

# NATURE

THE VESTURE OF GOD

SATHYA SAI INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION





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*“Any use of the elements over and above legitimate bounds is a sacrilege. So too, each element must be used under some limitations, not as and how you like. Treat the elements as a vesture of the almighty.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 11 March 1978  
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# NATURE

THE VESTURE OF GOD

*Dedicated to*

BHAGAWAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

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# FOREWORD

*“Nature is your school, your laboratory, the gateway to liberation, and the panorama of God’s majesty. Seek to know the lessons it is ready to teach.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 4 Oct 1970

## NATURE IS THE VESTURE OF GOD

Nature is a great gift of God to humanity, but even more important, it is the vesture of God. The ultimate truth is that Nature is the manifestation of God. Every cell, every atom, every moment in the universe is permeated by divinity, which is love itself. We owe our very existence to Nature. Like a compassionate mother, Nature nurtures us, sustains us, and protects us by giving us food, water, air, land and natural resources that often are taken for granted.

Nature is also a supreme teacher, for she teaches us love, patience, forbearance and sacrifice, which can be experienced by observing the interactions of trees, plants, animals, rivers, lakes and other natural phenomena.

Our attitude to such a compassionate Mother Nature should be one of awe, reverence and gratitude. But unfortunately, instead of being grateful, man is the only being in creation that is abusing nature with unbridled greed and selfishness, while other species continue to live within their prescribed limits, respecting the laws of Nature and utilising its gifts sparingly, thankfully and respectfully. On the other hand, man also has the unique capacity to correct his outlook and conduct.

## MAN’S UNBECOMING CONDUCT IS CAUSING HAVOC

Man, in the past few decades, has been abusing the natural elements, polluting the air, water and soil without regard for their ill effects, extracting fossil fuels to satisfy his never-ending desires, destroying forests that support life itself, and eliminating the natural habitats of many species, to name a few. The consequences of these reckless actions are obvious and are being manifested in premature deaths, ravaging diseases, destruction of species and their natural habitat, as well as various natural disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, floods, droughts, forest fires and other calamities that are taking a heavy toll on humanity.

For example, in 2016, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that air pollution is responsible for about one in every nine deaths annually, and scientific studies have shown that air pollution affects even unborn children. Climate change, leading to global warming is currently an immense threat to the planet – negatively affecting the Earth and all life on this planet, as explained in more detail in this booklet.

Many concerned people, including faith leaders, national governments, community leaders and environmental stewards are now taking action to increase our awareness and mobilise resources to protect Mother Earth – for the good of all creation.

## HOW TO RE-ESTABLISH BALANCE BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE

Sathya Sai Baba has said that pollution outside is a reflection of pollution inside our minds. The fundamental cause of our environmental problem is man’s greed, selfishness and disregard of the laws of Nature, caused by excessive desires and neglect of the innate human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence. The best way to address this problem is to practise placing a ceiling on our desires – such as reducing petroleum consumption, plastic goods and water usage – along with other positive actions so that we do not waste precious natural resources unnecessarily.

We should also practise the basic human values with respect to Nature by manifesting love for all creation and the Creator, for Nature is a reflection of the divine. Our love must encompass all creatures and creation and be expressed in our thoughts, words and deeds.

Sathya Sai Baba, the universal teacher, and other great masters have not only warned us about the dangers we are facing today but also told us about ways to correct our behaviour and attitude to re-establish rapport with nature.

## ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

The Sathya Sai Organisation has implemented many initiatives to instil love for Nature, the practice of ceiling on desires, and the practice of human values with respect to the environment. Many environmental projects have been and are being implemented in India and around the world, as part of the divine mission, such as landmark solar projects in Prasanthi Nilayam and in Thailand; planting trees for reforestation in Azerbaijan, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, Moldova, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa and USA; and cleaning beaches and riverbanks in Canada, Dubai, Ghana, Mexico, India, Nepal and Russia, to name a few.

Numerous public outreach initiatives such as: public meetings, Walks for Values, interfaith meetings and community projects are addressing environmental protection and restoration, and raising public consciousness about this important subject around the globe.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The Go Green Conference proposes to implement our vision of living in harmony with Nature by conducting study circles, practising ceiling on desires at the personal level, using eco-friendly materials and practices at Sathya Sai Centres, Groups and other venues, incorporating environmental awareness in educational curricula and SSEHV, and public outreach programmes.

The conference material shows ways to, for example, reuse, recycle and reduce consumer products, buy local produce, use less energy, use fewer chemicals at home and in industry, and reduce our carbon footprint by changing the ways we travel. These and other wonderful ideas and concepts are discussed further in this booklet and will be deliberated upon at the conference.

The conference resolutions will be implemented by individuals, communities and countries through the efforts of the Sathya Sai Organisation.



## CONCLUSION

Finally, when we are in harmony with Nature, we will be happy and peaceful and make our fellow beings happy. This is the best way to express our gratitude to Mother Nature and God. Each one of us can contribute to make our environment clean and habitable, not only for ourselves and our fellow human beings, but also for the flora and fauna that share this planet with us – thus fulfilling the divine commandments of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba: “Love all, serve all; Help ever, hurt ever.”

Jai Sai Ram.

Dr. Narendranath Reddy,  
Chairman, Prasanthi Council  
Sathya Sai International Organisation

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*“Human life will find fulfilment only when ecological balance is maintained. Balance in human life and balance in nature, both are equally important.”*

–Sathya Sai Baba, 25 September 2000

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# God, Nature, Man

## SEE GOD IN NATURE

“In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth,” states the first sentence of the Bible. The Vedas proclaim, “I am One. I shall become Many”. The cosmos manifested through the will of God. The vast cosmos, with its myriad moving and unmoving objects, has emanated from *Brahman* (Divine Consciousness), is sustained by *Brahman* and dissolves back into *Brahman*.



Know God through Nature

The one Divine Consciousness willed to become the many and exists as this diverse physical universe in order to experience Itself and love Itself. When the One assumes Name and Form, the One appears as many. Love is none other than the expression of the deep-seated experience of the underlying unity of everything in creation.

This exquisitely created universe is what we call Nature. Sathya Sai Baba says, “*Nature is the vesture of God*” – that is, it represents the aspect of the divine that we see in the material world. The other subtle aspects of God are manifest but unseen and hidden from physical sight. Nature is His body; the cosmos is His will. Evolution in Nature is really the gradual unfoldment of the inherent powers in Nature. We can know God through Nature, which is permeated by God and is one with it.



The Beautiful Creation

People declare that there is no God because they cannot see Him. This is sheer folly. A flower has a form but the fragrance emanating from it has no form. How can the reality of the fragrance be denied because it has no form? The form of the fragrance is manifested in the flower as the form of God is manifested in Nature. God is all forms, all names, all attributes and all assertions. Look at the marvellous variety in creation. This can only be the sport of a phenomenon with limitless glory – God!

The answer to the question “Where is God?” is provided by Nature. Nature is the demonstrable proof of the existence of God.

From the spiritual point of view, there is no material object without a divine basis, no living being without the vital life force and no inert substance without consciousness. All consciousness is alike because it is a manifestation of the one Cosmic Consciousness. There is only one single stream of Divine Consciousness immanent in Nature and all the multiplicity of names and forms. It is Consciousness that animates matter and not matter that gives rise to Consciousness. The One alone exists!

A devotee was holding out a copy of the book “God, Nature and Man” to be blessed and as Sathya Sai Baba approached him, He said to the devotee, “*God is Nature, Nature is God*”. This profound statement should guide our approach to understanding, using, caring for and living in the material environment we call Nature.

## MAN’S INTERACTION WITH NATURE

The Bible declares, “*God created man in His own image*”. Humankind is the pinnacle of creation, the summit of living beings, but man has forgotten his source and his relationship with the world expressed as Nature. Man is born to manifest and reflect divinity. He is a child of immortality, set in the circumstances of this mortal world and in this mortal frame. But mankind has lost his way and forgotten who he really is. The art of recognising Him in Nature and ourselves is strange to us and so we deny Him and live on in darkness.



The environment in which humans live is an aspect of Nature. Man has developed the capacity to tamper with Nature and mould our environment; humans now have the technology to create, modify, and impact the environment on an unprecedented scale. But showing no awareness of the relationship between God, Nature and man, this is having serious consequences for the balance of Nature and the well-being of all life, communities, countries and global ecosystems.

There are fewer and fewer environments that remain pristine and maintain their natural qualities, yet humans are reliant on these environments for their material, physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

The way Nature functions is amazing and beyond words. For instance, the carbon dioxide exhaled by man is taken up by plants and the oxygen released by plants is inhaled by man.



Man creates Imbalance with Nature

And, the clouds evaporated from the oceans rain upon the earth and return to the oceans in rivers and streams. Man has the knowledge and technology to disrupt these natural cycles and cause adverse perturbations and implications on a global scale.

Sadly, man is prone to take Nature for granted, thinking it is only insentient, thereby ignoring the sentient principle that is within Nature and ensures proper balance among its various constituents. We examine further the extent and magnitude of these impacts and the change that is occurring in our natural environment in Chapter 2 of this book.

### IMBALANCE BETWEEN NATURE AND MAN

For tens of thousands of years many cultures lived in harmony with Nature and the environment – examples include the indigenous people of America, Australia, Philippines, India and South America. They recognised that Nature provides all their material requirements as well as offering spiritual sustenance and teachings. Nature is the best teacher – the universe is the best university.

However, excessive desires, greed, and inequality are causing negative impacts on populations of whole countries as well as all the various components of Nature.

Urbanisation on a global scale is not only taking a toll on the environment but it is taking us further and further away from Nature and the natural environment and imposing even greater challenges for connecting with God in the natural world. We are becoming less and less aware of where our food, medicines, clothing and shelter come from, and where the household and industrial wastes and unwanted items we generate are being disposed.

Many of us no longer have a direct connection with the natural world and we do not recognise the critical role that Nature plays in our very existence. We can no longer afford to ignore our connection and reliance on the natural world — this is explored in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book.



Man Exploits Nature

Abusing the resources of Nature and forgetting his own basic human nature, man is going against creation itself. Many disorders in Nature are caused by man's behaviour and conduct. Man has forgotten the integral relationship between humanity and Nature and seeks to enjoy the benefits of Nature without any restraint or regulation. The result is imbalance in Nature with grave consequences.

In the utilisation of natural resources, a proper balance must be struck. The indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources leads to catastrophes like earthquakes, volcanoes, etc. The rapid and excessive proliferation of factories and automobiles is responsible for the increased incidence of diseases.

### COMING HOME TO NATURE

Man has the unique opportunity to realise and appreciate beauty, truth, goodness, harmony in Nature and to practise love, compassion, and sympathy. These feelings must be extended



not only to other humans but also to all beings and the whole of Nature. Man has to rediscover his spiritual basis and to re-identify with God in Nature and all living beings. Just as the picture makes you curious about the painter, the beauty of the Lord's handiwork should lead man to the glory of the Lord.

