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Sourcing Our Oneness
by Matthew Andrews

As with all spiritual traditions, there have always been subgroups within the Integral Yoga community: groups that formed based on geography, shared culture, friendships, and affinity for different aspects of the unique path described by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. And of course these groups have not always agreed. There have been differences of opinion and differences of approach, sometimes loosely held and sometimes solidifying into longstanding oppositional stances.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother reminded us again and again that despite any differences we may experience, we are all One. And the force that traverses the experiential gulf between the One and the Many is Love. Whenever Love is absent in human life, the gravity of the primal inconscient pulls toward factionalism, separation, and the experience of “us against them”. When Love is present, it draws us toward unity, wholeness, and the experience of “E Pluribus Unum” – out of many, One.

Since 1999, there has been an ongoing effort to bring together the various subgroups within the global Integral Yoga community. This effort, called Sourcing Our Oneness, is nurtured by Love. And the force of Love that erases boundaries and joins hearts in a common aspiration toward wholeness took another step forward at the beginning of October at a special retreat in Nainital India.

From October 1-8, the Sourcing Our Oneness retreat brought together people from around the world dedicated to bringing forward the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s vision and action. There were Aurovilians from various communities, including a good number of youth from both Youthslink and (Sience, Technology and Math) STEM Labs. People from both the Pondicherry Ashram and the Delhi Branch were there, and groups from throughout India connected to Sri Aurobindo’s Action, the Sri Aurobindo Society (also including a number of youth), and the Sri Aurobindo Knowledge Center in Varanasi. Muna, from Germany, and I represented Auroville International.

We met at Van Vivas, a property of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. It’s an old British mansion built by leveling off the top of a steep hill about 1000 vertical feet above Nainital Lake. After independence the property was sold to the Maharana of Nepal, who used it for years as a summer residence. Between 1894 and 1906, when Sri Aurobindo was acting as private secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda, he traveled to Nainital and stayed in a guest house down by the lake. Since royals at the time tended to pay each other visits when they were in the same area, it’s assumed the Sri Aurobindo would have come with the Maharaja to visit the Maharana, and thus would have been at Van Vivas himself.

The building is drafty in the fall, and the clouds rolling up the hillside obscure the sun, bringing a cold damp. But then they sweep away and the sun pours through, flooding the place with light and warmth. Thousands of flowers, both cultivated and wild, grow around the property, radiating their qualities into the atmosphere. And a small hill just at the edge of the property offers a 360 degree view of the Naina Valley and surrounding peaks.

Aside from the first and last days, which were given to introductions at one end and closing at the other, each day had a theme related to one of the Matrimandir Gardens – Life, Power, Wealth, and Utility. These themes flowed through all the activities of the day. The retreat was structured so we had time for yoga, a cardio workout, pranayama, or meditation in the early morning, and then after breakfast a group concentration with a backdrop of hymns by Mita and recitations of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry by Tara, with her commanding and nurturing voice, carrying the essential vibrations of the words into the space around us.

Then we spent time in randomly assigned groups (reassigned each day) doing a creative activity that wove together the day’s theme with specific qualities of the Mother’s symbol and the special significances that the Mother gave to flowers. These activities helped us to get to know each other in a deep and spiritually intimate way, allowing us to spend time in silent contemplation and then share and create a piece of art that wove together our inner experiences.

After lunch there was time for hiking up one of the local peaks, resting, or a trip to Nainital town. Then in the later afternoon we worked in “vision groups.” The entire retreat was divided into five groups, and each were assigned one of Sri Aurobindo’s dreams from his 1947 message broadcast on All India Radio on the occasion of India’s Independence. The groups had five days to work together on strategies for collectively bringing these dreams forward and acting to support their fulfillment. On the final day of the retreat each group presented their work, and the presentations included dance, music, tableaux, and aspirations for future collaborations.

On the last day we traveled to Madhuban, the Ashram property in Ramgarh, a secluded and shockingly beautiful valley about 90 minutes northeast of Nainital. The Madhuban retreat center sits perched on a precipitous hillside with breathtaking views of the valley below and the winding river meandering through it. Being 1500 feet lower in elevation that Nainital, it’s warmer and sunnier, as the surrounding orchards attest. I was only there for one night, but I could have been happy to spend months in this idyllic environment, listening to the ancient chants rolling from the temple’s megaphone through the valley and up the hill to my room. A small room with Sri Aurobindo’s relics is walled in
Creating The International House in Auroville:
The USA's first steps towards a “pavilion” in the International Zone
by Jeanne Korstange with Bill Leon

PART I
CONCEPTION: In 1999 the All USA Meeting (AUM) was organized by Rod Hemsell and Savitri Bhavan in Colorado. One session at the meeting brought many participants together to discuss what we as USAians envisioned for a pavilion in the International Zone in Auroville. Those participating believed that we should begin with building a complex which would be a place in Auroville where students from the USA and other countries could be housed for work-study programs, researchers could reside while doing their data collection, USAians and others could offer cultural programs, and visitors who wanted to experience living in a ecologically sustainable guest house could be accommodated.

