



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: *What part does religion play in the relationship between man and Nature?*

AMMA: It is religion that helps a person to maintain the awareness that he or she is not separate from Nature. Without religion mankind loses that awareness. Religion teaches us to love Nature. In truth, the progress and prosperity of mankind depend solely on the good which man does for Nature. Religion helps to maintain a harmonious relationship between human beings, between the individual and society, and between man and Nature.

The relationship between man and Nature is like the relationship between *Pindanada* (the microcosm) and *Brahmananda* (the macrocosm). Our great ancestors understood this. That is why they gave so much importance to Nature worship in religious practices. The idea behind all religious *acharam* (practices) was to closely associate human beings with Nature.

By establishing a loving relationship between man and Nature,
they ensured both the balance of Nature and the progress of the human race.

Look at a tree. It gives shade even to the person who cuts it down. It gives its sweet, delicious fruits to the person who harms it. But our attitude is completely different. When we plant a tree, or raise an animal, we are only concerned about the profit we will make from it. If the animal ceases to make a profit, we will have it destroyed without delay. As soon as the cow stops producing milk, we will sell it to the butcher in order to make money. If a tree stops yielding fruit, we will cut it down and make furniture or something else from it. Selfishness reigns supreme. (Today) selfless love cannot be found anywhere. But our ancestors were not like this. They knew that trees, plants and animals were absolutely necessary for the benefit and good of humans. They foresaw that man, in his selfish moments, would forget Nature, and would cease to have any concern for her. They also knew that future generations would suffer, due to man's disassociation from Nature. They therefore linked each religious rite with Nature. Thus, through religious principles, they could succeed in developing an emotional bond between man and Nature. The Ancients loved and worshipped trees and plants, such as the banyan tree, bilva and tulasi, not because the trees bore fruit and helped them to make a profit, but because the Ancients knew that they themselves in truth were one with all of Nature.

Religion teaches man to love the entire Creation. Some people mock religion saying that it is mere blind belief; yet it is generally found that the actions of such people do greater harm to Nature than those who believe in God. It is the religious minded people, not these so-called intellectuals, who protect, preserve and love Nature. There are some people who, by quoting modern scientific theories, are always trying to prove that whatever religion teaches is wrong. The truth is that the reverence and devotion that human beings develop through their religious faith are always beneficial, both to humanity and to Nature.

Religion teaches us to worship God within Nature. Through the stories of Sri Krishna's life, the tulasi (basil) plant and the cow have become very dear to the people of India, who lovingly protect and look after them. In times past, there would be a pond and a small grove of trees adjoining every house in India. Each home had a tulasi plant growing in the front yard. Tulasi leaves are highly medicinal. The leaves won't decay, even if plucked and kept for several days; the medicinal potency remains. Part of the daily routine in those days was to water the tulasi plant every morning, bowing down with reverence and devotion in front of it, worshipping it as an embodiment of the Goddess. This was the traditional way of reverence and worship which the Indians also showed to other trees, such as the banyan, the bilva and the fig. The medicinal value of tulasi leaves, which was known to the ancients rishis eons ago, has now been proven through modern scientific experiments. But the question is, do scientists and others who have discovered the medicinal value of the tulasi and other sacred plants, show the same love and reverence toward Nature as the Ancients did, who were inspired by their religious faith? Is it

not religious faith which helps to protect and preserve Nature, rather than the knowledge obtained through modern science?

Suppose you have ten seeds. Consume nine of them if you want, but let at least one seed remain for planting. Nothing should be destroyed completely. If you receive a hundred dollars from a harvest, at least ten dollars should be given to charity.

The scriptures of India teach that a householder should perform the *pancha yajnas*, or five daily sacrifices. The first of these is the *deva yajna*, or worshipping of God, the Supreme Power, which is to be done with devotion and to the best of one's ability. Next comes *rishi yajna*, or the adoration of the sages. The ancient God-Realized sages did not allow their unique experiences to vanish into oblivion. Out of compassion for humanity, they passed them on in the form of scriptures and other sacred writings. A devout study and practice of the scriptural teachings constitute this sacrifice. The third is *pitru yajna*. This consists of showing respect and rendering service towards one's parents and elders. It also includes thinking holy and auspicious thoughts for the welfare of one's departed ancestors. Fourth comes *nara yajna*, or service rendered to mankind. This includes all forms of selfless service, such as feeding the poor and serving the sick and the aged. *Bhuta yajna* is the last sacrifice; it is to serve all living beings as embodiments of the Universal Being. This is done through the feeding of and caring for the animal kingdom and the plants. In olden days family members never ate before feeding their domestic birds and animals. They would also water their plants and trees before eating. In those days, worshipping Nature and natural phenomenon were part and parcel of human life. People were always eager to please Nature in gratitude for her kind gifts. *Bhuta yajna* brings about the consciousness of the unity of all life. Through these rituals and sacrifices, human beings learn to live in harmony with society and Nature.