Just as humans have developed the technology to destroy the environment, we can also develop the technology to avoid or minimise the adverse impacts and return to living more in harmony with Nature.

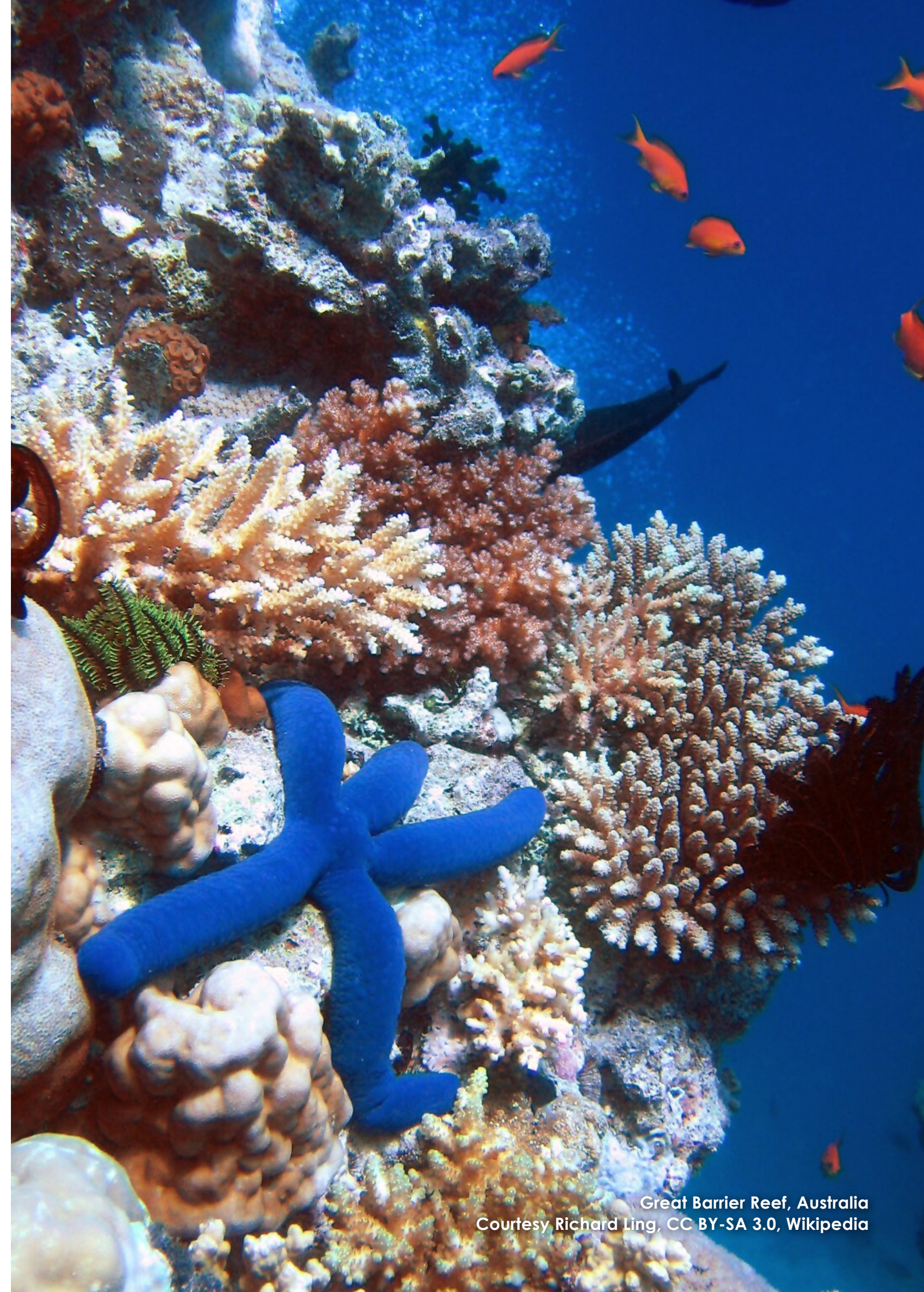
Nature cannot confer on man security, peace, joy and happiness – these must come from within. However, Nature provides the essential requisites for humans to live with dignity and respect. Nature gives man the tools he needs to traverse each lifetime in service and surrender. If man is able to love Nature and be in tune with it, man will be that much closer to God.

There are two important facets of man's constructive behaviour in relation to Nature: the practice of the universal human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence, and placing a ceiling on desires for excessive and harmful consumption. Selfless service is the expression of love in action – when directed towards Nature, it can take man back home to God.

Man should show gratitude to Nature and treat it accordingly. The actions that must be taken by all spiritual seekers and those wanting to protect Nature and the environment are further described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this book. The physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of living in harmony with Nature is explained in Chapter 8 of this book. The vision and way forward for the Sathya Sai Organisations is considered in Chapter 9 of this book.



Coming Back to Nature



Great Barrier Reef, Australia  
Courtesy Richard Ling, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikipedia



# Understanding the Environment

## BACKGROUND

It is estimated that the Earth is around 4.6 billion years old, with the first life appearing after about one billion years. Until recently, changes in man's environment were mainly controlled by natural phenomena and gradual changes in climate cycles. However, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialisation has advanced rapidly. In the relatively small period since then, the rate and the extent of change in our environment has accelerated significantly due to human activity.

The environment comprises the interaction of all living species, climate, weather and natural resources that exist on this planet and beyond. It is rightly said that a healthy environment is the foundation for a fulfilling human life.

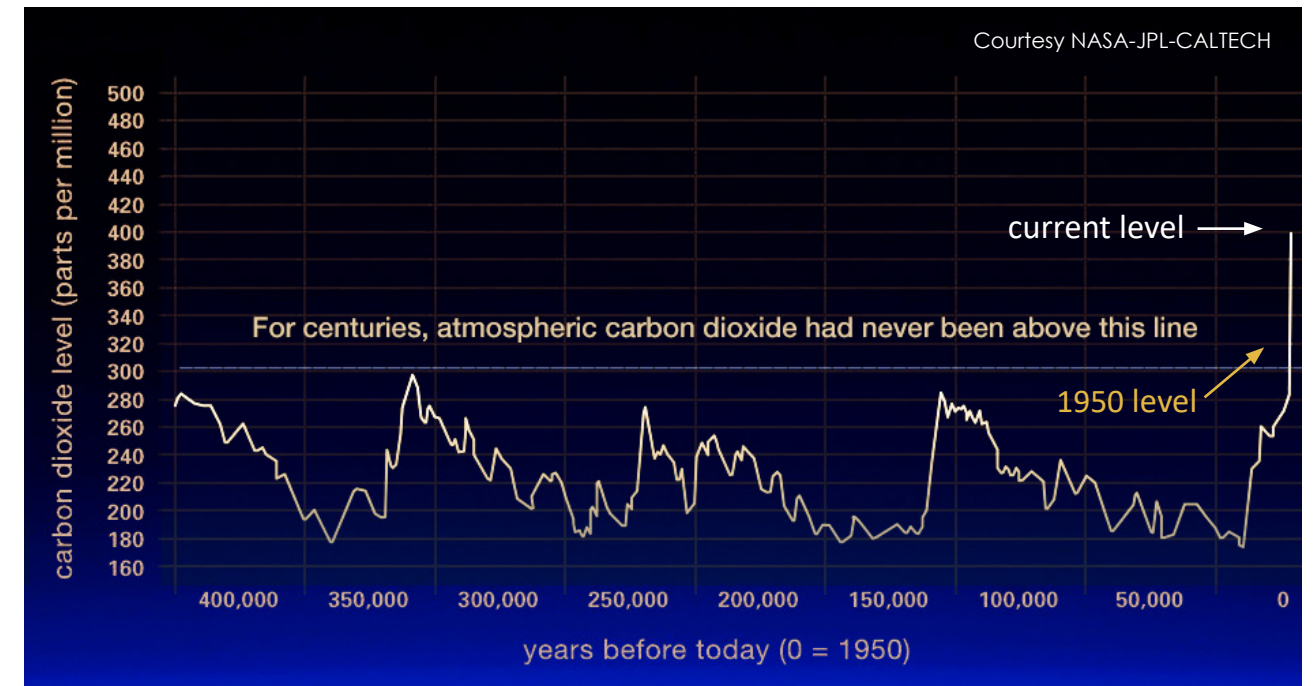
Changes to the natural environment have become so severe and significant that they now affect the ability of communities, countries, and the whole world to maintain and ensure an adequate quality of living for existing and future generations. This sad state has arisen because most of mankind has placed no value on Nature – either economically or spiritually. Sathya Sai Baba has said that *“Man is the most devalued entity today. He knows not his own greatness or worth.”*

Unfortunately, in devaluing himself, man has also devalued Nature, which has led to major social inequities, the indiscriminate exploitation of resources, critical loss of biodiversity and gross pollution of air, land, and water.

Understanding environmental change creates an appreciation of the importance of natural habitats, forests, oceans, ecosystems, biodiversity, and the effect of the environment on human health and welfare. It means becoming aware of the beneficial impacts from:

- relying on clean energy and a green economy
- practicing sustainable agriculture that provides nourishing food
- adopting technologies that enable industry and transportation to operate cleanly
- avoiding chemical and waste disposal to the environment
- maintaining wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- planting and restoring forests

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the pollution of air, land and water are the biggest threats to the environment and life itself.



Rise of Carbon Dioxide in the Atmosphere

A World Health Organisation Report in 2016 stated that 12.6 million deaths globally, representing 23% of all deaths, were attributable to the environment. When accounting for both death and disability, the fraction of the global burden of disease due to the environment is 22%. In children under five years, up to 26% of all deaths could have been prevented if environmental risks were removed.

## BIODIVERSITY AND LAND USE – CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Increasing world population has led to the need for more and more land for the purposes of urbanisation, food production, timber for housing and mining for resources. This had led to the indiscriminate destruction of habitats and loss of biodiversity on a global scale.

Combating land degradation and restoring degraded land is an urgent priority to protect the biodiversity and ecosystem services vital to all life on Earth and to ensure human well-being.

A report released in early 2018 and produced by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which has representatives from 129 countries, contained an alarming assessment of the extent of land degradation globally. Some key findings are:

- Currently, degradation of the Earth's land surface through human activities is negatively impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people, pushing the planet towards a sixth mass species extinction, and costing more than 10% of the annual global gross product in loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Unless urgent and concerted action is taken, land degradation will worsen with population growth, unprecedented consumption, an increasingly globalised economy and climate change.
- High consumption lifestyles in developed economies combined with rising consumption in emerging economies are the dominant factors driving land degradation globally.



- Timely action to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation can increase food and water security, contribute substantially to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change, and reduce or avoid instances of conflict and migration.

Loss of forest cover has negative consequences at both the local and global levels. Locally, trees help maintain moisture levels, provide shade and habitat, moderate temperature, absorb pollution and provide us with valuable fruits and wood products. Globally, forests absorb CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) and release oxygen as integral parts of maintaining the delicate balance of our life-maintaining atmosphere, including the moderation of global temperature.