DEVELOPMENT: Bill Leon, AVI-USA Board Member and then a professor staff member at the University of Washington (UW), took the AUM inspiration to the UW Design and Build program. There he was able to attract a team of professionals and students to carry out an ecologically sustainable building project on the site then dedicated to the USA Pavilion in Auroville. In 2002 a group of 20 students from the UW took on the project which was led by the following professors of architecture: Sergio Palleroni, Steve Badanes, Jim Adamson and Chuck Henry, a Landscape Architecture Professor.

UW PROGRAM: The 2001-02 program, like previous ones, offered experiences in Mexico, Cuba, on Native American reservations of South Dakota and Montana, migrant housing communities in Eastern Washington and for the first time in Brazil and India. The curriculum that was used stressed a process for understanding the distinct culture, climate and building tradition of each project and integrating this knowledge with contemporary ideas of sustainability in the making of much needed community facilities. It promoted an idea of sustainability inclusive of both cultural and ecological concerns.

The courses were: The Design of Community Public Facilities, Cultural Theory, Sustainable Practices, Field Work in Community Projects and field trips to nearby sites, as well as opportunities to participate in the ongoing Auroville wasteland reclamation and reforestation work, organic farming, renewable energy, appropriate building technologies, education, health care and development of the bioregion.

A preparatory seminar at UW in the fall of 2001 was required and led by Prof. Vikram Prakash giving presentations on Indian politics, history, culture and the arts.

Realization: In 2001 UW began student study programs in Auroville. The established contacts with Auroville and Aurovilians who could assist in organizing a building program was possible in 2002.

Since the facility was envisioned as a place to host visiting groups, it was designed as a sort of eco-dorm. UW students and faculty in architecture and landscape architecture design substantially used building techniques to build the first structure and other facilities alongside local artisans hired for the work.

It includes walls made mostly of rammed earth, an inner roof plus a large aluminum parabolic roof that reflects excess heat and collects rain water, a large underground cistern for storing up to 20,000 gallons of water, a water tower (designed by Auroville architect Helmut) to store water with pressure to provide service to the building, solar panels to provide lighting and pumping of water between the two tanks, a tiny moat alongside local artisans hired for the work.

Glass, giving the feeling of floating in the wide spacious air, elevated and free.

The retreat’s structured activities provided an excellent container for people from different associations, backgrounds, and cultures to work together and get to know each other. Our shared connection to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother gave us a common ground to start from and work around, and our differences made things interesting and representative of the real diverse world. But beyond the structured activities, it was during the breakfasts, lunches, teas, and dinners, during the hikes and time spent wandering the grounds looking at flowers, during the early mornings and late evenings that friendships were forged. People who may not have otherwise met, much less become friends, talked about their lives, their aspirations, the loves and fears. We talked and breathed and ate and laughed together.

There was a general sense at the end of the retreat that something was just beginning. The What's App group has been active in the weeks since, with quotes and photos, audio recordings, memories, and appreciation being shared around the globe. A follow-up meeting with leaders from the various organizations represented at Sourcing Our Oneness has been scheduled for early January in Auroville. What comes next remains to be seen, but what’s sure is that many new individual relationships now connect and interweave Auroville, the Ashrams, the Sri Aurobindo Society, and various other groups. These relationships, tied as they are to different approaches to yoga and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s legacy, contain the promise of an integrated future, where unity and diversity flow back and forth and nurture our collective evolution. And they carry the current of Love that flows from the heart of the Supreme into the varied and diverse Universe, and back from our hearts to the Heart of God. May this effort continue to expand and progress, and may we all be swept up into its current.

Attending a Morning Session

Bill Leon
Part II

International House BLOOMING

By B. Garima, Manu, and Nandini (The International House Caretaking Team)

International House, a project of the U.S. Pavillion Group, is flourishing (all rooms are full at the moment) but needs to take some steps for a more sustainable future.

International House was born as a solution. The unique building, described above by Bill Leon, one of its originators, has retained its purpose of providing urgent housing for students, volunteers and visitors in the eco-spirit built into the site by the University of Washington architecture students.