More than the knowledge of modern science, it is the deeper understanding of religion, the truth of the oneness of all Creation, which teaches humans to love Nature, and to develop a sense of reverence and devotion to all. The love that religion teaches is not the kind of love which a gross intellect can understand. It is that of the heart. It can only be imbibed by a person who is endowed with a subtle intellect born out of faith.

If there is a policeman in a village, fewer thefts will occur because people fear him. Similarly, reverence and devotion to God help to maintain dharma, or right conduct, in society. By truly imbibing the principles of religion, and by observing the prescribed customs, people can avoid committing mistakes. Those who declare that religion is merely a collection of blind beliefs will not spare even a moment in order to try to understand the scientific principles behind religious practices. Modern science can produce rain by spraying silver iodide in the clouds. However, the water from such unnaturally caused rain may not be completely pure.

The scriptures, on the other hand, prescribe certain ritual sacrifices that will bring rain. The wise ones know that the purity of rain water obtained through these means is far superior to water obtained through unnatural methods, such as cloud seeding.

In a similar manner, a very beneficial change both for Nature and for human beings can be brought about by offering prescribed ingredients into the sacrificial fire. All such sacrifices and rituals help to restore the lost harmony and balance of Nature. Just as ayurvedic herbs and plants cure physical diseases, the smoke that emanates from the sacrificial fire, in which ingredients of medicinal value are offered, purifies the atmosphere. Burning incense, lighting oil lamps, offering pure food in a sacrificial fire, or to God, also helps cleanse the atmosphere. The side effects of such rituals will not create as much pollution as chlorine and the disinfectants which are used for purifying water and destroying germs. The smoke that comes from the sacrificial fire also helps to cleanse the respiratory system, by removing the mucus and phlegm that block the air passages.

Modern science says that it is harmful to look directly at the sun during a solar eclipse. The same cautionary advice was given by the ancient rishis eons ago. Using a primitive but effective method, they only looked at the sun's image reflected in water, in which cow dung had been dissolved.

By protecting and preserving wild and domestic animals, trees and plants, we are protecting and preserving Nature. The Ancients worshipped the cow and the earth, including them amongst the five mothers (*pancha matas*). The five mothers were: *deha-mata* – the biological mother, *desamata* – the motherland, *bhumata* – Mother Earth, *vedamata* – the Vedas, and *gomata* – the cow. To our ancestors, the cow was not just a four-legged creature, but a sacred animal which was worshipped as a form of the Mother (the Goddess).

No religion can exist disassociated from Nature. Religion is the link that binds mankind to Nature. Religion removes the ego in man, enabling him to know and experience his oneness with Nature.



AMRITACULTURE



PLANTING THE SEEDS OF AMMA'S TEACHINGS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE GARDENING

“In the old days, there was no particular need for environmental preservation because protecting Nature was part of worshipping God and life itself. More than remembering “God,” the people used to love and serve Nature and society. They saw the Creator through the creation. They loved, worshipped and protected Nature as the visible form of God.” - Amma

Amritaculture Sustainable Gardening is a GreenFriends initiative. It brings together all the principles of Sustainable Farming and combines it with Amma’s Teachings. Amma has been asking us to grow vegetables for several years now. So, a few of us got together to make it easier for devotees to learn how to garden. We are an international team of devotees coming together to share our gardening experiences, Amma stories and our love for nature. We have online classes, monthly live Q&A sessions, as well as a blog with stories and articles from gardening devotees all over the world. We want to invite you to join us in expanding our understanding about how to grow food for ourselves and our communities.

We asked Lola to share how she got started gardening with Amma to give you a taste of what Amritaculture gardening is all about:

My name is Lola and I have been living in Amritapuri India for most of my adult life. My story begins 20 years ago when Amma began giving me seeds. I needed a place to plant them, but there was no land available, So, my first garden was on a blue table next to the café. I just had little pots and I put the seeds in the pots. I actually didn't have many of the tools here that one would need to garden. The biggest thing that I didn't have was dirt.

So, I decided to ask Amma what to do. It was Devi Bhava and Amma was giving darshan in the big Temple. I went to Her and said, "Amma, I have no dirt to plant the seeds you have given me." She looked deep into my eyes and she said, "Use the dirt of your mind, you have so much of it." Amma! I went away feeling very dejected and sad. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of, "How can I move forward?"

