be through memories, linking moments to past and future through visions, dreams, sounds and other experiences. Today we are gathered together to be in those moments of togetherness with the Mother through living memories in the sound of words, in the meaning, more than words. A Sufi saint, Rabiya Basri prayed to the Lord:

If I worship thee for fear of hell, burn me in hell.
If I worship thee for hope of Paradise, kick me from Paradise.
But if I worship Thee for Thy own sake only,
Kick me not from Thy everlasting Beauty.

Being with the Mother, remembering the Mother...

Growing up... with the Mother

Aster Patel

It is a very precious moment in Auroville, that brings us together... to be in the Mother's Presence. Knowing the Mother during the early years of Auroville was a rare privilege. But, for me... I don't quite know where to begin! One could share something of the years of growing up with Her in the Ashram—and later participating in Auroville.

In a sense, I was practically born in the Ashram! I started to come here with my parents as a little child of six or seven. That's a time in the life of the Ashram which I think is not known to a lot of people here. For me nothing has been more precious than those early years! So if you would permit me, I will try not to recount memories—but, if at all possible, to share the 'atmosphere' of those years of growing up. And, then, to share how I came to know about Auroville through a work I was given.

It began when the Mother asked my mother to come here with the children, as simple as that—and be here by a certain date. That was in the early forties. There were then no children in the Ashram! One or two had just started to come. I will try not to see that time as an adult seeing it retrospectively. I will say simply, how a young person lived in that atmosphere... in the hope that something gets shared. As we came, the Mother received us like a mother takes up Her own children... in every way.

She gave us all Her time. She saw us several times a day. She talked to us about how to grow up—but gave us a great deal more in 'silence'. That's another story about which one can hardly say anything. We used to ask: How should one do
Darshan

Growing up... with The Mother

This? How should one do that? It was amazing—the way She spoke about things the children needed to know and the things they were interested in. She was not talking to grownups. She would tell us what to read, what games to play and how to play them. She organized classes first, as there was no school—since there were too few children to have a school. And She wanted to know what we were reading and why we were reading that.

Two things She kept saying, all the time, even when we were eight or nine years old. Every two months, She would remind us, “Be conscious.” She said, “Whatever comes up in you, it doesn’t matter whether it is good, bad or indifferent, just be aware of what has come. Why has it come? What is this movement—Be conscious.” And the second thing She said at the same time was, “Find your Psychic being.” Every few weeks, She would say that and She would work on us—that’s another dimension of life altogether.

But one can say that there was nothing that She did not deal with: where we lived, how we lived, what we studied, how things were. And as we children grew up, the way She related to us kept on changing too—depending on our problems, interests, the directions our lives were taking and what we needed to learn. There was nothing too ‘worldly’ for Her not to give an answer to! Above all, She tried to give us a love of beauty and of freedom, born of a psychic feeling.

There were about three hundred people in the Ashram at the time—and there was no school and practically no departments. Three hundred amazing group of people! There were great beings among those three hundred people around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. At that age, I didn’t know in what sense they were great. One only felt the ‘presence’ of great beings around the central place; in fact one spent one’s time in what is now the courtyard around the Samadhi. One practically lived there and hardly in the house the Mother had given us! And there was a powerful atmosphere of the Ashram... with all those great beings. Without knowing who they were, what their achievements were—one knew that they were there for a great cause, something much greater than themselves. They were totally given to that. And they gave of themselves to us as children with so much love, so much time—it was truly unbelievable.

The ‘presence’ of the Divine on Earth—the twin presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was there! And the Mother was moving around and talking to us and looking at the little problems of a growing child—all kinds of things that one went through! The life of the time and the way it filled in with greater things as one grew up were like one continuity. There was no gap. There was no this, that and the other. It was a ‘whole’ that was wrapped up in love, joy—an incredible kind of joy—beauty and strength, tremendous strength like something absolute. It was a great ‘totality.’

And the Mother was aware of each detail of our life; each detail of a child’s growing up. She watched over it, looked after it, corrected what was wrong, told one what was right, scolded, loved, was firm, gave one blows when needed and asked us: “Are you ready for a blow? I will give you one today.” She kept telling you what you have to do in life. What is the line of growth and destiny of each child? She would shape a child as a potter worked with clay... and from within outwards. She would tell you clearly in so many words, over the years, and write to you about it. The external was not unnecessary or to be neglected. That’s what I registered always. Not outer for the sake of the ‘outer’ but from within-out for everything.

One must also share the four Darshan days when one stood before Sri Aurobindo. We don’t always speak about Him and yet Mother was always with Sri Aurobindo! These are again the impressions of the child. Days before the Darshan, the compact density of the Ashram courtyard would somehow spill over into all the neighbouring streets. We lived in a house very close to the Ashram at the time—and one felt that the atmosphere was ‘charged’ as one walked down the streets. The atmosphere would swell up like an orchestra with the approaching Darshan day, when one would stand in a line to go up to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. As one stood in front of Them—Him, particularly—it was His vast, impersonal look that we all know, which we experienced. His gaze did not focus in recognition of anybody, as people went past. He was silent, majestic and absolute. We had the feeling of looking into His eyes and going into some
Darshan

marked by what followed. She said, “As soon as you have finished your studies, you will know about it, I will let you know. I will let you know when you are still in Paris.” Then I got a letter from Her saying that the United Nations was observing its 25th anniversary by having a World Youth Assembly. I was at that time in the category of university youth. Mother wanted me to attend that and represent Auroville and Ashram. I was informed that Janet, who is here, would be present with a lot of material from Auroville. There were official delegations from the countries and one couldn’t participate as individuals. It was an interesting situation but it was somehow worked out. That was Her first move of linking me with Auroville. As soon as I came back, She said, “Well, that’s your work. That’s your indication.” And then, that was the time when She gave one of Her almost last interviews in early ’70s. And She spoke at length of what the work should be, how one should do it, etc. There was one sentence She had used in that long interview which I think is of significance to all of us here. It is about the work of India—and Auroville being here—which is significant. She said, “India represents the Life Divine. And it is that which has to be shown in life, in action and in the manner of being,” adding, “India is open to the New Forces that wish to manifest.” This was shortly before She left the body.

With this, I would like to thank the organisers for giving one an occasion to re-live something of one’s deepest experience.

In Matter shall be lit the spirit’s glow...