CONNECT
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Embodyoga Practitioners at the Matrimandir. See P. 7

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Embodyoga Practitioners at the Matrimandir. See P. 7
Much of the work I have done here in Auroville has focused on empowering teachers to trust their knowledge of the children through their own observations. I have encouraged teachers to stop depending on textbooks and to integrate a more inquiry-based framework that allows room for choice and discovery of the child’s own interests. I believe we educate by providing space, medium, and foundations for the joyful recognition of a student’s interests and wonderings to come forth.

I have also introduced Vivian Paley’s storytelling techniques and used that as a foundation for literacy development. Finally I have written and presented Prospect Descriptive Reviews of children as a framework for observation of children in order to inspire teachers to look closely at the needs of their students in order to guide their teaching.

The library project was born from the feeling that Aykiyam teachers were intimidated by our school library. We have had many donations of books over the years from all over the world. This has left us with 4,000 English books on our shelves. I realized that many of the books have been untouched since their donations years ago. How could I get the teachers to use the books and bring them into their classrooms?

Many of the teachers like to teach by unit or theme. Some themed projects include plants, water, animals, and Indian culture. The teachers do projects around these topics but struggle to find books as our library has no organization. I saw a problem and realized the solution was clear. All of the books need to come off of the shelves, and put into themed categories such as community, friendship, transportation, culture, religion, etc.

So I endeavored to create such a system or Aykiyam. It has taken about two months but I am almost finished! I had to read almost every book on the self to determine what theme it was, then place them in categories, often having to reassess and create a new category within another category. Once I finally had the categories all set, I had to start labeling and putting each title into a system on the computer so that the librarian, Vincent, could find things.

It has been an elaborate process but I feel so proud of this work. I am hoping that it will inspire teachers to use books more in the classroom to enhance their teaching, but I am also hoping that it will get them thinking less about levels of books and more about content of books. Children learn how to read when they are reading something that is interesting to them. If a child is psyched about airplanes s/he should look at books about airplanes, even if the book is “too hard” for him. Reading every word isn’t always the point. We want children to be excited about opening up a book and investigating the pages.

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Seeds of Change, A Wetlands Awareness Program

By Aurolice

It’s 8:30 am on a February morning and the sun is rising over the paddy fields. The air is cool and fresh and the 30 or so sixth grade children run and skip along the pathway, pointing and calling out excitedly, “Pelican!” “Pied Kingfisher! Look at that eagle!” The children are on a bird watching excursion in Tamil Nadu, South India, and it’s a lot more fun and invigorating than their typical morning in the classroom.

These kids are a group of about 16 such groups that participate in a wetlands awareness program near Auroville every year. The program is part of the Seeds of Change project which is jointly run by two local organizations, Soma Waste in Auroville, and PondyCAN in Pondicherry, and works to engage youth with their natural and civic surroundings. The wetlands awareness activity has been running since 2012, with the goal of encouraging kids to appreciate and recognize the value of local wetlands and ultimately work towards protecting wetlands against an ever increasing onslaught of threats.

Each wetlands awareness program includes three four-hour sessions: an introductory session, a bird watching trip, and an internalization exercise which includes drawing and essay writing competitions. Children aged 6-16 participate, both through local schools and through a high school drop-out initiative.

Three major wetlands areas dot the Auroville-Pondicherry region: Kallivelli Tank, Ousteri Lake and Bahour Lake. All three host more than 160 varieties of migratory birds during the winter months, some from as far away as Europe. Wetlands awareness activities are conducted during these months, making the bird watching trips a marvel of flocks of ducks, flamingos, and many other beautiful birds.

Wetlands awareness activities are fun and educational for the groups that participate. They also show promising results: students recognize many more birds with each successive year they participate, and an increasing number refuse to eat poached bird meat at home. They also actively work to rescue wounded birds and promote wetlands protection among their families and communities. By engaging with their wetlands surroundings they are gaining a respect and appreciation for these ecosystems, a respect they didn’t have before the program, and one that is almost entirely lacking among local populations. Also the program is cheap to conduct: it involves very few costs other than the educators’ salary and some snacks and competition prizes for the kids. The total cost for the entire migratory bird season—which covers 16 schools and almost 500 kids—is under $2000.

While vastly important to human and wildlife wellbeing, local wetlands are terribly mistreated in this part of India. Traditionally well respected by local people for their essential value, they are increasingly encroached upon by local businessmen and politicians who ignore environmental protection laws to develop large parts of them. Garbage and chemicals pollutants are pumped into them. And area residents, having somehow disconnected from traditional recognition of wetlands importance, regularly poach animals and birds nesting there. As a result, local wetlands are under considerable threat of extinction.

The wetlands awareness program is one effort underway to try and reverse this trend. It also enables almost 500 children to engage with their beautiful wildlife and natural surroundings several mornings a year.