In those days there was no internet (in the ashram), no email, no online classes. But, by Amma's grace someone offered me a book on organic gardening. I began to read it. Soon, I saw there was a whole other world and a way to practice Amma's teachings. That's how I began. I used the dirt of my mind and that dirt became the soil for Amma to plant her seeds into.

It has been a great journey with Amma guiding me all along the way. We have a plot of land now to grow all the plants Amma has suggested we grow. We call it the Rudraksha Farm. We have vegetables, flowers, trees, and yes, so many weeds. We love them all. Amma taught us to restore biodiversity to the land. It is this diversity, we have discovered, that keeps nature in balance.



Now we realize that most of the organic gardening practices we use today are based on the principles and practices from ancient India. India has over 4000 years of sustainable agriculture that Amma is reawakening. The organic gardening movement has its roots in the villages of India. Amma is having us look at village life with new eyes and an open heart. Amma grew up in a village and so much of Her teachings are from Her mother and the way of life in the village.



Photo: © Jose Aragones

Village life is based on ancient texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These primarily oral traditions are from the Vedas. People incorporated these fundamental teachings in the very fabric of their daily life. One example is how the spirit of giving was central to the way people interacted. Amma's mother would always give buttermilk to people passing by and prepare food for guests before they even arrived. The guest is seen as God in the Indian Village. People always wanted to give. Amma said the other day that they would always give more than they intended. Better to give too much than too little. That was their attitude. Amma sees the whole world like a village. She is the central flame and light of the world village. She is giving us so much all the time. She wants us to give too.



Amma wants us to share in the abundance of giving from the heart. We can just read Amma's words in a book, but to actually then plant those seeds, and put that forward, that is the real meditation, the practice and the real giving. The most important thing is Amma's teachings and how we can implement those teachings both physically and practically.

A garden is one of the best places to bring life to Amma's words. Amma says, "Nature, now more than ever, needs our love and care." Planting seeds in a garden is a way of joining Nature's bounty. When we regenerate dirt back into soil, we are giving Mother Earth a great gift of healing and renewal. Once barren places can be restored to abundant food forests.

After 20 years of gardening with Amma and with the help of hundreds of devotees, we went from a few pots to a 1.5-acre farm. There are so many plants, birds, animals, bugs and even ponds. Our garden is full of life. The Rudraksha Farm is truly Mother's garden. This garden is a living and breathing example of Amma's love and reverence for nature.

Join us now in the world of Amritaculture cultivating love, compassion, patience and beauty. Together we can bring all of these values and understanding into one, into the garden. We have three classes open for enrollment. We have set up a team of gardeners to answer all your questions and to hear your stories too. Just go to Amrita Virtual Academy and click on gardening to find out how you can start connecting with Amma and the Earth in your garden today.

The following are four easy ways you can connect with us.

Questions or Contributions: If you have any questions or if you are an experienced gardener and want to make a contribution to Amritaculture such as teaching a workshop, writing a article, Blog or a Vlog, you can email us at the following address: amritaculture@amritavirtualacademy.com

Courses and workshops: To see our current courses, go to the Amrita Virtual Academy web address: <https://courses.amritavirtualacademy.com/collections?category=gardening>

YouTube: To see our Live Question and Answer Session Recordings go to the Amrita Virtual Academy YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/amritavirtualacademy>

Blog: To see our blog posts go to: <https://blog.amritavirtualacademy.com>



WONDERS OF NATURE



Look at the beauty of nature.

Living harmoniously with nature will in itself bring happiness and contentment

– Amma

INSPIRED BY AMMA AND VIDEOS OF THE VARIOUS AMRITACULTURE INITIATIVES,

I have been taking a closer look at all that Nature has to offer. Living in an urban environment, I see a lot of buildings. No matter how great the design or innovative the materials, they are no match for Mother Nature. The more I looked, the more amazed I was to see just how unique all of Her creations are. And not only are her creations beautiful to look at, they all serve a purpose...whether we understand them or not.

One day, I started looking at leaves on the various trees and shrubs I pass on my regular walks. I started to realize how many different shapes and designs there were on these leaves. In a short distance, I counted 27 different types of leaves!

