

AVI-USA CONNECT

Spring/Summer 2018 Newsletter

Issue 10



CONTENTS

CONNECTIONS

- Why I became a "Friend of Auroville" 2
- Why I Came to Auroville 3

REFLECTIONS

- Self Searching in Auroville: 5
- The Magic Garden of Sacred Groves 6

EVENTS

- Karma Kitchen Comes to Auroville 8

UPDATES

- Memorial Tree for Anie Nunnally 9
- The Vanavers Return to Auroville 9
- The Vastu Garden At Sacred Groves 10
- YouthLink 10
- ALL USA MEETING 2018 Aug 2nd -5th 11
- Celebrating the 50th 11
- Keep Informed Links 11
- Auroville House at Matagiri 12
- AVIUSA 12

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Why do people join the community of Auroville? In the early days it was simple: you showed up in Pondicherry, either planned or unplanned, applied to the Sri Aurobindo Society who sent your photo to the Mother, and she either said yes or no. Usually yes, since the project needed people.

These days the decision is more complicated. In "Connections" we present two people, one who calls himself "D" and who is now a newcomer, and the other, Roger Toll, who was one of those early settlers and who is rejoining Auroville by becoming a Friend of Auroville. Both of them delve into the inner reasons for their decision, to belong to the adventure of Auroville.



Why I became a "Friend of Auroville"

by Roger Toll

I left Auroville in 1979 after eight years as a resident

Aurovilian. I left to launch an Aurobindonian-related endeavor, but life got in the way and Mother put me onto other paths. I do not regret it, as I have learned a lot and done interesting things. During those years, I have returned to Auroville every five years or so, accumulating a series of mental postcards that are like seeing the development of Auroville in time-lapse photography. This refracted way of watching the growth of the City of Human

Unity has left me at times concerned and at times positive. My last visit, for the golden jubilee a month ago, was more positive than ever, whetting our appetite to spend far more time there, despite some Aurovilians' groaning about issues large or small. (But when have they not groaned?)

As a result, I decided to put some money where my mouth is and commit to being a Friend of Auroville (FoA). After all, I am not going to become an Aurovilian any time soon as 1) we have a life and friends we don't want to abandon at our other home, and 2) I never again want to sit in the steam bath that is Auroville from April through August. But I do want to make some sort of deeper connection and commitment to an ideal I believe in. At this stage of my life, and I think my wife is with me on this, I want to be a more consistent part of Auroville, not just an occasional guest. The status will encourage us to come yearly to spend, perhaps, three months a year. More significantly, it will offer the satisfaction of giving regularly to Auroville something most Aurovilians cannot offer: cash. Ironically, this city that has the Matrimandir, the Mother's Dream, the blessings of the government, a greenscape of millions of trees planted by fellow pioneers and a growing respect throughout India, is having a hard time growing one



Road to Edayanchavadi in the 70's

thing it needs: money. FoA status forces us to play a small part in helping.

So, in mid-February, I filled out a form, faced a panel of three who wanted to hear about my meetings with Mother, and was named a Friend of Auroville. I have never not been a friend of Auroville. But capitalizing the F, I discovered, requires some commitments and earns us a few benefits. Let me explain how.

Commitment:

- The FoA status allows Auroville to withdraw Rs. 3,150, or about \$50, from my account each month, even when we are sitting at home in Santa Fe New Mexico. This costs me about \$600 annually. (Auroville's in-house bankers assured me that said "contribution" will not be decreasing any time soon.) Moreover, this process eliminates any choice I have had in past donations to apportion it to a favorite cause, say. (That would be an additional cost.) The bankers, in other words, can use my \$600 in any way they like.
- Abandon visits over a three-year period, and you are no longer a Friend of Auroville (FoA). Which means, when you return, you are again a guest, or a friend... with a small f.

Benefits:

- Ownership of an Auroville account. Like any resident Aurovilian, I can now scribble my name, account number and the cost of a meal into a dog-eared blue ledger at any Auroville restaurant or shop, which will eventually be deducted from the money I will now need to feed into that account. This avoids the more time-involved task of presenting a guest's "AuroCard" to the cashier and awaiting an electronic connection that may or may not happen.

Roger Toll arrived in Pondicherry in early February, 1972, and saw the Mother in her room on his birthday and again on her birthday in the balcony darshan. Nearly a month later, Navajata (Sri Aurobindo Society chairman and nominal head of Auroville) took him to her room to discuss with Mother, at her request, his proposal to launch a new Auro-Information project and office.

My memory of the meeting is vague, but it comes back in deep, soulful flashes. Nava explained a little of what Auro-Information will do, but his words did not flow smoothly. She looked many long seconds into my expectant eyes. I felt small, like a child, as I tried to empty myself and reveal my soul. She saw all she wanted, it seemed, then gave me a smile of pure love and beatitude, and asked me what the job would entail. Again, Nava explained the idea. She asked me if I had read all of Sri Aurobindo. I said "No, not all, but most of it..." Words came out, I don't remember what, but I said that I think I understood and that I would keep trying to understand... Then more words, but they were nothing... All that was, was in her eyes and in her smile. It is all that existed. They seemed like diamonds of awareness, all knowing and loving. Finally, she blessed me and I left, somehow walking out of that room, beaming and transformed.

- Stewardship of an apartment. For a generous sum—80,000 Euros for a small but pleasant two-bedroom apartment in an “upscale” community, was one quote I got—you have the privilege of “stewarding” your own apartment during the time spent in Auroville each year. When not in residence, central housing can hand it to someone else—no argument there, as Auroville has a housing shortage. When or if you drop your FoA status, your “contribution” for said apartment becomes permanent. Not a drop of that 80,000 comes back to you as you were never the owner. Caveat emptor!
- FoA status allows you to attend Aurovilian-only meetings, which may suggest that the status allows for some role in the conversation about Auroville’s present and future, though it may be a silent role. (As though I had not had my fill of meetings in the 1970s.)
- A moot point for us, as I had always been given an Aurovilian-level pass to the Matrimandir as a worker there long ago, but the FoA status allows you to visit the inner chamber of the Matrimandir during all regular Auroville hours, which is reason enough to be an FoA’er.

