

Green Friends

Pacific Northwest Litter Pick-up Project

Looking at Nature and observing its selfless way of giving, we can become aware of our own limitations. That will help to develop devotion and self-surrender to God.

Amma



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March Greetings

Our hours are down a bit for February, but that doesn't surprise me. Mine are down too. I'm having a hard time motivating myself to go out into the cold and rain. It even snowed briefly this week! I really look forward to the weather getting warmer and to picking up litter daily again, both on my own and in work parties.

Kick Butts Day is coming very soon- March 21. I hope everyone will make some time to honor this event between March 17 and March 25. You can talk to kids about the dangers of tobacco, pick up cigarette butts or do something else. I hope satsangs will consider holding big or little work parties. Let me know what you do and I will report it to the Kick Butts group and will of course use the information in our next newsletter. To learn more go to <http://www.kickbuttsday.org/>.

I hope you enjoy your litter pick up time in March. I know I will.

Karuna

Green Friends is a global grassroots environmental movement which promotes environmental awareness and local participation in conservation efforts throughout the world.

Green Friends is one of the projects of Embracing the World, a not-for-profit international collective of charities founded by internationally known spiritual and humanitarian leader, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma)

To join the Pacific Northwest Green Friends Litter Project write Karuna at karunap108@comcast.net

To learn more about the project go to: www.seattlesatsang.amma.org/litterproject.html

Biodegradation time line

(from the City of Los Angeles)

<http://lastormwater.org/Siteorg/education/biodegrd.htm>

In Sea water

Paper towel: 2-4 weeks

Newspaper: 6 weeks

Cardboard: 2 months

Aluminum Can: 50 years

6 pack plastic ring: 400 years

Styrofoam: 400 years

Plastic Liter bottle: 450 years

In Landfills

“In anaerobic landfills, whether a material is biodegradable makes little difference: biodegradable matter usually does not decay because of the lack of oxygen required by the microorganisms.”

From www.EnvironmentWashington.org:

“Only about 5 percent of the billions of plastic bags Americans use each year are recycled; more than 2 billion disposable bags are distributed in Washington alone. The rest end up in our landfills or as litter, and too many find their way into Puget Sound.

In April 2010, a beached grey whale in West Seattle was found with 20 plastic bags in its stomach.”

Litter Project Membership

As February 29, 2012, we had 209 members.

4 new members in February

(“Members” are individuals who signed up for the project or who have participated in work parties.)

Litter Project Hours

In February, 65 members reported picking up 90.97 hours of litter. (The statistics below relate to members who report having picked up litter. They do not include those who do not report or who reported 0.)

Members Average : 1.4 hours

Range 2 minutes to 10 hours

Median : 45 minutes

The group has picked up 1310 hours of litter since the project began in July 2011!

Aluminum Can Report

Washington State Litter Project members collect and sell aluminum cans gathered from the litter they pick up and from friends, family and colleagues.

In 2011 they sold 323 pounds of aluminum cans for \$151.04.

During January and February 2012 they sold 85 pounds of aluminum for \$45.72.

All funds were donated to the Pacific Northwest Amma Center.

Words from Amma

The life force that pulsates in the trees, plants and animals is the same life force that pulsates within us. The same life energy that gives us the power to speak and to sing is the power behind the song of the bird and the roar of the lion. A sincere seeker or a true believer cannot harm nature because he or she sees nature as God. He doesn't experience nature as separate from himself. He is the real lover of nature. The Earth, trees, plants and animals are all manifestations of God. We should love them as we love our own self.

Email from Janani in Amritapuri

(Janani is one of the photographers in the Amritapuri ashram. Amma has charged her with making a movie about Amala Bharatam Campaign (ABC), Amma's campaign to clean up India. Janani has been very interested in our project since it began and recently joined it herself!)

Hi Karuna,

I just had to tell you about my ABC session today. It was a real shot in the arm! I stopped editing the ABC movie at about 5pm, feeling hot and frustrated, and...well...having the feeling I was doing a futile work--nothing is ever going to change, and I'm just making up fairy tales to help us feel good.

So i took my garbage down to the bins, emptied my two bags there, and kept them, figuring I'd pick up litter till they were full. Not long, but...worth doing. What the heck, I needed some bending exercise.

So I went out past the hospital and the boys' hostel, and started up the little road there towards the main road...just bits of cigarette packs (separate the paper part from the plastic), lots of sweet wrappers (plastic), some wadded up newspaper (paper)...then a stash of liquor bottles--but by then I'd found a usable old plastic bag, so that made a third, and I could keep sorting as I went--far preferable to handling everything twice, when I get back to the recycle bins.

