



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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BLISS IN A DELUGE



AND IT RAINED AND RAINED AND THEN ONE DAY IT DIDN'T, AND SO I WORE MY YELLOW PLASTIC RAIN JACKET AND RAIN PANTS ANYWAY.

I was living in Ireland at the time, 2017, in one of those white-washed Irish cottages with a red door, on the Isle of Dough in Inishowen, County Donegal. I'd dreamed of living in one of those cottages every time I saw a photo of one, and by Amma's Grace, one came to me during my year-long stay there. My cottage stood on the high end of a long slope of a sheep pasture overlooking Trawbreaga Bay that curved around the Isle of Dough. All of Ireland seems to be about circles—the circle on the Celtic Cross, ancient standing stone circles, the many round goddess temples (older than the

Egyptian pyramids) that were built along the River Boyne. In ancient times, before the invasion of the Celts, Ireland had been a goddess culture, with Mother Nature at the center of it all.

And so there I was on this summer day, dressed for rain, walking along under a blue and relatively cloudless sky. In Ireland you can never know about the rain and when it might come. I'd driven to a field a couple of miles down the road from my cottage to a spot where I often began my walk to the beach. As I strolled along the pathway through the grasses and among the various high knolls, the weather was calm, with only a light breeze. Then, after a few minutes, as I reached the top of a little rise, suddenly the wind whipped up, bringing with it a black cloud fast approaching. I was out in the open. I saw no other choice but to stand still and chant my mantra. I was caught in a deluge. Turning my back to the downpour, I reveled in the sound of the rain on my plastic jacket and the feel of it pelting my back.

When the rain slowed, I could see more black clouds blowing towards me, more ominous than the first one. And so I ran down the hill, down the trail lined with tufts of long pointy grasses, past the lion-man, the ancient troll who guards the narrow pathway, and down and down the now sandy trail to the shore. My rain jacket kept me dry, but my rain pants leaked, and my knees were soaked. I navigated my way across the golf-ball-sized pebbles, stepping gingerly, plotting the way over wobbly wet stones, until my feet touched hard sand on the shores of Trawbreaga Bay. I picked up speed and sprinted around the bend where I ducked into a cave.



Lion-man.

The rain fell in sheets, waving like wind-blown curtains, opening to mysteries unknown, unseen. The tide was partly out, leaving glass-like mirrors in the sand, sheets of rain reflecting there, and the light beyond the black clouds shining in the sandy mirror and in the falling rain. In the distance, across the narrow channel leading into the bay, cliffs rose up from the Atlantic to the high green hills of Donegal's Seven Sister Mountain range, and down from there, directly across the water from where I stood are Seven Sister sand dunes.

The cave where I'd sought shelter, smelling of moist sand, mossy rock, and old seaweed, allowed me the perfect dry spot for viewing the glory and spectacle of the storm. I remembered I was inside the very cave that had been made famous by the movie "A Shine of Rainbows," about a lonely orphan boy who makes friends with a baby seal. The boy's adoptive mother teaches the boy how to sing in a way that causes rainbows to appear and in doing so to call his seal friend to him. The lore around seals in Ireland is well-known, as it is the land where selkies hide, and if you have the eyes to see, you might catch a glimpse of one. The boy in the film is healed through the love of his seal friend and his adoptive mother's nurturing care. In my own imagination I envisioned that the baby

seal's mother might have been a selkie whose very home was the cave in which I was standing. In any case, the feeling of magic in that cavern was palpable, ancient and storied.



From inside the cave.

There was no rainbow with my storm today, no sun to bring out the colors. But there was enough light and drama in the cloud formations to give any poet inspiration. I, for one, was in a state of rapture. Eventually, the rain stopped. I gave a bow to our beloved Amma for the experience she had gifted me, and to the ancient stone beings that live in the rocky cliffs along that shore. Stepping out of the cave, I moved along down the beach, with a feeling of awe, and of reverence in my heart, remembering all the while what Amma tells us—Creator and Creation are One.



