate response comes and the Light and Force pour down through the crown of the head, eventually reaching right down to the toes. Meanwhile, another process can be observed. The psychic being comes out and, in a spirit of identity, rises upwards in order to meet the descent

from above. Eventually, as the forces consolidate, the psychic presence starts radiating outwards too. The whole being, including the body, becomes infused with such a blissful Presence.

The psychic consciousness acts like a searchlight, illuminating the darkest corners and inviting Her Force to descend and intervene. Wherever it pours its light, that Force is automatically present. Very often, by merely placing the consciousness on a particular area of the body that is troubled, I encounter a shift of vibration, so often a light, which brings a cure. Occasionally I might find it helpful to place a hand on that spot. Confronting the problem in the form of words (merely stating aloud the situation as the inner being perceives it) also helps.

This work with the psychic being is essential for the body's health. It forms a bridge with the physical. For some years now, I have been repeating this process and I shall continue it until that link is indelibly forged. This work can be undertaken at all times, even when engaged in ordinary activities. If diverted, in the course of action, I can still place the consciousness on the body and sincerely call the Mother's name. The effect is the same. To repeat the Mother's name with devotion summons the psychic being to step forward. It then becomes a psychic call. That call induces its influence to spread over the entire lower nature, not least the body. As a consequence, the body too can vibrate and resonate to the divine Word. From Mother's experience,

... the body repeats the mantra [which is also japa] spontaneously, and absolutely without the intervention of the consciousness. It has got into the habit; as soon as it has the least difficulty, it repeats the mantra. (8)

In other words, the body automatically starts to sing and vibrate in tune with the divine Word, entirely of its own volition.

Concentration

Through concentration, by uniting



the various strands of the awareness, one can go in search of the psychic being behind the heart centre. By applying the consciousness, I find its light becomes more prominent, its radiance more present and alive to my witness gaze. This concentration is maintained as long as the intensity persists. This intensity is not merely mental, but a focus of pure consciousness, supported by an atmosphere of stillness and relaxation. With repeated practice, I find that I can hold it longer. Finally, as I withdraw from this time of concentration, I gradually spread the consciousness outwards.

With this extension of consciousness, the outer being itself becomes immersed in the presence and light. The physical nature shares its touch too. The influence brings a joy to the body parts, from the brain to the feet. It is a natural process. I simply open my surface being and observe. It can even eventually extend beyond the limits of the gross body to the auric field. It is a beautiful journey.

Spontaneous connection

This connection is spontaneous in children. It becomes more elusive with the onset of advancing years. One can observe certain children whose psychic being stands out in front: there is so little that camouflages it. Their bodies are so supple and full of energy, their vital smiling and enthusiastic and, above all, their mind so uncomplicated and free of concern. Because of the close affinity between the body and psychic being, the Mother says, "Children—just because this psychic consciousness is in front in them—live also altogether in their body." (9) So there is a close association between the psychic being and the body. The Mother also says:

In fact the physical being has a simplicity and even a goodwill (which is not always very enlightened, far from it), but still a simplicity and goodwill which put it in a closer relation with the psychic than the passions of the vital or the pretensions of the mind. And it is probably because of that also that in children the psychic can feel more at ease, being less constantly jostled by mental and vital contradictions. (10)

Somehow that gets lost. The mind increasingly masks the psychic from the rest of the external nature. The lower nature

it through the eyes of the psychic being. A beautiful rose needs strong roots to bloom in full glory.

Inner voice

The psychic speaks! It is so still that it can easily get submerged by the din of the mind or vital. It never imposes. As opposed to the surface mind, which clothes itself in words, the contact takes on an altogether more subtle form. The Mother too says, "The psychic voice is silent—it manifests in the form of an understanding or knowledge rather than in words." (11) It takes an immense amount of sincerity to

recognize it. So often I await it but the surface mind usurps my attention and imposes its own fallible answer.

Sometimes I also find it fruitful to ask the psychic being questions. They may relate to any plane of the

The psychic speaks! It is so still that it can easily get submerged by the din of the mind or vital. It never imposes. As opposed to the surface mind, which clothes itself in words, the contact takes on an altogether more subtle form. The Mother too says, "The psychic voice is silent—it manifests in the form of an understanding or knowledge rather than in words."

gets set in its own patterns and dull formations. Above all, the body loses its natural plasticity in a round of habitual repetition. Perhaps this is one important reason why the Mother continually urges us to remain young. It is through a process of sadhana that this youth can be reclaimed. If the psychic being stays in front, the body spontaneously blossoms.

But I sometimes find it easy to lose contact. Now and then I find myself immersed in an inner world, where the body is limp though an inner glow may still be present. I lose the link whenever the psychic consciousness separates from the body. A twist or distortion in my lower nature might obscure the psychic being leaving the mind or vital to play havoc. The body yearns for transformation and the Mother's Light. But how can this be achieved if the awareness is placed elsewhere? Because of this, I believe that it is always better to be *in* the body: to observe

being. As a vehicle of Truth, the Mother says that it never errs. The response brings a spontaneous revelation rather than a dialogue.

When I am calling Mother's Force into the physical, it is quite possible that I come across some sort of a block or knot. So often a physical problem is accompanied and even caused by an inner tension. There are many ways in which this inner disturbance can show itself. For instance, there might be a feeling of nausea or perhaps just a sense of unease in a particular locality. Perhaps too, there might be a break in the flow of Force somewhere in the body. So I plunge down into that difficulty and try to place my awareness on it. I go further and further to enquire into the root cause. I ask the body where the distortion comes from and, if the connection between the psychic being and body is strong, the knowledge invariably comes.

At times the answer arrives very



quickly. At others, I have to wait for a sense of perfect stillness for the understanding to surface. It is then that I must be very patient as the mind is always eager to superimpose its own projections. Sometimes, due to a surface disturbance, I may find that the knowledge holds itself back. At such a point, I find it better to ask the body for an answer at a later stage. The understanding will eventually emerge, perhaps even days later through the vehicle of the psychic being, probably when the mind has completely forgotten about it!

The answer, if authentic, is inevitably spontaneous and contains no forethought. Once the understanding arrives there is always a sense of certitude behind it. It bears the unmistakable hallmark of the psychic influence: the truth itself. Then I repeat the answer, audibly even, to that specific region. The answer might be anything. I may for instance detect, deep down, a sense of impatience in a particular part of the body. I repeat that knowledge to the area concerned and a wonderful change occurs: as the understanding settles into the body, the difficulty disappears.

By repeating the knowledge in words, there is an inevitable translation and possible diminution. But if I keep the *essence* of the revelation in my consciousness, and confront the body with it, the effect is often quite miraculous.