On the mental plane, it is not a convincing argument to become a Friend of Auroville. But how many of us are into this for mental, rational reasons. In the end, it has to do with belonging, I suppose. At this point in my life, I want to be more tangibly connected to Mother’s Dream.



Why I Came to Auroville An interview with D



I heard about Auroville through a one-minute Facebook ad (by a guy named David Wolf): “A township with no money, no politics, and no religion.”

At that time, I had no politics, no religion and no money, so, I was like, ‘a place like that is right up my alley!’ In the video, I saw a lot of blonde kids farming and a bunch of people gathering around bonfires and handing buckets of dirt to each other. I looked it up. It was in India. I was looking for a place to go outside the US. Never before had I seen something which so closely aligned with my qualities, values and preferences.

Upon deeper investigation— actually, I didn’t get all that deep into it. I didn’t know nothin’ about India and I didn’t care either. That’s the American in me — I didn’t give a damn about India. I come from New York City and the Indians you meet . . . all of them are from New Delhi. I thought the entirety of India was New Delhi. I thought that Bombay was maybe another country. You’re not gonna get any Indian history classes in the NYC Public Schools. IGNORANT!

Now that I’m here, I can see India as an incredibly vast and deep ancient culture. It just precedes so many things. On the line of humanity’s chronology, India is integral to so many aspects of life. It’s incredible.

After a year in India I’m super impressed. It has changed my view on the world. I can’t imagine a world without India now. This is the biggest/smallest, stinkiest/most fragrant, dumbest/smartest, cleanest/most polluted, crowded/emptiest, most educated/most ignorant place I have ever been in my life. I love it. Things you see in India—there are no words for them. It’s like trying to describe the divine truth. You would need to read the Upanishads to get the basic level of feeling.

So, I bought the ticket and

I realised that so many questions would be raised like: ‘Why are you going?’ The only thing I had in my head was like ‘why are you staying?!’ ‘What are you going to do?’ Live I guess. Survive. [I had no idea.] It will be revealed to me when I get there.



I didn’t have any kind of spirituality in me at all. AT. ALL. I had long passed the stages of passionate atheism where I just wanted to convince everybody about the chaotic nature of everything - that zealot stage of disbelief. I was in the ‘question everything’ mode. Which, honestly, is a state I would like to remain in.

Coming to Auroville was the only calling I ever had to go somewhere that didn’t feel fueled by my ego. . . or money or sex or insecurity about the state of my life. It was this pure kind of magnetism and I realised that there was no age that I would be ready to go. I couldn’t picture any way to prepare myself.

I came here, luckily, with a perspective that not many people come here with. I think the way many people get sold on Auroville is with the idea of utopia. I don’t believe that you can have a place with ‘no politics’. When you have a city, a place where things have to get done, you have politics. I didn’t believe in a place where you have ‘no religion’. You can’t have a place where people are working on a level of spirituality without having religion drip in there. Plus, it’s India! Come on—like there’s no religion in a place like India?!

And the ‘no money’ thing, even if that were true, I had lived a long time without spending money, trying to avoid that feeling of scarcity built into capitalism where you constantly feel like you never have enough. You learn how to mitigate your resources; you start to appreciate people if you are wise. If you live my life, you have to realise that people make the world go round. There’s no amount of money that will get everything done. At the end of it, if you can’t connect with anyone, if your actions can’t benefit anyone else as they benefit yourself, if you can’t make a bad situation into a good situation then there’s no place on Earth for you. You can keep making money but you will never achieve anything you want to achieve.

I had such vehement distrust of the government and the media before I left. I don’t fall victim to that amnesia which people fall into living in the US. I didn’t fall into



Tree planting in early Auroville

that distraction. I'm just waiting for the next lie when I watch the news. I don't even have to look it up.

When I started to put that kind of stuff into perspective, I started to think about India and I'm like, 'really all I know about India is malaria.' It was New Delhi and malaria. And elephant gods. I went with very little travel experience. Before I came to India, I had lived in very few other places around the US. I did take a trip to Australia. That was the first time I had spent more than a week outside the US. In that small amount of time I got introduced to something different—it was an experience I don't think many people who look like me get. It fueled a fire that was already in motion as I had already bought my ticket to India.

That opened me up a bit. Every country has diseases. Every place has messed up water and air problems. And jerks and thieves. And murderers and corrupt politicians that hate you. And hierarchical education. You are going to deal with the same things wherever you go. Plus, the new place is going to have new issues that you can't possibly prepare for. These were logical assumptions that I made. Even with that it couldn't prepare me for the utter peculiarity of India.



That was my preparation for Auroville. And now? This is the slowest place I have ever been. Things move at a snail's pace—like, the snail is asleep and it's dreaming backward. Still things move incredibly fast here. Roads pop up and buildings get put up and forests grow fast. Just on a human level, things will change constantly.

I call this place the subway of travelers. You make a great friend and never see them again. You have lunch with them and then by dinner they're on the other side of the planet in Israel or somewhere.

I have gone through many phases here. When I first got here, I knew that I wanted to contribute - knew what my background was, so I started working at the Graphics Section (AV DZINES) at Town Hall. I was like, 'hey I'm a graphic designer. This is what I do. I can help you guys. I have a bunch of training in this . . . ' I came in with the corporate mindset. I think I brought a résumé but didn't give it to them. I even came in with a button shirt.