To contribute (and get a tax deduction, donate to AVI-USA, specified for the Seeds of Change project, a Soma Waste Management activity.)
Living Routes and Auroville: THE STUDENTS

Living Routes (LR) was an independent, non-profit educational organization etc. with academic programs accredited by the University of Massachusetts Amherst. It folded in January 2014. Living Routes programs challenged participating students to grow on academic, professional and personal levels. Students earned UMass Amherst credit through programs taught by faculty with international experience and expertise across a wide range of fields. Students and faculty together created a learning community within the living community of the Ecovillage, the ‘campuses’ for Living Routes programs. Those remarkable educational environments facilitated real transformative intellectual and personal development through Ecological Literacy; Positive Solutions; Learner Centeredness; Transdisciplinary Curricula; Environmental and Social Responsibility; Community-Immersion; Meaning-Making; and Service Learning.

Auroville was one of those communities. We interviewed two of LR’s former students in the Auroville Visitors Center restaurant.

Andrea (Andi) Paige was in LR in 2008 and is now an ND, MSc, E-RYT 500 practitioner in Bali, Indonesia. Matthew Andrews was in LR in 2000 and is now a yoga teacher and the co-owner with his wife Corinne of Amherst Yoga Studio in Amherst, MA. He is also on the board of AVI-USA.

I was at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst sitting in a class and Dan Greenberg came in and did a presentation about LR. I saw a photo of people living and sleeping in a capsule in India. And I said sign me up. Like right away. I’m going.

Andi: I came before me my LR program started in 2009 with another student in the program whom I met before the semester began. She ended up being my roommate in the program. She was a great teacher in a peer kind of way and with whom I am still in close contact with. We are deep friends. LR was a cornerstone of my life trajectory. A turning point at that corner.

After the experience, both Matthew and I wanted to go and work for LR. When you receive that much you don’t want to do anything but continue to be involved and continue to give something back. It is what I do in my work today on a very different level. Any kind of retreat or training that I am leading has that transformative aspect which I learned from LR.

I wasn’t on a path of anything destructive other than being too much in the mind of ego and stress. In fact, I was on a very strong path for diplomacy and international relations. I had lived abroad for 4 years and had traveled a lot.

Suddenly I was living with a bunch of Americans my own age. That was my biggest challenge because I had already been living abroad and speaking other languages. To be with Americans in a community with peers was not what I had done.

My university experience had been very non-traditional. LR was actually the most traditional part of it. That was a challenge. But it gave me so much because I had come in on this very strong path of international relations, ready to be a foreign service agent!

Matthew: Was there a turning point at that corner.

I softened so much during the semester. I remember getting into a bit of an argument with my advisor about the use of the word ‘I’ in our academic papers. I thought there was no room for the word ‘I’ in an academic paper. I grew up in Ohio. Not much of Ohio stays with me but it is very different from the northern California thought process which both of the LR teachers were educated in. I’m a midwest girl. It took me a long time to come around. But when I came around I came around really fast.

For me more than anything it is that LR was hosted in Auroville, and it’s about how much I received from Auroville. It was this duel layered thing where all of this enrichment and framework is delivered in such a jagged way. I wish I could say a seamless way but it’s never easy. Jaggedness is what cuts you open and creates this space for the flowing to happen.

Working for the Auroville radio was my service learning (part of the LR curriculum) so that is how I started. I was very much in the central part of the Auroville community, everywhere at all times covering events. There were times when I would have to skip LR meetings because I had an assignment to record an event or concert. That was a bit of a vortex sucking me into the community, allowing me to meet transformative people. I was much more in touch with Auroville than my peers. I was teaching English at the Language Lab 2 times a week as well.

I had known that the more I give to Auroville the more I would get from Auroville. So from the beginning of that experience there was this exchange between learning and doing within the two organizations. Later in the years when I came back I taught yoga at Verite and gave therapies at Quiet. I worked so many different places that this place just became home.

What is important about the LR experience for you? What impacted your life?

Matthew: I was at a tough point in my life and going in kind of a bad direction. The LR program was a big shift. Big wake-up. Full Stop. The entire trajectory of my life changed. Everything that has happened since then kind of originated with that trip. I can’t imagine getting to where my life is now if I hadn’t taken that trip.
Which elements of work and life in AV are most rewarding? What stays the same what has changed? Now and then... contrast.

Andi: Having to use a bicycle. I was staying at Youth Camp in Fraternity. I was cycling (LR didn’t allow students to use motorbikes) back and forth one or two times a day and it just got to be so much on that main tar road. That road is uphill. You only know that if you are on a bicycle. I remember the anger which would come up within me, as well as the spiritual challenge and the physical demand, with men coming on their motorbikes and saying things to me and reaching out and trying to grab.

As soon as the program ended I got a motorbike. That facilitated an active lifestyle which started at 8 am and ended at 8 pm. So now I’m renting a motorbike. Running on petrol. For me this is inherently discouraging, but I’m weighing the costs and benefits in terms of how much I do in a day versus how much I can get around.

Matthew: Auroville was way different 15 years ago. For example, the whole road of shops along the road from Kuirapalayam didn’t exist. My project was farming. I worked on the farms: Fertile, Windarra, Buddha Garden. This was not an integrating experience. I didn’t know a lot of people. I sweated in the field most of the day.