~ SAVITRI L. BESS

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE AND TREES



EXCERPTS FROM A TALK GIVEN BY AHALYA DURING THE NEW ENGLAND NATURE AND YOGA DAY WITH SWAMINI AMBIKĀMRITA PRĀNA, JUNE 2023

We can feel the energy of trees in their expression as an aspect of nature. Their rhythm is long, slow efforts. Their qualities are gentleness, trust, surrender. When we trust in the longer-term cycles of nature, we can feel less anxiety, discouragement, and striving for recognition for the ego. We can plant our seeds, or saplings, offer gentle, consistent care with self-surrender, and feel aligned with Nature's cycles and God's grace.

FOREST BATHING

You may have heard of forest bathing, which was developed as a practice by the Japanese, who call it Shinrin Yoku. Very similar to what we just experienced in our meditation with Swamini. The practice is to spend time in a natural setting and consciously tune the senses to the environment, allowing the mind to quiet. The senses can be a bridge, allowing the inherent peace of nature to affect us. Part of the practice is to invite wonder, and awe.

I read an article about forest bathing on the website of Kaiser Permanente, the medical company. The anti-stress and healing benefits of spending time with trees, and with nature, is so scientifically validated that it is even promoted by an insurance and medical company.



SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

Spending time with trees is beneficial for the mind and body, and can help us to develop spiritual qualities. Caring for a tree teaches us lessons such as patience, compassion, and self-surrender. Planting and raising a tree is a truly selfless act, for while we may enjoy its presence in our own yard, it is primarily a gift for future generations. Future individuals, communities, other vegetation, and wildlife, will benefit from a tree far beyond our own effort to care for it.

SELFLESSNESS WILL HEAL NATURE

Ultimately, I think it is the beauty of the selfless act that will be most healing for nature, for our planet, and for us.

We can grow by mirroring the qualities in nature of self-sacrifice, forgiveness, surrender, graceful acceptance of change, and interdependence. Embracing the Trees

wants to encourage the development of these qualities, and it doesn't have to be through austerity or hours of meditation.

NATURE IS JOY

The essential energy of nature can be perceived as joy, or divine bliss. By devoting attention and effort to relating with nature, such as planting a tree, growing garden vegetables, or engaging in an eco-meditation we can consciously connect with the essence of joy.

Nature easily expresses divine joy, as it has no mind to confuse it, as we do. Our minds can loosen their grip a little, allowing some space to open up like the branches in the tree canopy.

Imagine the bliss of the leaves, as the soft wind blows through and dances with them. Imagine the joy of a tree hosting bird and squirrel families, year after year, nourishing so many other parts of nature with their shade, with the body of their trunk, with their fallen leaves and seeds. Just by being themselves, trees embody the unique joy of selfless giving.

AMMA'S WISH FOR US

I believe this is the bliss that Amma wants us to connect to, and Embracing the Trees is just one more of Amma's infinite ways to help lead us there.

NPR Interview: [Spending time in a forest can boost health and lower stress. Here's how](#)

~ AHALYA, NEW HAMPSHIRE



THE DEVOTION AND SELFLESSNESS OF BEES



**EXCERPTS FROM MARY BETH'S SATSANG IN AMRITAPURI,
CONTINUED FROM 2023 Q3 [[PREVIOUS ARTICLE](#)]**

The day before I left to come to the Amritapuri ashram I was out in my garden. I looked over and noticed that a hive of honeybees had moved into the eaves of my home. This particular kind of bee likes to make their home in the walls of houses. They can do a lot of damage to a building. So I decided to call a local beekeeper to come and move them.

She came and gently took the honeycomb out of the wall and put it into her beekeeping box. She scooped out all of the bees and added them in with the honeycomb but she couldn't find the queen. So all the bees just kept flying back into the structure. Their devotion to their queen was unbending.

I could not help but think of Amma as the beekeeper worked, looking for the queen. Even though Covid has kept me away, all I wanted to do was fly and be with Amma. I could relate to the bees' wanting. What does it mean to have a guru?

When I arrived at Amritapuri I was put into the Amrita Darshan building. The first day I noticed a giant beehive attached to the overhang of the building. I soon discovered more on other floors. So many bees at my home in Los Angeles and here.

