

Auroville Today

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The Matrimandir Nursery and the Matrimandir Gardens

"Mother asked me to write you and tell you that She wants you to prepare to come and build the Gardens of the Matrimandir." From a letter from Udar to Narad (Richard Eggenberger). In this article, Narad reminisces about his life and the starting of the Matrimandir Nursery and Gardens.

I have always had a deep connection to flowers. My first conscious remembrance of dealing with flowers was when, 5 years old, I pulled off the hyacinths my mother had planted in the flowerbeds around our house and ran to her with the bouquet. Her face was a mixture of pain and happiness, seeing her child bring her flowers and knowing that her flowerbeds had been destroyed! My connection became deeper when, at about the age of eleven, my father became a partner with a landscaper. Throughout my teenage years and afterwards during the summers when I was in college I helped him in designing landscapes and maintaining gardens and estates, installing and renovating lawns, pruning trees, and running a plant nursery.

When I was 17, I was guided from within to study Raja Yoga with a Pundit in New York City. I followed him to California where I met Dr. Judith Tyberg. She had been named Jyotipriya by Sri Aurobindo when, as a young woman, she came to India to find the secret of the Veda. Jyotipriya, who founded the East-West Cultural Centre in Los Angeles in 1953, told me about The Mother and said that she would send Her my photo and a sample of my handwriting. Incredibly, within days Mother sent Her reply: "Tell him he may come and stay as long as he likes." I came in 1961 and was accepted in the Ashram, given Prosperity, joined in athletics and even formed a choir that sang to Mother on Christmas Eve.

I did not stay long in the Ashram as my vital was too restless. I returned to the U.S. in 1962. Before returning, Mother wrote to me: "Go on boldly, following your way with joy and confidence, taking great care of one thing only, never to forget the Divine." She also wrote: "Keep living in you the spirit of consecration and all will be alright." Back in the U.S., I worked at different jobs, married Anie Nunnally, and did whatever I could for the Ashram. Through all these years Mother sent me beautiful birthday cards and blessed my life continually.

An accident

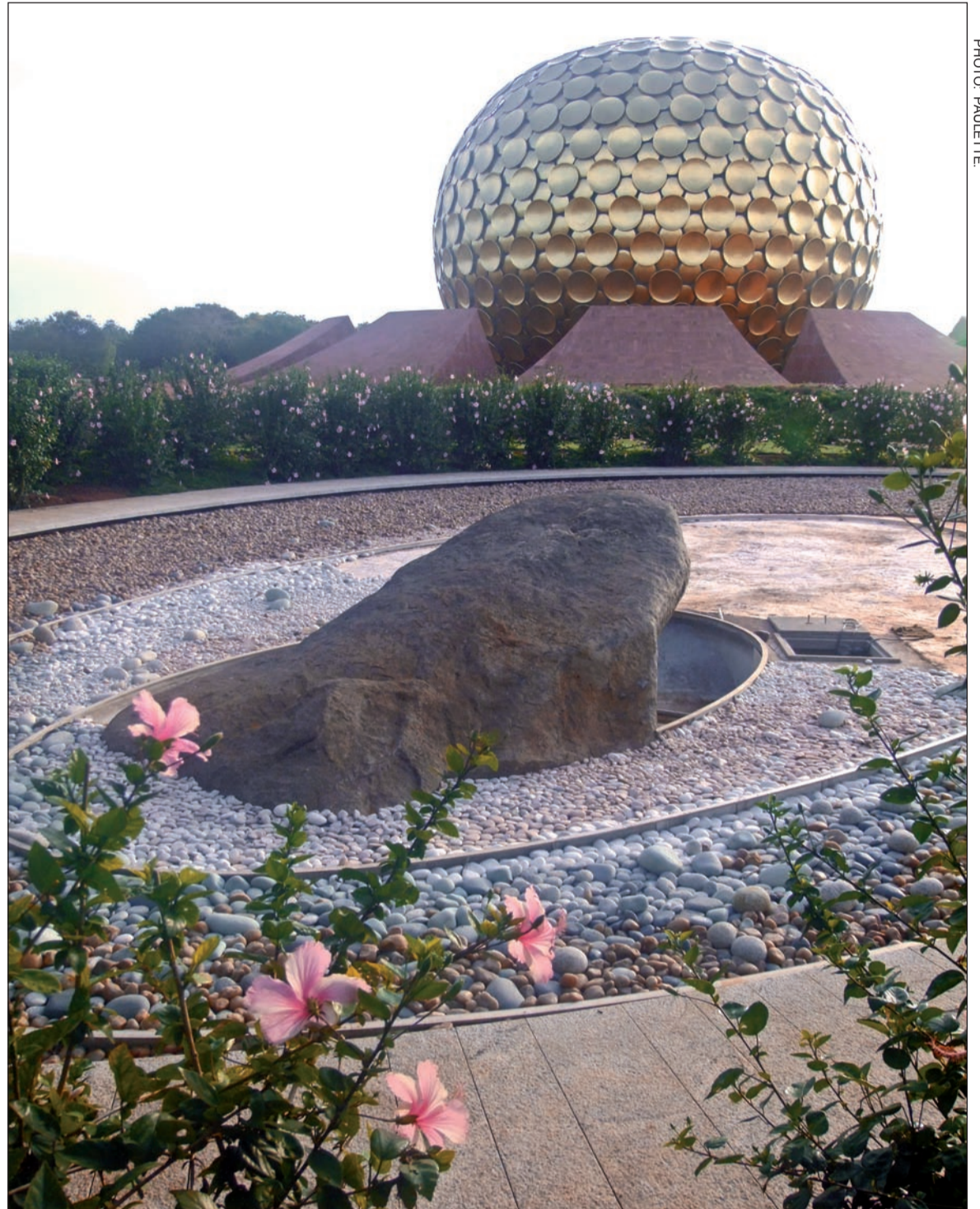
One winter during the mid 1960's, Anie and I were delivering organic bread to New York City from Connecticut. We were descending a steep hill in a blizzard and the roads were filled with ice. Two ladies had stalled their car perpendicular to traffic and were rambling around to find a flashlight. There was no way to stop or to miss them and we crashed head on into them. Anie's head went into the windshield and she required many