Then I found that Sri Aurobindo had observed:

Knowledge, when it goes to the root of our troubles, has a marvelous healing-power as it were. As soon as you touch the quick of the trouble, as soon as you, diving down and down, get at what really ails you, the pain disappears as though by a miracle. (12)

Distant dream?

Sri Aurobindo said that perfect health will only arrive with the supramental transformation of the body and union with the psychic being is certainly an essential

stage in that journey. Any idea of transformation would be a distant dream without this realization. The Mother says:

It is indispensable that each one finds his psychic and unites with it definitively. It is through the psychic that the supramental will manifest itself. (13)

Indeed, the psychic is the gateway to the entire supramental process itself. In this context, the Mother recounted an experience where she witnessed the psychic being of one of her disciples:

But it interested me very much, because it was as though that being were telling me, 'But you are busy looking to see what kind of being the supramental will be—there it is! There, it is that.' And it was there. It was the psychic being of the person. (14)

We can gain a detailed insight into the work of transformation from the Mother's own accounts in *Mother's Agenda*. Here, she vividly describes her 'Yoga of the Cells,' the meticulous process of infusing the divine consciousness into each of the body's cells. Our plodding toil lags light-years behind, but she has often said that what is done in her body can also be achieved in others. It is the 'deathless rose' concealed within us that provides the key. By extending its presence over the entire being, man can achieve a "divine life in a divine body." (15)

Opening to peace

Deep down, inside a thick crust of inertia and hidden within the cells, the body possesses a deep aspiration for the true consciousness, a yearning to also share in the divine life. This is the psychic being's yearning. Whenever I open myself and the Peace descends in the physical, a sublime joy wells up from the depths of the being. It is a joy of pure gratitude. This dual action is spontaneous.

It is through peace and joy that the body heals. One can call the peace at all times. I do this simply by calling Her name. I pray that with time and patience, the unconscious will become her conscious instrument as successive links between spirit and matter are fused.

I feel it is always more fruitful to look at challenges as opportunities. We all face our challenges, so the only thing is to get on with it. I feel it better not to get stuck in old patterns; one can always move forward. Yoga is about change too; traversing old boundaries, it teaches us to transcend the limitations of Nature. I would have probably shied away from this work with the body, had my circumstances been different. But clearly it is where my being most needed to evolve.

Though an uncomfortable journey at times, I feel this body is the Mother's gift. The destination is quite clear to me: to find and unite with my psychic being. It is from this that the true nature will manifest. In Her own words, nothing is incurable. I have faith that the Mother will take care of the details. The final result I leave to her but I pray that, whatever happens, the entire being eventually perfectly surrenders to her. It is a journey I cannot attempt single-handed. It is all in her hands.

Humility

A friend once told me that it is easier to be a 'nobody' when practicing this yoga. The work is so vast that it makes us humble before it. Sri Aurobindo wrote, "God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep." (16) So perhaps it is better to put the histrionics to one side and quietly get on with the work. We can surely take a leaf out of the Mother's book here too:

The great words, the great attitudes, the great experiences, all that is very good up there, but here...nothing spectacular—everything is very modest, very calm, very effaced—very modest. And this is the condition for progress, the condition for transformation (17).



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An eternal dream

by Arun Vaidya

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Multiplicity of the Oneness is an intriguing spiritual reality. The Indian scriptures have frequently propounded that He is everything and that everything is He. In Oneness, being different is an accentuation of diversity in harmony expressing and seeking delight of many-fold manifestation. In the context of this spiritual truth, it is not so surprising that the Mother's two creations—Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville—both have her dream as the inspirational genesis. It was in 1954 that the Mother openly talked about Sri Aurobindo Ashram as her dream:

There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be sup-

planted by opportunities to serve and organize. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities.

Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work. In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it nor the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream.

Yet, this dream is on the way of becoming a reality. That is exactly what we are seeking to do at the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo on a small scale, in proportion to our modest means. The achievement is indeed far from being perfect but it is progressive; little by little we advance towards our goal, which, we hope one day we shall be able to hold before the world as a practical and effective

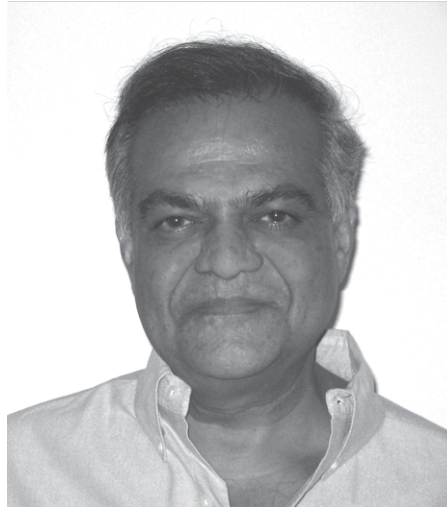


means of coming out of the present chaos in order to be born into a more true, more harmonious new life. (1)

To create a platform for the Truth Consciousness seeking to manifest in the world, the Ashram was formed. It provided diverse elements of humankind for the march of transformation of collective consciousness and to play the pivotal role as a laboratory of humankind's spiritualization with the intense practice of Integral Yoga.

Integral Yoga is also the "Purna Yoga"—the Complete Yoga—because of its all-encompassing objectives. Sri Aurobindo had asserted that, "By this Yoga we not only seek the Infinite, but we call upon the Infinite to unfold in human life." (2) Sri Aurobindo had cautioned his disciples, "The knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble argument of reason for or against his existence; it is to be gained only by self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience. Nor does that experience proceed by anything like rational scientific experiment or rational philosophic thinking." (3) He had clearly demarcated the path required for us to follow: "A divine life upon earth, the ideal we have placed before us, can only come about by a spiritual change of our being and a radical and fundamental change, an evolution or revolution of our nature. The embodied being upon earth would have to rise out of the domination over it of its veils of mind, life and body into the full consciousness and possession of its spiritual reality, and its nature also would have to be lifted out of the consciousness and power of consciousness proper to a mental, vital and physical being into the greater consciousness and greater power of being and the larger and freer life of the spirit." (4) For a better understanding and pursuit of such an all-encompassing unique and pioneering spiritual endeavor, one needs to follow the sunlit path charted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. However, there is a categorical prerequisite of purity of soul to be the seeker of the Truth:

Yes, there are happy ways near to
God's sun;



Arun Vaidya. (Photo courtesy Arun Vaidya)

But few are they who tread the sunlit
path;
Only the pure in soul can walk in
light. (5)

Sri Aurobindo provided the contextual ideal of human unity and its spiritual relevance is increasingly becoming urgent:

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here . . . There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be

the realisation by the [human] race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded . . . In this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence. (6)

The Mother was also emphatic about the importance of human unity for the human race to collectively seek the Supramental Truth and she had categorically expressed in *Bulletin of Physical Education*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, April 1952:

The most important [idea] one is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither through uniformity nor through domination and subjection. A synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its own place in accordance with its own genius and the role it has to play in the whole, can alone effect a comprehensive and progressive unification which may have some chance of enduring. And if the synthesis is to be a living thing, the grouping should be done around a central idea as high and wide as possible, and in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, would find their respective places. That idea is to give man the conditions of life necessary for preparing him to manifest the new force that will create the race of tomorrow.