Forests also harbour vast numbers of plant and animal species, providing everything from pharmaceuticals to natural pesticides, and substantially contributing to Earth's biodiversity.



Deforestation in Malaysia

Since 1990, the world has lost the equivalent of 1,000 football fields of forests every hour, according to World Bank development indicators in 2016. This is 1.3 million square kilometres of forest – an area larger than South Africa.

Phytoplankton in the world's oceans serve a similar role as forests on land in absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> and storing carbon. Scientists tell us that phytoplankton produces half the oxygen we breathe, draws down surface carbon dioxide, and supports marine life by serving as the foundation for the ocean food chain. They are an integral part of a healthy planet. But climate change and changes in ocean conditions are resulting in a decline of phytoplankton, which scientists say will result in a more dramatic impact on Nature's balance than the loss of tropical rainforests.

(<https://www.nature.com/news/2010/100728/full/news.2010.379.html>)

The need of today is to understand what is harming the forests of both the oceans and the land so that we can best preserve them. Planting more trees wherever possible is also vital to addressing climate change, benefitting local conditions and serving biodiversity. At the same time, it is important for us to discover alternate ways of providing for the needs of people across the planet, while simultaneously avoiding harm to our fellow species.

*“Because there is de-forestation to an alarming extent, the extent of carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere has considerably increased. Therefore, the remedy for this situation is intensive afforestation, growing more trees everywhere and protecting the existing trees without destroying them for other purposes.”*

–Sathya Sai Baba, 21 January 1993

## POLLUTION — CAUSES AND EFFECTS

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2017 report titled “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet” acknowledges that pollution is pervasive and persistent and has a significant impact on human health and the ecosystems. Approximately 19 million premature deaths are estimated to occur annually because of the way we extract natural resources and harm the environment to support production and consumption (Ramaswami *et al.* 2016).

### AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution affects human health and welfare. It is the most important environmental health risk in recent times. Airborne pollutants are responsible for about one-third of all deaths from stroke, chronic respiratory disease, and lung cancer, as well as one-quarter of all deaths from heart attack. Some 6.5 million people die annually because of poor air quality. It reduces the quality of life and contributes to loss of productivity and learning ability, besides affecting plants and animals.

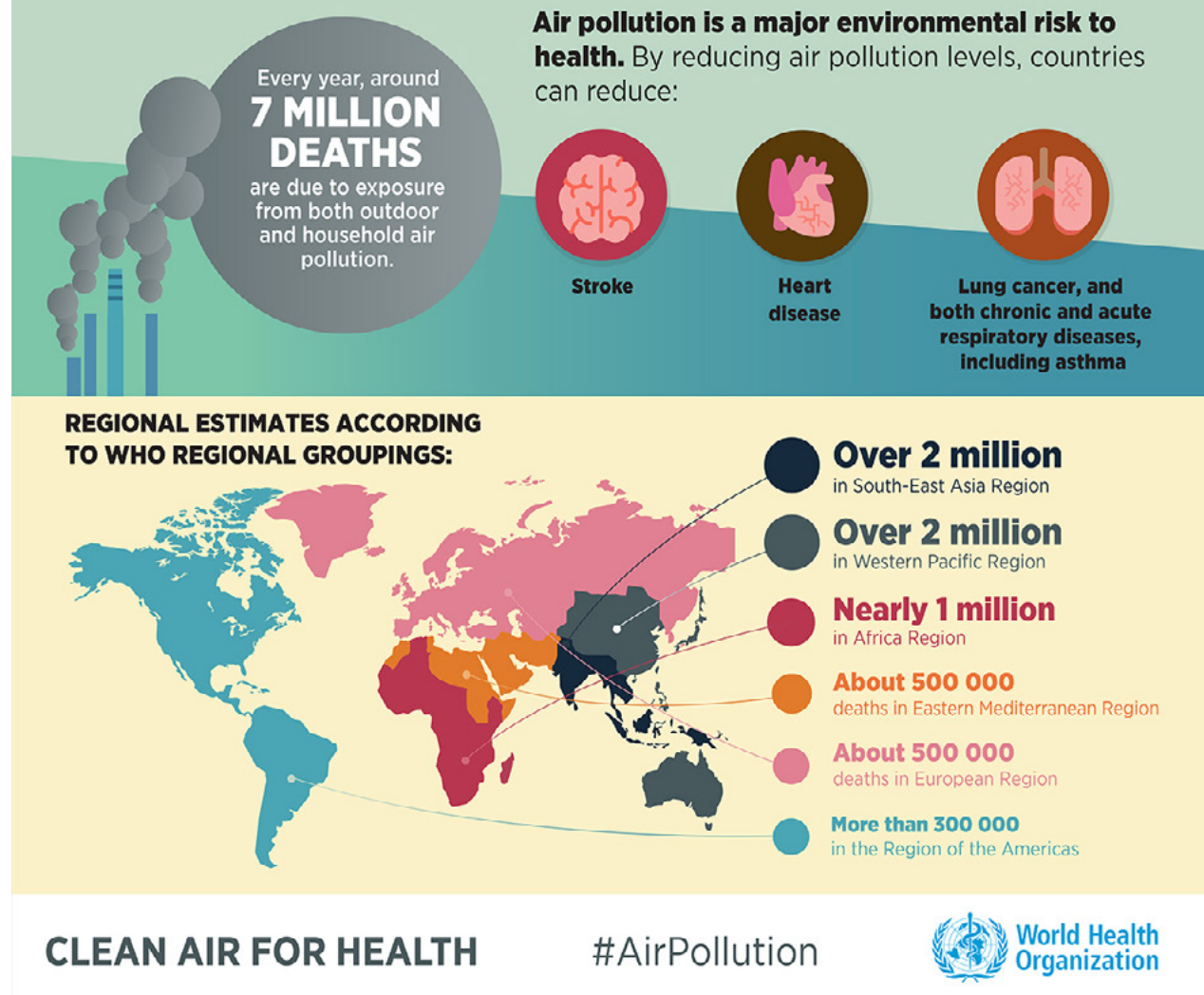
In its 2016 report entitled “Ambient Air Pollution: A Global Assessment of Exposure and Burden of Disease”, the World Health Organisation (WHO) asserted that air pollution – both ambient (outdoor) and household – is the biggest environmental risk to health, being responsible for about one in every nine deaths annually. Further, it stated that only one person in ten lives in a city that complies with WHO air quality guidelines, which are not as stringent as the standards for clean air in many advanced countries.

The UNEP 2017 report noted that the main sources of outdoor pollution are fossil fuel emissions from burning coal, oil and natural gas for power and heat, transportation emissions (especially diesel particulates), industrial furnaces, agricultural burning, domestic solid fuel heating, and burning of waste materials like plastics and batteries. In addition, cooking stoves and kerosene lamps, wildfires, sand and dust storms, deforestation and desertification contribute to the problem.

Different sources of air pollution have a host of effects on human health, on the ecology, and on ecosystems. For example, nitrogen oxides emissions from transport and energy production cause lung irritation in humans, acid rain can cause damage to humans,



# AIR POLLUTION – THE SILENT KILLER



animals, and crops, and can also adversely affect fish, plants and animal species when the nitrogen feeds algal blooms on water surfaces.

Heavy metals pollution from transport (especially lead), industrial sources, contaminated sites and unregulated burning of waste leads to impaired neurological development and harmful effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, lung and kidneys in humans, and toxicity build-up in food chains with consequent reduction of available food due to contamination (Pruss-Ustun *et al.* 2016).

Ground level ozone is created by chemical reactions when pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants, and other sources chemically react in the presence of sunlight. Ozone at ground level is a harmful air pollutant because of its effects on people and the environment.

It is little wonder then that air pollution is used as a marker of ecologically sustainable development. The encouraging news is that interventions and policies for dealing with air pollution have proven to be effective. The technology exists to reduce air pollution to acceptable levels if social and economic values are changed and Nature is given a higher

value than accorded at present. Moral and ethical behaviour, based on universal human values, can effectively reduce air pollution through voluntary actions.

## LAND POLLUTION

Land pollution, which is the degradation of the Earth's surface and soil, is primarily due to deforestation, unplanned expansion of cities and towns, poor agricultural practices, improper solid waste management, and industrial, military and mining activities. Uncontrolled dumping of waste that contains heavy metals, poisonous organic compounds, pharmaceuticals and other chemical waste degrade the land and soil and pose a threat to humans and wildlife.

Global estimates reveal that at least 1 million people are unintentionally poisoned yearly by excessive exposure to inappropriate use of pesticides (UNEP, 2013). Agricultural chemicals and pesticides pose serious risks to living beings and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems.

Land pollution also has a profound impact on wildlife due to the loss of natural habitats and food supplies, which forces species to move away from their habitats; those unable to adjust to new regions risk death and are at greater risk of extinction.

Crops and plants grown on polluted soil absorb much of the contamination and can result in illness and death. Long term exposure to such soil can cause congenital illnesses and chronic health problems that cannot be cured easily. Soil pollution from pesticides causes cancer and sterility and other reproductive diseases in humans, and the disappearance of bees, other insects and butterflies, reptiles, birds and mammals, which causes disruption to life cycles and imbalances in Nature.

Pharmaceutical pollution from the use of antibiotics in livestock gives rise to increase antimicrobial resistance in humans, and new resistant strains of soil microbial populations that affect the productivity of soil and livestock.



Parched Land





Water Pollution

Contamination of land from military activities is a massive world-wide problem, especially in former combat zones, where unexploded landmines and other munitions maim and kill many each year.

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Soil pollutants can be washed into groundwater, rivers, and oceans causing significant changes to aquatic environments and threats to human health. Fertilisers and other farm chemicals can become pollutants resulting in blue-green algal blooms in water bodies; these algae produce poisonous toxins.

## WATER POLLUTION

Water covers more than two-thirds of the planet, but readily accessible freshwater – which is found in rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers – accounts for less than 1% of the world’s water supply. Clean freshwater plays a fundamental role in support of human life, the environment, society and the economy, and is indispensable for life on our planet.

Freshwater bodies are heavily affected by pollution from urban and agricultural runoff, clear felling timber, untreated wastewater, and heavy metals from mining and industrial effluents. It is estimated that over 80% of the world’s wastewater is released to the environment without treatment, and 58% of diarrheal disease globally is due to a lack of access to clean water and sanitation (Pruss-Ustun *et al.* 2016).

Ocean and coastal waters are heavily polluted by waste and pollutants from land-based sources such as urban storm water, sewage, industry, agriculture, mining, etc. (Jambeck *et al.* 2015), and from shipping, fisheries, oil wells and other sea-based activities.

Although 3.5 billion people depend on the oceans as a source of food, solid waste and wastewater are dumped into the oceans because it is easy and cheap.

Three quarters of marine litter is composed of plastic (UN Environmental Programme and International Solid Waste Association 2015); between 4.8 million tonnes and 12.7 million

tonnes of plastic waste enter the ocean every year due to carelessness and inadequate waste management (Jambeck *et al.* 2015). Additionally, nutrient pollution threatens biodiversity and marine ecosystems, and radioactive wastes dumped or leaked into the ocean contribute to the pollution.

