



GreenFriends North America NEWSLETTER

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GreenFriends
strives to
communicate the
importance of treating
Nature with respect
and gratitude.

We invite each of you Green Friends to share your ideas and experiences with your own gardening efforts as well as experiences with animals.

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AMMA'S TEACHINGS ON MAN AND NATURE



AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOKLET, "MAN AND NATURE," COMPRISED OF AMMA'S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NATURE

Question: *Are human beings becoming a threat to the very existence of life on earth?*

AMMA: When Nature graciously protects and serves human beings, it is, without question, their responsibility to return that protection and service to Nature. Modern science says that trees and plants can respond in an imperceptible way to the thoughts and actions of human beings. Science has discovered that plants tremble with fear when we go near them with the intention of plucking their leaves. But ages ago, the saints and sages of India, having understood this great truth, lived a life of complete harmlessness.

There is a story in the Hindu scriptures, called Sakunthalam, which demonstrates this point. Once a sage found an abandoned child in a forest. He brought the child to his hermitage and raised her there as his own. When she grew up, the sage entrusted her with the job of looking after the plants and domestic animals of the hermitage. She loved plants and animals as much as her own life. One day when the sage was away, the king who ruled that country saw this beautiful girl while riding through the forest during a hunting expedition. He fell in love with her and desired to marry her. On his return, the sage came to know about it and gladly consented to the king's wish. After the marriage ceremony, the girl was about to leave the hermitage for the king's palace. At that time, the jasmine plant which she had always loved and carefully tended, bent down and coiled softly around her ankles. The animals shed tears when she left. This illustrates how plants, trees and all of Nature will return our love if we really care about them.

*Mere intellectual understanding is not enough.
People should be taught to function from their hearts.*

Question: *Is it necessary to give more importance to human needs than to Nature?*

AMMA: Nature gives all her wealth to human beings. Just as Nature is dedicated to helping us, we too should be dedicated to helping Nature. Only then can the harmony between Nature and human beings be preserved. To pluck ten leaves, when only five leaves are sufficient, is a sin. Suppose two potatoes are enough to cook a dish. If you take a third potato, you are acting indiscriminately — you are committing an adharmic (unrighteous) act. Using Nature for our needs cannot be considered wrong. But exploitation changes the whole set of circumstances. This makes our action an unrighteous one. First of all, we are unnecessarily destroying the life of the extra plant, animal or whatever it is that we exploit. Secondly, we deny it for someone else's use. Someone else could have used it, perhaps our neighbor who does not have anything to eat. Thus, when we exploit Nature, we are exploiting others. It is certainly a necessity to have a house to protect us from the rain and the sun. But we should not build a house in order to make a show of our wealth and luxurious lifestyle. Cutting down enough trees to build a house cannot be considered to be unrighteous. An act becomes unrighteous or sinful when we perform it indiscriminately, without any alertness. Spending lavishly without thinking of God, the Great Giver, or others who would be benefited by the extra money — that is unrighteousness.

Question: *What are the steps that can be taken in society to prevent the destruction of Nature and animals?*

AMMA: It is certainly high time to take stern steps to prevent mankind from destroying Nature and the resources which she kindly bestows on us as a gift or reward for the good actions we perform. The implementation of strict rules would be beneficial; but there is a need for people who are prepared to obey and execute such rules. Nowadays, those who are supposed to observe the rules are the first to break them. Societies should be formed in each and every village, in order to create an awareness of the significance of protecting and preserving Nature. Mere intellectual understanding is not enough. People should be taught to function from their hearts. The teachers and counselors of these societies should have

the ability to encourage people to love Nature and feel compassion for all of Creation and its creatures. The teachers and counselors themselves should be highly competent and efficient people, who can inspire others to do whatever they are taught. Only then will there be any benefit. The support of religion and spiritual principles will greatly help to achieve this goal.