Shortly after that, I realised I needed to learn Tamil because everything I bought

was 3 times more than it was supposed to cost since I didn't speak the language. It's just built in—you gotta haggle. So, I went to the Auroville Language Lab to learn Tamil and wound up teaching English as well as working at the Graphics Section.

Then, one day, while driving down the road, I met these two people on a bike—two 'American built' people. The next day, I linked with them outside AV Radio. They introduced me to Miriam. She told me that I had a good voice and asked me if I wanted to work for the radio. So, I've been doing the morning news and interviews since maybe July.

In between that I've done a bunch of stuff: designed websites, been at the African Pavilion, worked at News & Notes — anywhere I can help people. I go into everything at this point with harmony. That's my whole purpose for anything I'm doing. Anything that disturbs my harmony gets dropped. If I feel like what I'm doing isn't going to be good for the greater Auroville or the world, I'll drop it. If it's something that is going to make someone else or me unhappy, I'll drop it. If what I am doing is only helping one person's ego, I'll drop it. It's not really about money. If I want money, I'll do money stuff.

This actually has allowed me the freedom to unleash myself from cash. I've appreciated Auroville for that. But, the level of money and Auroville's connection with it makes



Entrance road to Auroville 1972

me uncomfortable. You will walk into a place and on the wall you'll see 'the purpose of this place is not material' and it'll be the most decadent office you have ever seen and they're charging you for stuff that should be free.

Plus, you get charged to work here. Stupid stuff like that. If you really want to get



Road to the Matrimandir 1976

involved that's when the charging starts. I was working and living here for free for a long time. But, I'm becoming a Newcomer now and, suddenly, I owe them money. It's a weird feeling. Money is one of those things folks use to control you emotionally. An understanding that I had when I was in the US and poor was that your possessions possess you and that the tighter you hold onto them the looser your grip becomes.

Another thing that happens is you walk into a place in Auroville, read "whatever may be the circumstances, rudeness or curt behavior are never permissible" and a curt lady starts yelling rudely at you. There's a lot of contradiction here. It's cognitive dissonance: you believe you are one thing and you are completely the other thing. But, people are just trying to make it every day in a world that is not yet Auroville. If the world was Auroville, I would probably have different things to complain about.



On the spiritual level, I've only recently gone through ... well to name it is to sully it or make it smaller. So the only term I can connect it with is ... "awakening"—to explain it somehow. Suddenly, I'm realising the opportunity this place gives you. I hadn't realised it before. No matter what they put on a video or what they put as the tag line ("a place of concentration"); no matter what they put, I would never really have had a concept of it if I had not had this shift. Up until maybe a month ago, I had been in so many different groups - done so many activities. I've acted, I've danced, I've travelled, eaten a bunch of stuff I shouldn't have eaten; I've done so much stuff here good and bad for me and for the world, and, only now am I realising how outward all of that was - how I was kind of *trained* from where I was brought up to distract myself. Because I'm from New York and that is just a smorgasbord of distraction - an oppressive distraction that kind of just keeps your body and eyes active.

And this 'awakening'/epiphany/what-

ever: I wasn't even looking for it. It just happened. I was doing my regular work . . . it just struck me—I was just crying in the forest. It was a crazy unlocking of something—a memory of something. Something clicked on that had been clicked off for so long. It changed all my goals.

All this time I had this looming question—I think all of us do to some extent—about what the purpose of it all is. And what/why we are striving so hard for. *Is it happiness?* But, I've been happy before and I kept striving. If I were truly happy, then I would have stayed at that moment. *Is it bliss?* Bliss is unsustainable.

Now, I've been able to think about it fully and come to some conclusions that feel like introductions. I don't think I would have been able to get that without the silence of Auroville - without the opportunity of concentration.

This new experience was the juxtaposition of my upbringing and my current state; it just did something to me. It's one of the things I awakened to.

I'm only living the one life and I don't have the hypothetical in clear view, but I highly doubt it would have happened to me back there in the US. You don't really get any kind of clarity on yourself but you get to lie to yourself and say that you do. You don't notice it but you have a template of what a balanced person looks like. And the template is based on a very bad, young lie.

I don't feel like I wasted time back there. In fact, I think that seeing the difference has given me a level of clarity that someone who was born here wouldn't get. I think maybe they would live in it. Just to be able to connect both of those worlds feels like an opportunity that I shouldn't squander

So, that's what I'm following now. It's only recent. And I'm battling a lot of things. I'm battling the world that I built around nothingness, disconnectedness. And I'm trying to shift it toward harmony and light.

So, I'm using Auroville for what I guess is its intended purpose. That was the whole thing: I didn't think that would be me. I was like just get me the hell out of America. I don't care where I go. I didn't expect that to be me. I thought I had a good grasp on what my inner-self was. But, now I see it's just a Fibonacci spiral that goes inward.



Self Searching in Auroville: My Experience with Language Learning and the Tomatis Listening Method

by Sandra Harris

The world as yet does not have a common language. This condition became clear to me when I first arrived in Auroville, India from the USA. Almost everyone spoke enough English so that I could get around and get what I needed. It felt privileged, unearned, and based upon inhabitants of other countries taking the time to learn communicable English. So I decided to ask the Auroville Language Lab to teach me Tamil, the live-



Sandy and Palani

ly language of the many people who cook, clean, garden and transport in Auroville. I was attracted to Tamil because it is musical, alive, practical and doable. Also, because many of the Tamil people I met were naturally loving, open and responsive. I found that on many occasions, just a few words of Tamil met with a smile and a dynamic connection. From this beginning effort, the following realization emerged.

By starting to learn another's language and attempting to speak and understand one another, a surprising gestalt occurs. There is an unknown, unspoken language that develops from the feeble attempt to establish this dynamic connection cross culturally by speaking a word or two in another's language with loving intention and dynamic identity. The other person intuitively picks this up, and the bond is palpable, the connection is immediate. In that moment, there is knowledge through identity, beyond thought. It feels emotional, but it is beyond emotion and time. It feels like the moment releases knowing and enjoying.