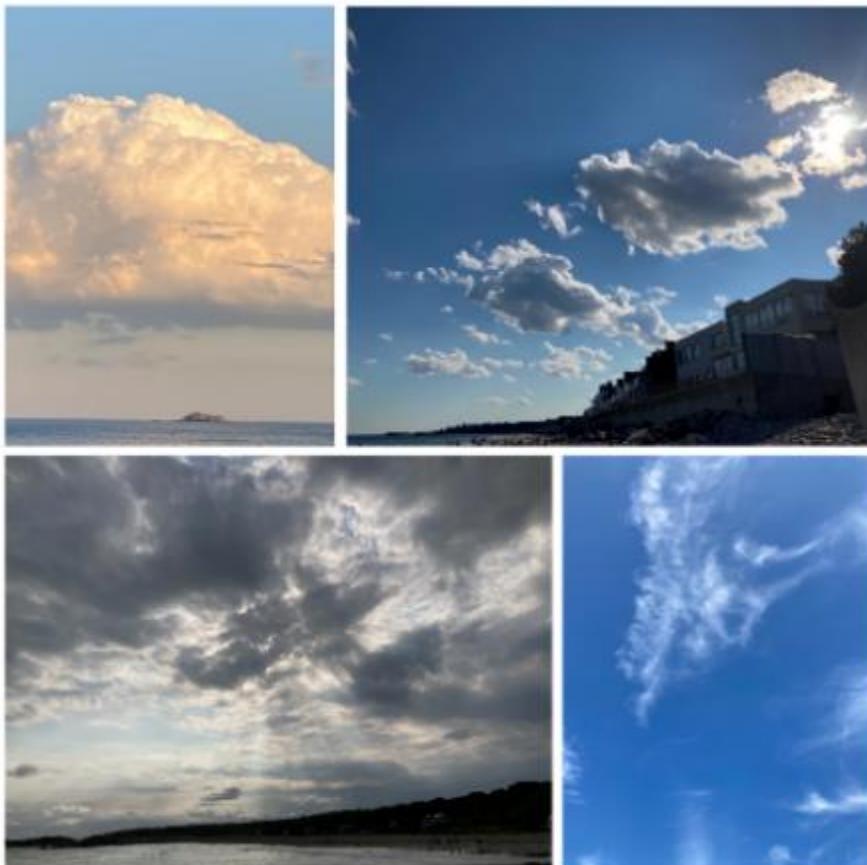
Leaves are responsible for cleaning the air of carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. They are only second to oceans as a source of oxygen. We owe our very breath to them!

Besides leaves, I spotted birds and animals that I had never seen before. The Heron in the photo was standing perfectly still at the end of a raging waterfall from a small dam.



I hope with Amma's grace and enough sadhana (spiritual practice), I can learn to be this still in the face of anything life throws at me.

As I started appreciating the uniqueness of everything in Nature, I realized that right above me, almost every day, I can find formations of clouds, not a single one alike. Besides being beautiful to look at, they provide rain and help regulate the Earth's temperature...no small feat!



One of the most incredible gifts from Mother Nature is the Ocean. Studies have shown that negative ions (a small molecule that's gained a negative electrical charge), found in very high concentrations near the ocean, have antimicrobial properties and mood stabilizing effects. But the most important role oceans play is to provide 50-80% of the oxygen we breathe via tiny oceanic plants called plankton. We are alive because of the ocean!



Speaking of being alive, we owe part of our existence to another tiny creature, the honey bee. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that 80% of crops making up the world's food supply are pollinated by wild bees and other wildlife.



Finally, living in New England, we get to experience four distinct seasons that allow the Earth to rest in the Fall and Winter and come back fully rejuvenated and ready to be productive in the Spring and Summer. An added bonus of having four seasons is that it gives New Englanders something to talk about all year round!



Let us pray for the wellbeing of all beings that serve us, silently and asking for nothing in return. Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu (May all beings everywhere be happy and peaceful).

Share your observations and photos about Mother Nature with us at info@greenfriendsna.org



~A DEVOTEE FROM NEW ENGLAND

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE (IN THAT ORDER)



When most of us think Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, we focus on the recycle part. George Wright, however, lives in the first two steps, going well beyond recycling by trying to think about things that never have to be consumed in the first place, leaving nothing to recycle. He places a greater emphasis on the Reduce and the Reuse part of the equation. In this light-hearted interview with fellow Santa Fe satsang member Vishwan, George explains some of the novel ways he saves energy, and reuses items in ways most of us have never even considered.



George Wright

GreenFriends: George, I understand that you like to recycle. Is that true?

George: Yes.

GreenFriends: You've got to give me a little more elaborate answer than that, George.

George: Yes. Well, actually, to me, recycling is the last step. It's my least favorite thing. Well, it's not the least favorite, but I think more crucial is to reduce and reuse. Those are the two most important things.

One thing I do in my kitchen, you can see here now, I use ash. I use ash that I have from my fireplace, and I have a little plastic container of it, even though I'm not supposed to use plastic, but still, there it is.

GreenFriends: A little container?

George: A little container of fireplace ash. So I'm just cleaning my sink with fireplace ash.

GreenFriends: So it acts like a scrubbing agent?