A major cause of pollution in the atmosphere is the toxic smoke which emanates from huge machines in factories and other industries. This affects the healthy growth of plants and trees. The toxins produced from such places also badly damage the health of humans. Necessary steps should be taken to protect and preserve the trees and plants, which grow in the areas surrounding the factories and other industrial sites. In fact, it is these trees and plants which, to a great extent, cleanse and purify the polluted atmosphere of such places. But for the existence of these plants, the situation would be much worse. The initiative to preserve the natural surroundings should come from the entrepreneurs and employees of such companies.

A government alone cannot do anything without the sincere and wholehearted cooperation of the people. For this to happen, it should be a government which works in accordance with the will and wishes of the people who love Nature. This again demands support from political leaders and government officials. They should not just be a group of people who are craving money and position. Their aim should be the upliftment of the country and its people. A great deal will be achieved if they are people endowed with a selfless and universal outlook in their judgment.



IRONDALE BEACH SADHANA



O MOTHER,

COME LIKE A RADIANT BENEFICENT CLOUD,

THROUGH THE PATHWAY

OF THE OPEN SKY OF MY MIND

On Irondale Beach on a Puget Sound inlet just a few minutes' drive from where I live on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, I often imagine Amma walking with me, or sitting with me on a driftwood log listening to the wavelets lapping onto the shore. It's summertime. Most days

are sunny and warm. Sometimes Amma and I play and laugh, splashing water on each other. At other times I stand in awe, seeing Amma's form as a huge ephemeral being rising out of the water. Chanting my mantra with each step puts my mind in a mood of feeling one with Amma in nature—the silence, the exquisite beauty, the majesty of the Douglas fir trees that line the shore.

Hérons, seagulls, crows, geese, ducks, and the occasional eagle populate the area. Little birds rustle around in the bushes, chirping and singing. On many days I love to follow otter prints in the sand, most easily visible during low tide. Sometimes I see an otter poking its head above the water and then dipping down again to go fishing. One day an otter was rolling around scratching its back on the sand. While he looked ever ready to dart into the cove, he didn't seem to mind me standing close to him. In addition to the fauna and flora, there are often people walking with their dogs, or now and then two or three children playing together at the water's edge.

On one quiet day I was practicing mantra walking meditation, looking down to check the placement of my feet, moving along in slow motion. A bearded man passing by said, "You look like a heron." I laughed and so did he.



On certain days if I'm upset over a disagreement I've had with someone, a walk on the beach soothes my mind. The sound of the water. Ducks floating peacefully. Gulls soaring overhead. Observing nature calms my thoughts. With a tranquil mind I can then reflect on how I participated in the difficulty and how to avoid such confrontations in the future. Most of all to remember to stay tethered to Amma and to keep a space between my thoughts and my actions.

When I recently returned from a visit to Amritapuri, I found that my experiences with Amma on the beach often deepened, her presence more palpable than before. Additionally, my meditations took me into Amma's heart of silence.

In Amritapuri I'd had trouble getting around and doing chores because of this aged body of mine (I'm 82). I could not detach from my body or change my perception. During my darshans Amma looked worried, "You ok? Tired?" I had no response. Amma knew, and it always brings tears that she knows more completely than I do. When I got home my body was still bothering me, and so it was obvious the aches and pains of old age had nothing to do with India. One day I began contemplating my memory of Amma arriving for the evening programs, walking slowly down the long pathway along the bhajan hall, holding onto Swamini Krishnamrita's arm. With this poignant image surfacing in my mind, I realized I needed to do what Amma does, to move slowly, to respect the body as it is, to take care of it and be unattached to it. To accept. I began to repeat to myself: "I am not the body; Amma, please help me remember it is you alone permeating this body and causing it to move and act." This self-talk along with Prasada Buddhi (gratitude for all that comes my way) is quite miraculous and very simple. And it works.