Then, like a flick of a switch, time resumes. The residue of the experience is palpable, and we each go about our business a little

larger while the joy remains. These moments make me wonder if a new world language beyond words is moving toward manifestation/realization. A language of the heart. Since the time I came to Auroville in December, 2017 I have had many moments of these kinds of connections.

My time in Auroville being limited, I contracted to do the Passive Phase of the Language Lab program, about 40 hours, (and not the full 70 hours of a full language integration training) in two phases with a break in between. The Tomatis training addressed my left ear hearing deficit, in addition to training my ears to listen to the specific sounds of Tamil.

I was put in a room by myself with a desk, bed, lounge chair, drawing supplies and puzzles, no phone and reading/writing materials. I was instructed to draw, paint, do puzzles, or even sleep, but not to read, write, chew or meditate. The room had one window with a natural intake and exhaust system providing fresh air. I wore a non-sound cancelling headset hooked to a Tomatis electronic ear machine located in a separate room calibrated specifically for my individual needs. I was able to hear some but not many surrounding sounds. Mozart was played for a specific amount of time, then spoken Tamil, and then Gregorian Chant. Each was timed with a different purpose. This kind of training was exactly why I came to India: to search for myself; to get away from doing; to control my vital socializing self; to press the pause button on my self of distraction. Yes, this was PERFECT. So each morning I got on my electric bike, which was way too big for me, with my sprained knee and cautiously drove to the Language

Lab on Auroville's infamous ruddy dirt roads, asking Mother's help that I make it in one piece. And, voila, I actually arrived, cheating death each time.

The Tomatis Program is very interesting. It has been in practical existence since the 1950's, essentially in France. It has been helpful to Autistic, Dyslexic, ADD and anxious children and helpful in other areas as well, such as hearing loss, psychological disturbances and language learning. The program isn't just for problem areas. (Check the presentation at aurovillelanguage.org/presentation.php)

Because it hasn't been fully accepted and codified by the scientific community, it still has open potential for creative research and application. Many of the sounds given to participants are high frequency sounds that are heard by the fetus in the mother's womb through the amniotic fluid such as s,t,f,sh. It is postulated that the child can find the psychic being in this early womb experience. This early reenactment may lead to a deeper understanding of how we listen; it may also create an inner pathway to a deeper self understanding.

My 20 Tomatis/Tamil sessions of 2 hours



Mita (center) with Language Lab staff

each produced some interesting results: (1) In the beginning highs and lows were confused and octaves not clear. Now, the right ear is fully open to all 6 octaves. The left ear is open to 3 1/2 octaves. I still have hearing loss in the left ear, although somewhat improved; (2) In the first test, there were 6 spatialization errors. In the second test, only 1 error. Therefore, I am much better at localizing sound in space; (3) This net result appears to translate for me to an improved ability to concentrate and focus regardless of outside distraction and

noise, which appears friendlier and not bothersome. My reading and writing have improved, and I have a more robust connection to inner energies.

To understate the matter, I am very happy at the results and plan to continue my connection to the Language Lab. Mita, a co-director, explained to me that some Aurovilians find the cost of the Tomatis Program to be prohibitive. To deal with this issue, the Language Lab Team, under the direction of Tapas, the other co-director and Mita is applying to several funding agencies and stands a good chance of making the program more available to the Auroville community and surrounding villages. Further, the Language Lab has to deal with the high cost of purchase and maintenance of equipment, along with the payment of staff salaries in the absence of any budget from the Auroville community.

The team is also working on identifying the specific parameters of the Indian languages: Tamil first, then Sanskrit and Hindi. This will make the Active Phase work of audio-vocal training in those languages more precise.

So in my musings, I am wondering if there is a new language emerging, subjective and intuitive, contacted by inner and outer attentive listening and a desire for deeper heart connections with others beyond the tamas we each experience.

Is the Language Lab an avenue for this expansion? It is a wonderful instrument for learning known languages and bringing the known world languages and people a little closer together. Can it accommodate the possibility of the development of a new unknown language? Time will tell, although I feel that the basic elements of intention, caring and attention to detail are there. And as more Aurovilians begin to experience the Tomatis Listening method, perhaps some will open to newer emerging channels.

However, in the final analysis, if it is meant to become, it will be done in and by



The listening room

the Loving Light of The Mother.

The base of language is laid out in the womb, and through the voice of the mother coming in and out, sparking in the embryo, the desire to listen and communicate. Tomatis recreates this process of early Introduction to language and communication. 

The Magic Garden of Sacred Groves

by Seb and Yoko

Sometimes the 'Powers that Be' indulge in funny ways to guide you to where you have to be. Our journey to Auroville started with watching the movie "The Life of Pi", which had nothing to do with Auroville. Through the movie we discovered Pondicherry, and Pondicherry guided us to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. From the Ashram it was just a small step to Auroville.



Yoko and Seb

After deciding to move to Auroville, we had to think of what kind of activity we would engage in. My wife Yoko had the brilliant idea to suggest farming. Moving into new lands, working with the earth and with the local plants is a sure way of getting connected. The only thing was that neither of us had any farming experience. Our friends declared us totally nuts. "At your retirement age, moving to Southern India, with its harsh climate, and on top of that taking on farming, something that you have never done in your life, you must be out of your mind." They probably were right, but then, we were not interested in staying in our 'old' mind, anyway.

We both loved our experience on the Auroville farms. During about a year we worked on three different farms, learned a lot, and thoroughly enjoyed it. While in Auroville as volunteers, we had visited Sacred Groves, but the project hadn't looked attractive. It was



Sacred Groves houses

stagnating and bogged down by internal and external problems.