I came back to Auroville with Corinne in 2013 but only for a week. My process was an inward, internal process, yet everything from the beach to the forest to the farms was different. I spent a lot of time at Matrimandir and Samadhi in Pondy and at the beach and in the forest. Being in the spirit of Auroville but not interacting as much with Aurovilians.

This time (see Embodyoga, p. 7) has been totally different... Having the yoga group that I brought and knowing the AVI-USA people and Aurovilians created more interpersonal interaction.

Since I joined Auroville International-USA and taken up ownership of Amherst Yoga Studio. I now feel like I am part of a family. It’s totally new people that I didn’t know before. It feels good. I filled myself with the spirit of the place while here. I visited Sacred Groves, Darkali and The Mother’s room on the 29th. I was here to touch the earth and fill myself with the spirit of the place and be with people.

Andi: A lot of people ask me when will you become an Aurovilian. That question is always here. But I never understood that as my role. I’m always out talking about Auroville and sending people here. That is my role. With that I tell people you must spend a month in Auroville if you want to understand anything. I tell them to reserve this time in their life to enter into their being. Auroville is a bubble where you can explore and experience your being. Absorb the land and the inner work.

In the LR community work there was so much circle work, group work which I had never done before. It brought tears to my eyes several times. And that in and of itself was a big part of the experience. The microcosm of the LR community within the Auroville experience was the vortex of my own transformation. Personal growth and interpersonal learning both occurred.

### Living Routes and Auroville: THE TEACHERS

Heather Reid received her Masters degree from the California Institute of Integral Studies (Philosophy and Religion) and is completing a PhD in Adult Education with a focus on Transformative Learning from the University of Toronto. Neil Meikleham received a Masters degree in Holistic and Ecological Science from Schumacher College in the UK, after first receiving his PhD in Plant Chemistry from University of Witswatersrand in South Africa. They now live in TerraSoul (Windarra Farm) and are active in the Auroville experiential education process.

Heather: We taught two semesters for Living Routes (LR) in 2006, Winter and Spring, and again in 2012 and 2013. We came back twice in that interim period to be involved in other projects in Auroville and not teach for LR. We taught the last semester in Auroville. We were signed up and ready to go for Fall 2014 when LR dissolved.

When I was first applying for the LR job and Daniel (Greenberg) sent me the curriculum, I said to Neil, if I could design a full-on immersive, transformative semester for young people to connect with who they are, to find their own power and become change agents (that’s really my core calling) this program is the one I would have created.

Neil: The different LR programs around the world all had different focal points, from permaculture in Israel to indigenous studies in Peru. In Auroville the program was framed in the light of integral thinking. There was the personal, the social, the community, the environmental, and all of this was integrated in multiple ways. The core questions we were both attracted to were (1) What does it mean to be human; (2) what does it mean to live sustainably; and (3) what does it mean to be alive at this time in the earth’s evolution?

Heather: At a certain age everything is up for question. We refer to that age as “emerging adults,” people in their early 20’s. Who am I outside of everything I’ve been told I am, by my parents, by my peers, by my culture? What is my calling, my gift to give back to society? We framed the semester as a vision quest, a rite-of-passage, the opportunity to leave behind the dominant influences of American culture to ask these important questions.

Just getting to India does a lot of this work. Being in a place like Auroville also does a huge amount, because everyone here is living a radically different paradigm. An especially large influence on the students is the kind of mentoring Aurovilians do, just by living their lives. People like Johnny and Krishna—years later students found these people to have had a huge impact on them. Students came with a very clear picture of, “at this age you do this, at this age you do that.” Here in Auroville that opens up.

Neil: We saw this over and over. Young people would come here with a fixed idea of what they thought they were going to get. Maybe they were coming just to learn about
solar panels or organic farming in the tropics. Yet at the end of 4 months all of them would say, “Wow I had no idea what I really came for was to actually ask these deeper questions about who I am, and my relationship to my culture and society.” This was the greatest gift of the LR program.

Heather: I think it would be really helpful to have been a student in the program, because it was so intense. As a faculty I never quite knew if I was pushing them too much. How much is too much? Or too little?

In Auroville the learning community aspect of LR was a primary focus. We were all living and learning together, students and faculty. It was challenging to find it within myself to keep showing up for the students and to be modeling and living authentically, because we were not positioning ourselves as the authorities or the experts in the usual way. It was challenging, but amazing growth.

It wasn’t until the program ended abruptly that we were thrown back on ourselves. Okay, now what? What’s our relationship to Auroville now?

We wanted to be here without that identification (of being LR faculty) to see what wanted to emerge. To be here just for Auroville.

How does this inform what you are doing now in Auroville?

Neil: The Botanical Garden and the TerraSoul project (part of Windarra Farm) is where I am putting most of my energy right now. TerraSoul is a working farm that is also an educational space with a focus on healing the connection between the earth and the human body and soul.

Windarra Farm used to be a very popular place for the students. It was one of the favorite service learning or project sites: a place where they could live and do farming or sustainability studies, while also living in a community.