And now back on Irondale beach: One day I was imagining Amma and I walking along supporting each other's bodies that don't work so well anymore. There is no attention to pain because we are not the body. It was a sweet moment, filled with the joy of a lasting friendship.

When the image faded, I headed up a few yards to the area where the Queen Anne's lace is turning brown, and the flowers folding in on themselves in a circle, forming exquisite skeletons of themselves. I watched for a while as the Queen Anne's on their long stems waved around in the breeze. Then, I continued on my way, now walking along the dead grass (it's been a dry summer). I felt I was walking on air, just an inch or so off the ground. You have to sort of pinch yourself when such experiences happen, to believe them. This feeling of walking on air stayed with me. An elderly gentleman was heading along towards me. I asked him, "Do you feel like you're walking on air?" With a big smile, he said, "Yes!" And then he added, "The wind is coming from the south."



Further up from the beach, along where the big leaf maples and firs grow, was a patch of native thistles giving up their seeds in a major display of fluffy down. In the end, just like these thistles, we give up the body. The thistle spreads seeds to sprout anew in the spring season. Before we give up our bodies, I pray we spread seeds of love through our care and nurturing all of creation, by planting trees, growing organic veggies, leaving space for the wild animals, and giving to mother nature by contemplating her deep silence and exquisite beauty.

~ SAVITRI BESS,
OLYMPIC PENINSULA, WA



Thistledown

MY FIRST GARDEN SEVA



ALTHOUGH I'VE RECEIVED AMMA'S DARSHAN AND BEEN A DEVOTEE OF HERS FOR SOME YEARS NOW, IT WAS ONLY RECENTLY THAT I VISITED THE TORONTO ASHRAM AND HAD MY FIRST GARDEN SEVA EXPERIENCE.

It was a hot day and my fiancé, Daniel, who has plenty of past gardening experience was eager to spend the entire day at the farm. This made me feel uneasy and a bit overwhelmed. Aside from repotting houseplants, I've never worked in a garden before. I was worried it would be exhausting, awkward and challenging.

As soon as we arrived, the small garden team welcomed us with open hearts and beaming smiles as if welcoming old friends. Daniel went off in a different section of the garden and I was assigned to plant onions. One of the coordinators showed me how to use a wooden stick or my finger to make a hole

and plant each seedling. Following her example, I removed the seedling bunches from the small pots they were in and gently rubbed the soil between my hands, ensuring the thin roots remained intact. I took one seedling, made a hole in the already prepared soil bed and planted my first onion. Before planting the rest, I measured with my eyes and hands the approximate distance between each hole to ensure the onions were evenly spread out. It was quiet and peaceful. It felt nice. I kept to myself and mentally repeated my mantra as often as I could remember to stay focused and in the present moment. Amma says that “first, the human mind should be harmonized, then the harmony of Nature will spontaneously take place.”



Working so closely with the earth, many insects, spiders and worms were crawling out of the soil. Surprisingly, my fear and aversion towards them seemed to have dissipated. I even found myself mentally talking to them and excusing myself for disturbing their dwelling place. I took a handful of soil and covered the worms to protect them from the scorching sun. Amma tells us that “each and every living being in nature is part of God’s body” and that “it is one of our foremost duties to lovingly care for all living things.”

*"Nature is an indispensable part of life on Earth.
Everything relies on nature to live. We are not different from nature—
we are an interdependent part of it.
Our lives depend on the well-being of the whole." – Amma*

After what seemed like a short while (although it must have been a couple of hours), we were called inside for lunch. Everyone was so joyful and showed us so much gratitude, even calling us “family.” It was such an open-hearted, positive and welcoming atmosphere.



After a delicious lunch together, I finished planting the onions and began planting potatoes. I’ve never seen the process before. I was amazed at how easy it was to just cut a large potato in half and plant it in the prepared soil. We added some cow dung to the beds for fertilization.

Amma says that “even if we only have a tiny plot of land, we should try to grow a few vegetables using organic fertilizers. Spending some time with our plants, we should talk to them, kiss them and sing to them. This relationship will give us a new vitality.”