Last year we rediscovered Sacred Groves, and this time it was different. Although the problems had not disappeared, there was a much more positive energy in the air. It was as if Sacred Groves was ready to blossom, ready to take its proper status in Auroville. All it needed was a bit of energy from the outside, a push to get airborne. We decided that it was a good time to build a house at Sacred Groves. Other people had noticed the same potential, and the project of building a cluster of three houses slowly got on its way.

We were excited about the potential of Sacred Groves, the potential of its building technologies based on traditional knowledge, but also the potential of creating a new living community with a different focus. We didn't want to just sit and wait for our house to be built. We wanted to be inside the project. We wanted to breathe Sacred Groves and become part of its dynamics. Only that way could we learn from it; only that way we would be able to contribute our energy.

At Sacred Groves there is a vegetable garden, called the magic garden. It was created over time by different people. Looking around the garden you can feel the loving energy each individual has put in. However, the garden was in need of attention. The plants didn't look happy. The small banana plants were struggling. Most of the beds had only a few plants. These plants lacked vigor. Large areas of the garden were bare, adding a feeling of austerity.

It is not that the garden had been abandoned. Several of the young interns spent some of their free time watering the plants, and keeping the garden alive. The garden showed an outlook similar to the Sacred Groves project. It had potential, but it lacked spark. It was in need of attention. Plants, like human beings, need attention to thrive. The garden be-

came our entry ticket for Sacred Groves.

Four days a week we go to Sacred Groves in the morning and work several hours in the garden. Well, it is mainly Yoko who does the work. She loves growing plants from seeds. I make the con-

structions to support the beans, fix the fence to keep the cows out, and spend a lot of time talking to the young interns.

It is such a privilege working with young people. To feel all that potential, all that talent. And instead of stifling this potential in rigid rules and fixed procedures, what a joy it is to try to spark off that potential with a little "Aha!" Erlebnis ("experience," in German).

The first thing we do when we arrive at Sacred Groves is walk around in the garden, greeting the plants, giving them attention. They seem to like that, and most of them respond positively. Then we water the garden and get on with the daily chores of seeding, preparing the beds, transplanting, and mulching.

Regularly we get visitors in the garden.



Seb, Yoko and a Sacred Groves volunteer

Most of them bring their own ideas. They come and look around and talk about permaculture and advise us how to do things. They usually have more knowledge about gardening than we do. We just potter on. If the plants are happy, we are happy. If the garden is thriving with a sparkling energy, we feel that energetic spark inside of us. Structural knowledge has its place, for sure, but life is first of all about the flow of energy, the energy that

connects us all. In the magic garden, it is so easy to feel connected.

Sacred Groves aspires to be a community based on interaction, on the flow of energy, taking on challenges. It wants to move away from the conventional model of a blueprint that has to be realized meticulously. How can we combine fluidity with a high level focus? It is not easy. Little by little we are changing the general outlook of the garden, from strict rectangular beds, to circles and spirals. It helps the energy flow, and it is soothing to the eyes.

The garden is doing well. The banana plants keep growing and producing huge leaves that come out of the top of the plant like giant cigars. The garden's aspect is brighter than before and shows signs of hope and aspiration. More of the young interns come to the garden, because they feel good there.

This is all just a beginning. I keep telling people that the garden will look fabulous in four or five years. At the moment you can still see the work that we put in. In a few years, the trees will have grown, the garden will have found its natural shape, and there will be a much greater diversity of plants. Our work will become less, and what we do will be hardly visible. When there is a balance, life sustains life. Then instead of doers and receivers, there is a joyous interaction. We hope that it will become a truly magical garden. A garden that fits in perfectly with the spirit of Sacred Groves.

I have met few grumpy gardeners. A garden always gives you a lot. Feeling good in your own garden is quite easy, but Yoko and I feel that we are on the right (garden) Path,

when visitors from outside feel attracted to the garden, look for the gate, and enjoy just being there. Similarly, we very much hope that Sacred Groves will become a community where people feel welcome, where they can catch the positive energy in the air, and where their step is lighter when they leave, than when they came.

Seb is from Belgium; Yoko from Japan



EVENTS

Karma Kitchen Comes to Auroville

Karma Kitchen is a project of the organization ServiceSpace begun by Nipun Mehta. In December, Nipun came to Auroville with a group of people for a retreat with some Aurovilians to Verite, and offered a talk at Unity Pavilion that revolved around the question; "How can we design for generosity, and lead with inner transformation in our labor-of-love projects?" (see www.movedbylove.org/bla). Nipun describes his life so far in this way:



"In junior high, I had a paper route. By high school age, my goal in life was to either become a tennis pro or a Himalayan Yogi. My 17th year transformed me in ways I can't describe in a sentence. After that, I got a degree from UC Berkeley in Computer Science and Philosophy. A job at Sun Microsystems in my third year of college gave me more money than I needed. So I started to give it away. As money ran out, I started to give time; and as time ran out, I gave myself. By 1999, those experiments in gifting birthed ServiceSpace — which has now mushroomed into an ecosystem 500,000 members."



Along with the retreat, the Karma Kitchen volunteers, including Nipun, prepared and served a meal at the Tibetan Pavilion. Here is a description of that meal excerpted from the ServiceSpace newsletter www.servicespace/ and written by Zilong Wang:



"The food tastes like Love!" "Best meal I've ever had!" "The volunteer team was in FLOW!" These are some of the common sentiments after an epic Karma Kitchen experiment in Auroville. Within 2 hours on a sunny Sunday, the team welcomed over 120 guests to co-create the magic of deliciousness and generosity. Karma Kitchen, a gift-economy restaurant, was the grand finale of a 3-day festival of love and kinship in Auroville hosted by ServiceSpace. A brochure on each flower-adorned table introduced the context for



Shiviya, Nipun Mehta and Jaya



Karma Kitchen Group

Karma Kitchen:

Sharing food is a basic and universal human tendency. Feeding others and sitting down to a communal meal is a cross-cultural ritual that nourishes the spirit of giving. Karma Kitchen is one modern experiment to revive the ancient chain reaction of generosity in the context of a pay-it-forward restaurant.

