

## **Auroville International Conference 2002**

### **Auroville Today: Spiritual and Material Aspects of Auroville and Auroville International**

Saturday July 20, 2002

Every summer morning, fog blankets the timbered hillsides of the Santa Cruz Mountains, and today was no exception. We awoke in our rustic wood cabins that dot the steep slopes of the Sequoia Seminar, a retreat sheltered under towering redwoods, those ancient, straight-as-an-arrow trees native to California's Pacific Coast. It was chilly outdoors as we climbed the steep trails to Las Alas lodge, on the crest of the highest ridge. The chill evaporated as we greeted old friends in the yoga over breakfast. An hour later, the fog burned off, revealing other ridges in the distance and a gorgeous day bathed in sun. The air was sweet and soft with the promise of the ocean only a few miles away.

Julian Lines greeted everyone, spoke of the program we were embarking on, then asked all to introduce themselves. I think I counted eight actual residents of Auroville, and a couple handfuls of "old" Aurovilians, a denomination which I trust has more to do with the fact that we no longer live there than with our age. Julian honored two people in the audience with a special introduction. Deborah Lawlor, who with her former husband Bob, was among the first residents on the land of Auroville, in Forecomers. "They grew the first Auroville fruit that was given to the Mother, they created the first cultural performance, and they built the first dam that was washed away," he said. June Maher, a frequent visitor to Auroville since its earliest days, a stalwart of AVI USA and the owner of a home in Santa Cruz that has long been a stopping point for traveling Aurovilians, was cited for her "years of care and love to Aurovilians and the city of tomorrow."

Guy showed a new video fresh from Auroville that is a well-built explanation of why Auroville needs to buy all the missing land plots of land. He gave a full report on the present needs and challenges facing land acquisition, which was followed by a lively discussion. The hour and a half dedicated to the subject ended with a group meditation-visualization of a secure Auroville, complete with all its land secure.

After lunch, Bhavana gave a presentation on her work with the Auroville Village Action Group and underlined the on-going difficulty of integrating Auroville and the villages, which she said represent "two completely different cultural backgrounds." After all, she pointed out, here is a mass of people who have not come to Auroville, but rather who have had Auroville brought to them, whether they wanted it or not. The jewel in her talk was a list of the qualities Tamilians bring to Auroville, among them: a willingness to learn, goodwill, openness to change and a spontaneous contact with the Divine.

Michael Bonke brought everyone up to date on progress at Matrimandir, a fascinating report that included the physics of light, the aesthetic rationale for reworking the air conditioning vents, a digression on the manufacturing of the discs and a discussion on the

present controversy over plans for the lake and gardens. It was refreshing to hear Michael encourage even contradiction and controversy as a way of finding solutions to disparate positions. When there isn't controversy, he pointed out, terrible mistakes have been made. If discord allows for the best solutions to evolve, then we should welcome it.

I returned down the steep trail to my cabin late in the afternoon, admiring the tall, stately redwoods rising out of the thick forest. I threw open the cabin door only to see a young deer scramble to its feet on the small wood terrace on the other side of the cabin, just three meters away. It seemed to stare at me, watching for suspicious movement inside the cabin. And I, immobile, stared at it. It was a sweet moment of meeting between species, a meeting that too often results in tragedy for one side and a hearty meal for the other. As I stared, I imagined that a supreme movement of goodwill and universal love might bridge the karmic gulf that lies between me, as man, and that wary deer, and that we might even be able to communicate. A metaphor, I thought, for Auroville itself, which is trying to bridge the karmic gulfs between cultures, humans... and even species.

- Roger Toll