As a result of pollution there are changes to habitats and ecosystems, loss of aquatic biodiversity, loss of productive capacity, risks to human and animal health, spread of waterborne diseases, accumulation of pollutants up the aquatic food chain, etc. The most direct effect of water pollution is suffered by the organisms and vegetation that survive in water, including amphibians.

A UNEP report states that some two million tons of waste is being discharged daily into rivers and seas, causing the spread of disease and damage of ecosystems. It is also reported that unless we act now, the ocean will contain more plastic than fish by 2050 (Source: <https://www.unenvironment.org/>)

A WHO report states that:

- 844 million people lack even a basic drinking-water service, including 159 million people who are dependent on surface water.
- Globally, at least 2 billion people use a drinking water source contaminated with faeces.
- Contaminated water can transmit diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and polio. Contaminated drinking water is estimated to cause 502,000 diarrhoeal deaths each year.

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## CLIMATE CHANGE

Life on Earth depends on climate, is shaped by climate and affects climate. Changes in climate conditions affect not only human beings but the health and function of ecosystems and the survival of entire species. The Earth’s climate, which is the long-term reflection of weather, is influenced by complex interactions of the sun, ocean, land, atmosphere, clouds, plants and human activity, etc.

Just as the sun’s rays heat the ocean, land and atmosphere, so heat-trapping gases help keep the Earth’s surface warm and liveable. This is the natural greenhouse effect.

Although the Earth’s climate has varied greatly in its history, since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a substantial increase in the rate at which the atmosphere is warming. It is not coincidental that during this time significant changes in the environment have been observed, including increases in temperatures of ocean and land, reduction in the size of ice sheets and most glaciers, rising sea levels, changes in regional weather patterns, etc.

It is now scientifically accepted that human activities have a significant influence on the climate, particularly as these activities cause increases in three important heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere: carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. These greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere and increase the natural greenhouse effect, causing what is described as ‘Global Warming’ or ‘Climate Change’.

Carbon dioxide is the largest contributor to Global Warming and is emitted predominantly by burning fossil fuels for electricity generation, transportation, industrial energy and heat



for commercial and residential use. In addition, hydrofluorocarbons, which are mostly used for refrigeration and air-conditioning, are powerful greenhouse gases.

Human activities like discharging chemicals into the atmosphere, reducing the planet's forest cover, and rapid expansion of farming and industrial activities also release large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, affecting the balance of the climate system. Logging and clearing land for agriculture or livestock are a major factor since these activities reduce the ability to absorb carbon dioxide.

If greenhouse gas emissions continue to grow at an accelerated rate, it is expected that by 2100 the global average air temperature will warm by around 4C, compared to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Such a scenario would result in significant impacts to food production, threaten the survival of millions of people in low lying communities, cause the loss of many species, impact human health, increase extreme weather events affecting people, their homes and industries, etc.



Air Pollution from Industries Affect Human Health

Due to climate change, there have been noticeable effects on the environment: Arctic ice is shrinking; glaciers have shrunk; sea levels have risen; and there are longer, more intense heatwaves. Hurricanes and other storms are likely to become stronger – exceeding the capacity of drinking water or wastewater treatment plants, increasing the risk that people will be exposed to contaminants – and droughts will become more common.

The most direct impact of climate change and air pollution is associated with warming temperatures and increases in the frequency, duration, and severity of heatwaves. These have a significant impact on humans, animal and marine life, and on plants, sometimes affecting the survival of entire species of animals and plants.

With warmer temperatures, access to food, water, land, raw materials and energy are likely to adversely affected. This will increasingly lead to competition and conflicts between

peoples and countries; mortality rates will increase. Thus, human health, biodiversity, economic stability and national security are affected.

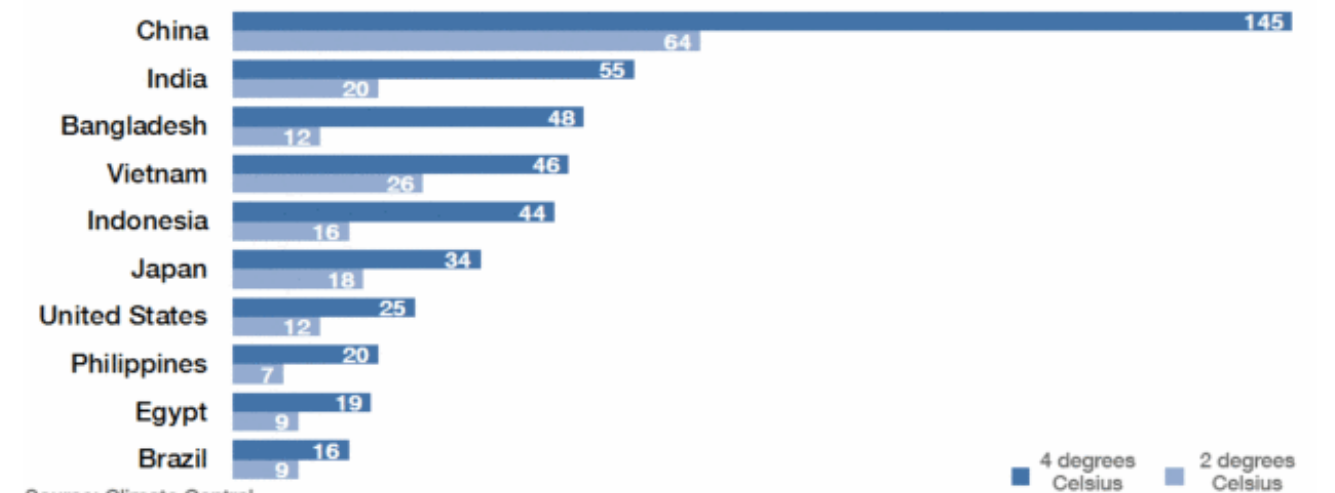
Many locations will see substantial increases in the number of heat waves per year and likely decreases in episodes of severe cold. Exposure to extreme heat can lead to heat stroke and dehydration, as well as cardiovascular, respiratory, and cerebrovascular disease. Young children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with certain medical conditions.

Melting of ice sheets and glaciers and the thermal expansion of seawater as oceans warm cause sea levels to rise. These increase shoreline erosion and degradation, and the risk of submerging coastal communities, facilities, and barrier islands. Seawater moving to low-lying land contaminates coastal fresh water sources increase the salinity of freshwater used for drinking and agriculture. Scientists at the non-profit organisation Climate Central estimate that 275 million people worldwide live in areas that will eventually be flooded with 3C of global warming.

Sea-level rise increases the risk of damage to homes and buildings from water inundation, typhoons, hurricanes and storm surges. In the USA alone, it is anticipated that a rise of two feet above present sea levels would put more than \$1 trillion of property and structures at risk of inundation.

### Which countries are most in danger from rising sea levels?

Total 2010 population (millions) below median locked-in sea level rise, based on different warming levels



Source: Climate Central

Precipitation events are likely to become less frequent but more intense in many areas, and droughts will be more frequent and severe. This will alter the distribution and availability of freshwater, reducing steady access to water for people and crops.

Vector-borne diseases are illnesses that are transmitted by disease vectors, which include mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas. These vectors can carry infectious pathogens, such as viruses and bacteria, from animals to humans. Changes in temperature, precipitation, and extreme events can increase the incidence and geographical range of climate-sensitive infectious diseases, such as malaria, dengue fever, and tick-borne diseases.

Due to climate change, plants, and animals on land and in the oceans are undergoing shifts in distributions and life-cycles. According to the World Wildlife Foundation, more frequent and intense droughts, storms, heat waves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and warming



oceans can directly harm animals and destroy the places they live, and up to 50% of species could be lost from certain vulnerable areas without a climate policy.

So acute is the problem that the Centre for Biological Diversity fears that the world is currently experiencing the worst spate of species extinctions since the loss of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago, with dozens of species going extinct every day!

Mankind has the technology and means to help slow the rate of climate change, which can be employed successfully only if there is understanding, harmony, and cooperation among the nations of the world, leading to a global plan of action. A spiritual basis for such action is needed, with shared values of compassion for man and Nature, selflessness over selfishness, and cooperation over competition.

## ECONOMIC COSTS

Pollution has significant economic costs that result from the impact on human health, productivity losses, health-care costs and ecosystem damage. It is anticipated that in 2015 the costs of indoor and outdoor air pollution was US\$5,322 billion, the cost of chemical pollution was US\$480 billion, and the cost of pollution due to general waste was US\$216 billion. These are all conservative estimates.

The total value of economic losses resulting from climate-related events has been increasing since 1990, totalling US\$129 billion in 2016, with 99% of these economic losses in low-income countries being uninsured. There is an urgent need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels as a source of energy and our cumulative carbon dioxide emissions.

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Pollution can have negative impacts and disproportionate burdens on women and men, and particularly on the poor and the vulnerable, such as elderly, children and the disabled, affecting their rights to health, water, food, life, housing and development.

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*“The entire creation is the expression of the will power of God. Nature is a manifestation of the supreme divine. Man is born to manifest and reflect divinity. All constituents of nature reflect their inherent qualities.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 19 July 1997

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# Message on the Environment

Sathya Sai Baba on Nature

## NATURE IS GOD'S VESTURE

People want to see God. How can they do it? Nature is the mirror in which the image of God can be seen. A mirror needs a mercury coating to reflect an object. To see God in Nature, the mirror has to be coated with the mercury of love.

Sathya Sai Speaks (SSS) 28:10, 15 April 1995

You have to realise that Nature is a manifestation of God. Hence, Nature should not be ignored. Nature is the effect and God is the cause. You should recognise the immanence of the Divine in the entire cosmos.

SSS 29:22, 20 June 1996

Nature is God's vesture. The universe is the 'university' for man. Man should treat Nature with reverence. He has no right to talk of conquering nature or exploiting the force of Nature. He must proceed to visualise in nature its God.

Sathyam Sivam Sundaram, Volume 4, p.55

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Nature is God's Vesture

## GOD, NATURE, AND MAN

There are three entities in the universe, with which man has to deal: God, Nature, and man. Of course, God is to be worshipped by man, to be realised by man through Nature. Nature is the name for all the various items that impress upon man the glory and the splendour of God.

SSS 7:12, 23 March 1967

Nature is your school, your laboratory, the gateway to liberation, and the panorama of God's manifold majesty. Seek to know the lessons it is ready to teach: all things in Nature are as *Brahman* (Divine) as you are. So, any act is Divine, any work is Divine worship, build the mansion of your life on the strong foundation of the faith that all this is *Brahman*.

SSS 10:23, 4 October 1970

It is a pity that, instead of paying attention to God, Nature, and man, in that order, men today are concerned most with themselves, more with Nature and very much less with God. From birth to death, from dawn till night, man pursues fleeting pleasures by the exploitation, the despoiling, the desecration of Nature, ignoring the truth that it is the property of God, the Creator, and any injury caused to it is a sacrilege, which merits dire punishment.