George: It acts as a scrubbing agent, and it's also extremely alkaline. So for instance, you'll never want to use it on your hair. Once, I tried it as a shampoo, and it was like, "Oh my God, my scalp is filled with steel wool." It took everything out. So you don't want to do that. But the wonderful thing about the ash is that it's so alkaline. This rag that's in the dish there, hasn't been washed in six or eight months, but the ash is so alkaline that nothing can grow on it. So really, it's antiseptic as well as cleaning. And you can use the ash to polish stainless steel and polish silver. What do you think?

GreenFriends: It looks good.

George: I just washed my sink with it.



Ash container



Sink scrubbed with ash

GreenFriends: Okay. Is there anything else you use ash for besides cleaning? Would you say you use it in a garden?

George: Not in New Mexico, because...well, you can use some, but already, the soil is so alkaline. You don't want to add to it.

GreenFriends: But in areas where the soil is more acid?

George: Yeah, you could use it there. The Indian Pueblos used ash in their adobes. That's how they would recycle or reuse the ash. They would mix it in with the adobes when they were making them. And I think it would be a very good thing, because it's alkaline. It would prevent mold and things from growing. I'm a mischievous cook, so sometimes I put a little bit in the cakes I make.

GreenFriends: In lieu of baking powder or what?

George: No, I just add another element. Sometimes I put coffee grounds in, or I'll put some unbrewed tea in it.

GreenFriends: I think we'll pass on this dessert that you have created for us.

George: The other thing I'd like to describe is T-shirts. I get these T-shirts from Walmart, or Dillard's, and inevitably what happens, seems very quickly, I don't know why, but the back goes out, right under the back collar, and it all just disintegrates. So I cut the T-shirts up. I cut the sleeves off, and I cut the

hard parts of the collar and the seams that are all bumpy. And then I make these rags like this, and then I just use them for wipers.

GreenFriends: For what? Wipers?

George: Instead of paper towels. There haven't been any paper towels ever in this house since I've lived here. So I wipe up the counter with it. And most of the time, it'll dry up and I'll reuse it again, and then I'll just throw it in the corner and put it in the laundry. And they're just so much more effective than paper towels and useful. So that is one of my loveliest, loveliest discoveries.

And the other discovery is this hotbox. I'd been reading about hotboxes. They're made of wood and some kind of insulation, all this kind of stuff. And I said one day, "I'm never going to have the time to build one of these damn things with everything I've got to do."

So I just found a box.

GreenFriends: Please explain the idea behind the hotbox.

George: The idea behind the hotbox is you put, say, Basmati rice, on the burner, you bring it to a boil, and then you take the pot and put it in a box like this, after it's brought to a boil for two or three or four minutes. Then you take this wooden box and you put it in so it fits nicely. It's got the cover on and all that. And I put all the rags around it, and the rags on top, like this. And then I cover it. And I do that at 8:30 or 9 in the morning, and then at lunchtime, I've got a pot of rice.

GreenFriends: Fully cooked?

George: Fully cooked.

GreenFriends: You're putting a cutting board on the top?

George: It could be any board.

GreenFriends: Any board?

George: Yeah. Even if you're bored with yourself, you can put that on top.



Cardboard hotbox with basmati rice

GreenFriends: (Eyes rolling) So you're saving energy, whether it's electricity for an electric stove, or gas for a gas stove, by only using a small amount of energy to get it started?

George: Mm-hmm. And it's sweet. I think it's a gentler food in a way. Electricity or gas has that pulse to it. It's more sattvic in a way, and sweeter. Like Amma says, "Cook your own food, because then it's got your vibration, pure vibration."

There's a story about a guy in India who was possessed by this idea to read newspapers. And he's like, "Where is this coming from?" It turned out the guy who was cooking his food was reading a newspaper as he was cooking. Then it goes into the food.

GreenFriends: So when you're cooking the food this way by putting it in a box and leaving it alone, then there's no vibes going into it?

George: Yeah, right. Well, maybe the vibes of the house.

GreenFriends: Well, it's kind of neutral, I mean, it's not being directly affected by the cook.

George: Right.

GreenFriends: Okay, George. So you get the ash from the fireplace. Tell us about how you heat your house.

George: Well, in the winter, I do have a gas heater in the living room, which I turn on in the morning, just to take the edge off the chill while I'm doing the meditation and so forth. And then I shut it off when I'm out working in the day. In the evening I use the fireplace. I have a nice fireplace and I make a blazing fire in front of that. And then I do yoga or I read in front of it and it's just totally delightful. The treat of a fire at the end of the day makes a goal so I don't mind the cold so much. But furthermore, I've discovered that I could train myself to not mind the cold. I could feel cold, or I could feel chilled, and I could distinguish the kind of chill that would lead to illness and the kind of chill that would just be like I'm chilly.