All urges of rivalry, all struggles for precedence and dominion should disappear giving place to a will for harmonious organisation, for clear-sighted and effective collaboration . . .

The Mother founded Auroville on 28 February 1968 as the continuation and expansion of her objective of the Truth manifestation upon earth and the integral transformation of humanity. Under the endorsement of UNESCO, 121 countries and the states of India participated in its inauguration. Each of them sent its soil with a young woman and young man as its representatives to put its soil in an urn in the amphitheatre that is in front of the Matri-mandir as a symbol of human unity on a global scale.

Auroville is the attempt towards collective realization. It is a chosen site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity among all those of goodwill who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life. It is not for comfort and satisfaction of desires that one comes to Auroville; it is for growth of consciousness and consecration to the Truth that has to be realized. It is an ideal example of collective workings of designated representatives to manage a centralized shared economy for the progress and to hasten the growth of the collective and individual consciousness aspiring to manifest unity, mutuality and harmony at all levels. It is envisioned that with sincere adherence to these guiding principles, Auroville economics will be conducive in offering to all Aurovilians the joy of work and the space for inner growth according to their innate nature and aspirations for a simple, enriched and beautiful life.

The darshan day message of 21 February 2006, the Mother's birthday, was

A spirit of its celestial source aware
Translating heaven into a human
shape
Descended into earth's imperfect
mould . . .
She took again her divine unfinished
task:

Survivor of death and the aeonic
years,
Once more with her fathomless heart
she fronted Time. (7)

The statement "Once more with her fathomless heart she fronted Time" is at once reassuring and poignant. It is a reminder of the repeated shortcomings of humanity and an assurance that in spite of that the Divine does not abandon us! Maybe we could strive a little more and a little harder with sincerity and persistency to be deserving of the Grace and progressively minimize the constant need of it due to our ceaseless negligence and unabated faults. Yes, we all do need to learn from the lessons of the past:

In 1369 B.C., Pharaoh Akhnaton and his Queen Nefertiti built the new capital of Egypt called Amarna in response to their spiritual convictions and ushered in the era of monotheism in a time of deeply entrenched polytheism. They were the daring pioneer of the new religion to dispense with the partial truth aspects of polytheism that was preventing the due recognition and acceptance of the unalloyed Truth—Ra—Sun—Light. This is what the supramental truth consciousness of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is focusing on!

In the center of this city, a temple was built in reverence the unalloyed Truth—Ra—Sun—Light, which is how the Matri-mandir at Auroville is envisioned to be! The following charter of Amarna is so comparable to Auroville's:

Here is the place which belongs to no
prince, to no god.
No one owns it.
Here is a place for all of us . . .
The earth will find joy in it.
Here the hearts will be happy.

In 1347 B.C., the power shifted to the general Horemheb and he obliterated Amarna with vengeance to wipe out any of its ideals!

As the divine providence would have it, the representatives of Auroville, using selected extractions and alterations of some of the text, chose the Mother's dream

expressed in connection with Sri Aurobindo Ashram quoted earlier, as the Mother's dream for Auroville:

There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its own, a place where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given, not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organize; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities.

Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessibility to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position.

For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing.



There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action.

In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation in doing well, of collaboration, and real brotherhood. (8)

Maybe the first step of unity of humanity begins with the spiritual union of the two creations of the Mother: Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville where the dream of the Mother finds its roots. In 1347 B.C., Akhnaton's ideal was willfully destroyed and his dream city was reduced to rubble by an army general who revived and reverted to the past traditions. One of the four "Matter Forces" as characterized by Sri Aurobindo, "Affinity to the Laws of Past" (Dragon), prevailed once again!

The question remains, will we at this time rise above our petty selves and meet the challenge of the time to be worthy of the "Hour of the God?" Will the silent majority remain silent forever in the cozy comfort of as is—this time the Eternal Inertia (Rock), another of the four "Matter Forces"—or will it actively invoke the "Mother of Radiance" and seek transformation of itself and collective consciousness to collaborate and hasten the success of the divine plan? "You say Auroville is a dream. Yes, it is a 'dream' of the Lord and generally these 'dreams' turn out to be true—much more than the human so-called realities." (9)

A human frailty may surface here and there in this grand transformational process, creating its own challenges and delaying the rate of spiritual progress. But the march continues steadily even if slowly, towards the objective of unification of spirit and its realization in collective endeavors and community dwelling for the harmony to prevail. After all, the direct and indirect participants of Auroville do repre-

sent humanity at large, which is even now far from being perfect and still struggling to establish harmony within to manifest it in the collective domain. If humanity were more open to the Divine Consciousness, more willing to adhere to the principles of Integral Yoga, and more ready and willing to follow the light of the supramental Truth, maybe all the direct and indirect participants as affiliates, associates and well-wishers of Auroville would be better instruments and workers of the Divine. If that were the case, the Auroville work might progress faster; and the time, talent, and resources deployed will find a greater level of success in reflecting the manifestation of Bliss, Beauty, and Truth.

Auroville is a great reminder that the fault lies not with circumstances and somewhere outside but within all of us around the world. Auroville is the greatest opportunity for the human spirit to collectively progress and aspire for the divine Truth. It provides an uncommon opportunity to experience that aspiration; and above all, it demonstrates the descent and functioning of the Supreme's Light to enable us to work collectively to collaborate and to live collectively in harmony with accentuated individuality. Auroville still remains the vibrant symbol of mankind's hope and aspiration for the future. All the participants and supporters of Auroville in their respective roles from around the world are the harbingers of the new dawn of our civilization.

The Mother emphasized several times that the Matrimandir (literally, Temple of the Mother) with its crystal globe at the center of its meditation hall, is the soul of Auroville in the symbolic spiritual sense. Ananda Reddy's interpretation of Matrimandir foundation stone is very insightful:

What astounds me, thinking philosophically, is that the Mother has given Matrimandir the foundation of AUM, chiseled in hard granite, with her name signed underneath. For no other building has the Mother given AUM for its foundation. In one of her writings, she gave the significance of AUM as "the signature of the Lord."