So when the possibility for us to join TerraSoul opened up, I was very much attracted to it. How do we create a living space which is also an educational space, a space where you learn to grow food, where you learn to live sustainably whilst being fully present in a community with all of its dynamics?

Heather: For me the desire for integrity was really important. With LR I always felt there was a bit of a disconnect. Students had been sitting inside a classroom and then they would go to Windarra and be working outside - the guys with their shirts off and their faces bright - it was obvious this is what they had come for. I always felt like I would feel more integrity in myself if I was actually living in the place where the students were finding themselves in the work. Like inviting them to join us in our space, where we the faculty were living, rather than just lecturing them about sustainability.

We are involved in developing a few educational programs here. For a while we were working with the Campus Initiative, the first attempt for Auroville to have its own semester program. We were very central in developing the curriculum, but we have stepped back for now.

LR had a huge impact on any kind of education I am ever going to do: not just teaching content but facilitating a space for deeper inquiry and experiential learning, weaving together inner and outer experience.

Neil: In the educational programs that we are part of, we recognize that people come here with a calling. They’re coming because they hear something in the dream of Auroville. How do we as educators assist them? We are trying to understand how to do this. What I learned from LR was what I saw within myself. I’m seeking to decolonize from my old education. The TerraSoul experiment is my attempt to continue this decolonization process. I seek to do this both for myself and for people who come into this as a learning place.

Heather: My ideal, if I imagine Auroville as a campus, would be that every young person coming through would be coming as a student of the Yoga, no matter what outer activity they got involved in. But in order for that to happen, there has to be mentoring of the inner dimension. There could be a central group of people who are mentors, and young people coming through could choose to receive mentoring. Every young person, regardless of what culture they come from, is ultimately looking for that.

I believe the university is already here. I see in Auroville multiple educational things going on, from Auroville Consulting to Sadhana Forest to Sacred Groves. We are all experimenting in different ways. It’s not about bringing in external ideas about what it means to be a university, which are antiquated ideas. It is reconceptualizing what a university is. That is what excites me the most about Auroville. The City the Earth Needs is this experientially-based university. What is the City the Earth needs? There is nowhere else where people can live this question, and in an international community, in the context of rural south India. There is no other place like it on the planet.
Embodyoga in Auroville
By Matthew Andrews
Photographs by Mark Hart

AVI-USA board member Matthew Andrews brought Embodyoga* founder Patty Townsend and 18 practitioners from the US to Auroville in February. Matthew and Patty led a 2 week exploration of Embodyoga and Auroville.

We all arrived in Chennai in the middle of the night, and after spending a few worried minutes looking for our driver, hopped on the bus for a three-hour drive through the dark to Auroville, the city of dawn. We drove out of the city and through small towns that were waking up, roadside chai stalls with groups of men gathered, chatting and smoking, past cows and goats, streets littered with half-burnt garbage, and into the countryside. Palm trees, cashew and casuarina plantations, rice fields, and the acrid smell of backyard burn pits and kitchen stoves powered by wood and dung. We turned off the highway in the growing hazy light and down a forested lane, giving way to a village. Homes, shrines, a temple, shops, dogs, children preparing for school.

In Auroville we stayed in Verite, a small eco-community within the broader city that’s set up as a retreat space with two yoga halls, including mats and props. The rooms are small but comfortable, with no AC but strong ceiling fans and good air flow. There’s no hot water in the showers because Verite is off the grid and totally powered by solar and wind, which also means that it’s not subject to the occasional rolling blackouts. But there are solar hot water heaters where you can get a bucket full of hot water if you need it.

We settled into what would become a familiar breakfast – a sweet porridge called ragi (made from a local millet mixed with raisins, peanuts, and mango jam), fresh fruit from the local trees (papaya, banana, pineapple, watermelon), fresh-baked bread with nut butters and jams, and fresh yogurt. All three daily meals were similarly delicious and fresh, highlighting local favorites like idli and dosa while also including raw salads with homemade dressings and sometimes extras like banana lassi.

Throughout the trip we spent time getting to know Auroville and practicing Embodyoga with Patty and Karen Miscall-Bannon. Their deep and inspired teaching helped to ground the experiences we had exploring Auroville and Tiruvanamalai, and added layers of depth to what we took in. They taught the kosas, the chakras, mantras and chanting. We sang the seed sounds for the chakras in asanas, and dove into the nature of the body’s energy centers and how they relate to the organs, glands, and fascia. We found the pits of our bellies and inhaled South Indian breath, saluted the sun in the land where surya namaskar was born, and felt our fluids seeping and washing and pulsing.

Ashesh Joshi and Vera Lipen, Aurovilians who teach Integral Yoga workshops locally, shared with us the background of the yoga and the yogis that inspired Auroville, helping us place the space in context. Aloka shared Awareness Through the Body, helping us understand Integral Yoga through play and embodiment experiences, the way children in Auroville learn about the layers of self and explore their energy bodies in space. And then we went to the beach, basked in the blazing sun and played in the waves like dolphins. We ate fresh fish by the saltwater pool in the shade of palm trees.