The second dormitory, provided with any material including video tape cassettes as bricks or beer bottles for walls. Like the second dormitory, the Trash Mahal uses the roofing sheets made from recycled tetrapaks as part of a vault roof and adds bottles for skylights.

As Auroville wakes up to its goal of zero waste, the effort to reduce the current land-fill practice to zero meant “mining” the waste stream for the wealth of all that can be used for construction. The research shows that practically everything can be used when imagination and appropriate technology combine.

Another caretaker house is set to begin construction very soon for Manu, Garima and their 2 children, Aiyana and Uday. These caretaker houses are donated by the users as all income from the IH just covers upkeep and upgrades.

We have recently remodeled the kitchen of IH, provided roofs on 2 storage areas around the toilets, upgraded the solar power with new batteries and solar panels, overhauled lighting in the old dormitory and added essential furniture to the new dorm.

This has strained the budget and we now look for ways to make a reception area, landscape the campus, and have a functioning garden for food and fruit. This is not possible within our current budget. We are considering building two or three small cottages to provide higher-end non-dormitory style accommodation to supplement the budget because of the seasonal shortages of availability of guest accommodations. Other suggestions and solutions would be most welcome.

International House can be reached by taking a dirt road just north of the Visitor's Center that also leads to the Tibetan pavilion.

Cousin Findhorn

by Julian Lines

What an itinerary! From the muggy heat of Pondicherry to the thin air of Colorado to Northern Scotland's Moray Firth all within a month was pushing it. But what a privilege to see the wonderful work of the Life Education Centre in Auroville, to vote in a second generation Aurovilian as the new President of AVI-USA and to be with my dear cousin Marianna Lines, an expert on Pictish stones and a Findhorn Fellow.

I first heard of Findhorn from a talk David Spangler gave in 1974 at St. John the Divine in Manhattan in a conference called “Spiritual Communities for a Planetary Culture”. Organized by William Irwin Thompson, he invited Dr. V.M. Reddy to speak about Auroville. Zen Center, San Francisco and Arcosanti were also featured with a grand exposition about the recently formed Lindisfarne, a seed community in Long Island where scholars, poets, mystics and musicians would gather.

I ended up living two years in the Manhattan branch of Lindisfarne meeting a number of remarkable people including Gregory Bateson, who had Mother’s Darshan and asked after Anne Nunnally. During those early years I got to meet the Findhorn founders, Peter and Eileen Caddy, and spent more time with Findhorn seer and scribe, David Spangler, who became close to Thompson.

Findhorn always seemed a sister or cousin of Auroville, close and distant both. The community was founded on November 17th, 1962 and it intrigued me that the founder of Auroville would pass on that date 11 years later. Many people traveled between the two communities and continue to this day. There was even an early formal exchange called the Hexiad Project linking Findhorn, Auroville and Arcosanti. So it was with deep delight that when I finally visited Findhorn I discovered that Marianna's close friend and founder of Findhorn Flower Essences, Marion Leigh, was part of that original group and had worked on the book "Linking the Future" and
had strong memories of Bhavana Dee DeCew, who had been so supportive of Village Action and the Life Education Center and so many programs aimed at co-evolution with the villages surrounding Auroville.

Roger Doudna, who had visited Lindisfarne, worked at the NY Open Center with Ralph White and dropped in on our Auroville International meeting in Cape Town, was kind enough to give Wendy and me an in-depth tour including a number of new housing complexes coming up. Solar panels, wind turbines and a wood fired boiler all contribute to the green energy portfolio which has been recently featured on a CNN television segment about the “Findhorn Ecovillage”.

Group Meditation and morning “Taizé” singing in a beautiful stone yurt indicated the pulse of Findhorn’s spirituality is alive. It seems the culture of the community has incorporated so much of the early philosophy that “attunement” seems second nature now. And some of the next generation and even third generation are participating and living there bringing both artistic and entrepreneurial diversity.

Like Auroville, there is a lot of outside money coming in and the housing is often very expensive. There is a gardening team but the plant Devas and roses blooming in winter seem a distant echo. We did not get much input on Cluny Hill, the educational wing which runs Esalen/Omega kinds of programs providing both outreach and funding but our time was short. But there are ongoing collaborations between Findhorn and Auroville and I hope they multiply. More information is at www.findhorn.org.