Then a voice behind me--an Indian woman: "Ende cheyum?"

I knew enough malayalm for that--"What are you doing?"

I held out my bags and said, "Clean cheyunum."

She smiled, and another woman came, and the first told her I was cleaning up. Then a spate of Malayalam I couldn't much follow, but I knew it

had to do with Amma's cleanup program, so I smiled a lot. Told and showed them that one bag was plastic, one paper, one glass. This is my level of Malayalam: the words they take from English and just pronounce a little differently! We exchanged names, and I went back to picking up stuff.

Suddenly a little boy behind me--he wanted to add something to my bag. I showed hm the right one, saying, "Plastic." Next a smaller little girl. I held out a different bag, "Paper," and she dropped a scrap in. The ladies wanted to talk more, so I told them mostly by sign language that the plastic would be good for weaving--"Bag, phone cover," I said, and they got it. The first lady went on about how you could weave things from this soft plastic--all news to the second lady. I told them that a phone cover would sell for 50 rupees, and they were interested...Meanwhile,, the kids kept coming with more trash, and guessing and then KNOWING what bag to put each bit into. Finally the ladies stepped aside, and I went on cleaning--two minutes later, one of the ladies comes--she has two pieces of trash to add. Lots of smiling all around.

I was sorry when, after pushing my way in among some bushes where I'd spied some liquor bottles, all three bags reached the full level, and I had to stop. The kids were sorry too, and wanted to continue. "Bag finished," I said.

Continued on the next page



More Stories and Reflections

From Janani in India:

(continued from previous page)

When the boy and I parted he raised his arms and shouted out "Amritavarsham!"

I was mystified for a moment---why that, 8 years later??

But I did a thumbs up and said "Amalabharatham!"

Then both of us, "Amalabharatham!"

It felt good!

As I walked back to the recycle bins by the boys' hostel, I thought, "THIS is the way it probably needs to spread....naturally. What am I doing making a movie?"

I know, there's room for both, and anyhow my duty is to make the movie. But I'm awfully glad I had the chance to participate in what felt like a much more REAL form of meaningful education, and maybe bringing about of change...and connecting.

So now to the serious business: did I pick up litter for 15 minutes because of time out talking? Or did I pick it up for 25 minutes because that's how long I was there? Or how about 35 or so to count the contributions of the kids and women?? And how much are new friendships worth? Jai Ma!

Janani

Karuna's response to Janani:

Every minute from the time you started to the time you finished counts. You are right. This is what the project is ultimately about. This is how the world will change. And your movie is also part of the "this". Thanks for sending a major story for the next newsletter. And also for giving me a great way to begin my day!

From Joann in Edmonds:

I think that litter is increasing or maybe this project is helping me to become more aware. Let me know if you have any upcoming litter pick up parties.

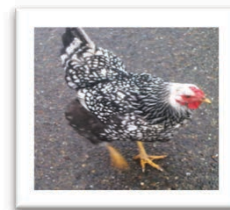
From Nigama in Seattle:

(From litter walk with her son Noah- age 3)

Unfortunately one playground we went to recently had broken glass all over and around the play equipment that looked like it had been deliberately smashed there. That was really upsetting to me, but I took it as my assignment for the day and spent the next 45 minutes cleaning it up. Noah was upset that I wouldn't let him help.

From Karuna in Seattle:

I'm used to having people thank me as I pick up litter, but I had some unexpected greeters as I cleaned up litter on a side street near my home one day.



From Clarice in Seattle:

Most of my litter time time was spent picking up litter while on a meditation retreat on Whidbey Island. I was picking up litter on the beach. I had also picked up litter on that beach last summer and noticed there wasn't much. However, this month there was so much more. This was surprising since there were much fewer people on the beach than last summer. I have been wondering if perhaps I'm just getting better at seeing the litter as it seems I am noticing it everywhere these days.

From Allison in Snohomish:

I'm reporting here that while I was in Hawaii, I made a conscious effort to pick up trash everywhere I went. When on the beach, I would find cigarette butts, bottle caps, plastic bags, etc., and I would throw them away. I found a buried plastic toy sand rake and gave it to some children building sand castles. Walking along the sidewalk I would always stoop down and pickup overflow rubbish from around trash cans and carry it to the next receptacle. Mindfulness made the difference; keeping on my mind love for nature and the desire to do some small thing to help.