Vera took us to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where we learned about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, saw the small museum that houses articles from their lives, and then sat for some time at the Samadhi, the place where their bodies lay in rest. We drank in the charged air of the Samadhi, sharing space with devotees who wept and laid their heads on the shrine, overflowing with devotion and love. We ate at the ashram dining hall, walked through the sprawling Pondicherry park, and along the seaside.

Then we left in the early morning and drove two hours to Tiruvanamalai, the small city nestled into the crook of Mount Arunachala. The mountain is the embodiment of Siva, creator and destroyer of the universe, and home of Ramana Maharshi’s ashram. We met author, ayurvedic doctor, and vedic scholar Peter Malakoff, heard stories about Tiru’s past and Ramana’s teachings, and then woke up at 4am the next day to circumambulate the sacred mountain and visit the eight sacred shrines that line the eight-mile route. Saran was an excellent guide, sharing the significance of each shrine and helping us engage with the spiritual roots of the place intimately. It was transformative. We sat and felt the reverberations of vedic chanting in the samadhi hall at the ashram, basking in the aura of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s life and work. Then there were zipping-zagging rickshaw rides through the city past the giant and voluminous Siva temple and buses, cars, motorcycles, animals and people.

After Tiru we came back to Auroville and the Matrimandir, the radiating globe temple to the Mother, descending the ramp and then rising into the sphere, walking the spiral stairs widening into a wrapping spiral ramp up to the inner chamber, struck by the majesty of the giant flawless crystal with sunlight streaming down into it, pouring out into the silent white room. Light entering the womb...
Embodyoga in Auroville  
Continued

of creation, the mystic heart, the cells. And then emerging into the Park of Unity and the shade of the Banyan Tree – solid and grand. Peacocks and brain fever birds called.

Sadhana Forest showed what can be done with 60 acres of barren deforested land by a few devoted souls who love the Earth so much that they plant all day and find innovative ways to keep the seedlings alive. Living on one bucket of water a day, hauled by hand to the rough outdoor shower and sleeping in keet huts through sun and monsoon. Their inspiring spirit has flowed to Haiti, where they planted 80,000 trees with a 80% survival rate (the next highest NGO's survival rate was 25%) and the deserts of Northern Kenya, Samburu Land.

We drank in the local lore at the Irumbai Siva Temple, basked in the harmonies of Vera's Sacred Bells, and joined the OM choir at Savitri Bhavan. We saw Sacred Groves, a new and creative building project, with a natural cooling and dehumidifying system, and got a sound bath at Svaram where we learned about Aurelio's commitment to preserving the local heritage and create livelihoods for local instrument makers.

And then, suddenly, it was time to go. Mahabalipuram and ancient stone carvings framed the day of travel to the airport. And hours and hours and days (but somehow only one day) later, we were back. Home. Disoriented, cold, confused about how this life we had shared and left would integrate and fuse with the old life that was now new and looming around us. And over time it has seeped in. For me, the experience ignited something deep within, so deep that sometimes it's hard to find. But the radiant heat warms me, and inspires me. I find myself more engaged with life, willing and able to bring more of myself forward – not necessarily more of my personality but more of my soul. I feel the Earth breathing and the blood pulsing through my heart and body pulses in a rhythm that I hadn't noticed before.

If you are interested in going to Auroville next year visit www.yogacenteramherst.com/india.

EVENTS

Tango – in Auroville?
By Camille Cusumano

Earlier this year I told my friends I was doing "India-Lite" for my first trip to the sub-continent. I was headed to Auroville, which I had heard much about from Berlin friends who spend two months there as volunteers each winter. Yes, I'll do yoga and meditation, I told friends (whose first question always baffled me: Why India? Why not India, I should have replied.) If pushed, I'd admit that I planned my trip to overlap with a tango festival that I had heard takes place in Auroville. It is called the Holi Tango Festival and it ran for five glorious days this year, March 9 through 13, and kicked off with a call to wear lots of colors.

It's no secret that I've been a tango aficionado for nearly thirteen years. In 2005 after falling in love with tango I quit my magazine editor job and headed to Buenos Aires where I lived the better part of four years, 2006 to 2010. I wrote a book about the transformative power of tango—Tango, an Argentine Love Story, describing how the dance changed my life. For many years prior to tango, I had done Iyengar yoga and I instantly saw the overlap with my Zen meditation practice in its requirement for total presence, the surrender of ego, and especially the need to empty your mind when you dance. Not infrequently, there is the state of bliss that arises when two become one with the music, the floor, the rest of the dancers.

Argentine tango, not to be confused with ballroom or American tango which is usually choreographed, is an improvisational social dance and not unlike a martial art, say aikido or tai chi—or partners yoga.

So, even though tango is sexy and probably the most sensual dance on earth given its torso-to-torso intimacy, it is very much about what we call "connection" with other and the ineffable embrace. Despite its indisputable physicality, tango has proven for many to embody a spiritual aspect. A place like Auroville, dedicated to the concept of human unity, is a natural venue for this dance that elevates the common hug to an art form.