REFLECTIONS

A Personal Shamanic Path

Integrating Past, Present and Future, While Empowering Others to Heal

by Raina Imig

Raina, a former AVI-USA board member, who I met in Auroville in 1978, wrote some of her story as part of a master’s degree in Shamanic Healing. Always impressed by her dedication to “unending education,” I asked her to send it to me, and felt its inspiration needed to be shared with our CONNECT Community. As it is too extensive for a newsletter, I have taken the liberty to edit her document to give you just a taste of her unique adventure. (B Sullivan, Auroville)

The great gift of shamanic healing came into my life six years ago. In 2010, as I was navigating a major life transition, I heard the call repeatedly and insistently. When I say I heard the call, I mean literally and otherwise. Mystical experiences have been in my life as long as I can remember. Thanks to my finally answering this particular call, I was led to LightSong, based in Oregon and a Soul Retrieval,* followed by training as a shamanic practitioner that has transformed my life.

What draws me to the shamanic path is the beauty and wholeness of this universal world view. Always connected to the natural world, with a love of the patterns of trees, shells, galaxies, which I expressed from early childhood, in mandalas and other art, the divine signature pattern of the golden spiral found everywhere in Nature.

I believe that shamanism is human-kind’s first faith path. Back when we were still connected to Nature and understood ourselves as part of Her, we all, no matter where we lived in the world, communed with the elements, related to the sun, moon and stars, honored our ancestors, and collaborated with Guides from among the animal and other kingdoms. Still to this day all over India, where I was born on Dussehra day, also in parts of the US, where I have lived for 33 years, and in fact, anywhere that the indigenous traditions are still alive, there are communities and individuals who practice, by different names and in various styles, this heart-based pre-religious ancient path. The signs of a shamanic foundation to the culture are visible and palpable everywhere in India, and being immersed in India’s spiritual legacy is a major influence in who I am.

The beauty, for me, of shamanism is that it gives us tools to be present in our bodies and in our life in this world while exploring other worlds in ways that are healthful for ourselves and healing for others. I love its simplicity and feeling of intrinsic rightness.

In the ’70s, when I was about 20, my regular mystical experiences culminated in a major spiritual experience, a life changing vision that embodied revelations about the nature of reality and the Divine. By that time, as I had always been fascinated to find out why things are the way they are and what was the deeper meaning of human existence, I had already read all the significant Western literature available on that subject, literature that was easily available in the libraries of Calcutta where I was attending college. None of that reading was very enlightening to me, leaving me looking for deeper truths.

During my late teens, I started to read the writings of my teachers, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and so immediately after graduating from college in 1978 I moved to Auroville, my spiritual hometown in India. In Auroville I received experiential training in alternative health, childbirth, parenting, eating, ecology, and education. Living in residential community with hundreds of seekers from all over the world, I made lifelong friendships.

Exploring the vast sacred literature of India, I also began devouring the new Western books about shamanic and other healing that were circulating among community members.

Marrying, becoming a parent and moving to the West pre-occupied me for a time. Since settling here in USA, in the intervening 30-plus years, I studied all the emerging new age, shamanic and other literature about healing and learned...
from several other wisdom traditions, and becoming a Reiki Master in 2000.

Forward to 2010: I received a profound healing that came from soul retrieval. In the 6 years that followed, grateful for a shamanic community, with years full of ceremony and celebration, my life came full circle. Combining my prior knowledge and experience, with new found training, I feel empowered when I apply the practical ways of 21st century core shamanism with its unconditional love, to improve my life and the lives of others.

Included in my life experience are several features that combine what may seem opposites. For example, I was born in India, but not to a Hindu family, although Hindus comprise about 80% of Indians. My parent-age is (Bene Israeli) Jewish on my father's side and Parsee (Zoroastrian) on my mother's side, a heritage so rare we have heard of only 2 other families in our generation in India. Unlike most Indian families, most of my family was atheist. In post colonial India, when witnessing sectarian violence, they rightly rejected the hierarchical structure of religions with their narrow mindedness, dogma, 'empty rituals' and judgment, they also gave up on God. Much to their dismay, I was born loving the Divine, a mystical child who loved to draw, sing and write poetry.

On the other hand, many gifts come from my family of origin, especially from the love of my role models, my beloved parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Our interfaith and intercultural perspective, with the gift of education and national and international travel from an early age, opened my eyes to the world. Before I was 7, I spoke 5 languages. By the time I was 11, I had lived and attended school in India, Germany and England. Among my relatives who lived all over India and the world, there were creative souls—poets, singers and theater people. I am grateful to my ancestors and to the unique family in which I grew up. I thank the Goddess for the gift of laughter.

In my shamanic practice, it is in my nature to integrate the best of all the knowledge and experience I have from before. I am not absolutely certain how to describe how I do that, as it is pretty seamless, or at least I cannot see the seams. There is no particular technique nor procedure to describe. It is not necessarily what I do, but who I am, that makes my practice different. I know who I am, and it is not any one thing, but a blending of several layers, which gives my perspective on life and on people a depth and richness that I enjoy and value.