Amma says,

“Love is not something that can be taught by someone or learned from somewhere. But in the presence of a perfect master we can feel it and, in due course, develop it, because the Satguru creates the necessary circumstances for love to grow within us. These circumstances created by the Guru will be so beautiful and unforgettable that we will truly cherish these moments as something precious and invaluable. They will remain as a sweet memory forever and ever. One incident of this kind will create a big wave of love in us. More incidents like this created by the Guru will make a chain of exhilarating memories which will produce waves and waves of love. Through these circumstances the Guru will win over our heart and soul, filling us with pure and innocent love.”

One morning, a few days after I arrived, I was going to morning prayer, and as I came down the stairs my forehead smacked right into a swarm of bees in front of the elevators. They had started a new hive on the light.

At this point I felt called to really stop and contemplate the life of a bee. Bees are devoted to their queen, the hive collective, and to the world. Their entire life is a devotion to others.

They spend their time collecting pollen to create honey to feed the collective. In their lifetime they will make less than 1 gram of honey, but collectively they feed thousands in the hive.

While gathering the pollen for their queen and fellow bees they pollinate the world's food. The United Nations states that bees pollinate over 71% of the crops responsible for 90% of all food grown around the world. They feed not only their collective, they feed the world through their actions.

The labor of the sevites (volunteers) growing trees would produce no fruit if it wasn't for the bees. They come and attentively visit every blossom and pollinate the flowers. Their actions affect the entire world. Without them our existence crumbles.

Amma says,

Be like the honeybee who gathers only nectar wherever it goes.
Seek the goodness that is found in everyone.



While each bee gathers only 1 gram of honey in his life, that small action has a huge benefit. When we show up for others we also are able to change the world. When our actions are for the collective we radiate love.

The bees where I live sting quite quickly if they feel their queen or hive is threatened. You must be careful when you are near their home. I have noticed the bees here are quite gentle. You can walk right up to their hive and they have no reaction. They continue to tend to the hive. Even when I walked right into them they didn't sting me. Their devotion to the hive is steady, kind, and peaceful.

I look at the collective action of Amma and her children. Her global beehive. I see a community that is feeding the world physically, mentally, and spiritually. The fragrance of the collective drifts to the air for all. A sweet fragrance of unconditional devoted love. It attracts people from all over the world and welcomes them with open arms.

Nature has always been very important to me. She was my first spiritual teacher. As a child I

used to wander the hills and streets always looking at all of the animals, bugs, plants, and trees. I couldn't believe how big and creative and gorgeous the world was. My childhood love grew into a love for gardening and environmental consciousness.

Amma says,

Nature is our first mother. She nurtures us throughout our lives. Our birth mother may allow us to sit on her lap for a couple of years, but Mother Nature patiently bears our weight our entire life. Just as a child is obligated to his birth mother, we should feel an obligation and responsibility toward Mother Nature. If we forget this responsibility, it is equal to forgetting our own self. If we forget Nature, we will cease to exist, for to do so is to walk toward death.

May we be inspired by the bees to practice selfless devotion for the greater good of all species. When we all work together we can change the world and support our future generations.

Amma says,

May the tree of our life be firmly rooted in the soil of love. May good deeds be the leaves on that tree. May words of kindness form its flowers, and may peace be its fruit. Let us grow and prosper as one family united in love.

Thank you Amma for all of these words of wisdom. May we all take them to heart and lovingly care for Mother Nature.

~ MARY BETH, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

THE SENTIENCE OF TREES



IN THE LATEST EDITION OF THE BOOK *TREES OF NORTH AMERICA* BY THE AUDUBON SOCIETY, A NEW SECTION HAS BEEN ADDED CALLED “PLANT COMMUNICATION.”

The Audubon Society says “Trees appear to have multiple networks for sharing resources and information with one another.” When the roots of one tree have direct contact with the roots of another, their vascular systems can actually merge. These trees then share water, carbon, nutrients and chemical messages through these root grafts. Recent research suggests that trees are communicating through these grafts and through their mycorrhizal fungi connections, which has been christened the wood-wide-web. Trees also communicate through airborne chemicals through the use of pheromones and other scents. If an insect attacks one tree, that tree sends chemical signals to the trees in a circle around it and all those trees change the chemistry of their leaves to make the leaves less palatable for that insect. Additionally, “Studies have shown that trees can recognize if

their neighbors are family.” They even nurture their own seedlings and often form alliances with trees from different species.