SSS 18:16, 11 July 1985

## MAN'S DISRUPTION OF NATURE'S BALANCE

Whatever man seeks to achieve, he has to rely on Nature. Nature is not anyone's private property. It belongs to God. Without the grace of the Lord no one can enjoy the benefits of Nature. Not realising this truth, some people embark on the exploitation of Nature, out of arrogance and self-conceit. This is highly misconceived.

SSS 22:17, 25 June 1989

... there can be no objection to man enjoying the resources of Nature. But as a result of uncontrolled desires and reckless exploitation of natural resources, Nature is exhibiting frightening disorders. Natural calamities like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts and floods are the result of disturbances in the balance of Nature caused by reckless exploitation of natural resources. Mankind today appears like a foolish man who is wielding the axe at the branch of a tree on which he is sitting.

SSS 30:4, 13 February 1997

What should be recognised is that in controlling the forces of Nature, the balance should not be upset. In dealing with Nature, there are three requirements. The first is knowledge of the laws of Nature. The second is the skill to utilise the powers of Nature for human needs. The third is to maintain the balance among natural forces. It is the disturbance of this balance that has led to such consequences as soil erosion, pollution of the atmosphere, etc.

SSS 19:2, 20 January 1986

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## TREAD SOFTLY, MOVE REVERENTIALLY, UTILISE GRATEFULLY

I may tell you, nevertheless, that all the five elements have been created by the Will of the Supreme. They have each to be used by you with reverential care and vigilant discrimination. Reckless use of any of them will only rebound on you with tremendous harm. External Nature has to be handled with caution and awe.

SSS 8:45, 23 November 1968

I shall tell you of one form of worship which will endow you with divine strength. Godhead expresses itself initially as the five elements: the sky, the wind, the fire, the water, and the earth. All creation is but a combination of two or more of these in varying proportions. ... Now, since these are saturated with the divine, one has to use them reverentially and with humility and gratefulness.

So, efficient use of these is itself a form of worship. The body is equipped with mechanisms which ensure a steady degree of warmth, beyond which or beneath which man cannot be healthy and active. Nature is in essence divinity itself, *Ishavasyam idam sarvam*: all this is divine. *Vasudevasarvamidam*: all this is Vasudeva, God. So, tread softly, move reverentially, utilise gratefully.

SSS 6:28, 15 October 1966

God's creation is very sacred. Do not pollute it. How sacred are the five elements given by God! But, today, the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the sound we hear— everything is polluted. All these sacred elements have been made unsacred by humanity. That is why the world today is afflicted with so many diseases. That one is a true human being who makes sacred use of the five elements. Never waste natural resources.

SSS 29:69, 18 July 1996

## REVERENCE FOR NATURE

Today there is pollution in everything such as the air we breathe, the water we drink, the sounds that are jarring to the ears and the food we consume. Because of this all round pollution, man's health is affected. Apart from this, man's mind is also polluted making him susceptible to diseases. Man should make an earnest endeavour to lead a serene and pure life. ... The observance of the three P's, namely, purity, patience, and perseverance, vouchsafes permanent happiness and good health free from diseases.

SSS 27:3, 21 January 1994

The rapid and excessive proliferation of industries, factories and automobiles with the attendant pollution of the atmosphere is responsible for the increasing incidence of diseases like eosinophilia, asthma, deafness, and pneumonia. ... science per se is not bad. What is necessary is for man to put it to proper and judicious use.

SSS 25:17, 26 May 1992

Devotion and morality are as important for physical health as they are for mental health. They free the mind from agitation, they feed it with joy and contentment; they quieten the nerves and help even bodily processes.

SSS 4:46, 14 December 1964

My advice to office-goers and students is that it is good for them to commute by cycle at least 5 or 6 kilometres a day. This cycling exercise is very useful not only for maintaining health but also for reducing the expenditure on automobiles. Another advantage is the avoidance of accidents. Moreover, it serves to reduce atmospheric pollution caused by the release of harmful fumes from automobiles.

SSS 26:4, 6 February 1993

To enjoy good health, one should have water, food and air free from pollution. Now all these three are polluted. Apart from these, man's mind is also polluted. To purify the mind, one should nurture noble and sacred thoughts of service to others. One who does not hurt



Revere Nature

anybody and has feelings of love and compassion to fellow beings is the greatest of men. That is why sage Vyasa gave the essence of the Eighteen Puranas he composed in the aphorism; "Help ever, hurt never." You should make every effort to avoid harming others in any circumstance. You are only hurting yourself when you hurt others. You should not use harsh words. When you develop human values, you can be free from diseases and even enjoy good health with God's Grace.

SSS 27:5, 29 January 1994

## CEILING ON DESIRES

Man should realise that there should be no excessive indulgence in any desire, whether it be food or other necessities.

SSS 30:24, 5 October 1997



Man should put a ceiling on his desires. As man's conduct is perverted, today we find natural calamities taking place. The reason for this is that man is entertaining excessive desires. God maintains perfect balance in His creation. In God's creation, the Earth and the oceans are endowed with balance. But man is indiscriminately exploiting the Earth for extracting oil. Every day, tonnes of fish are caught from the oceans. This indiscriminate exploitation of Nature results in imbalance in Earth, which is playing havoc with human lives.

SSS 34:3, 21 February 2001

The world has not been created for mere enjoyment. Abusing the resources of Nature and forgetting his own basic human Nature, man is going against the purpose of creation. Many natural catastrophes are entirely due to man's behaviour. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, wars, floods and famines and other calamities are the result of grave disorders in Nature. These disorders are traceable to man's conduct. Man has not recognised the integral relationship between humanity and the world of Nature.

SSS 25:37, 22 November 1992

Nature is more progressive than man, and to protect Nature, man has to make use of it within limits. When man tampers with Nature recklessly, it reacts adversely and trouble arises. In order to protect Nature, man has to practice Ceiling on Desires.

SSS 26:3, 21 January 1993

In order to protect Nature, man has to practice a ceiling on desires. He should not trigger the negative aspect of Nature. Care should be exercised in providing comforts as excessive comforts may spoil man's mind and cause misery instead of happiness. Nothing good can be achieved without certain restraints.

SSS 26:3, 21 January 1993

The five elements are nothing but manifestations of the divine. Man's life will be secure only when he realises this truth and acts accordingly. ... You should enjoy Nature according to your need. You should not rob Nature of its resources to satisfy your greed.

SSS 34:3, 21 February 2001

The object of the [Ceiling on Desires] programme is to prevent waste of money, time, food or other resources and to use all these for the welfare of the people. The money that is saved ... may be used in the best way you choose for the benefit of others.

SSS 17:16, 14 July 1984

## LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

The primary task is to purify the environment, which is affected by pollution of air, water and food. All the five elements are affected by pollution. People should therefore try to reduce the use of automobiles and control the emission of harmful industrial effluents.

SSS 26:4, 6 February 1993

Trees play a vital role in helping mankind to receive oxygen from the atmosphere while they absorb the carbon dioxide exhaled by human beings. Hence, the ancients favoured the growing of trees to control atmospheric pollution.

SSS 26:4, 6 February 1993

As regards *Ahimsa* (non-violence), in the context of industrial management, it has a wider social meaning than merely avoiding causing harm to others. The avoidance of pollution of the atmosphere or of natural resources like rivers is one of the ways in which an enterprise practices nonviolence. In these different ways, a great deal of good can be done to our people and nation by business managers who adhere to basic human values and who adopt a spiritual approach to the tasks of the business world.

SSS 23:3, 10 February 1990



Harmony with Nature



# Message on the Environment

## Eternal Wisdom on Nature and Man

This section presents eternal wisdom on Nature and man's role in environmental change. Shared here are the perspectives of spiritual masters and faith leaders from the major world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism – as well as those of indigenous cultures.

The remarkable similarity of their views quickly becomes apparent. Each agrees that man was meant to live in harmony with Nature and care for Mother Earth. At present, man has deviated from this ideal. We all need to become aware of the global changes caused by man



Nature and Man

and the need to change our lifestyle and choices in order to stop harming the planet we share. Man needs to live in harmony with Nature.

### GOD, NATURE, AND MAN

*“In the beginning, There was but the Absolute Self alone. Nothing else was. Brahman willed, ‘Let me create the worlds.’”*

Aitareya Upanishad, i:i:1<sup>1</sup>

Our Loving Creator manifested creation from His own being. The first words of the ancient Ishavasya Upanishad, *“Ishavasyam idham sarvam”*, proclaim that the entire universe is pervaded by the Supreme and is, in fact, the form or body of the Lord. Every atom, element and cell – the building blocks of creation – is vibrating with the energy of God. From the microcosm to the macrocosm, divinity is immanent.

Each religion and culture has its own unique way of expressing that creation is divine. Most would agree that Nature – in all its glorious variety – deserves our utmost reverence and care. While not all see Nature as requiring our worship, it is clear upon reflection that Nature is extraordinary and far beyond the capacity of man to create.

*“When a man does a piece of work which is admired by all we say that it is wonderful; but when we see the changes of day and night, the sun, the moon, and the stars in the sky, and the changing seasons upon the earth, with their ripening fruits, anyone must realise that it is the work of someone more powerful than man.”*

Chased-by-Bears,  
Santee-Yanktonai Sioux, North America<sup>2</sup>

Nature is the greatest work known to man. Its infinite complexities and interrelationships can be seen as evidence of a master creator. Every breath we take shows our interdependence with Nature.

*“This beautiful, bounteous, life-giving planet we call Earth has given birth to each one of us, and each one of us carries the Earth within every cell of our body. ... The Earth is our mother, nourishing and protecting us in every moment – giving us air to breathe, fresh water to drink, food to eat and healing herbs to cure us when we are sick. Every breath we inhale contains our planet's nitrogen, oxygen, water vapour and trace elements. When we breathe with mindfulness, we can experience our inter-being with the Earth's delicate atmosphere, with all the plants, and even with the sun, whose light makes possible the miracle of photosynthesis. With every breath we can experience communion. With every breath we can savour the wonders of life.”*

Thich Nhat Hanh,  
2 July 2015<sup>3</sup>

We are called to serve in order to give back to Nature, our mother, in gratitude for the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food that makes our lives possible. With all the gifts we receive from Mother Earth comes the responsibility to care for her, to preserve her beauty and her delicate balance, on which we all depend.

*“Our sages of old articulated human responsibility to care for the Earth, placing these words in the mouth of God: ‘See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything I have created has been for your sake. Think of this, and neither corrupt nor destroy My world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.’”*

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13<sup>4</sup>





Land Pollution

## MAN'S LACK OF AWARENESS

*“As stewards of God’s creation, we are called to make the Earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.”*

Pope Francis, 18 January 2015<sup>5</sup>

For the first time in history, man’s habits are having a significant impact on the health of our planet. Man has forgotten that, being part of Nature, he has an inherent responsibility to care for Nature.

Man has lost sight of the essential divinity and unity that underlies Nature’s diversity. Distracted by worldly objects, we are driven by desire, greed, and selfish motives. We chase the external attractions of creation, ineffectively seeking to regain a sense of wholeness and permanent happiness. This ignorance and our insatiable desires lead to excessive consumption of natural resources and the degradation of our planet.