My life challenges and personal vulnerabilities are also part of this picture and are blessings of their own kind, providing me with compassion born of experience.

Those who come to me for sessions, I have noticed, appreciate this and benefit too. To empower others on their own individual path to healing and manifestation is my goal. I hear daily from my clients of the constant improvements in their lives. Blessed in this way, I look forward with wonder to an amazing future, and to the ripple effects of healing a world for ourselves and our descendants.

My Guide and Teacher, The Divine Mother, is the One who guides my life and my shamanic practice. In the process of becoming a shamanic practitioner, I integrate my past with my present in order to create a new future for myself, for my work and for the world. Seeing no reason to give up the rich cultural understanding that comes with being from several cultures at once, and being comfortable in still others, I feel this background and inclination aligns me with most of the world, my home, and connects me in kinship with humanity.

*Soul Retrieval is the signature procedure of shamanic healing. We are all made up of energy. The human condition causes us to lose some of our essence via the processes of daily life, as well as a consequence of trauma.

In traditional societies where shamanic healing was/is practiced, the healer would regularly restore this essence, maintaining balance and optimum health physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

In our modern world, this loss of essence causes us to be susceptible to intrusions or attachments of a frequency lower than our own. This causes illness, imbalance, alienation, addiction, and so on.

Soul Retrieval consists of removing those energies that do not serve our highest wellbeing, followed by retrieving our lost soul essence. This two part procedure restores us to wholeness.

Soul Retrieval has a history in all cultures going back about 40,000 years.

Appreciative Inquiry Research in Auroville
by Jane V. Wheeler, Ph.D.

I learned about Auroville from a friend who invited me to attend an AUM session in 2015 where I met Jeannine and Gordon Korstange. I spoke with them about my work as a professor in the Management Department of Bowling Green State University where I have been researching “Starting with the Self” in relation to Organizational Development practices and using several activities in my classroom that help students ‘get present’ in order to learn more effectively.

My conversations with Jeanne and Gordon Korstange inspired me to create a study that would more deeply explore the self-exploration practices of people in Auroville, a community that is based on the idea of ‘Starting with the Self’ and self-exploration. As an ‘outsider’ considering a research project in such a geographically faraway place and a place whose culture is so different from the American culture I hail from, I was quite overwhelmed and excited by the task. In creating the methodology for my study, I needed to know (1) how to access my target population (Aurovilians); (2) where to conduct the study, and (3) how to appropriately approach people there.

Having the support of Jeanne and Gordon was essential to me; without their early and on-going support, my dream of travelling to Auroville never would have happened. When I first arrived, I was graciously welcomed by Dhanalakshmi and her daughter, Archana, and got my first experience of Auroville hospitality.

Next, I want to thank Harini, the Executive Director of the Social Research Centre, who wrote a letter of support to my university; Chali, the Executive Director of
REFLECTIONS

the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER), who helped me find my research site and put the support of SAIER behind my work; to Jaya, the Executive, Unity Pavilion, who continues to provide on-going support and friendship; and I want to thank the many Aurovillians who shared their energy, vitality, and friendship on a moment’s notice. Finally, my rickshaw driver, Palani, and the hotel cook, Shanti, each gave me a glimpse into the local life. They invited me to their homes, introduced me to their families, and shared their food. Everyone was so gracious, open, and welcoming and I remain moved by their generosity.

It was recommended by Chali that I go to the Pour Tous Distribution Center (PTDC) in order to find people for my study, as Aurovillians go there to get food and other items, and if asked, they might be willing to complete my questionnaire. Once I arrived at Auroville in December, 2015 and after I got myself settled, I spent 2-3 hours at the PTDC every day. At first I was just observing and chatting with people there, and within a few weeks I began to collect my data. I created my questionnaire and collected the data using the Appreciative Inquiry model (see article on Appreciative Inquiry). By the end of my first month I had enough questionnaires to complete my study. I found that people were quite open to helping me, and they took time and were thoughtful about their responses.

Here is a summary of conclusions: Results of my study indicate that daily self-exploration practices have allowed Aurovillians to not only aspire to but actually become more elevated, conscious, giving, thoughtful, ethical, and loving in their daily lives. I believe that these practices can be extrapolated to the classroom, and that self-exploration and ‘starting with the self’ are the future path for the Organizational Development field, allowing for more robust, meaningful, and ethical business behaviors and practices.