I wouldn't mind being chilly. Somebody told me that's a good way to stimulate your immune system, to be a little bit cold. And also the lower temperature is better for your lungs rather than even 60 or 65. This house can be in the 40s. Sometimes going down in the upper 30s. But it gives me a feeling of self-confidence, if we were to arrive at a time where there's no gas or no electricity, or something went down, I could survive, and be, and happily.

Part of the way of doing it is to dress properly. In the middle of winter, I have long johns that are silk. Over that I'll have long johns that are smart wool, Merino wool. Over that, I'll have a final shirt and over that, I'll have a sweater and over that, I'll have another sweater and then I'll have a coat or a down jacket, so I can live comfortably. I'm a little bit muffled up about clothing, but it's wonderful.

GreenFriends: This is actually what a lot of people had to do recently during the ice storm in Texas.

George: Exactly. The other thing that I do that I think is really a wonderful discovery is all my clothing goes out into the sunshine every morning. The long underwear, the silk, the wool, the pants, everything goes out. The pillows from the bed, sometimes the top sheet, and they're all cooking in the sun.

GreenFriends: And what are you saving by doing that?

George: I don't have to wash so much. I mean the silks, the winter silk, the silk underwear and the smart wools will maybe be washed two times in the winter. Probably I wouldn't even need to do that because they're refreshed. Silk and wool doesn't hold odor, cotton does. Cotton definitely holds odor. Silk and wool doesn't, so you save the normal things on laundry.

GreenFriends: So you're saving water and you're saving the energy to heat that water.

George: Yeah. Furthermore, the clothes that have been put out there, smell almost like freshly-washed clothes. They have that sun kind of scent to them. And then sometimes I'll put my clothes out, well, we don't get rain so much here in New Mexico, but I'll put them out before the rain, because then they'll get an extra rinse.

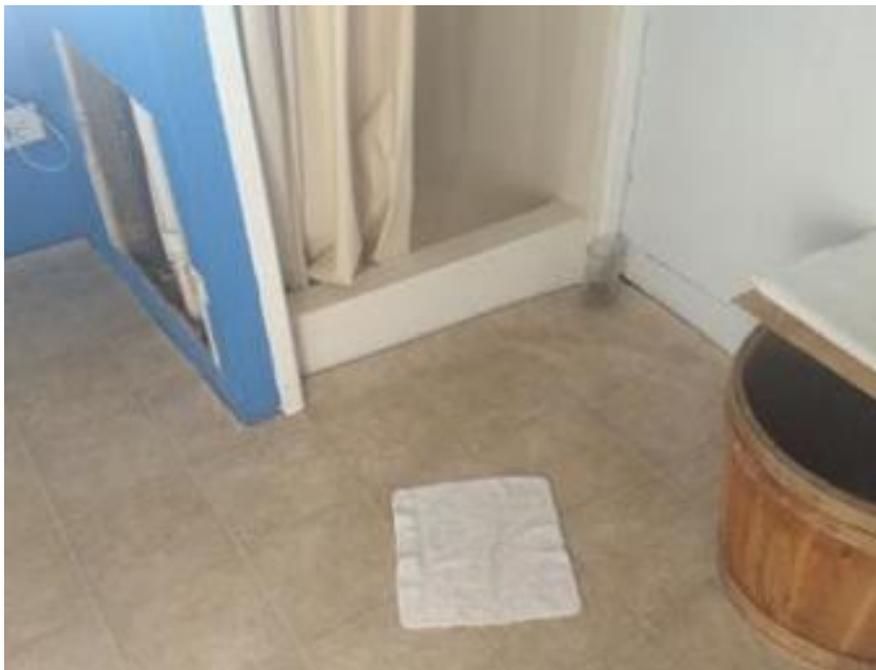
GreenFriends: And your clothes smell so good that you don't have to take a shower, right?

George: Right. And then even the wind, I love the wind because the wind blows through the clothes. It's like blowing the clothes out. Something refreshes them. I don't know if it's true, but poetically, it seems like that's true. And it's just, I don't know, it's just so lovely. It's just so completely lovely to live like that. Sometimes in the wintertime I'll go in, and I have some rose oil, and I'll be under the sheets that have just been outside and all smelling fresh with the sun. And I'll put a little rose oil on each of my wrists. And then I'll fall off to sleep and I'm smelling roses and fresh laundry sheets. It's like Holy Mary, Mother of God has suddenly appeared.

GreenFriends: It sounds like a different spin on both wind power and solar power. We're taking advantage of both of those things. You're not generating electricity, you're avoiding the use of electricity.