What does it mean? The scriptures say that from AUM the world was created. We have here a second AUM in Matter, in the foundation of the Matrimandir—which itself is the symbol of the Supramental action of the world. That places the true importance of the Matrimandir not only in the presence of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's symbols and of the crystal, but deep in its very foundation. It turns Matrimandir literally into the cradle of a New Creation, from Matter upwards, just as the first one had been from the Spirit downwards. (10)

The Mother's Christmas message of 1972 is for the world at large, but it is so relevant to all those involved with Auroville:

We want to show to the world that man can become a true servitor of the Divine. Who will collaborate in all sincerity?" (11)

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Beauty and singing

by Seabury Gould

The purpose of music is to understand better: to evolve and expand our inner world. Legends of many people deem music to be of divine origin: thus when we have reached the boundaries of human understanding, music points beyond. —Zoltan Kodaly; composer, educator and visionary

Through sacred music we can appreciate how devotion, consecration and beauty affect consciousness and emotions. Indeed, as Sri Aurobindo says, “Music deepens the emotions and harmonizes them with each other.” It is a blessing on our lives to deepen our appreciation of beautiful melodies, soul-drenched harmonies and intoxicating multi-ethnic rhythms. Our soul is naturally attracted to beauty and enchantment. Our inner life is nourished by joyful and uplifting musical experiences.

Beauty inspires the poet, painter, musician, lover and hiker. The inspiration that beauty gives motivates the singer to sing beautiful songs. In all the activities of life where beauty is the inspiration, there is music or what might be called an aesthetic divine blessing. As Sri Aurobindo says, “The musician and poet stand for a truth, it is the truth of the expression of the Spirit through beauty.”

Regarding the music of India, all Indian classical music is based on vocal music. Every note carries within it a certain expression or emotion. Master musician and composer Tyagaraja speaks of how the notes themselves are sacred, reminding us to “praise the divine forms of the seven celestial notes,” and that “it is in the seven notes that the Lord lives and moves and has His being.” Learning and playing (or singing) Indian music involves both discipline and freedom. As the Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan says, “Hindu music is unique in character, for the player and singer are given perfect freedom in expressing their soul through their art.”

Fortunately there is the uniquely accessible genre of Indian music known as kirtan, the singing of devotional songs. When we sing the words and melodies of these songs, it is an opportunity to use our voice as an expression of our spirit. In the Hindu tradition it is understood that singing is the first art, playing the second art and dancing the third art which make music. In group singing settings such as kirtan, there is typically harmonious and beautiful musical sharing which reminds us of how great it feels to sing. There’s nothing like making music with others: don’t miss any opportunity to sing and play with others. As the ecstatic Sufi poet Rumi says, “When the tendency of friends is toward spirit, toward the heart, they go, like wind and flame, upward together... Let everyone climb on their roofs and sing their notes! Sing loud!”

The truth is that in all arts everything depends upon the artist, and what he does depends upon the state of consciousness in which he is. —The Mother

Source material

Ideals for spiritual collective living

by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

This Ashram has been created with another object than that ordinarily common to such institutions, not for the renunciation of the world but as a centre and a field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life which would in the final end be moved by a higher spiritual consciousness and embody a greater life of the spirit. There is no general rule as to the stage at which one may leave the ordinary life and enter here; in each case it depends on the personal need and impulsion and the possibility or the advisability for one to take the step. —Sri Aurobindo, 24 July 1947, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 7.

* * *

It is not from disgust for life and people that one must come to yoga.

It is not to run away from difficulties that one must come here.

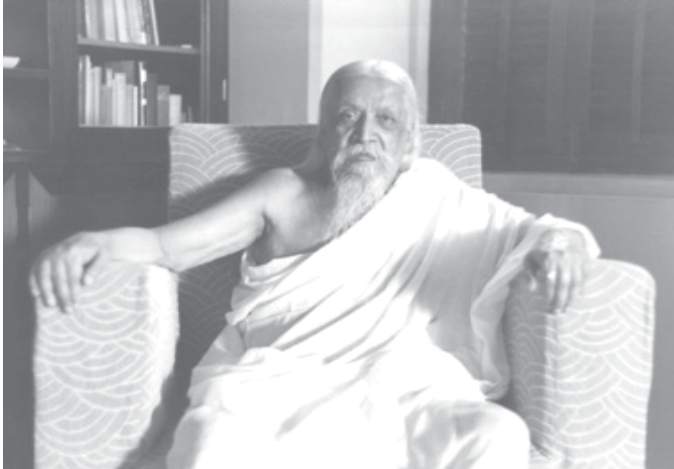
It is not even to find the sweetness of love and protection, for the Divine’s love and protection can be enjoyed everywhere if one takes the right attitude.

When one wants to give oneself totally in service to the Divine, to consecrate oneself totally to the Divine’s work, simply for the joy of giving oneself and of serving, without asking for anything in exchange, except the possibility of consecration and service, then one is ready to come here and will find the doors wide open.

I give you the blessings given to all my children wherever they are in the world and tell you, “Prepare yourself, my help will always be with you.” —The Mother, 30 March 1960, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 14.

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The reason for people to come and settle here is surely not to find comfort and luxury—this can be found anywhere if one is lucky enough. But what one can get here, that is not got in any other place: it is the Divine Love, Grace and Care. It is when this is forgotten or disregarded that people begin to feel miserable here. Indeed whenever somebody feels unhappy and discontented, it can be taken as a sure sign that he is turning his back on what the Divine is always giving and that he has gone astray in pursuit of worldly satisfaction. The Mother, 13 January 1947, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 19.



Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

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

If one feels human beings to be near and the Divine to be far and seeks the Divine through service of and love of human beings and not the direct service and love of the Divine, then one is following a wrong principle—for that is the principle of the mental, vital and moral not the spiritual life. —Sri Aurobindo, 6 November 1933, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 31.

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If anybody in the Ashram tries to establish a supremacy or dominating influence over others, he is in the wrong. For it is bound to be a wrong vital influence and come in the way of the Mother's work.

All the work should be done under the Mother's sole authority. All must be arranged according to her free decision. She must be free to use the capacities of each separately or together to what is best for the work and best for the worker.

None should regard or treat another member of the Ashram as his subordinate. If he is in charge, he should regard the others as his associates and helpers in the work, and he should not try to dominate or impose on them his own ideas and personal fancies, but only see to the execution of the will of the Mother. None should regard himself as a subordinate, even if he has to carry out instructions given through another or to execute under supervision the work he has to do.

All should try to work in harmony, thinking only of how best to make the work a success; personal feelings should not be allowed to interfere, for this is a most frequent cause of disturbance in the work, failure or disorder.

If you keep this truth of the work in mind and always abide by it, difficulties are likely to disappear; for others will be influenced by the rightness of your attitude and work smoothly with you or, if through any weakness or perversity in them, they create difficulties, the effects will fall back on them and you will feel no disturbance or trouble. —Sri Aurobindo, 12 October 1929, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 38-39.