In his encyclical letter *On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis explains that man’s disconnect has unfortunately led us to treat Nature as a resource separate and subservient to ourselves. Consequently, man has plundered Nature without restraint.

*“We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’ (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”*

Pope Francis, 24 May 2015<sup>6</sup>

In a similar vein, Zarathushtra taught that caring for the environment was a fundamental principle of the Parsi faith. He warned that those who do not respect God’s creation and damage the environment are acting contrary to divine principles.

*“He who abhors and shuns the light of the Sun, he who refuses to behold with respect the living creation of God, he who leads the good to wickedness, he who makes the meadows waterless and the pastures desolate, he who lets fly his weapon against the innocent; an enemy of my faith, a destroyer of Thy principles is he, O Lord!”*

The Gathas – The Hymns of Zarathushtra,  
Ahunuvaiti Gatha, Yasna 32.10<sup>7</sup>

The Buddha also spoke on the importance of preserving Nature. He taught that all beings are interdependent and that if the environment suffers man will also suffer. The Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective reiterates the Buddha’s wisdom in the contemporary context.

*“... everyday life can easily lead us to forget that our lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world through every breath we take, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Through our lack of insight, we are destroying the very life support systems that we and all other living beings depend on for survival. ...*

*Together, humanity must act on the root causes of this environmental crisis, which is driven by our use of fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption patterns, lack of awareness, and lack of concern about the consequences of our actions.”*

Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective,  
29 October 2015<sup>8</sup>



Courtesy Walter Siegmund, CC BY 2.5

Refinery in USA



This lack of awareness and concern leads to unrestrained desires and consumption patterns that are damaging the environment. The remedy is to understand the chain of cause and effect in Nature, to control our desires and to develop respect for the Earth and a more compassionate way of living.

*“We lose ourselves in buying and consuming things we don’t need, putting a heavy strain on both our bodies and the planet. We don’t need to consume a lot to be happy; in fact we can live very simply. ... Each one of us needs to come back to reconnect with ourselves, with our loved ones and with the Earth. It’s not money, power or consuming that can make us happy, but having love and understanding in our heart.”*

*We need to consume in such a way that keeps our compassion alive. And yet many of us consume in a way that is very violent. Forests are cut down to raise cattle for beef, or to grow grain for liquor, while millions in the world are dying of starvation. Reducing the amount of meat we eat and alcohol we consume by 50% is a true act of love for ourselves, for the Earth and for one another. Eating with compassion can already help transform the situation our planet is facing and restore balance to ourselves and the Earth.”*

Thich Nhat Hanh,  
2 July 2015<sup>9</sup>

Failure to adopt this compassionate outlook – where we reduce our desires and change our consumption patterns – will have dire consequences for each of us, our families, and the future of humanity.

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*“Our species, though selected to be a caretaker or steward (khalīfah) on the earth, has been the cause of such corruption and devastation on it that we are in danger [of] ending life as we know it on our planet. This current rate of climate change cannot be sustained, and the earth’s fine equilibrium (mīzān) may soon be lost. ... What will future generations say of us, who leave them a degraded planet as our legacy? How will we face our Lord and Creator?”*

The Islamic Foundation For Ecology And  
Environmental Sciences, 2015<sup>10</sup>

*“When you have polluted the last river, when you have caught the very last fish, and when you have cut down the very last tree, it is too bad that then, and only then, will you realise that you cannot eat all your money in the bank.”*

Osage saying, North America<sup>11</sup>

Even though we have already significantly damaged our planet, the Quran holds a message of hope – that we have a chance to learn from this and change our ways.

*“Corruption has appeared in land and sea caused by the hands of people so that they may taste the consequences of their actions and turn back.”*

Quran, The Romans (Ar-Rum) 30:4<sup>12</sup>

## LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

*“The purpose of life is to be part of all that there is. ... we are connected to everything else, and the proof is being alive. You’re one with everything there is.”*

Bob Randall,  
Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal Elder, Australia<sup>13</sup>

Man must again learn to revere, love, and live in harmony with Nature, offering worship and seeing all as one. Only through this spiritual understanding and the practice of self-control, renunciation of desires, and selfless service can we find fulfilment in human life.

Man’s oldest cultures have understood their oneness and interdependence with Nature for thousands of years. They maintained a reverence and compassion for Nature. They understood that it was common sense not to take more than they needed or irreparably damage the environment – not just for their sake, but for the sake of future generations.



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Love for Animals

*“My culture’s been around for 40,000 years. We’re probably the oldest culture in the world ... We had this discipline in place of not to take more than you need or not to destroy anything that’s there to the level where it cannot produce again.”*

Bob Randall,  
Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal Elder, Australia<sup>14</sup>

*“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”*

Chief Seattle,  
Duwamish, North America<sup>15</sup>



*“Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people, and have always in view not only the present, but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground – the unborn of the future Nation.”*

Kayanerehkowa: The Great Law of Peace,  
Iroquois, North America<sup>16</sup>

Faith leaders, such as the Dalai Lama, echo the same message.

*“We must consider future generations: a clean environment is a human right like any other. It is therefore part of our responsibility towards others to ensure that the world we pass on is as healthy, if not healthier, than when we found it.”*

His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama,  
Tenzin Gyatso, 1990<sup>17</sup>

Collectively and individually, each one of us has a responsibility to lovingly care for Mother Earth. We can do this by developing our love and compassion for all living beings.

*“Only through love and compassion is the protection and preservation of Nature possible. But both these qualities are fast diminishing in human beings. In order to feel real love and compassion, one must realise the oneness of the life force that sustains and is the substratum of the entire universe.”*

Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, 1994<sup>18</sup>

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Love and compassion will help change our perspective from seeing the Earth as something separate to us to seeing the Earth as part of our greater Self.

*“We need to change our way of thinking and seeing things. We need to realise that the Earth is not just our environment. ... When you realise the Earth is so much more than simply your environment, you’ll be moved to protect her in the same way as you would yourself.”*

Thich Nhat Hanh,  
2 July 2015<sup>19</sup>

Together, we have the power to change man’s destiny by reducing the impact of environmental change. Working in unity, we have the opportunity to save our world.

*“Moreover, the fact that the air we breathe, the water we drink, the forests and oceans which sustain millions of different life forms, and the climatic patterns which govern our weather systems all transcend national boundaries is a source of hope. It means that no country, no matter how rich and powerful or how poor and weak it may be, can afford not to take action in respect of this issue.”*

His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama,  
Tenzin Gyatso, 1999<sup>20</sup>

The decision rests with us, individually and collectively. We have the inherent intelligence and discrimination to:

- develop our awareness and understanding of environmental issues;
- expand our love and compassion to embrace all life as one; and
- change our habits, take positive environmental action, and be accountable to ourselves and future generations.

Remember, this planet is our only home. By taking up this environmental and ethically-responsible challenge today – with love in our hearts – we can help preserve the Earth for all living beings.

*“In the end, love is the only medicine that can heal the wounds of the world. In this universe, it is love that binds everything together. As this awareness dawns within us, all disharmony will cease. Abiding peace alone will reign.”*

Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi<sup>21</sup>

May there be peace on Earth.



Peaceful Countryside

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*“Foster the tiny seed of Love that clings to ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ let it sprout into Love for the group around you, and grow into Love for all mankind, and spread out its branches over animals, birds and those that creep and crawl, and let the Love enfold all things and beings in all the worlds. Proceed from less Love to more Love, narrow Love to expanded Love.”*  
.....

–Sathya Sai Baba, 23 July 1975



# Creating Harmony Between Man and Nature

## Policy Discussion

### BACKGROUND

The push for greater corporate profits, the degradation of the environment, an ever-increasing human population and the widening disconnect from Nature are threatening the sustainability of life on Earth. For tens of thousands of years mankind only had a small impact on the environment. However, increasing population and urbanisation together with rapid industrialisation impacted humanity from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, leading eventually to the growing awareness that action must be taken to preserve and protect aspects of Nature.

### BEGINNING OF THE FORMAL CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

The conservation of environmental qualities first emerged in India in the mid-1800s with the practical application of scientific conservation principles. The conservation ethic that began to evolve included three core principles: that human activity damaged the environment; there was a civic duty to maintain the environment for future generations; and scientific, empirically based methods should be applied to ensure this duty was carried out. The Madras government adopted these principles and implemented them.

Henry Thoreau (*“Walden”*) and George Marsh (*“Man and Nature”*) lamented the effects of industrialisation and the loss of Nature in the mid-1800s. The first National Park in the world for the protection of Nature was established at Yellowstone (USA) in 1872 by the government. This was followed by the world’s second national park established to protect biodiversity and natural systems in 1879 near Sydney, Australia. For the next 50 years many countries then set aside pristine areas for conservation of the natural environment.

### A WAKE-UP CALL

The middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the beginning of a shift from conservation of natural environments to an emerging, wider environmental awareness. In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, which uncovered the harm from synthetic insecticides and eventually led to worldwide bans of many chemicals used on crops and plants. More significantly, the book brought to the awareness of ordinary people the need to protect Nature; this led to demands for new legislation aimed at protecting the environment – a word that entered into common usage from this time.

In 1972, the United Nations convened a conference of 114 countries in Stockholm to *“consider the need for a common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment.”* It formally recognised that urgent action was required to protect and improve the environment as a result of the rapid



United Nations Climate Change Conference, Paris, 2015

acceleration of science and technology. The 26 Principles and the 109 Recommendations arising from the conference are just as relevant today as they were at the time.

From the early 1970s onwards, most developed countries and many developing nations formulated policies and legislation to control the discharge of industrial waste, restrict the indiscriminate use of chemicals that pollute land, air and water, limit pollution from any source that adversely impacts the environment and initiate actions to protect biodiversity and environmental values. Legislative controls have been placed on utilities and commercial and industrial activities that adversely affect clean air, clean water (rivers and oceans), and clean soil.

The protection of the environment and human health is now high on the agenda of almost all nations and the mandatory controls legislated by governments are becoming more comprehensive and detailed.

### ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM ON THE WORLD STAGE

Increasing recognition that countries acting in isolation cannot protect global environmental qualities led, from the mid-1970s, to the adoption of many international agreements for environmental protection, agreements that were often supported by national legislation in signatory countries. These agreements were often between neighbouring countries or groups of countries and covered many aspects of trans-boundary impacts, such as the protection of rivers, air quality, migratory species, endangered species, marine environments, threatened rainforests, and led to a moratorium on commercial whaling and other matters.

A number of environmental catastrophes brought global awareness to the need for a significant improvement in managing risks to the environment and people. In 1979, the core at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania, USA partially melted down, releasing radiation into the surrounding communities. In a tragedy in 1984 in Bhopal, India, some 10,000 people were killed and many more were injured when Union



Carbide's pesticide plant leaked tonnes of methyl isocyanate gas into the air. Two years later, one of the reactors at the Soviet Union's Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded and completely melted down leading to devastating impacts on surrounding populations, including 2,000 cases of thyroid cancer.