Use of the Appreciative Inquiry Model in Auroville

Much of my work as a Professor of Management/Organizational Development has been the study and practice of “Starting with the Self”. In 2015-16 I completed a qualitative research study in Auroville that was designed to understand the self-exploration practices or sadhanas of Aurovillians. The questionnaire design and format were based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a research model that focuses on strengths and possibilities as opposed to deficits and problems. Previously used in large organizations, AI has also been used on a smaller and more individual level in recent years.

Here is an example that helped me really understand the concepts of AI (Cooperrider, D., and Whitney, D. Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change, 2005). A large organization had identified an on-going, worsening problem with sexual harassment in their workplace. They spent a lot of time and money discussing the problem, writing and instituting new policies, and looking at this problem from every angle, only to find that the problem got worse. They then hired a consultant who used AI with them, meaning that he did not ask them more about the problem, he asked them what positive atmosphere they wanted to see for their organization. Once this basic perceptual shift was made, managers and staff were able to identify behaviors they could engage in towards that end, and the organizational culture was able to make a change to become what they wanted it to be. Within six months, the “problem” was gone and workers were able to create the atmosphere they truly desired.

I chose the AI model for my research in

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Auroville because I have used it before, with good success. However, as I worked with my data within the AI model, it became quite evident to me that the “experiment” of Auroville is based on the tenets of AI. Or perhaps more clearly, the AI model is based on the tenets of Auroville which is based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Perhaps those who created the AI model were influenced in some way by Auroville and its teachings.

Table 1 compares the 4 tenets of AI as outlined by Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003) with the data I collected for this project.

It seems that the excitement and momentum created by AI rests in its focus on a person or organization’s dreams and vision, not on the problems that may hinder that dream. The Mother had a vision that then became the intentional, experimental community of Auroville. The use of these tenets has allowed Auroville to become the wonderful place that it is. Given what the model has done in Auroville, it appears that it can offer organizations worldwide the opportunity to push past old paradigms and move towards a place of elevated consciousness and meaningful achievement.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONS
1. What do you find intriguing/exciting about the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in your world today?
2. What attracted you to Auroville?
3. How has living in Auroville shaped your personal internal work?
4. Describe your personal Sadhana (personal practice of self-exploration);
5. From this Sadhana, describe a peak experience of: a) collaboration you have had with other(s) while living in Auroville; b) trust you have had with other(s) while living in Auroville; c) compassion you have had with other(s) while living in Auroville; d) unity you have had with other(s) while living in Auroville.
6. If you could transform yourself in any way you wished, what 3 things would you do to develop yourself internally?

The second concerned decision making which is a problem because of decisions having to be made by telephone, sometimes with only a segment of the board present. The board has chosen to make decisions through both formal and informal consensus, depending on the issue to be decided. At least 2/3 of the board members must be present for a decision to be made.

Bryan Walton announced that he was leaving the presidency after several years of stellar service. The board then selected Bina Thillairajah by happy acclaim to be the new president (who shortly after the meeting went to Auroville for a visit). The other officers, Jeanne Korstange (vice-president), Bill Leon (secretary) and Mary Alexander (treasurer) were re-elected to one year terms.

The board reluctantly accepted the resignation of Chetana Deorah with the hope that she would return at a later date.

We then moved on to the area of board initiatives. Committees of three members each were formed for the following: (1) board nominating—to find and recruit new members; (2) membership—to assess whether and how AVI-USA can build a membership base of people with skills and interests that can help us; (3) communications—including Evolve, our online newsletter and Connect, as well as other forms of out reach; (4) finance—to support the treasurer and the infrastructure of receiving and sending money to Auroville; (5) fundraising—to work with donors on ways to help Auroville and AVI; and (6) Auroville’s 50th anniversary—to initiate a project which will collect the stories of people’s experiences in Auroville in the manner of Story Corps as heard on NPR.

The meeting concluded on a highly positive note, with all agreeing that an annual face-to-face meeting is necessary to our functioning. We will meet again in September 2017 in Colorado (at a somewhat lower altitude!)
Sadhana Forest

A major highlight for Sadhana Forest India in 2016 has been the building of a Goshala (Cow Sanctuary). This project will educate the project’s volunteers and visitors about compassion towards animals and veganism. On September 15th 2016 the Goshala of Sadhana Forest in Auroville welcomed its first three inhabitants. Their names are Jenni, Vishnu and Hari. Jenni is an elderly cow from Annapurna farm in Auroville. Hari and Vishnu are two calves that were donated to Sadhana Forest by the Blue Cross of India. We are all looking forward to spending more time with our new friends and helping them to enjoy their time in Sadhana Forest. They have a large area to graze on. They are also supplied with additional special foods on a regular basis and have a team of volunteers assigned to take care of their well-being by giving them a lot of love and attention and brushing and washing them daily.