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Here nobody can be an exclusive head—everyone must learn to collaborate. It is a very good discipline for vanity, self-conceit and the excessive sense of personal importance. —The Mother, 17 February 1968, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 40.

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You seem to forget that by the fact that you are living in the Ashram, it is neither for yourself nor for a boss that you are working, but for the Divine. Your life must be entirely consecrated to the Divine Work and cannot be governed by petty human considerations. —The Mother, 28 May 1970, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 40.

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The greater the difficulties that rise in the work the more one can profit by them in deepening the equality, if one takes it in the right spirit. You must also keep yourself open to receive the help towards that, for the help will always be coming from the Mother for the change of the nature. —Sri Aurobindo, 29 September 1935, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 41.

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If other Sadhaks commit errors that is their responsibility, one can observe and avoid similar mistakes in oneself, but one Sadhak cannot correct the errors of others unless that comes within his responsibility—each has to correct himself and his own defects and mistakes. —Sri Aurobindo, 21 August 1936, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 41.



* * *

If you leave it to the Mother entirely, then what the Mother would want you to do is to go on with the work as best you can without allowing yourself to be disturbed or troubled by these things which you enumerate in your letters, without insisting on your own ideas or vital feelings. That is indeed the rule that all ought to follow, to do their work here as the Mother's work, not their own; the worker must not insist on the work being done according to his own ideas; for that is to treat it as his own work, not the Mother's. If there are inconveniences, troubles, things done not as he would like them to be, still he should go on doing his work as best he can under the circumstances. That is a rule of the Sadhana, to remain unconcerned by outward circumstances and quietly do what one has to do, what one can do, leaving the rest to the Mother. —Sri Aurobindo, 5 July 1937, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 41-42.

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

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

Even when physically the lines of work differ, the union can remain intact and constant if we keep always in mind the essential points and principles which unite, and the Divine Goal, the Realisation which must be the one unchanging object of our aspiration and works. —The Mother, 7 November 1959, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 42.

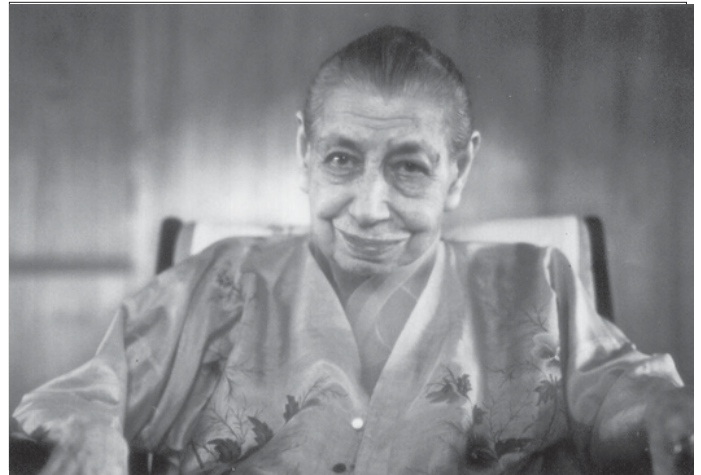
* * *

You should be very polite with those who depend upon you for their living. If you ill-treat them, they feel it very much but cannot reply to you as man to man for fear of losing their job.

There may be some dignity in being rough with your superiors, but with those who depend on you, the true dignity is to be very courteous. —The Mother, 23 June 1932, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 43.

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Each one has his own way of doing Sadhana and his own approach to the Divine and need not trouble himself about how the others do it; their success or unsuccess, their difficulties, their delusions, their egoism and vanity are in [the Mother's] care; she has an infinite patience, but that does not mean that she approves of their defects or supports them in all they say or do. The Mother takes no sides in any quarrel or antagonism or dispute, but her silence does not mean that she approves what they may say or do



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

when it is improper . . . The Mother tolerates all; she does not forbid any criticism of the Sadhaks by each other nor does she give these criticisms any value. It is only when the Sadhaks see the futility of all these things from the spiritual level that there can be any hope that they will cease. —Sri Aurobindo, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 45-46.

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I see no reason therefore why you should care so much if anybody is not behaving well with you. I have told you already that people in the Ashram—it is true even of those who have inner experiences and some opening—are not yet free in their outer selves from ego and wrong ideas and wrong movements. It is no use getting distressed or depressed by that. What you must do is to be turned only to the Mother and relying on her go forward quietly with your work and Sadhana until the time when the Sadhaks are sufficiently awakened and changed to feel the need of greater harmony and union with each other. Let only your spiritual change and progress matter for you and for that trust wholly in the Mother's force and her grace which is with you—do not let things or people disturb you,—for compared with the truth within and the journey to the full Light of the Mother's Consciousness these things have no importance. —Sri Aurobindo, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 46.

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In human life the cause of all difficulties, all discords, all more moral sufferings, is the presence in everyone of the ego with its desires, its likes and dislikes. Even in a disinterested work which consists in helping others, until one has learned to overcome the ego and its demands, until one can force it to keep calm and quiet in one corner, the ego reacts to everything that displeases it, starts an inner storm that rises to the surface and spoils all the work.



This work of overcoming the ego is long, slow and difficult; it demands constant alertness and sustained effort. This effort is easier for some and more difficult for others.

We are here in the Ashram to do this work together with the help of Sri Aurobindo's knowledge and force, in an attempt to create a community that is more harmonious, more united, and consequently much more effective in life.

As long as I was physically present among you all, my presence was helping you to achieve this mastery over the ego and so it was not necessary for me to speak to you about it individually very often.

But now this effort must become the basis of each individual's existence, more especially for those of you who have a responsible position and have to take care of others. The leaders must always set the example, the leaders must always practice the virtues they demand from those who are in their care; they must be understanding, patient, enduring, full of sympathy and warm and friendly goodwill, not out of egoism in order to win friends for themselves, but out of generosity so that they may understand and help others.

To forget oneself, one's own likings and preferences, is indispensable in order to be a true leader.

That is what I am asking of you now, so that you can face your responsibilities as you should. And then you will find that where you used to feel disorder and disunity, they have vanished, and harmony, peace and joy have taken their place. —The Mother, 26 August 1969, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 47-48.