Additionally, there have been numerous cases of spilled oil, radiation from nuclear power plants, and pollution on land and sea that have severely affected people, flora and fauna, aquatic life and natural habitats in the ensuing decades. These have led to legal restrictions on industrial and commercial activities to reduce the risk of harming Nature and people.



Sign near site of Nuclear Reactor Accident at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, USA

## INTERNATIONAL IMPERATIVE

The identification of a hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic in 1985 galvanised 24 nations to sign the Montreal Protocol to ban the production and use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC). Recent evidence has shown the actions taken have been effective, demonstrating that actions taken in unity and cooperation are often successful.

In 1992, the need for urgent action on the environment crystallised into action when representatives from 172 nations, including 108 heads of state, participated in the groundbreaking UN Conference on Environment and Development ("Earth Summit"), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Participants adopted Agenda 21, an expansive blueprint for sustainable development that called for improving the quality of life on Earth.

By the end of the millennium, environmental awareness was at an all time high as a result of high profile environmental catastrophes, increasing awareness, and pressure from grass-roots activists and concerned communities. Advanced thinking corporations launched their own environmental initiatives and corporations pillaging Nature were brought to task in law courts and, increasingly, in social media.

## ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS

Although all the examples, actions and initiatives described above for protecting Nature and the environment reflect the good intentions of governments, it is incumbent on individuals to follow and implement these requirements. The commercial pressures to maximise profits and minimise costs need to be countered by the manifested will of people to avoid harm to the environment and to protect the health of communities.

The priority has to shift from a purely financial and economic focus to a holistic one that includes moral and spiritual values. Fortunately, this is being slowly taken up by companies and individuals committed to *triple bottom line reporting* (financial, social, and environmental aspects) and greater consideration of their roles in the global community. Many corporations are responding to the demands of people and government for cleaner technologies, minimisation of environmental impacts, and greater conservation, recycle and reuse of resources.



Climate Change - Moving to Sustainable World

## INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

As the scale of technology advances so does the potential for adverse environmental impacts on a global scale. The pressures to prioritise economic well-being over the health of Nature, of other small nations and mankind is no more evident than in the quarrelling over the international action to be taken to address potential climate change. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 brought 172 nations together to set global standards to protect the Earth against global warming and other environmental threats.

Various international protocols and agreements were formulated over the following 23 years but common agreement on definitive action and targets has remained elusive. In 2015, 196 countries adopted the Paris Agreement, which in effect allows each country to adopt non-binding national goals to reduce global warming.



So, 26 years after the Rio Summit countries are still arguing as to the targets and measures to be adopted to prevent potentially catastrophic impacts on climate and the environment of all living things.

### A NEW MILLENNIUM

A change in attitude, behaviour, and values is needed to ensure sustainable development, to maintain and improve environmental conditions, and to maintain man's ability to live in harmony with Nature. Such a change can only come about by a major shift in man's priorities for spiritual wealth over material wealth and having compassion for all living beings on the planet.

It is the aim of this conference to affirm the values and actions that we can take as individuals and influencers to recognise and protect Nature and ensure sustainable development for all mankind and future generations.



Mt. Fuji, Japan



Yosemite National Park, USA



# Creating Harmony Between Man and Nature

## Scientific and Technological Advances

Man has the capacity to adversely impact the environment, but he also has the capacity to protect, restore and enhance it. Developments in science and technology have resulted in significant harm to Nature; but it can also be used to benefit Nature. Over the last several decades many international agreements, national and state policies, guidelines and legislation have been implemented to protect the environment, human health and welfare, and society.

The environment has always been regarded as free and accessible to everyone. Unfortunately, this has been not only for providing food, shelter and clothing but also for



Courtesy Ásgeir Eggertsson, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikipedia

Geothermal Power Station, Iceland

mining, discharging waste and pollution, and a host of other potentially adverse activities. This is mainly due to a lack of moral and spiritual values and environmental consciousness.

It is unfortunate that Nature has been so devalued that governments have had to legislate individual and corporate behaviour to protect the environment by force rather than voluntary actions at source, the people who pollute. Since society is reluctant to incur the expense to protect Nature and the environment, laws and regulations are commonly employed in many countries to protect and preserve the quality of the air, water, and land. The extent of governmental action has depended on local needs and political will.

The application of science and technology to human activity can make a highly significant contribution to preventing the adverse impacts on the planet and restoring natural systems, or at least reducing / minimising potential risks. Examples include the long-term management and disposal of radioactive waste in geologically stable areas or the safe disposal of materials that contain asbestos where humans and animals cannot breathe the fibres.

### REDUCING POLLUTION

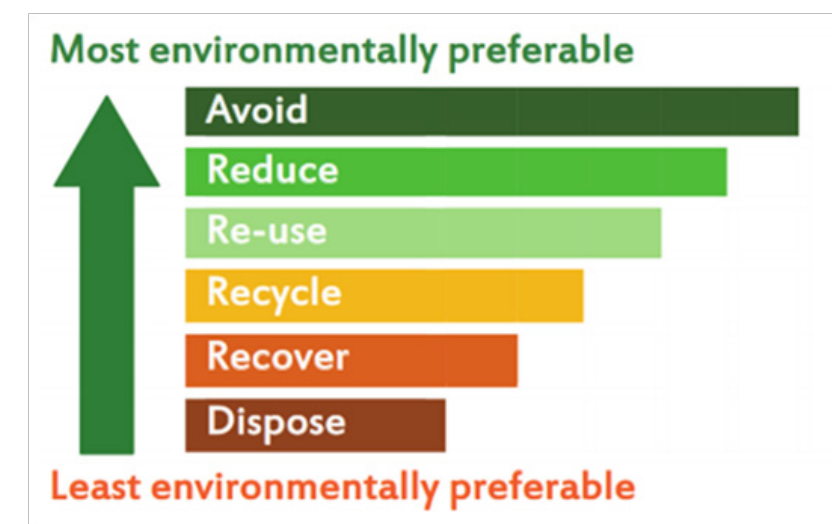
Society should eliminate or minimise the adverse impacts on Nature and the environment for the good of all. Preventing the discharge of wastes and pollutants into the air, water, and land is one of the great priorities of many governments around the world. Voluntary individual and corporate actions can also be encouraged by financial incentives or similar means. Eco-friendly businesses and lifestyles are best achieved when individuals and societies practice human values, Ceiling on Desires, and environmental awareness.

Electricity generation and transportation are the biggest sources of air, water, and land pollution in most developed and developing nations. Thankfully, many scientific and technological advances coupled with mature knowledge and awareness are effectively reducing man's adverse impact on Nature – but much more needs to be done in these important areas.

In many countries, public outreach, education and commercial incentives are used to adopt new technologies or to effectively change behaviour. The change of behaviour is evident in using mass transit networks, conserving heat and electricity, using solar panels, energy efficient appliances and electric cars, to name a few. In developing societies, technology transfer and applications are needed to provide for basic needs, such as clean water, transportation, and fuels for sustained economic growth and prosperity in an eco-friendly manner.

There is a hierarchy of actions that can be taken to minimise the effect of wastes and pollutants as shown in the figure below.

The highest priority – avoiding and reducing the generation of waste and pollution – encourages people to reduce the amount of virgin materials extracted from the earth. The goal is to maximise efficiency and avoid unnecessary consumption by, for example, buying products that are recycled, recyclable, repairable, refillable, reusable or biodegradable.





# SOLUTIONS



CLEAN AIR FOR HEALTH

#AirPollution



For example, industrial liquid waste from steel making can be used in sewage treatment to remove nutrients that would otherwise go into waterways. Recycled glass and old rubber tires can be used in the manufacture of bitumen for roads. Drink bottles manufactured from PET plastic can be recycled into polar fleece clothing and children's playground equipment.

There are many examples of innovative methods that have been developed for avoiding, reducing and recycling materials that would otherwise end up polluting the environment. But in the absence of financial incentives, a new way of thinking is required to place a value on Nature and the resources it provides.

## REDUCING/REVERSING CLIMATE CHANGE

The largest source (almost 90%) of the increase in carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, which causes climate change, comes from the burning of fossil fuels – notably coal and natural gas for power generation and petroleum for transport. Electricity and transportation needs have grown exponentially due to population growth and increasing demands for a higher standard of living.

Deforestation is contributing about 9% by adding carbon dioxide as well as taking away the sinks for carbon dioxide in the form of vegetation growth. This trend is being reversed in recent times in many countries where forests are being protected from indiscriminate destruction.

There is a direct link between economic growth and increasing emissions of carbon dioxide, which is changing our climate. This situation must be changed to protect Nature. Greater world peace and prosperity can be achieved by raising environmental consciousness – this will lead to change of behaviour and the use of cleaner, non-polluting technologies.

There are many alternatives to burning fossil fuels, such as wind, solar, hydro, geo-thermal, biomass, hydrogen and nuclear energy. There is also a great deal of research underway to



Solar powered homes, Germany

capture the carbon dioxide from combustion of fossil fuels for storage underground or in the ocean, or recycling and reuse.

Many social, economic, political, technological and other factors need to be addressed before there can be wide-scale adoption of new and advanced technologies on a significant scale to reduce the risks of climate change. There needs to be a will to bring change.

Despite decades of negotiations and development of international agreements and the availability of alternative technologies, progress has been slow; much still needs to be done to reduce the impacts of fossil fuel use around the world. There is an urgent need for change in our attitude towards Nature and the reduction of greenhouse gases that are responsible for climate change, which is affecting the Earth and life itself.