Sometimes the dance is overly cloaked in mystique and an aura of difficulty. But anyone—even non-dancers, even older folks—can learn to dance tango. It can be as simple as walking together to the music. Certainly, it can be fancy with advanced showy steps, too. A Holi festival might be a good way to get started with tango.

This year, 2016, was the fifth edition of Holi Tango Festival and the hosts did a great job of organizing the event. Aurovilians Monna Maier, Aurevan, and Jorge Ayarza, the festival planners, limit the number of attendees (to about 170) in order to keep the this event as a "boutique festival." There are numerous tango festivals all around the world and many are so big and challenging, if you are the least bit shy it's no fun. Holi is friendly—I might add beginner-friendly.

The 2016 festival opened on a Wednesday with a mini milonga, the term for a tango dance party, at the visitors center. There was also a dazzling exhibition by the three sets of instructors who came from France (Natalia and Diego), Greece (Marianna and Vaggelis), and Italy (Caterina and Pino). After that, Thursday to Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. the instructors gave classes at various locations—Cria, Arka, and Sawchu. Participants were given color-coded bracelets that matched them up with classes at their self-described level. Each evening, everyone donned their best outfit and attended the milonga, always at Sawchu, which often went to 2 a.m. The festival attendees were about two-thirds from around India and the rest from Auroville and Europe, with a few from the United States and elsewhere.

If you are in Auroville, you don't have to wait for the festival. There are weekly tango classes Mondays at the New Creation Sports Resource Center (near La Piscine), 6 to 7 p.m. for beginners, and 7 to 7:45 p.m. for intermediate dancers. Every Wednesday there is a practice at Sawchu Bharat Nivas, 7:30 to 9 pm. For more information contact Monna, Aurevan, or Jorge: tango@auroville.org.in.

Visit the Facebook page: Auroville Holi Tango Festival.

Camille Cusumano is the author of Tango, an Argentine Love Story (Seal Press) and other books. She lives in San Francisco.
Nakashima Global Connections III: A Meditation in the Light of the Supramental

By Miriam Belov

On February 25, 2016 around the Sacred Peace Table in the Hall of Peace in the Unity Pavilion, Auroville, a meditation focusing on the Supramental Manifestation was held. Through Skype, Mira Nakashima and family at the Nakashima Peace Table at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City also participated. Additionally, Russian devotees at the Sacred Peace Table in the Russian Academy of the Arts in Moscow participated. All three tables were designed by George Nakashima.

Various people read about flowers to which The Mother had given Supramental significance. Beautifully, it began with my daughter Maddye reading about “Aspiration in the physical for the Supramental Light,” the same flower which the Ashram put on its card for the 29th.

Even though the meditation was to prepare for the auspicious February 29th, the Supramental Day, I was deeply inspired to connect its energy to the fragile climate we see all around us. As I spontaneously said, “Let us include the creations of the ancients: Machu Picchu, Stonehenge, the vortex of golden Jerusalem, and people from the United Nations to us. The importance of the COP21 historic agreement and our deep prayers. May these all unite in strength.”

These words were recited in Moscow:

"Please see the powerful flow of Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness that The Mother described flowing from the heart of each cell of your body, illuminating your soul, filling your whole being here and now in 2016. Allow this Supramental Light to flow in a clockwise direction to the other people in the Hall. See The Matrimandir, the soul of Auroville, collaborating with us.

Please make larger circles, embracing all of Auroville and the Ashram. This Supramental Force is now encircling the globe bathing all sentient beings, all of Nature. It is connecting the Sacred Peace Table in Moscow and the Altar in New York City. A large wave of peace covering all: elephants, ladybugs, dolphins and eagles, the iced peaks of Everest, the rainforests of the Amazon, the Grand Canyon, the islands of Hawaii, the Danube river, the great expanse of the Steppes.

We pray for Peace – both planetary and in each of our bodies – and for the Divine grace to stop the ecocide and rejuvenate the environment. Pure water/clean air, blue sky/green grass, rich soil, vibrant health and strength flooding everyone, every species so precious to the ecological web. See this Golden Consciousness flowing around and through our fragile globe, Mother Earth, as Matter and Spirit unite, Evolving by the Supramental Light, Peace and Love."

Allow me to thank Jaya, Shivaya, Pala, Gordon Korstange, Wendy and Julian Lines in collaborating together to create a powerful moment and atmosphere for all who gathered in Auroville and around the world. I also wish to thank Manohar for the wonderful video he filmed.

UPDATES

The University of Human Unity Project: CONNECTING THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

by Rod Hemsell

Auroville, India

The University of Human Unity (UHU) Project in Auroville organized a three-day seminar this year in February bringing together an international group of devotees. The UHU team has worked together to provide courses and seminars in Auroville annually since 2007. This year’s seminar was primarily devoted to "knowledge.”

This year’s seminar included; the educationist Matthew Rich-Tolmsa from South Africa, currently residing in Holland; the international business management consultant Tong Schraa-Liu from China, currently residing in Norway; Natalya Pavlovskaya, a socio-biologist visiting Auroville from Russia; professor of philosophy Ananta Kumar Giri from Bihar, currently residing in Chennai; professor of psychology Werner Sattman-Frese from Germany, currently residing in Australia; Ladislav Brozman, concert violinist; Nishtha Muller, Sanskritist; and myself, philosopher and educationist.