* * *

All of you who have come here have been told many things; you have been put in contact with a world of truth, you live in it, the air you breathe is full of it. And yet how few of you know that these truths have value only when they are put into practice and that it is useless to talk about consciousness, knowledge, equality, universality, infinity, eternity, supreme truth, the divine presence and all sorts of things like that, if you yourselves don't make an effort to *live* these things and feel them concretely in you. And don't tell yourselves, "Oh, I have been here so many years! Oh, I would really like to see some result for my efforts.!" You must know that very persistent efforts and very steadfast endurance are necessary to overcome the least weakness, the least pettiness, the least meanness in one's nature. What is the use of talking about divine love if one cannot love without egoism? What is the use of talking about immortality if one is stubbornly attached to the past and the present and one doesn't want to give anything in order to receive everything?

You are still very young, but you must learn right away that to reach the goal you must know how to pay the price and that to understand the supreme truths you must put them into practice in your daily life. —The Mother, 22 March 1957, *Aims and Ideals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 78.

Book Reviews

Four new books on psychology, psychotherapy and Integral Yoga

by Bhavana Dee

One of the treats at the AUM was to have present three therapists who have been deeply immersed in Integral Yoga for decades and have recently produced books reflecting their experiences for all of us to share. I've read all three, and a fourth book which came out even more recently, and find them milestones in the expression of the connection between psychology and Integral Yoga, helpful in understanding my own experience, and excellent material to share with others about the evolutionary perspective which I now take nearly for granted.

I'm not going to try to compare them. I found each one a deeply moving pleasure to take in. All of them emphasized the same important themes: widening the horizons of the psychological cosmos to include spiritual experience, finding the psychic being behind the heart, seeing the pains of the "normal-neurotic" state most every human has to deal with as a natural phenomenon, giving enormous importance to a background of love and joy of being, and including the therapist's own development strongly in the conceptual picture.

I experienced each one like a friend on the path telling me about his or her explorations and discoveries. It was really helpful! I was confirmed in many semi-insights of my own, reassured I was on the right path and made aware of the many others also studying, thinking, progressing in this field of consciousness, encouraged by the sense of being part of a wave, and inspired to take some new steps. I felt like writing to each of the authors to thank them, and so I will use that format for this review, which I hope will encourage others to read them.

Arya Maloney, *Alchemy of the Soul, Integral Healing: The Work of Psychology and Spirituality*, 2007, Blue Dolphin Publishing Company

Dear Arya, I really appreciate the generosity of your sharing in this book—your own story, and the stories of your patients really got to me. The people-scape just doesn't seem the same anymore when I know that behind the smiles, polite conversations, and eccentricities of so many are horrendous scenarios they have survived. The comforting black-and-whites of being down-to-earth and "normal" turn into intense struggles between good and evil when we dig a little deeper into the ground. It seems more and more miraculous that the world holds together at all.

But you haven't just given me vivid examples in the case histories; your studies in transpersonal psychology and your famil-



ilarity with Mindell, Jung, Grof, Aminah Raheem, and above all, your deep understanding of Sri Aurobindo's vision and cosmology, made me aware that what I am experiencing as personal progress on the path is shared widely in the academic and clinical worlds of the practical study of consciousness.

I know that, despite the agnostic bias of western science and philosophy, studies have shown that many more people have had beyond-rational experiences than have not! But there is hardly a forum on which to confirm and compare. Therefore your book is important because it not only shares these experiences, but also gives a carefully explained and described context in which to understand them. By sharing the insights that modern psychologists have arrived at through their practical experience of working with people facing today's problems, and then describing the map of consciousness which Sri Aurobindo has perceived, which includes not only several more layers of higher consciousness but also an evolutionary perspective with an evolving soul to explore this new territory over many lifetimes, you gave me both a condensed mental understanding of much of my own inner meanderings and a push to move onward.

Soleil Lithman, *The Hladina Method: Uniting the Sacred with the Cells for Conscious Evolution, Level One, Soul Fulfillment and Inlightening the Body*, 2007, Self-published manuscript, available from Soleil at: hladinasoleil@earthlink.net

Hello Soleil, it is a special experience to have someone who has been deeply involved with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for as long as you to apply their teachings in their therapeutic practice. It's generous of you to take the trouble to bring into words and paragraphs what must be more of a felt experience for you, something you keep on evolving moment to moment with your clients. Thanks for making the effort and taking the risk of being misunderstood in these deep and personal areas of consciousness. I guess it will take these individual acts of courage to bring what has been taboo into "normal" consciousness. It has to be done, we cannot after all expect to move into a wholistic consciousness if we are not ready to admit the whole of it, even the difficult or disgusting or weird parts. And thanks for being so specific and clear about the *method* of working through the residue of our evolutionary journey so we can take some steps to move on.

Psychotherapy still has in Auroville the sense of something you do only if there's something wrong with you, if your behaviour or feelings are so dysfunctional that you have to seek help. Your explanation of "clearing cellular womb residue" makes it clear that having resistances, obscurities, and fears are part and parcel of being in a human consciousness—something we should be addressing, just like we learn to read, write, and operate software programmes. It no longer seems like a disgrace, but rather a duty to meet with an expert and take some regular participatory lessons in cleaning up the old psychological mess and letting in some light.

I like your emphasis on the heart, and creating clarity in the mind and perceptions to distinguish between the personal emotion heart centre at the front of the heart, the psychic being at the centre of the heart, and the Transpersonal Divine behind the heart. Your descriptions are so immediate, I found myself doing it as I read, and emerging with much more surety about these hitherto rather vague and occult notions. Like so many of the ideas you put forth, this is based in a deep familiarity with the insights of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and it is really refreshing to have some practical material emerge from our midst, imbued with lived experience informed by Their vision. I was also reassured that parts of the book are instructions to practitioners who will be available to help when needed.

Actually, the variety of perspectives that you take was interesting: sometimes it is a sharing of your questions and research, sometimes it is mapping the consciousness as you've been experiencing it in your own inner self and applying it to your clients and explaining it to other researchers, sometimes it's a record of your findings and surprises, sometimes a presentation of your tentative and not-so-tentative convictions and system, and sometimes it's a manual for prospective practitioners. Your writing conveys that your convictions are based on your own experience, and this makes me feel that we are all intrepid explorers in the ocean of being, that the possibilities are infinite, and that one of the joys of being is in exchanging travel notes. It is no small matter that your notes are so clearly expressed, and have been proven capable of informing so many old-time Aurovilians. I see your contribution to be not only in the method you describe, but also in your encouragement to be more open to helping each other through the housecleaning we each have to do to move toward the consciousness needed to manifest a city without laws, without money, a society that realizes an actual human unity.