Forests capture and store the largest amount of carbon on the planet, second only to oceans. They provide habitat for over half the species on the planet, they help regulate the rain, clean the air and bring us a sense of peace and majesty in their presence.



In Amma’s booklet, *Man and Nature*, published by the Amritapuri ashram decades before the current research on the benefit of trees, Amma said,

“Science has yet to understand the various benefits that forests bestow on nature. They are indispensable. They purify and prevent the overheating of the atmosphere, they keep the soil moist, they protect and preserve wildlife. You may feel that destroying a tree or a plant is less wrong than killing a human being. This concept is wrong. In order to meet the necessities of life, it is not wrong to cut down trees and collect medicinal plants from the forests. But we must not exploit and destroy the forests. When the ancient sages encouraged us to worship trees, they were teaching the world the importance of preserving and protecting nature. Trees purify the atmosphere absorbing the carbon we exhale. They greatly assist the harmony of nature. Even mentally worshiping and protecting the trees, that bring us so much good, is beneficial.”

Urban forests, too, are now being acknowledged as vital planetary ecosystems that have been overlooked for the benefits they have selflessly given us for thousands of years. Towns and cities, at this moment in history, house more than half the world’s population. And the importance of urban

forests for the health of the people in these cities, and for planetary health, is beginning to be recognized.

Replenishing trees in both the worldwide traditional forests as well as in all urban forest environments, plays a vital role in healing the planet and reducing the effects of climate change. Amma has been encouraging us for many years to grow and plant trees.

“Everyone should grow trees and plants in their yard. Planting a tree is a selfless service to society. Plant trees. It is a blessing to do so. Trees outlive us and provide fruit and shade to coming generations. Just as we enjoy the presence of trees planted by people in the past, we too should plant for future generations. If we haven’t done any selfless acts, we should plant a tree or sapling, that would be a truly selfless deed, benefiting others and ourselves.”



Trees cool and reduce the “heat island effect” in cities, reducing the temperature produced by so much hardscape (such as cement and asphalt) by up to as much as 20° Fahrenheit (11° Celsius). Trees provide habitat for numerous birds, animals and insects, absorb CO₂, reduce carbon emissions, improve air quality and have even been shown to improve physical and mental health for residents by reducing blood pressure and stress.

Urban nut and fruit trees have also helped reduce city food insecurity. In the city where I live, for example, Food is Free (a nonprofit group) collects ripe fruit and/or nuts, if residents don’t want the harvest, or have too much of a harvest, and they give the surplus to families in need, food banks and shelters. Approximately 25,000 pounds of food was harvested in 2022 alone.

Amma has said,

“Mother earth is serving us; the sun, the moon and the stars all serve us. What can we do in return for their selfless service? Let us take from nature only what we really need and try to give back to some extent. Mother Nature has now begun withdrawing her blessings. It is the urgent duty of all human beings to please her by performing selfless actions endowed with love, faith and sincerity. Only then will she flow again and bless humanity with endless resources.”

Amma's Embracing the World Initiative is a member organization of the United Nations Billion Tree Campaign and has planted more than a million trees globally since 2001. Addressing the [Trillion Tree Campaign](#), Amma said,

“Forests play the most important role in maintaining nature's harmony. Each country should try to protect its remaining forests and plant as many trees as possible.”

Swami Jnanamritananda, who wrote an online PDF "[Nature is Love](#)," said that Amma began GreenFriends so that we could see that we have the same relationship with nature that Amma has. There are numerous opportunities through GreenFriends and worldwide to learn how to grow, plant and care for trees. Swamiji said that with all of the GreenFriends Initiatives, many of the people they connected with wanted to learn how to take action and address issues like global warming, pollution, recycling and tree-planting. Taking care of nature is one way to involve many people in spiritual practices.

Amma has said,



“Everything is permeated with God-consciousness. The earth, trees, plants, and animals are all manifestations of God. We must have love and concern for nature as well as for each other. Everything relies on nature to live, we are an interdependent part of nature. Our lives depend on the wellbeing of the whole. It is one of our foremost duties to lovingly care for all living things. The progress and prosperity of humanity depend solely on the good that people do for nature. By establishing a loving bond between humanity and nature, we ensure both the balance of nature and the progress of humanity.”