stitches. Mother was informed and said that she would have no scars. We recovered \$3,000.00 in damages and I wrote to Mother immediately saying that I wanted to send the money to Her. Mother replied: "Why don't you use the money to come for the inauguration of Auroville?" We purchased two tickets (exactly \$3,000.00) and came to the Ashram. We knelt at Mother's feet. When She first turned to Anie, She said: "This is not the first time we have met. You have been with me many times before, many, many times." Then Mother turned to me and said: "You don't want to come to Auroville in a few years? I feel you can do something there." I replied, "Yes, Mother, whatever is Your Will." Mother gave me permission to photograph the Inauguration, and the many rolls of slides I took are part of Auroville's collection.

We returned to the U.S. in March 1968. As I thought it would be long before Mother would call me to work for Auroville, I started work as a manager of a restaurant and became a partner in another. In this period I made a lot of money. Yet a day came when I began to hear a voice within saying, "Go to California and help Jyotipriya." I wrote to Mother but received no answer. After a month I wrote to Her again saying that the voice prompting me to go and help Jyotipriya had not stopped. Mother sent a telegram saying, "My answer to you was so positive that I thought I had written it!" I gave up my restaurant business and we left for California to assist Jyotipriya at the East-West Cultural Centre. To have some income I found employment in the finest garden centre in Beverley Hills, answering such questions from Hollywood stars as "Which end of a tuberous begonia is up?" The garden centre was a very profitable enterprise and the owner took a deep liking to me. As had no family left he called me into his office one day and said that he considered me his son and wanted to give me the business as he was getting too old to manage. Would I consider it? The business and the property were already worth millions of dollars. But Mother had other plans for me.

Come to build the Gardens

One day, around the spring of 1969, I received a letter from Udar. He wrote: "Mother asked me to write you and tell you that She wants you to prepare to come and build the Gardens of the Matrimandir." Joy and gratitude filled my heart! I replied to Udar, asking if Mother wanted me to attend formal horticultural classes in college or engage in practical work before coming to Auroville. Mother replied that the best would be a combination of both. I quit my job at the garden centre, found a job with a large landscape design firm and took courses at the University of California, Los Angeles, in plant combination theory, toured some of the most beautifully landscaped homes in this wealthy area of California with well-



Work in the Garden of Existence is almost completed. A large rock emerges out of the earth, with a spring of water underneath. Its flowers express various aspects of 'Existence'.

known architects, and studied sub-tropical plant life, for until now all my experience had been with temperate climate species. How subtly Mother works! Moving to California introduced me to a wide range of plants closer to the climate of Auroville. I never would have been exposed to these species had we remained in New York.

Anie came first and we were given a place at Promesse. After settling all our affairs I came in December 1969 and we met Mother again. I believe it was on Anie's birthday, December 18. It was at this time that Mother spoke these words about the gardens. She said, "It must be a thing of great beauty, of such beauty that when men enter they will say, 'Ah, this is it' and they will experience physically and concretely, the significance of each garden. In the Garden of Youth they will know youth. In the Garden of Bliss they will know bliss, and so on. One must know how to move from consciousness to consciousness." As she said the last sentence Mother moved her hand in an ascending

spiral. Anie remembered one additional sentence of Mother. "It (the gardens) must manifest something of that which we are trying to bring down." Mother also said to me: "You will make some sketches and then show them to me and we will see together." At another time Mother said to me: "I would like you to begin with the Garden of Unity." I was thirty-one years old. The Matrimandir construction had not yet begun.

The founding of the Nursery

Thus began a period of twelve years in Auroville in which I was guided to prepare a nursery to introduce, acclimatize and study hundreds of species of ornamental shrubs, trees, vines, and ground covers, to determine if they were of sufficient beauty to be introduced into the Matrimandir Gardens. The first task was to find an appropriate site for a nursery, as close as possible to the area that would be the Matrimandir, in the place called 'Peace'.

I found the best possible location, one that was protected in the west by a

canyon, on the south by a lower road and on the north by a wadi, although the whole area would require fencing. At the same time Amrit went separately and chose the same location. Mother gave Her blessings and we began. There were a number of mango trees that provided shade for delicate seedlings and helped to break the wind. You cannot know how difficult it was in those days when a month's work under the most trying conditions could be wiped out in an hour by a herd of goats or cattle. The goatherds purposely sent their animals in to graze. Around this time Mother also gave me the incomparable blessing to be the first to read *Savitri* in Auroville. I read each week for more than ten years.

Naming the flowers

From 1970-1972, for a brief period, I sent flowers to The Mother which She would name according to their spiritual significance. She named more than 60 flowers from the Matrimandir Nursery.

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To our readers

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