George: Also it's in the garden. All the clothes are being dried in the garden. There's rosemary; there's mint; there's oregano; there's chives; there's chard. All these different kinds of aromatic things. And don't forget the moon. You have the moon. Sometimes I leave the things out, and they're getting moonlight. It's a subtle thing, but it's there.

This morning I was just about to get out of the shower and I realized that the little hand towel I use as a bathmat was gone. I looked around and saw a washcloth and I used it for a bathmat. It was perfect! My two bare feet barely fit on it, but they did!



Wash cloth shower mat

My usual “hand towel bathmat” is about 12 in. by 18 in. (216 sq. in.) - much smaller than a more standard sized bath mat which is about 2 ft. by 3 ft. (864 sq. in.) That is four times the size of mine. This morning’s discovery opened new dimensions of frugal Reduce.

And even better, eliminate the bathmat altogether! Enjoy the experience of cold feet bottoms shivering spineward. Furthermore, as far as towels go, I use a 20 in. by 40 in. (800 sq. in.) white “gym” towel, like the ones you get at the gym. Regular size bath towels are about 2 ft. by 4 ft. (1152 sq. in.), about 50% larger. Downsizing to smaller towels can save 50% on laundry costs.

The Japanese have small bath towels. Here is one that measures 13 in. by 34 in. (442 sq. in.)! Not only is it small, it is thin - the thickness of a cotton sheet! Yikes! Some of the more luxurious Japanese bath towels are made of terrycloth, but it is the thinnest terry cloth that I have ever seen. I can almost dry my average size 5’ 5”, 150 lb. frame. I must wring out the towel several times and there is still a layer of moisture on the skin, which quickly evaporates. I can do the same job with a 12 in. by 12 in. US washcloth. Easier to do in warmer summer temperatures.

This sensibility, to me, is the essence of Reduce. It's an interesting, fun game – finding ways to economize, looking with fresh eyes, what is really needed – essential. Shradha all over the place!

~GREENFRIENDS



Japanese bath towel

KABIR'S JOURNEY WITH GREENFRIENDS AND THE BEES (AYUDH MEMBER)



I STARTED COMING TO AMMA'S ASHRAM IN SAN RAMON, CALIFORNIA IN 2017, DURING AMMA'S SUMMER TOUR.

I returned in 2018 as a Karma Yogi**, and in 2019 my family moved to a town near the ashram. During Amma's absence, I was drawn to the ashram to do seva (selfless service) and learn the Vedic sciences from a hands-on, practical approach. In 2020, I got involved with GreenFriends, Amma's environmental sustainability initiatives. I found it to be very therapeutic as well as a way to offset my carbon footprint.

GreenFriends Farm at MA Center San Ramon is one of the ashram's many GreenFriends projects, which also include recycling, waste reduction, vegetable gardening, ecosystem habitat protection, solar energy and more. GreenFriends Farm (GFF) comprises three main orchards, the Maha Ganapati, the

Lotus, and the Adi. The largest orchard is the Maha Ganapati. My first seva was to do tree maintenance to help conserve water for the trees during the California drought. This included mulching, and planting cover crops. Additionally the GFF crew worked on drilling holes to put in irrigation stakes so that the water from the drip system would go directly to the roots and stay in the soil for longer periods of time.



My next seva was beekeeping which turned out to be an especially fascinating experience. I first got interested in bees years ago, after hearing about colony collapse disorder (CCD) which causes bee populations to mysteriously decline. However, I had never had an opportunity to learn about it. When someone mentioned to me that there is a GFF beekeeping team consisting of our bee experts, Bill and Dan, and GFF volunteers Jarret, Jasmin and

Muneebah, I jumped at the opportunity to join. Despite getting stung multiple times, joining the bee keeping team has been one of the best life choices I have made. There are so many lessons to learn from the bees, both spiritual and material. I look at the beehive as a fully optimized “system”, as each type of bee carries out its particular function to ensure that the hive functions properly. Each bee is totally egoless and carries out its duties without question. One of the tasks in beekeeping is called queen-spotting, in which we have to find the queen amongst the thousands of bees. Oftentimes seeing the queen reminded me of seeing Amma, surrounded by hundreds of people, all clamoring for her attention.

One of the best parts of the GFF experience is learning from people who are passionate about the environment and who understand nature on a spiritual level. I have been mentored by people on the GFF teams who have been farmers in their native countries or localities, and bring their skills to the ashram. Each day at GFF felt like an adventure and many of the lessons that I learned at the ashram I brought home to apply to daily life. I learned how to properly care for houseplants,



planted food for the bees in my home garden, and became more aware of the origins of the food on my plate. Additionally, I became more attuned to local bee populations and often find myself spotting bees in places that I never would have expected. GreenFriends Farm SR has taught me many lifelong lessons that have enabled me to connect to nature in a way that I had not before. I hope to learn more about the earth and its conservation by continuing my GreenFriends journey.