Entirely run by volunteers, our meals are cooked and served with love, and offered to our guests as a genuine gift, without a price tag. Guests are free -- and often inspired -- to pay it forward so that people after them could partake in the joy and magic. The volunteers also cultivate selfless service by cooking food, serving the tables, and engaging with the guests in enriching conversations and kindness activities. In keeping this chain going, both guests and volunteers help to create a shift from transaction to trust, from self-oriented isolation to shared commitment, and from fear of scarcity to celebration of abundance.

The preparation for the two-hour "pop-up restaurant" started weeks earlier, when Shaalini went around Auroville looking for an ideal location for the event. The team needed not just a physical space that could be transformed into a restaurant for over 100 guests. It also needed a place that shares the same spirit of generosity. As serendipity would have it, after a few inquiries, Shaalini connected with Kalsang Dolma of the Pavilion of Tibetan

Culture. What's unique about the space is not just that it was inaugurated by HH the Dalai Lama, but also because it has been running on gift economy since its inception. The kindred spirit is palpably felt as Kalsang, the manager of the Pavilion, joined the volunteer crew for the entire day, 7am-5pm, from chopping vegetables to lifting tables to "coming to the rescue" when the kitchen ran out of food.



Nandini and B came to lunch

Our crew included a wandering Himalayan yogi, a father who just came out of a 10-day silent meditation course, and four Austrians who have come to Auroville just for these 3 days. We even had four kids as full-time volunteers for the whole day, carrying cushions and welcoming guests with heart pins -- in their cute kid-size KK aprons.

By 10am, the whole volunteer team gathered for a quick circle filled with laughter and excitement. Then, the guests came. First, in a trickle, then, in waves. First-timers, old-timers, big families, solo travelers... "Come, come, whoever you are." Smiles widened on every face, as bellies and hearts got equally filled to the brim. Strangers sit down at the same table, and witness each other's journey and stories.

The dishwashing team was every-

one's amazement. They must have washed a thousand pieces of dishes, while singing and laughing. Some people would bring dishes to the washing station just for the joy of watching them in action. Nisha thought the dishwashers would grow roots from standing in one spot for hours!

The kitchen kept a steady flow of deliciousness coming. At some point, the kitchen ran out of the main vegetable dish because so many more guests turned up than expected. The kitchen team was like an arrow on a tensioned bow: as soon as the vegetables arrived (with much delay), they went into a total flow, with dishes and hands and ingredients flying in the air, reminding people of the classic scene in the hobbit's house. As if by divine intervention, the new batch of vegetable was completed right when the first round ran out.

After their meal, many guests simply didn't feel like leaving. One elderly Aurovilian was unable to finish the food in her plate and requested to parcel it for later. Kalsang immediately went into the kitchen and bought a box to pack the food. She was touched by this gesture and was visibly moved by the entire experience. As she walked out, she mentioned that she was visiting the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture after many years and she loved the ambience. Then she asked Shaalini where she volunteers in Auroville. When Shaalini mentioned about holding weekly kindness circles with children at Deepanam School, the older woman teared up. She shared that today was very special and she will come back to return the box to Kalsang. And she did come again in an hour with the box and stayed on to pick some cards from the Kindness Table and hang around for some more time. The staff at the Pavilion also chose to stay on as volunteers on their day off, after being so moved by the spirit. They told Kalsang, "If these people are volunteering, then we are, too!"

The day was perhaps best summed up by Carollyne, a volunteer from the Netherlands. "I learnt a precious lesson from Aum (our 11-year-old volunteer). He was slicing watermelons when I walked up to him and asked how he's enjoying this experience. He said 'I don't know if it's good, I don't know if it's bad, I'm just doing it.'"

In the end, we are all grateful for the opportunity to come together and "just do it," and fill the place "with so much life!"



Michael puts Anie's ashes into the tree pit

Auroville, Matagiri and the Los Angeles Aurobindo Center, places where she brought her unique gifts. The group joined in a rendition of "Climb Every Mountain" from the "Sound of Music," the famous musical that she appeared in on Broadway.

Afterwards, a golden palm tree, was planted, near to the site of where the Four Sisters guest cottages will be built, one of which will be named after her. An Auroville bakery cake completed the joyous occasion.

Memorial Tree for Anie Nunnally

In February of this year a gathering of her long time friends celebrated Anie's life on the upper floor of International House in Auroville. The group included members of Auroville International USA as well as others whose lives had been touched by her character.

She was remembered as a high spirited, funny and courageous woman who went from a small town in Mississippi to the Broadway stage, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram,



Participants in the remembrance gathering.

The Vanavers Return to Auroville

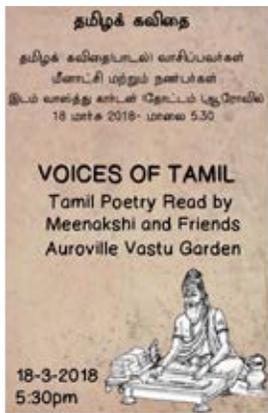
This year The Vanaver Caravan (vanavercaravan.org) designed a dance and story telling residency with the kindergarten and crèche classes at Aikiyam School. Every day each class would begin with a creative movement workshop that led into dancing a story from Japan, Ireland and the Lakota Native Americans. Their bodies gleefully transformed into characters and animals in these tales from around the world which focused on kindness and equanimity.