Another important step for Sadhana Forest Auroville in 2016 has been Aviram’s appointment to the Global Restoration Council. Initiated and co-chaired by former prime minister of Sweden, Dr. Göran Persson, the council, supported by the World Resources Institute, aims to propel and sustain a global movement for land restoration. Aviram is honored to be the first council member from India.

Sadhana Forest’s land restoration model in Haiti and Kenya addresses the challenge of private land owned by 133 million malnourished people globally, who do not grow food on it due to lack of water and agricultural knowledge. We train local people across India, Haiti and Kenya on the use of innovative, low cost, water-saving irrigation techniques and provide them with free seedlings to plant drought-resistant, indigenous, food-bearing trees around their homes. The resulting indigenous food forests are well protected by their owners from cutting and animal grazing. Through establishing long-term food self-sufficiency, these food forests reduce the risk of famine caused by natural hazards such as droughts and floods. Sadhana Forest also plants various oxalogenic tree species, which permanently sequester atmospheric carbon in the soil as calcium carbonate (Limestone).

Sadhana Forest Haiti has had an astonishing impact on the local population in Haiti, educating the people about the benefits of food forests through numerous presentations, fairs and festivals. The local population has been offered a viable alternative to the current external sources.

Sadhana Forest is in soul and spirit with all of the victims of the devastating hurricane Matthew. The Sadhana Forest Haiti team feels very grateful and fortunate for not suffering any damage on both people’s safety and the infrastructure on campus. Flowers and trees are blossoming due to the very heavy rains in the south east of Haiti.

As part of Sadhana Forest’s journey to incorporating greater compassion into the daily life at all of the 3 Sadhana Forests (India, Haiti and Kenya) the Sadhana Forest Kenya team is very happy to announce the opening of our Goshala. On Friday July 29th we welcomed the first two cows Suki and Toiye. Suki is a local common name for a cow that has been purchased by the Samburu people from the neighbouring tribe, the Pokot. The cows raised by Pokot are a bit smaller and have blotches. Toiye is a common name for a cow given as dowry among the Samburu tribe. The team of Sadhana Forest Kenya is delighted to begin this journey towards a more kind and compassionate world together with Suki and Toiye.

In September our team in Kenya was joined by a group of Korean students. They helped us plant trees with the local Samburu people and at the same time went through an eye-opening experience which they would definitely never forget.
UPDATES

News From Darkali

*Darkali is a small community just a short distance from one of the main roads in Auroville and the Matrimandir. It abuts an area of the International Zone that has been set aside for The pavilion of the Americas. Darkali residents have taken up the work of overseeing this area as well as their own forest.*

DARKALI DAM

By Agnes

First of all a great many thanks to you all for making this dam a reality. We are very grateful for the financial support but also deeply touched by the growing bond of friendship, an invisible thread between Darkali Auroville and the AVI-USA family which is helping us to get beyond the small daily problems into the larger spiritual reality of Auroville, that Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.

As for the dam, he is eagerly waiting for the delayed monsoon. He is young and impatient to prove himself and maybe brag a little about his ability to harvest thousands of liters of water. We, on the other hand, like parents seeing their child on his own for the first time, are a little nervous at the thought of him facing his first monsoon in his beautiful yet unfinished state. But with a little help via the Divine all will be well.

On a more practical note. It has taken 174 Bobcat hours and 92 tractor hours to build this dam so far. We have used granite pillars to control the erosion on the top of the dam. Our experience has taught us that it is preferable to let a new dam “experience” one monsoon to give it time to settle and expose its little flaws before finishing it. The last stage of the dam; building the spillway and paving the side with granite stones to prevent erosion and increase longevity, will be done in 2017.

*With gratitude from Darkali.*

DARKALI WILDLIFE

by Auronevi

Editors Note: A small grant from AVI-USA made it possible for Darkali to buy a night camera to capture the wildlife that lives in and frequents this refuge.

Finally in June the long awaited camera trap arrived, something that I have dreamed of using for a long time. It came from the USA, delivered without a fuss by one those online shopping companies that have mushroomed up over the years. I was astonished that even imported goods would arrive safely and on time.

Having observed Auroville wildlife since I started to crawl, I was more and more intrigued by the nighttime activity of our animal neighbors as I could see all kinds of tracks and marks left behind by them during a time when most of us are fast asleep. I was especially curious about the tracks I could not recognize. Now the time had come to solve those mysteries.