For more information about GreenFriends Farm, go to www.greenfriendsfarm.org

~ KABIR, AYUDH MEMBER

** - The Karma Yoga program at a few of Amma's North American Centers is a program in which interested devotees can stay at the ashram for a limited period of time (from between 2 weeks to 2 months) and perform selfless service as their main sadhana focus. They volunteer each day in one of the areas of the ashram needing help or with one of the charitable programs. A Karma Yogi is a devotee who is participating in that program. Of course everyone who stays at the ashram as a guest or longer term participates in seva (selfless service) which is also called karma yoga.

For more information on the Karma Yoga Program go to:
MAC San Ramon:

<https://amma.org/groups/north-america/ma-center-san-ramon/guides/karma-yoga-program>

MAC Chicago:

<https://amma.org/groups/north-america/ma-center-chicago/karma-yoga-program-ma-center-chicago>



INTRODUCING 'EMBRACING THE TREES'



A TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE OF GREENFRIENDS NORTH AMERICA

Amma's encouragement for us to plant trees has gotten stronger and taken on more urgency recently. First she asked us to plant one tree per month. Now she asks us to also plant trees for special holy days, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Although willing to plant trees, many of us don't know how or where to begin. To that end, GreenFriends North America is introducing the Embracing the Trees initiative to support all MA Centers and satsangs as we work together to plant as many trees as we can.

First a few words from our foremost guide and inspiration, Amma. These are words that she has spoken on different occasions in the past years, and which she continues to emphasize:

"The entire world revolves around the central point of compassion. It is sustained by this alone. This is seen in Nature, where all creatures coexist and help each other survive in subtle and gross

ways. As more and more plants and animals are destroyed and become extinct, we see how we are unable to get pure air, which in turn makes our bodies impure, pollutes our food, and so on."

(Amma - Guru Purnima 2020)

"We are a part of nature. We have come from nature. The human body is comprised of the five natural elements. Forever forbearing and forgiving us, the earth remains as our constant support. The sun gives us light. Trees absorb carbon dioxide, which is poisonous to us, and release oxygen. Rivers and lakes give us fresh water to quench our thirst. Air provides us with our life-breath. In spite of all this, human beings, who have evolved from the five elements, fail to acknowledge their importance.

"... Therefore our focus today should neither be on dependence nor non-dependence, but on interdependence. This is because humans, animals, plants, the earth, the sky, the atmosphere, the sun, the moon and all the planets are all interdependent." (Amma, Birthday 2012)

The GreenFriends North America "Embracing the Trees" initiative (GFNA ETT) aims to provide opportunities for practicing this interdependence and cooperation in doing our part to re-green Mother Earth, and to honor Amma's pledge to join the Trillion Tree Campaign which was launched by the UN in March of 2018.

<https://www.embracingtheworld.org/news/trillion-tree-campaign/>

The ETT initiative involves regional resource teams working through the regional MA Center ashrams (including Amma Centers and Amma Foundation of Canada) to support tree planting activities among satsangs. It is envisioned to be an interconnected web of support and information among the MA Centers and satsangs, sharing information and expertise. The web site greenfriendsna.org is building a web section to support this web of tree planting activity among satsangs.

There are many ways for satsangs to be involved in this endeavor, including the initial phase of research and planning. Some satsangs will want to be involved in tree planting only, whether on public, private lands or in urban centers. Some might focus on growing the appropriate trees for your region from seeds or by grafting onto rootstock. Some might want to donate toward growing or planting trees. There are many ways to be involved.

It is important to take the time for the research and planning phase so that the most appropriate trees and support plants for your region are chosen, given the climatic changes we are seeing. Also, if applicable, different partner organizations would need to be vetted.

Going slow and starting small will ensure success in the long run.

All this will be guided by your regional MAC ETT team.

Regional MA Centers are putting together ETT teams that will guide satsangs and individuals in their regions with all aspects of this endeavor. If you are interested in being involved, please contact your satsang coordinator or regional MAC at the address listed at the end of the article. You can also write to us at trees@greenfriendsna.org if it is not clear which regional MAC you should connect with. Please include the city and state you live in when writing to us.

Modern science is proving that the entire universe, both gross and subtle, is made up of one substance and all the different modifications of this substance are governed by the same laws. For Ages, the Sages of India have been calling that one substance as the Universal Consciousness. Through this Consciousness we are all united and interdependent, just as Amma describes to us, over and over in different ways.

With Amma's grace, may we join together as an interdependent cooperative web of life-sustaining actions for Mother Earth and future generations.

**Swamini Ambikamrita Prana
and GreenFriends North America Core Team:**

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