From Gaurang in Seattle:

Visala, Bob Freer, Mike and I took a walk along the beach on Saturday afternoon. Started at the south end and went to the lighthouse. We had a couple of big garbage bags and picked up the flotsam and jetsam that littered the beach. Filled up two bags with a lot of styrofoam, plastic bottles, broken pieces of unidentified things. Found a garbage can lid and some flexible plastic pipe. Some helium balloons from a party that still had a little helium. There was a tire, but it was buried too deep in the sand. It was a pleasant walk with the added bonus of helping clean the park and de-litter the earth!



From Aditi in Iowa:

I saw so many cans/bottles, etc., by the sides of the road on our 2 lane highway to IaCity for a dental trip, that I promised Amma I would stop on the way back. On a 5 mile stretch between Brighton and Washington (!) IA, I drove very slowly on the shoulder stopping numerous times. 2 garbage bags overflowing with cans and bottles filled the trunk and another 2 bags of unredeemable cans and bottles and assorted other trash in the back seat. The wind was blowing at about 25 mph and the temp was around 30 and I had the energy to just keep going. When I ran out of car space I told Amma she must have taken me very seriously, and that was enough for the day, OK?



From Jovanna in Seattle :

I just got back from 3 weeks in France and, besides sightseeing, eating delicious food, meditating in grand cathedrals and meeting amazing local people, what did we do? Pick up garbage!

Now this is harder to do in France. I was surprised to see in streets, alleys even along the freeways, there is no garbage. What are they doing? Has Amma got them working overtime? Or is this part of the consciousness of the French culture?

But, in front of some of the most stunning (and famous) buildings in France, we did find some garbage. The tourists left their calling cards, food wrappings, Kleenex and crumbled brochures; even when there was a garbage can just a few steps away. It is easy to get overwhelmed by the beauty and stature of the Norte Dame Cathedral in heart of Paris, so maybe people just aren't aware of what they are doing. But with Amma's request that we pick up garbage, I could not walk by. So, my friend Melissa and I spent some time at each site picking up garbage here and there. See how beautiful this grand cathedral is? What wonderful way to say 'thank you' to all those countless people who build this place of worship in honor of Mother Mary.

One day we went to the Montmarte area of Paris, up on a hillside overlooking the rest of the city. We went to see my friend's favorite cathedral, the beautiful domed Basilique du Sacre Coeur (The Sacred Heart of Jesus). We wandered separately though the church, planning to rendezvous outside. Once outside, I waited for her and went back in to see if we missed each other. Finally, I decided to stay outside enjoying the spirit of the place and people watching. Then I saw all the trash on the steps going up to this grand cathedral and thought, "Rather than going back inside and mediating, picking up garbage is a great way to worship." So I had a wonderful time spending 20 minutes walking among the international flow of people as I picked up garbage!

Thank you Amma for all the ways you touch me. I so appreciate you, your love, your teachings and your presence in my life!

Singing for Amma!

(Please read this section whether you consider yourself a singer or not.)

Many of you know that the Litter Project was born out of a series of events that occurred to me in June of 2011. During that week, I was also flooded with many related ideas and since then have been working to make them reality. One of those ideas was for the Litter Project team to sing for Amma at the summer retreat. The songs to sing also came into my mind at that time: "Spirit and Nature," "The Earth is our Mother" and a litter song written by Mike Hersey. Mike completed the song in a very short period of time and we learned it after our first litter work party in September!

When I was in India recently, it occurred to me that we have more than 200 members and MOST of them will be at Amma's Pacific Northwest retreat this summer. Can you imagine Amma's face if nearly 200 of us processed into the room during that part of the entertainment program? While I, of course, don't know for sure how she would react, I think she would be so happy. (Lead singers and musicians would most likely sit on the stage and the rest would make a U around the room.)

With this many of us, plus the people in the audience singing, it won't matter if you sing well or not, so don't be shy! So much of the power will be in the group experience. I hope that everyone who has been involved with the Litter Project in any way will participate regardless of age or singing ability.

At the recent regional retreat in Ft. Flagler we sang all three songs for the first time. I was ecstatic with how we sounded and it was only our first practice! Now it is time to begin working on them as individuals and as a region.

I will use a similar process as I did for the regional dance last year in that I will make a web page and put each of the songs on it so you the can learn and practice them individually at home. I hope you will become as excited about this program as I am!

Karuna



Kannan, The Amma Shop manager wants to make sure that enough people are interested in purchasing the new Green Friends t shirt to make it worth producing them. If you think you would likely buy one in t-shirt or hoodie form during Amma's summer tour, write karunap108@comcast.net.

Several people have asked for information on buying one of the litter grabbers. Here is one version: http://www.wayfair.com/AliMed-Economy-Aluminum-Shaft-Reacher-8234-XAA1046.html?refid=AC49-XAA1046_5210959&PiID=5210959