Brant Cortright, *Integral Psychology: Yoga, Growth and Opening the Heart*, 2007, SUNY Press

Hi Brant, I bought your book at AUM knowing I would be in for a treat because I had already read and appreciated the extensiveness of your knowledge of both psychology and spiritual practice in your earlier book. I like it that you are willing to wear your intensity on your sleeve, and listening to you speak convinced me that although your mental powers of memory and synthesis are enormous, they do not over-ride a deeper, heart-based sense of knowing. Your new book really brings these two strengths to the fore. My skeptical mental side really appreciates the intellectual thoroughness of this book. Your academic acuity allows you to fill in—from a deeper understanding of the field that Wilber seems to have missed in his spectrum of consciousness—the picture of man's place in the evolution of consciousness as mapped out by both Western psychology and Eastern wisdom practices. As you fit the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together—in describing how the different schools of psychology cover the different levels of selfhood, for example—your familiarity with



them demonstrates the wide tolerance needed for an integral approach. “Familiarity” is the right word here: you recognize each approach in its own right while also seeing its place in a larger whole than any of them have even glimpsed. And, you seem to *love* each piece as it completes the emerging picture! It was deeply satisfying to read your description of integral Vedanta as a philosophical foundation for integral psychology, and your obvious familiarity with Buddhist practice. As someone living in Auroville, I keep finding the Western myopia in regard to explorations of consciousness really detrimental to a global understanding of what’s going on today worldwide. I truly delighted in the expression of a good mind ruminating on a full spectrum of the planet’s researches into the matter. It was so refreshing to find categories (e.g., theistic and non-theistic) that included both Eastern and Western schools in both. My mind enjoyed the weaving of well-known strands into a tapestry that illustrates what we are all about.

We are on one rung of an evolutionary ladder of consciousness. Below us is a seething mass of animal instincts, but above us is a range of light. Western psychology is daily throwing more and more light on the instincts and conditionings of our present state, meanwhile reaching the limits of reason, while Eastern spiritual practices open up higher reaches. As present day world citizens, we stand on a cusp, ready to seize on the tools while also recognizing the limitations of the many schools of thought in this very ancient and global research. I was reading your book after having read Arya’s and Soleil’s, and it seemed very fitting that it was such a synthetic work, almost providing me with a bookshelf on which to place the other two.

Don Salmon and Jan Maslow, *Yoga Psychology and the Transformation of Consciousness: Seeing through the Eyes of Infinity*, 2007, Paragon House

Dear Don and Jan, I know how long you’ve been working on this book, and I want to thank you for it. It breathes careful craftsmanship, and I like the man-woman collaboration. I can almost hear the two of you discussing points, deciding what to put in and what to omit. And you’ve intentionally included the reader, urging us to be patient—we’ll go into that later—or to read a passage again more deeply, offering definitions of unfamiliar words, and even appending a CD with your honeyed voices to carry us into the relaxed states helpful for taking these beyond-the-mind leaps.

Changing the way we look at human nature is not an easy subject, but you’ve been brave and hard-working enough to address the huge question of what sort of universe we are living in, or rather, what sort of universe we are creating with our concepts and thought habits. I like the way you so fully and respectfully describe the “view from nowhere,” and then elaborate the contrast between that and the view from infinity. Although you don’t talk much about your own process, I clearly sensed your own efforts to comprehend and experience what you are researching. I also felt your compassion for the readers’ needed effort to follow

your careful layout of the stages of development. Your detailed descriptions of each stage are so evocative that I could actually enter into and feel the qualities.

It wasn’t long before I realized that your descriptions of the Cosmos and then of the developmental psychological states were climbing the “World Stair” that Sri Aurobindo revealed in *Savitri*. How great to approach that ladder from a psychological point of view with scientific references, case histories, anecdotes and vivid new metaphors and similes! I find there is a great truth in this developmental approach that keeps on revealing new insights over time. I also appreciated your version of the creation myth because it doesn’t have to be imagined as happening in a materialistic void, but as a bright birth in a vast and infinitely creative field of consciousness. “Consciousness is . . . the fundamental thing in existence . . .”—you begin every chapter with a variation on this quote from Sri Aurobindo, and pretty soon, thanks to your elucidations, it begins to sink in.

I like the way you consistently present the “yoga psychology” perspective as a legitimate point of view, with the records and the achievements of yogis cited confidently as examples of what is possible when psychology is practiced not just to address the problems of the sick, but as a field of human accomplishment to perfect and excel. I appreciated the examples of the newly emerging consciousness in such “zones of evolution” as Gaviotas community in Colombia, the Samatha Project to produce “professional contemplatives,” and the Contemplative Mind in Society project which introduces meditative techniques in the mainstream. But, why not Auroville? I’m sure you thought about it, and I’d be interested to know why you left it out.

Anyway, it’s great that you are not afraid to refer to the reports of contemporary mystics and give credence to the possibility of an evolutionary step being taken now, and to look at present global developments through the eyes of infinity. I liked the way you end the book with the wonderful long quotes from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo describing the supramental consciousness, urging us to leap towards it. You have conveyed not only the content of Their vision but much of the essence. Reading your book left me inspired to renewed intensity in the Yoga.

Dear five authors, reading your works together, I found myself wishing that you would be a living example of what to me seems the most important work to be done in Auroville—working together, consciously. Would you be able to plan together and present a programme in Auroville, which would draw a huge number of our residents, re-inspire us, equip us with tools, assist us in becoming the new species? The difficulties which you might face in attempting this would find poignant resonance with the experiences of Aurovilians, and could be part of the presentation. With all your insights and experience and articulation skills, you should not only be able to face the problems, but find the way through them and be able to tell the tale. The methods you employ, and the presence you would bring, could open some doors. Would you try?



The poetry room

Love in sorrow

Do you remember, Love, that sunset pale
When from near meadows sad with mist the breeze
Sighed like a feverous soul and with soft wail
The ghostly river sobbed among the trees?
I think that Nature heard our misery
Weep to itself and wept for sympathy.

For we were strangers then; we knew not Fate
In ambush by the solitary stream
Nor did our sorrows hope to find a mate,
Much less of love or friendship dared we dream.
Rather we thought that loneliness and we
Were wed in marble perpetuity.

For there was none who loved me, no, not one.
Alas, what was there that a man should love?
For I was misery's last and frailest son
And even my mother bade me homeless rove.
And I had wronged my youth and nobler powers
By weak attempts, small failures, wasted hours.

Therefore I laid my cheek on the chill grass
And murmured, "I am overborne with grief
And joy to richer natures hopes to pass.
Oh me! My life is like an aspen leaf
That shakes but will not fall. My thoughts are blind
And life so bitter that death seems almost kind.

"How am I weary of the days' increase,
Of the moon's brightness and the splendid stars,
The sun that dies not. I would be at peace,
Nor blind my soul with images, nor force
My lips to mirth whose later taste is death,
Nor with vain utterance load my weary breath."

Thus murmured I aloud nor deemed I spoke
To human ears, but you were hidden, sweet,
Behind the willows when my plaining broke
Upon your lonely muse. Ah, kindly feet
That brushed the grass in tender haste to bind
Another's wounds, you were less wise than kind.