A couple of devotees working alongside me recalled the previous year's harvest and how amazing everything smelled and tasted, especially the tomatoes and apple juice. They said that it is nothing compared to store bought vegetables and fruits. This lit me up and boosted my excitement.



The more I worked in the garden that day, the more peaceful and at ease I felt. Everyone was so positive, happy and truly grateful to be there. I was completely welcomed, supported and appreciated. The spiritual energy pervading the ashram premises felt so deeply nourishing and palpable.

Later in the day, we were invited to take a walk through the orchard to enjoy the silence and the beauty of the cherry blossoms.





To be honest, at the end of the day, I realized that I didn't feel like I had just worked a sweaty eight hours. Not at all. I actually felt so eager to work more. Sure the body felt a little achy, but this feeling was somewhere in the background, overshadowed by the vibrant surroundings and the open-hearted and positive attitude of everyone around me. This filled me with energy. The beauty of nature nourished me on every level, making me feel happy, peaceful and grateful. I was filled with God's Grace. What a unique experience.

~IOANA,
ONTARIO, CANADA

*"When people live in accordance with Nature,
the song of life becomes sweet." — Amma*

EARTH DAY 2022 AT MA CENTER CHICAGO



TO CELEBRATE EARTH DAY, MA CENTER CHICAGO PLANTED 25 SWAMP OAK TREE SAPLINGS ALONG THE ROAD ON ASHRAM PROPERTY.

A team helped prepare for the event by ordering the bare root trees, putting them into buckets of water before planting, and collecting tools such as shovels, work gloves, compost and mulch.

It was a beautiful, relatively warm, sunny day for April in Chicagoland. Many sevites came to help and the joy of serving was on everyone's face.



Later, after Bhajans, Arati and meditation in the Satsang Hall, the regional Embracing the Trees team introduced the Embracing the Trees Campaign, explaining that it was formed to support and encourage devotees to plant trees on their own property, record the number of trees planted and then report back to the national team in the late fall. To help encourage and inspire tree planting, the ETT team presented a poster of a tree trunk with multi-colored leaves to the Satsang. This tree provides a visual of how many trees MA Center Chicago satsang members will plant in 2022. Each leaf will have the name of the people who planted them and the number of trees planted. We are hoping to have many leaves on the tree by fall.

MA Center Chicago Tree Trunk with 2 leaves to commemorate 2 planting events that occurred on Earth Day, 2022 in Chicago, for a total of 40 trees planted!

~MA CENTER CHICAGO

TREES IN AMMA'S NAME

LAUNCHED IN 2021, EMBRACING THE TREES IS A PROGRAM TO HONOR AMMA'S WISH FOR US TO PLANT TREES.

Several devotees in New England responded to the call and formed our regional team, Embracing the Trees New England. With the support of the national team led by Swamini Ambikamrita Prana, we began meeting to brainstorm strategies for the project. Our first initiative was sending a survey to the New England mailing list.



Satyadev



Caroline and Hridaya

Nandita was our first respondent to the outreach, which asked for New England homeowners with land for tree-planting. Nandita's home is in Redding Connecticut and abuts the elementary school. Planting trees along her driveway would add green life to her own property as well as bless the school community.

We planned the project over several zoom calls, looking at images of Nandita's property and developing a plan, coached by our group's tree expert, Victoria. Nandita desired to plant Arbor Vitae trees, and would order from a local nursery or Home Depot. Spacing considerations between trees, such as trees spread-out and fully-expressed, or planting them closer together for a thicker visual barrier, would determine how many trees to purchase.

The New England ETT team suggested adding one or two fruit or nut trees to the project, but Nandita decided to keep it simple for her first endeavor of caring for young trees. Based on Victoria's

advice about watering needs prior to and after planting, a long hose would be needed. Other supplies such as compost and mulch were added to the list.