The audience of 50 participants included an equally diverse representation of nationalities and interests, as would be expected, and the venue and service provided by the Unity Pavilion were appropriately world-class. The thoughtful and stimulating program of presentations was also beautifully embellished by two musical performances – Arnab Chaudhury’s media fusion based on a poem of Sri Aurobindo, and Ladislav’s solo performance of Bach.

Speaker and sponsor Tong Schraa-Liu

Seminar Participants
UPDATES
The University of Human Unity Project CONTINUED

The seminar’s central theme of the Integral Paradigm of Knowledge has been an on-going project of this team for many years, and there have been many courses and seminars devoted to it in the past, which are available on the University of Human Unity website.

Briefly summarized it is the theory of knowledge based on Sri Aurobindo’s commentaries on the Vedas and Upanishads. As such, it is not especially focused on either of the more common themes of Integral Yoga, and the day-to-day life and development of Auroville, as one might expect, but on the more typical, arcane issues of philosophy: How we know what we know, and whether our knowledge gives us a true understanding of reality.

Of course one expects the outcome of such a study to significantly impact those broader practical and spiritual concerns of our community. This was evidenced by a series of presentations on the applications of the theory in such fields as education, science, and business.

Find the full video coverage of the presentations on the website, thanks to the camera work of Olaf and a grant from TSLPartners and the Foundation for World Education which helped us to provide the equipment, travel expenses, and general logistical support for these events, as well as continuing workshops in Europe and the US, on-line courses, and publications.

Our friends and affiliates include, the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone Colorado, the Gnostic Center in New Delhi, the Indian Psychology Institute in Pondicherry, and Auro-ebooks. Please have a look at the website: universityofhumanunity.org/video-detail.php?videoid=2423.

USA Community
For The USA Community there are workshops and Activities this summer and fall at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, CO. The Goddess Savitri by Rod Hemsell will focus on the esoteric nature of the teaching that is revealed in Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol, In the cantos of Books 4 and 5, dealing with the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan in the forest, but which is actually an initiatory transmission of the qualities embodied by the symbolic goddess of the “New Consciousness” descending on earth, and of the truly ready human soul that is elected as a vessel of that descent.

And in these pages we also find several examples of a pattern and technique where by Sri Aurobindo makes the poem reflect on itself in a way that expresses its deeper meaning and purpose. He writes of it:

This word was seed of all the thing to be...
The word was used as a hieratic means
For the release of the imprisoned spirit...

When read in the normal way, by the eyes and the brain, one can easily miss the meaning and power of lines and phrases like these. But in a dynamic mantraic reading and hearing the direct revelatory effect is of a presence and quality of experience that is exactly what is being described and transmitted by the poetry. This is the mantraic quality of Savitri, which is the essence of Vedic speech known as mantra. One of the primary aims of our workshops and the activities of the center is to make such experience a familiar occurrence on the path of Integral Yoga.

For information on upcoming workshops and activities of SALC please call 719-256-4917.

Adventures in Auroville by Livia Vanaver
Bill and Livia Vanaver are cofounders of the Vanaver Caravan (vanavercaravan.org) and made their second trip to Auroville this year and taught in Aikiyam. The following is an excerpt from Livia’s blog.

Yesterday was quite an adventure….but then again, this is the case most every day here. We completed our first week of teaching 3rd-8th grade students at Aikiyam School in Auroville building a world dance and song festival and including creative movement and improvisation. It’s a beautiful school with round cement structures, pastel walls and a banyan tree forest for a playground. The children are from the local Tamil villages. Everyone is barefoot, wide eyed and beautiful. Shankar, the principal, is one of the kindest, gracious and most positive people I have ever met. The cultivation of attention and concentration is vibrant throughout the school and the 2 hour long classes are a joy to teach. We have ½ hour break for tea and 45 minutes for lunch together each day. I’m getting pretty good at eating with my hands and really enjoying it! The phrase ‘don’t play with your food’ couldn’t possibly exist here.

When we walked in, Usha, the teacher who team teaches with us was all dressed, with traditional Tamil clusters of flowers in her hair. She said, “Don’t be surprised if all the teachers in the school leave at 9:30, they are going to an engagement celebration for our secretary in Pondicherry. Do you want to go?” I immediately called Moo and she was able to take the class with Bill and off I went on Usha’s motorcycle in a motorcade with other teachers on bikes.

Why was someone having an engagement party in the middle of the morning? According to Indian tradition, this was
the auspicious day and hour for the couple to be engaged. This was also a love engagement as opposed to an arranged marriage and they will be married within 3 months...at the exact auspicious day and time that are indicated by their astrological charts.