You said, "My brother, lift your forlorn eyes;
I am your sister more than you unblest."
I looked upon your face, the book of sighs
And index to incurable unrest.

I rose and kissed you, sweet. Your lips were warm
And drew my heart out like a witch's charm.

We parted where the sacred spires arose
In silent power above the silent street.
I saw you mid the rose-trees, O white rose,
Linger a moment, then the dusk defeat
My eyes, and, listening, heard your footsteps fade
On the sad leaves of the autumnal glade.

And were you happy, sweet? In me I know—
For either in my blood the autumn sang
His own pale requiem or that new sweet glow
Failed in the light of bitter knowledge—rang
A voice that said, "Behold the loves too pure
To live, the joy that never shall endure."

This too I know, nor is my hope so bright
But that it sees its autumn cold and sere
Attending with a pale and solemn light
Beyond the gardens of the vernal year.
Yet will I not my weary heart constrain
But take you, sweet, and sweet surcease from pain.

—Sri Aurobindo

The secret of existence

The secret of existence,
Key to life's mystery and aim,
Is an ineffable marvel
Disclosing itself in time.

It is the Self of an infinite
Being, Consciousness and Delight.
Absolute, it is all things—
Darkness is its Light drawn in.

Here it is wrapped in darkness
In the body's subconscious depths,
Behind the mind's restless din,
And life's unending clamor.

To unveil our secret Self
In its native Power and Truth,
Our natures must be mastered
And changed to channels of Light.

But such a transformation
Is too great for human strength;
It requires the Spirit's force
And complete self-giving to God.



Our constant assent is needed
To consecrate and offer
All thought, desire, and action
To recast in the Light of Truth.

Surrender to the Divine
Who leans down in transmuting Love;
His Grace of infinite sweetness
Can reveal this secret in us.

—Larry Seidlitz

Panchassee-Ma

Panchassee is a sacred mountain in the Himalyas of Nepal

Her soothing touch, a calm inside the heart
Breathward-flowing as I climb the Path,
Tingling everywhere her descent starts
To glisten on the leaves in daylight bath.

She comes light dressed in sun, morning-bare
With vastness all around her trees and rock,
As emerald lines of force her strands of hair
Fall into my eyes when footfalls lock

Me into breaths that meet somewhere inside,
Within her morning breeze and quiet flow,
This touching spreads her love into a wide
And sun-filled vastness on the way I go

Towards her lap, in barefoot tremble-tred,
Climbing up to plenitudes outspread.

—Gary Millar

Phoenix rising

From the ashes of the past I rise,
A bird of flame with puissant wings,
A diamond lustre in the eyes,
The plumage of a newborn king's.

I've left the little self behind,
The smallness from which all men die,
And turn with burning wings to find
Above, a bright immortal sky.

With all that checked my flight now gone,
Consumed in tongues of sacrifice,
I climb to meet a lustrous dawn,
The rising sun of paradise.

—Angelo Salerno

The staff

On lofty Himalayan peaks
Roamed free the proud Sannyasin.
“I belong to none, am bound nowhere
And I roam as I will,” sang his heart.
But crossing chasm upon chasm
And traversing field beyond field
Of soft yet treacherous snow-drifts,
His courage drooped like a withered plant
And a sigh escaped his cracked lips.
From his numbed fingers slipped the staff,
As in a drowse he stumbled, groping for the path.
A sudden tinkling laughter teased him awake,
Within his soul he beheld a peacock crown
On a bewitching Face. That Image sweetly asked,
“Friend, wilt thou take my hand at last,
Or wilt thou forever grope in the dark
For transient staffs on foggy ways?”
As the Sannyasin relinquished his small ego,
His arm's weakness vanished like an imagined shadow,
Universal might coursed through his heart.
The snow-piled, lofty-pinnacled heights
Could no more arrest his infirm steps and vast sight.

—Shyam Kumari

The first stream of the Mother

The Adhi Khola is a river in the mountains of Nepal

The Adhi Khola flows to pools of trance,
A falling water sound against the rocks
Announces she is here, in poolside glance
Below her grass-fringed strands of girlish locks.

Her eyes beneath this fringe are clear and bold,
In front of us she smiles below the sky
From whence she came, her look enough to hold
Me in the heart, in feelings falling high

Around my head she shows nearby a seat,
A splendor by her mind, a quiet flow
Of something in the heart, when we meet
At streamside pool she wants to let me know

About this place of strength and force in love;
And all she does is flow down from above.

—Gary Millar



Apropos

Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing. —Theodore Roosevelt

Enlighten the people, generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like spirits at the dawn of day. —Thomas Jefferson

If you want to know what God thinks of money, just look at the people he gave it to. —Dorothy Parker

All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure. —Mark Twain

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. —Henry David Thoreau

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved. —Helen Keller

The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience. —Eleanor Roosevelt

Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment. —Benjamin Franklin

Be not the slave of your own past. Plunge into the sublime seas, dive deep and swim far, so you shall come back with self-respect, with new power, with an advanced experience that shall explain and overlook the old. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

The cost of a thing is the amount of what I call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run. —Henry David Thoreau

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. —Abraham Lincoln

The American, by nature, is optimistic. He is experimental, an inventor and a builder who builds best when called upon to build greatly. —John F. Kennedy

Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances. —Thomas Jefferson

I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts. —Will Rogers

Don't be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself. —Eleanor Roosevelt

Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose. —Helen Keller

What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

I've come to believe that each of us has a personal calling that's as unique as a fingerprint—and that the best way to succeed is to discover what you love and then find a way to offer it to others in the form of service, working hard, and also allowing the energy of the universe to lead you. —Oprah Winfrey

Ten thousand fools proclaim themselves into obscurity, while one wise man forgets himself into immortality. —Martin Luther King Jr.

Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it. —Helen Keller

When we remember we are all mad, the mysteries disappear and life stands explained. —Mark Twain

Who is wise? He that learns from every One. Who is powerful? He that governs his Passions. Who is rich? He that is content. Who is that? Nobody. —Benjamin Franklin

This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

All human beings should try to learn before they die what they are running from, and to, and why. —James Thurber

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart. —Helen Keller

Living in the moment brings you a sense of reverence for all of life's blessings. —Oprah Winfrey

The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers. —Martin Luther King Jr.

Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people. —Eleanor Roosevelt

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there. —Will Rogers

Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence. —Robert Frost

Age is opportunity no less than youth itself, though in another dress, and as the evening twilight fades away, the sky is filled with stars, invisible by day. —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

There is nothing wrong with America that the faith, love of freedom, intelligence and energy of her citizens cannot cure. —Dwight Eisenhower