On a beautiful Sunday in May, our ETT team of Lovelle, Victoria, and myself carpooled from New Hampshire and Massachusetts to southern Connecticut, where we were met by a local team prepared with shovels and enthusiasm. Julianna was the 6-year-old princess of shakti, dressed ready to work in cowboy boots (“Cowgirl boots!” she stomps.) A special daughter of Amma, Julie was conceived after Nandita and Satyadev asked Amma directly for Her sankalpa (prayer/resolve). Her curiosity, friendliness and love reminded our hearts of the childlike joy we feel around Amma—and our day was permeated by that priceless bliss.

Ray, Eric, Kathleen and Caroline had also responded to the call, running to Amma seva like gopis and gopas. We initiated our project day with the Dhyayamo prayer to beseech Amma’s Grace and a couple of sun salutations to loosen the body before the physical effort of plunging our shovels into the soil.

Our energetic team made quick work of digging holes for the nine Arbor Vitae, to be planted in a zig-zagged arrangement for more visual interest, and space for the trees to grow, rather than a straight line. We dug holes a bit deeper than the trees’ planting buckets, and about twice as wide. The removed dirt was mixed with compost, which would be used to backfill the space below and around the new trees’ root balls. This loose, nutrient-rich soil would invite the young trees’ tender roots to explore and grow.



Julie, the princess of Shakti



Generating the nectar of seva

The trees were gently coaxed from their buckets, and we scuffed up the outer roots to “wake them up” and encourage them to branch out into their new environment. In teams of two we placed the trees in the holes, backfilling the extra space with the dirt and compost mixture. Filling the hole only to the top of the root ball, extra dirt was shaped into a circular berm (a low raised ridge) just outside the outer perimeter of the tree’s branches. This would allow rainwater dripping from its branches to stay collected close to the tree.



Love for the new tree babies

Each tree received two buckets of water along with loving pats and encouraging words. The last step of the project was adding several inches of mulch atop the entire planted area. The mulch covered up the disturbed soil and created a unified appearance, as well as reducing moisture loss from the ground after each watering.

We stood back and celebrated our effort, feeling gratitude as each tree sparkled with joy and pride. The nectar of satsang and seva fed extra nutrients to these young divine beings.



Satsang with the divine painting

Having nestled Amma's new babies into the ground, we took our lunches and gathered on Nandita's back porch for satsang. Our altar was a stunning piece of art created by someone who had not met Amma but had heard stories about Her through Nandita. It was clear that the artist had been touched deeply by Her Grace. The shades-of-white painting emanated Amma's heavenly beauty, with unique three-dimensional flower adornments.

Satyadev (Paul) Averignos led the satsang with original devotional songs and creative bhajan renditions. We chanted Amma's 108 Names and read scriptural stories. Our spirits were captivated in the sensation of Amma's presence with us on that porch. Our hearts opened through seva, devotion flowed freely. We shared divine friendship with palpable gratitude to gather in person after the long satsang drought due to Covid.



Nine new satsang members



Victoria, our gardening expert

As the day closed, we bid farewell to the nine new sapling members of the Redding Connecticut satsang. Lined up like children waiting for a school bus, we wished the green babies well-being. Julianna was tasked with giving them friendly and loving attention. Our joy carried us home, bodies tired and hearts full.

**~ AHALYA
NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Are you a New England devotee who would like to plant trees in Amma's Name on your land?

Embracing the Trees would love to support you and invite Amma's Grace to your yard. After the summer heat, planting projects will resume. If you have already written to us or responded to our survey, thank you. We will be reaching out. Feel free to drop us another line, if you are ready to go!

Contact: trees.ammame@ammagroups.org

"TRY TO CULTIVATE A MIND
THAT NEVER HARMS ANY
BEING IN THOUGHTS, WORD, OR
DEED"

- *Amma*



f @ /MataAmritanandamayi



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