Livia, Bill and Gabriel Vanaver, accompanied by 4 interns from

Swaraj University, led the workshops and performance for the entire school. The young children felt the power and joy of dance as they created an appreciation and respect for world cultures and themselves. The whole school learned Tom Chapin's new song, "Walk the World." The Vanaver Caravan will be performing during the All USA Meeting on August 4th.



Aikiyam dance with the Vanavers



Voices of Tamil poster

The Vastu Garden at Sacred Groves

On March 20, the first large event of the garden, a recitation of Tamil poetry, brought together teachers, scholars, and Aurovilians who

came to the microphone to read and chant verses of the *Tirukkural*, the *Silapadikaram*, and other works, all under the direction of Meenakshi, Auroville's Tamil eminent poet in residence.

The Vastu garden was started in 2015 by the Auroville Vastu Study Group and designed by Jana. A huge stone was placed on the energy point which is oriented towards the Matrimandir, the ancient Iumbai Shiva temple and the Edayanchavadi temple. As the Vastu Garden is meant to offer a space to honor our ancestors and to celebrate the culture of the land, trees were planted around the stage to invite shade for performers and audience.

Although the cows and goats have been in and out of the garden, most of the trees planted in remembrance of early Aurovilians have survived and grown beyond the intruders' reach. In addition to the large stone in the center, cement stools have been placed around it in a circle. Trees in the garden honor a variety of people, from June Maher to William Netter to Kireet Joshi.

The garden lies just to the east of Sacred Groves.



Meenakshi, Kamala (reading) and Raman

YouthLink : The Hive and Impermanence

In the Spring 2017 issue of Connect we ran an interview with Kavitha, Niki of YouthLink and Ethan about the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course that brought young people to Auroville to work on community building projects using the methodology of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). This past winter we sat down with Kavitha and Michael to find out where Youthlink is headed now..

MICHAEL: The EDE gave us many ideas, but afterwards we didn't know what specifically we were doing except to provide a platform for connecting projects and young people. We also felt that EDE needed to be a bit more Aurovilian and less GEN.

KAVITHA: Our approach to work changed. We realised that we wanted to create a space where young people could create what they found for themselves rather than respond to the needs of others like elder care or cooking classes. We also felt a need for working with our own hands. We wanted to engage young people here in Auroville to design a course and then implement what they want to build.

MICHAEL: Feedback from the Auroville community about the Global Village Network essentially said that Auroville is not an ecovillage or a part of GEN—it is an Ecocity with many other ideals and goals. We agree that we are not here to copy and paste. There was an Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) template from GEN which was open, and we could adapt it to Auroville, but we thought maybe we could implement a new model. So we decided to start with a shorter six week course. We checked out different models: 5 elements, the chakras, the 5 senses or 12 senses, but we felt we needed something more simple like the 3 H's: heart, head and hands. The EDE was too much in the head; it seemed unbalanced with too much information. We began the workshop with the focus on the heart and then the bringing in of the head and hands.



Kavitha

The first week of the course is seen as a birth. It can be the birth of the community of people in the workshop which can disappear when the workshop is over. You have to work as a community. And it is the participant's rebirth because you have to let go of everything you learned.



Michael

We are experimenting with how to fund our next course "Come for Unity." As of the 19th of March (2018) we have not been able to facilitate many international people because of visa issues and the short notice. We are trying this based on the gift economy. Typically our target audience is young adults, and it's not realistic for them to pay 2 to 3 thousand Euros for an experience like this. How can we do what we love and remain open to those who can't afford it. I think if we show our goodwill it will come. As YouthLink runs out of money we will find out.

In my work with NGO's my ideal was to try to decrease the amounts needed for the work to be done. Abundance seems to be defined in many minds as a large amount of money coming in, but abundance should be about food and materials. I see abundance all around me in Auroville's resources.

KAVITHA: The Joy of Impermanence is YouthLink's community incubator. The idea is that any community that embodies the ideals of impermanence would be willing either to shift to another home to accommodate another group, or put their homes on wheels so they could be moved, or build organically to allow their homes to biodegrade back to the soil.

Anitya is the first community to be built in the spirit of 'joy of impermanence.' The Anitya community is located on a small plot of land between Edayanchavadi, Aurodam and Sacred Groves. The project has been lent a yurt

from Ruslan, and a tetrahedron from Peter, and is building a Earth Bag Tsatsa house. The community will finally include about 30 people and uses the symbol of the banyan tree to represent different commitments. The core members who hold greatest responsibility represent the 'trunk'; those that branch out will be those who are undergoing training, and the 'birds' are volunteers or friends who fly in and out to cross-pollinate within Auroville and the world. Currently the project has seven young adults as core team members.

MICHAEL: The idea of impermanence allows us to detach from possession. We try to take care of the land and provide learning opportunities—to be the steward of all the abundance we have. Why have newcomers come here for the fully equipped apartment? This is a time to be heroic—we are not born to just get the pleasure of things—we are here to work to do something that humanity has not done before. I would suggest that newcomers would have to live the life of pioneers like the people who came here 50 years ago. You get a simple and humble life. Come here with nothing and leave all behind and start a dedicated new life. You can then move on to comforts. You can burn all the things that your ego needs. You can let go of all this and find the joy of impermanence.

I would love to have 10 joy of impermanence communities that are like the gypsies of Auroville moving on and always creating. There should always be a space to try new things out. Along with impermanence we must include imperfection. I think it's important to allow people to make mistakes. If you think we have to be perfect then when you make a building you will make something that will last here for 100 years. But then how do we take risks? We are not supposed to just copy and paste; no, we have to innovate in Auroville. If we do not have room for mistakes then we won't be a community of innovation.

I want the space to move beyond concrete buildings and to dare things no one has tried before. Impermanence will give the space for the innovators and the risk takers. We want to try to take care of land and use earth to build houses that don't even cost 1 lakh of rupees (about \$1500).