As I was waiting for the camera to arrive I saw some photos taken by a camera trap in Pitchandikulam. One of them was of a wildcat that we did not know existed here, and that got me more excited.

Since June this camera has been sitting at different locations in Darkali taking photos of anything moving within its range. Quite a few are empty shots as a bird might have flown past triggering the shutter but too slowly to catch it within its frame.

Other photos have been of unsuspecting staff going about their forest work not knowing they were being watched (nothing yet to be embarrassed about!), village dogs transiting, and last but not least a few great shots of our wildlife.

A good beginning and a promising future for the really rare ones that will appear one day.

Save the date:
AUM 2017 August 17th-20th
Sirius Community
near Amherst MA

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www.sadhanaforest.org
www.sacredgroves.in
www.collaboration.org
Whither Sacred Groves?

By The Sacred Groves Team

Where is Sacred Groves ecological co-housing project headed? What has been its impact as it approaches its 3 year anniversary in early 2017?

Just as we had started work on the first houses at Sacred Groves in January 2014, we hosted Sunita Narain, Director General of Centre for Science and Environment, a prominent think-tank in New Delhi steering environmental policy in India. We shared with her our method of recycling construction & demolition [C&D] wastes into fresh concrete which we call EarthCrete.

We learned that later she appointed one of our ex-volunteers, Avikal Somvanshi, to lead a national campaign to end the dumping of C&D wastes into wetlands. Recycling of C&D wastes is the way to stop the indiscriminate choking of our lakes, ponds and paddy fields around cities. The demise of wetlands also leads to the destruction of aquifers underground. Wetlands are the funnels that recharge aquifers. This campaign took 2 years to climax.

The Government of India took cognizance of the matter early this year. In March 2016, it issued an official notification on C&D Waste Recycling to all city governments in the country. The government directed all cities above 1 million population to set up C&D waste recycling plants within 6 months. All government contractors were ordered to buy recycled C&D wastes as raw materials at least 20% of all raw stock. This move alone would make a marked reduction in the destruction of wetlands in the country. An associated effect is that we would need to mine less mountain stone and river sand as these are completely substituted by filtered C&D wastes in EarthCrete.

Sacred Groves has associate researchers in 3 academic institutions: Indian Institute of Technology in Madras; Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bangalore and Biometta/National University of Singapore. The research team based in IIT Madras under the company EPMCR has conducted independent laboratory and field analysis of the materials EarthCrete and Cob. A few months back, they presented their findings to an All University Symposium in India where there were hundreds of papers presented by even doctoral and postdoctoral candidates. Of all the research presented, their paper on Cob and EarthCrete won the first prize, citation and trophy.

Thus it seems there has been some impact of Sacred Groves outside Auroville especially in greater India. But what on home ground? How is Sacred Groves being received in Auroville?

We have a list of people who are keen to move in at the earliest and also start investing in the next set of houses. We are engaging them in a participatory design exercise to arrive at the best possible site layout for the next 17 houses. This drawing would soon be sent to the Town Development Council for their approval.

The education program at Sacred Groves is booming. We recently reached the mark of 5000 participants in our short-term exposure programs and workshops. We have already trained more than 450 young people as part of a 6 month internship program. Over 150 volunteers have worked at Sacred Groves in addition to this. We have also built up a Core Team of 10 long-term volunteers, some of whom are Aurovilians, who are licensed architects, engineers or builders working with us for over a year. They are the engine of the project steering it in the right direction and troubleshooting issues as they arise.

Financial and physical support from our friends in the US has helped us continue building in spite of all odds. The worst situation we faced was when promised funding was prematurely withdrawn due to an opposition campaign led by influential builders and contractors. Regular monthly support from our friends channeled very promptly by AVI-USA to Auroville has helped us tide this over and stay focused on finishing the 3 prototype houses.

We have finished all of the walls and roofs of the superstructure and are at present plastering the walls. The scratch coat has been applied. The work on flooring is also continuing. A lime chakki powered by Auroville raised bulls constantly churns out fine lime plaster for the wall finishing. Bull-power over diesel and nuclear electricity!

Thank you once again for keeping us in your hearts!
Because Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole, all work done in Auroville is done for the whole Earth. Every project that we support is an investment in human unity, and sends ripples of possibility that echo throughout the world. We invite you to join us and invest in the City of Dawn by signing up as a monthly contributor.

The future Earth thanks you.

FY 2016 Donations to Auroville

* Misc includes unspecified donations, plus AV Today, Farewell Fund, Health Care (AIIH), Hospice, Dental Clinic, Eco Femme, Savitri Bhavan, and Tamarai.