The colorful temple was filled with over 100 people in beautiful sarees. The priest was blessing the couple as we arrived. Usha urged me to go up with the other older women to bless the couple, instructing me how to put the red powder on their third eye, and the sandalwood paste on their cheeks and hands...which were already so caked with the paste of other people's blessings....sprinkling special water over them and throwing rice and flowers on their heads...all the while trying to stay as present and loving and really offering a blessing from within.

Upstairs after the ceremony, there was lunch on large banana leaves. Usha said there was nutritional value to eating food from these leaves (besides being very ecological). When we were finished we had to fold the banana leaf towards us as an indication of being satisfied and also it was traditional at happy events. (folding the other way was for funerals only...and if dissatisfied with the meal). I felt it was a real honor to be a part of this rite of passage so far from home....and yet something felt so familiar at the same time.

February 19, 2016

This morning we got up early and joined all of the Aikiyam students in their beautiful morning meeting on the second floor of the open air dining hall (next to the banyan trees which houses a pregnant monkey and her mate). Shankar, principal, meets with them each morning and they all sit attentively with their classes, just the students, while the teachers prepare their classrooms. They love Shankar. He was a student at Aikiyam and he himself grew up in the village. He has the understanding, kindness and respect for each student....and they know it.

A few children have a chance to speak about what is important to them, and everyone listens. Towards the end of the meeting, a few giggles ensue. I see a baby goat made its way following one of the children up the stairs. Bill and I looked at each other and started singing, “Mary had a little lamb...” When the meeting concluded, we piled into a van with all of the 8th graders and Usha and barreled down the road to Tibetan House where they were asked to open a conference on Creative Arts Therapy with Krupa Devi.

They were delighted to perform and the attendees enjoyed their Bharat Natyam piece and the South African Gumboot Dance. (really nice to hear them on a wood floor!). Scooting back into the van, including Wendy Lines who is the angel helping us out for the entire day of preparing the dance festival costumes, I will never forget the look on everyone's face in Auroville as we passed by, hearing This Little Light of Mine ring out loud and clear the entire way back to school...banjo and all!

Getting ready for our last day at Aikiyam School. Today Shankar, the principal, spread out a huge tarp on the sand in front of the banyan trees which will be shady by 2:30 PM tomorrow. All the boys took off like lightning and I couldn't imagine where they had gone. They returned with huge bricks from the local building project on campus and we weighted down the tarp. At any given time, the entire class would surround the tarp and give a good tug to smooth it out. Such good team effort.

Everyone walks around barefoot all day so all the dances including the boot dance will be performed barefoot. (I’m getting used to being barefoot the entire time, and have even overcome my shyness about my big bunions!....That was a huge step for me). It is a joy to be working in this school. Just as we were leaving, Bill asked Shankar what the meaning of the Tamil greeting: vanakam. He reached down and picked up a dry leaf and bent it with his fingers. Of course it snapped and broke. “This dry leaf is too stiff, too much ego.... it cannot bow to another and say, ‘Vanakam.’ See this leaf?” He picked up a fresh green leaf and bent it but was supple and did not break. “This leaf can say, ‘vanakam’.

Every other year Auroville International meets in Auroville as they did this February with representatives from many countries: www.auroville-international.org

2017-18 marks Auroville's 50th anniversary. How would you like to celebrate it? Please post suggestions on AVIUSA’s Facebook page or write to info@aviusa.org.
The Garden of Remembrance

More trees were planted in 2016. On December 31, 2015 one was planted for Steven Johnston. In January of 2016 two trees were planted, one for Dawn Rouslin who lived at Matagiri in the 70s and one for Virginia Wheeler. On February 28th trees were planted for Juanita Cole, William Netter, Kireet Joshi, Nijal, Edith Schnapper and Joy Calvert.

Make A Tribute Gift

AVIUSA accepts gifts in memory of someone who has died. Donors may also give a gift just to remember those who have made contributions to Auroville through their work/financial contribution/dedication to the Auroville community.

We welcome donations for the ongoing maintenance of the Remembrance Garden at Sacred Groves in Auroville.

AVI-USA remembers with gratitude the following who have contributed to our community.

Ron Anastasia  Kenneth Fator  Gene Maslow  Muriel Spanier
Ariel Browne  Myrtle Fator  Eleanor Montgomery  Sam Spanier
Aurobindam (Russell Douglas)  Alan Gray  George Nakashima  Elizabeth Stiller
Cassia Berman  Dick Hawk  Namas (Dennis)  Alice Thomas
Haridas Chaudhuri  Barbara Heimlich  William Netter  Adm. Rutledge Tompkins
Juanita Cole  Eric Hughes  Liam O’Gallagher  Judith Tyberg
Bob Dane  John Kelly  Steven Johnston  Ruth Villalobos
Bhavana (Dee Decew)  Trudy King  Ida Patterson  Dimitri Von Mohrenschildt
Rosine Debode  Alan Klaas  Dawn Rouslin  John Walker
Lois Kellogg Duncan  Mary Clara (Molly) Kurtz  Seyril Schochen  Virgina S. Wheeler
Mary Helen Eggenberger  Eleanor Lovett  Betty Slovis  Deidre (Claire) Worden
Lalit Fullman  June Maher  Marjorie Spalding

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