It is tough to join this community, but it is comfortable and safe to do so at the same time compared to different spaces in the

world. Auroville's space will be more about how to live differently. Those young people who love to travel and move can be here and then go back to other places—refugee sites or their homes or whatever they are in touch with, but Auroville doesn't need to be a site for their permanent commitment. We are building a city that is an example for the world so that training ground is our focus. We are happy to have international students come and see how they will cross pollinate. We don't want to convert everyone into a newcomer. They should take it back to where they have come from, be it the Auroville bioregion or France. For those connected to their heritage they get support and knowledge here along with living in community. 

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- www.sadhanaforest.org
- www.sacredgroves.in
- www.collaboration.org

ALL USA MEETING 2018 Aug 2nd -5th Celebrating Auroville, Matagiri and CIIS's 50th

“The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga.”
– The Mother

Aurobindo Ghose had his first poem published at age ten; at age twelve young Mira Alfassa was already doing portraits and had her first exhibition at age fourteen, so in the roots of our path of integral yoga are the Arts.

Fifty years ago the name Matagiri (Mother's Mountain) was given. Co-founder, Sam Spanier, was an actor and artist, Eric Hughes was a playwright and Lee Brooks a jewelry and fashion designer. The Center is located just outside of Woodstock, NY, an artist colony.

Our time together at AUM 2018 will allow us to explore the Arts as a bridge to our inner life through the expressive arts, mask making, music, storytelling and dance. Presenters and participants deeply immersed in integral yoga and Auroville will share their knowledge.

The Ashokan Center is a beautiful compound with trails, streams, a covered bridge and only 15 minutes from Matagiri. Please make your reservations now on the Matagiri website or by mailing your check to Matagiri, 1218 Wittenberg Rd, Mt Tremper NY 12457. Call 845-679-8322 for information. FINANCIAL AID IS AVAILABLE. SPACE IS LIMITED.





AUROVILLE HOUSE AT MATAGIRI

Auroville House is the culmination of over a decade's effort to create new infrastructure at Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mount Tremper, NY. Located one hundred miles north of New York City and 8 miles west of Woodstock, "Mother's Mountain" is also celebrating its 50th Birthday on August 2nd, the first day of the 2018 All USA Meeting.

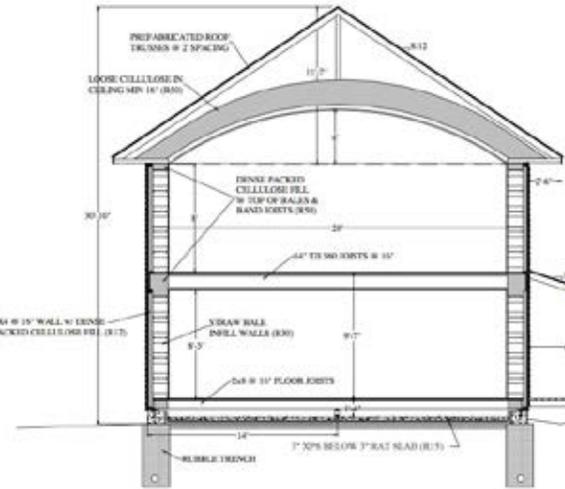
Following a vision he had in Maggi Lidchi-Grassi's home in Pondicherry, Sam Spanier searched for the right place to create a "bridge between East and West". He was joined by Eric Hughes and Lee Brooks, though Auroville pioneer John Kelly was the first to spend a night in the log cabin on 42 acres in the Catskill mountains.

As inspired, mostly young, seekers came to join Matagiri, the roof of the cabin was domered to create four upstairs bedrooms and the garage became a storeroom for incense and handmade paper imported from the Cottage Industries of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. They distributed the incense and paper nationally to support their work, including the publication of the newsletter "Collaboration". An upstairs studio for Sam to paint and a book saleroom were added to the garage creating even more rooflines. A wood-working studio is now the Sanctuary for meditation and a new living room for a proposed apartment complex became a storeroom and finally the current library.

The newest buildings will provide a garage apartment for Julie Manna, a dance teacher from nearby Saugerties, who visited Auroville and attended a *Savitri* intensive with Rod Hemsell. Julian and Wendy Lines will be stewards of Auroville House and continue inviting people for study circles, talks, concerts and yoga classes. The larger kitchen / living room will be a good venue for ayurvedic, vegetarian and vegan cooking classes.

Both buildings are well insulated to insure a low carbon footprint, but Auroville House will be super-insulated including inner straw bales covered with probiotic infused lime plaster and fresh air circulation with a heat exchanger to contribute to a healthy environment. Solar panels will be added when the necessary funds are raised.

A permaculture garden and medicinal herbs are being planted throughout the property along with berry bushes and fruit trees including pawpaws and apples. Contributions towards landscaping and flowering plants are needed and welcome. The goal is to preserve the sweetness of the atmosphere Sam and Eric created and invite a new generation of seekers to discover the integral yoga and how it manifested in Auroville.



Plan for Auroville House



Looking east



Golden Disc filled with water from around the world

AVIUSA

The entire AVIUSA Board was in Auroville to celebrate the fiftieth birthday. Board members visited a number of projects including the Bamboo Center with stewards Balu and Rajaveni. The Board will hold their next face to face meeting during this summer's **All USA Meeting August 2nd - 5th**. A team of Aurovilians including Bindu Mohanty, Kathy Walking, Sauro Mezzetti, and Suryamayi Clarence-Smith will present at a seminar hosted by the **California Institute for Integral Studies** September 28th-30th in San Francisco. Dr. Mohanty will also present at the **125th Parliament of World Religions** in Toronto November 1st - 6th. A new documentary about Auroville "Heading Towards Utopia" is available to interested groups for screenings. Please call or email aviny@aviusa.org.



AVIUSA Board and Friends meet at the Bamboo Center