Dr. Priya Nair in Amritapuri shared a story of one of Amma's visits at the French ashram prior to the pandemic. She said that Amma walked over to a tree and touched the leaves on the lower branches, and the water from the dewdrops streamed down Amma's hand.

“See,” Amma said, “the movement of the water down my hand, the feel of the grass on my feet, the coolness of the leaves on my skin, all this is the form of God. When God has provided us with such a brilliant manifestation, why look to anything more for inspiration? Why do we need any other form?”

In one of Amma's YouTube videos in the "[Amma's Heart](#)" series, she talks about a few ways in which we can start to give back to nature:

“People have to plant flowering trees and also install bee hives. Thousands of Amma's children are doing this, but even more children should get involved and plant more trees and beehives with focus and sincerity. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals changes first. Only through love and respect of nature will we become spiritually awakened. Our goal is to feel life everywhere. Nature is a huge flower garden. Let us work together to prevent these diverse flowers from withering away, so that the garden may remain eternally beautiful. For that, we should first make a resolve within our heart to make all possible efforts. Amma prays to the Supreme to grace us with the blessings to do so.”

May we all make the resolve to honor Amma's words and requests to honor Mother Nature by planting and caring for more trees. May we find ways to have more love and concern for nature and may we take expedient actions within our own sphere of life to bring Mother Nature back to harmony and wellbeing.

~ DIVYA NANCY GRIFFITHS, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO



PLESSIS ECOVILLAGE



AN ECOLOGICAL LIVING COMMUNITY ADJACENT TO AMMA'S FRENCH ASHRAM

The Plessis ecovillage is the home of several families who wish to embody an ecological and harmonious way of life. Designed to welcome 28 families, 12 eco-houses have already been built, in which 20 adults and 10 children are currently living.

The village is located right next door to Amma's French ashram in Pontgouin, France, and has been conceived to support the aspirations of a group of devotees to live together in sharing, sobriety, simplicity, self-reliance

and respect for Nature. To achieve this intention, residents seek to cultivate values of kindness, solidarity and responsibility, in order to take care of the ecosystem and of human relationships.



The project has been organized with private eco-friendly houses, common buildings, land and gardens which facilitate sharing and community living. A 250 m² (2,700 sq ft) common house in the middle of the village hosts a large community room, 5 bedrooms, 2 kitchens, a co-working space and other facilities. The members can use the facilities for personal needs, but they can also be used for activities by like-minded visitors who are interested in exploring this way of living.

At the onset of the project, the residents created regulations pertaining to the design and construction of the houses and buildings to ensure their carbon footprint is very low. The regulations include the use of bio-sourced materials, mostly straw, clay and wood, wood as a source of heat, installation of dry toilets (no-flush toilets that operate without using water, including composting toilets and container-based systems) and the use of solar power for heating water. As a result, they are almost passive (Passivhaus), a voluntary standard focusing on energy efficiency and minimal ecological impact which includes principles such as airtight construction, exceptional thermal insulation, high performance doors and windows, ventilations systems with heat recovery, etc. Overall, a veritable laboratory of eco-building techniques.

The group opted for eco-friendly sanitation by implementing three phyto-purification systems for recycling greywater. This initiative is part of a comprehensive water management strategy that includes swales, ponds, and other features, enhancing the ecosystem's resilience to summer heatwaves.

The general plan for the 4.3-hectare (10.6-acre) property was created using permaculture design. In particular, approximately 100 fruit trees have already been planted and a food forest has been established. This design facilitates a progressive shift towards self-sustaining food production for the inhabitants, featuring communal vegetable gardens, two shared chicken coops, and an abundance of berry bushes.



The governance is sociocracy-oriented, emphasizing inclusive, consensus-based processes and collaborative leadership. The implementation at the ecovillage includes plenary sessions, a steering committee, different circles and working groups to manage different areas such as gardens, communication, community living, building works, common house. Debates and sharing circles are organized on a monthly basis. As more families move into the community, governance will continue to evolve in order to adapt to the new needs of the group.

For more information about this project, visit:

<https://amma.org/news/fulfilling-the-dream-to-live-a-sustainable-life>

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu
May all beings everywhere be happy.

~ DIVYANAND, PROJECT COORDINATOR FOR PLESSIS ECOVILLAGE



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