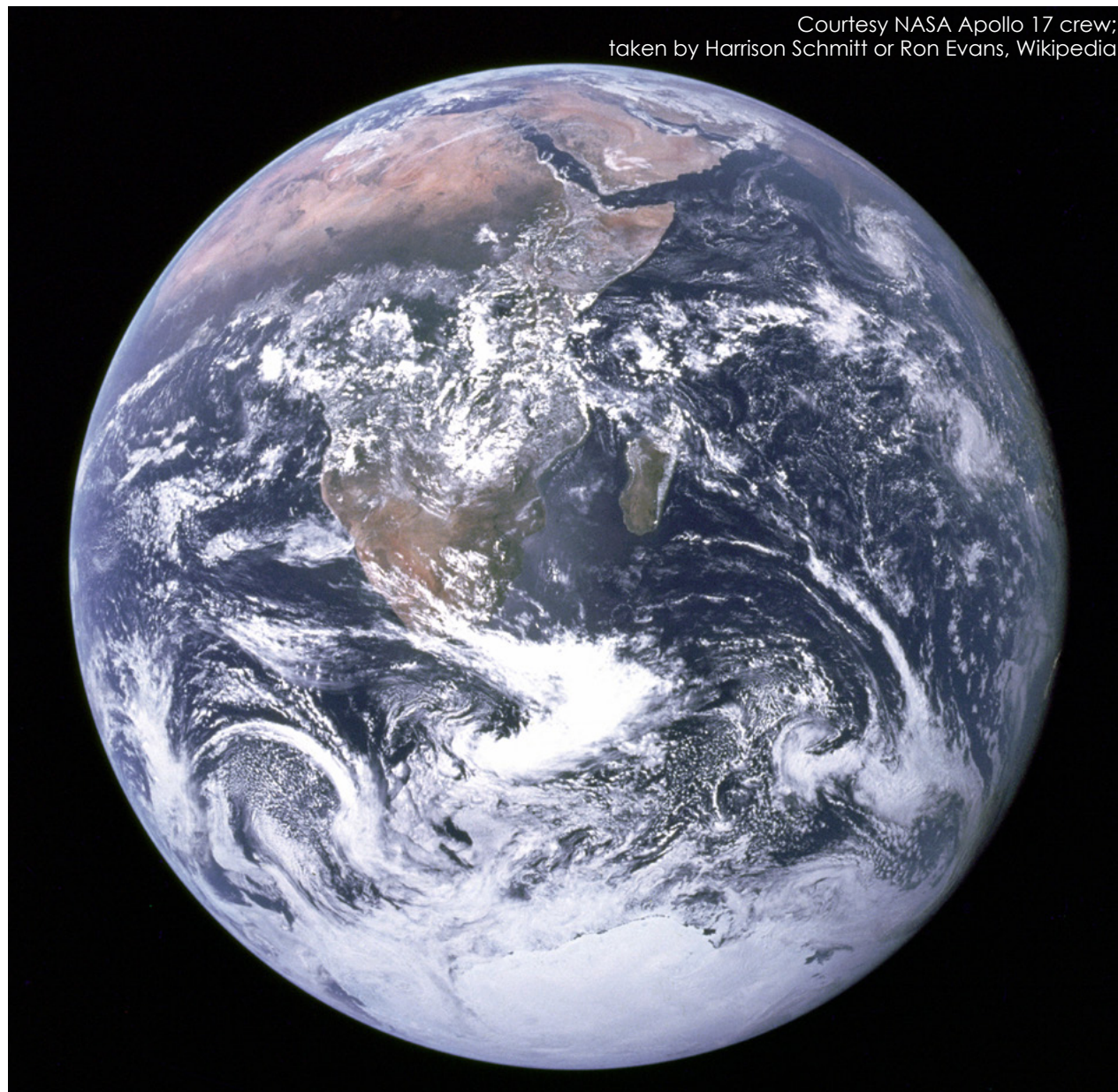


## HOLISTIC APPROACH

The technology is available or can be developed to address many of the issues relating to environmental change but, as pointed out earlier, even with the best science and technology there has to be a will and a reason for adoption and implementation. Man needs to realise the importance of Nature and practice self-control to restore the balance with Nature.

It is not so much a technological change that is required but a behavioural, cultural, attitudinal and values change. Unfortunately, today, man considers the world only for exploitation and enjoyment. The world has not been created for mere enjoyment. Abusing the resources of Nature and forgetting his own basic human nature, man is going against the purpose of creation.

The indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources by scientists and technologists, such as mining and extraction of minerals, mica, coal, petroleum, natural gas, etc. results in imbalances and pollution of the five major elements, leading to catastrophes like earthquakes, volcanoes etc. The rapid and excessive proliferation of industries, factories,



Courtesy NASA Apollo 17 crew;  
taken by Harrison Schmitt or Ron Evans, Wikipedia

The Earth from Space, 1972

automobiles, etc, with the attendant pollution, is responsible for the increasing incidence of diseases like eosinophilia, asthma, deafness, pneumonia, typhoid, gastro-intestinal diseases, vector-borne diseases, cancer, neurological and cardiovascular diseases, etc. Science *per se* is not bad; what is necessary is for man to put it to proper and judicious use.

## PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

The major threats to biodiversity on land and in the oceans comes from the destruction of habitats and the overharvesting of plants and animals.

The need for land to meet the increasing demands for housing, agriculture, and resources will result in increased encroachment into natural and semi-natural areas. The application of land use planning principles that embody “soft” engineering principles, the protection of habitats, specially for threatened and endangered species and ecological communities, the maintenance of wildlife corridors, the creation of new habitats and the inclusion of green spaces can help maintain biodiversity.

The principles for sustainable development of land exist but are being eroded by economic and financial pressures. Thankfully, there are an increasing number of developers and producers who recognise the financial and social benefits of incorporating sustainability principles into projects.

Scientists have greater knowledge than ever before about natural systems and how they can be used in a sustainable manner on land and in the oceans. Yet, there is still massive overharvesting of natural resources around the world, especially in oceans outside territorial limits and in developing countries rich in natural resources, where mandatory controls are weak or difficult to enforce.

The need is urgent to adopt ecologically sustainable development across all ecosystems of the planet, a new paradigm is needed to assist this transition.

Humankind must value Nature for its inherent qualities and live in harmony with Nature, for which it must have compassion. All our activities should be aimed at reducing the use of its resources and minimising the impact of our living and consumption on the environment. Actions to achieve this should be taken by individuals, communities, industries, educational and medical institutions, corporations, NGOs and governments, and should be given an equivalent priority to that of profit and GDP.

Our actions towards all things should be based on the five universal human values of Love, Truth, Right-action, Peace and Non-violence.

.....  
*“The primary task is to purify the environment, which is affected by pollution of air, water, and food. All the five elements are affected by pollution. People should therefore try to reduce the use of automobiles and control the emission of harmful industrial effluents.”*  
.....

–Sathya Sai Baba, 6 February 1993



# Creating Harmony Between Man and Nature

## Making Practical Changes in Lifestyles and Habits

*“Man must learn to use Nature not for his comfort or entanglement to the utter forgetfulness of the God behind the joy he derives but for the better understanding of the intelligence that guides the universe.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 27 March 1967

Every moment of each day, we interact with the environment, directly and indirectly. The choices we make and our actions – such as choosing the food we eat, how we spend our money and time, the energy and natural resources we utilise, and even the thoughts we have – impact the environment.

Being aware of our actions, we can make simple changes that reduce our negative impact on the environment and help us better serve and value Nature. Goal 12 of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals calls for “responsible production and consumption,” which requires each of us to be aware, informed, and conscious about the purchases we make and the impact this has on the environment.

Sathya Sai Baba taught us how to live in harmony with Nature by His exemplary lifestyle. Further details on the Ceiling on Desires programme and practicing human values is discussed elsewhere in this book. Putting these teachings into practice enables us to reduce our demand for material goods and services (including food), which contributes to climate change and pollution of the air, land, and water at the various stages of production, transportation, sale, consumption and eventual disposal of waste material.



## ELECTRICITY

- Turn off lights and appliances when not needed.
- Change to CFL or LED bulbs.
- Buy more efficient refrigerators, furnaces, and appliances.
- Install timers or motion sensors on outdoor lights.
- Think before you print, and use recycled paper – print double-side whenever possible.



## HEATING & COOLING

- Install solar panels for electricity.
- Set your thermostat at 26C in summer and 20C in winter.
- Use a fan instead of air-conditioning when possible.
- Install programmable thermostats.
- Improve insulation for the attic, doors, windows.
- Plant trees on the sunny side of your home.
- Dry your clothes in the sun.
- Keep furnace and air-conditioning filters clean.



## TRANSPORTATION

- Limit driving – carpool, combine trips, telecommute.
- Use public transportation – the bus or train.
- Walk or bicycle, it’s healthier.
- Keep your engine tuned and tires properly inflated.
- Consider a fuel-efficient car or an electric or hybrid car for your next vehicle.



## WATER

- Take shorter showers of less than 5 minutes to conserve water.
- Install low-flow shower heads.
- Fix leaky faucets, toilets, and sprinklers.
- Reduce lawn and plant watering.
- Plant drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, and vegetation.
- Run the clothes washer and dishwasher only if it’s full. Wash clothes in cold water.
- Install water butts or rain barrels to harvest rainwater for gardening and irrigation.
- Reuse your towels in a hotel, instead of having them washed after each use.





## FOOD

- Do not waste food, take only what you can eat.
- Eat freshly prepared food instead of processed food because a lot of energy is used in preparing and transporting processed foods.
- Reduce dairy intake – livestock and agricultural farming contribute to a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions, and dairy cows require large amounts of land, water, and food, leading to high rates of deforestation.
- Buy locally grown and seasonal food – they travel fewer miles to be in market, are healthier, and support local farmers and the local community. Grow your own food where possible.
- Buy organic food and fair-trade products whenever possible – conventional agriculture relies on fertilisers and pesticides that pollute land, waterways, and the air.



## LIFESTYLE

- Reuse, repair, or donate. Don't buy it unless you really need it.
- Use water-based or low-Volatile Organic Compounds paints, finishes, glues.
- Keep air-cleaning houseplants at home.
- Support local government efforts for sustainable communities, clean electricity, and public transportation.
- Support national and international policies to reduce climate change and pollution.

.....  
*“Nature is your school, your laboratory, the gateway to liberation, and the panorama of God’s majesty. Seek to know the lessons it is ready to teach.”*  
 .....

–Sathya Sai Baba, 4 October 1970  
 .....

In this chapter, we share practical suggestions for reducing our impact on Mother Earth:

Change begins with us individuals and it is important that each one of us evaluates our own life and does what one can to “tread softly”. Making even a few of these changes will help us to progress in our spiritual journeys and also signal to companies and governments the importance of shifting business practices and policies toward a more sustainable society. Through collective action, we can protect the planet.

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## WASTE

- Recycle aluminium cans, glass bottles, plastic containers, paper and buy recycled products.
- Recycle electronic equipment, do not dump them in regular trash.
- Choose products that have less packaging, avoid plastic packaging.
- Reduce use of disposable plastic items, such as plastic utensils, bottles, bags and wraps.
- Do not use styrofoam and plastic cups and plates.
- Carry cloth bags when shopping.
- Use a refillable travel mug or water bottle.
- Compost organic waste, such as clippings and kitchen scraps. Do not dump hazardous products, such as paints, oils, solvents, household cleaning chemicals and medication into the sink or the toilet.
- Use environmentally safe household cleaning products, e.g. white vinegar and baking soda.



# Role of the International Organisation

## Fostering Awareness of the Environment and Love for Nature

We can foster awareness of the environment and love for Nature by practising Ceiling on Desires and Sathya Sai Human Values. Selfless service is a universal means to change and simplify our daily lives and develop sustainable levels of consumption.

Sathya Sai Baba said the main objective of the Sathya Sai Organisation is to help one realise the divinity inherent in man. One's spiritual life should be a concentrated effort to purify the mind and heart, for when this is achieved the truth of man's divinity is revealed. The activities of the SSIO foster this purity through devotional, value-based educational, and selfless service activities. These are not separate, distinct pathways, but integrated

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Natural Disaster Cleanup, USA



Tree Planting in Canada

spiritual practices that facilitate the vision of unity in diversity and the inter-connectedness of God, Nature, and man.

### DEVOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Whilst devotional activity frequently refers to worship and rituals in adoration of God, Sathya Sai Baba said that true devotion is being constantly immersed in total love for the Lord, who is immanent in His creation.

This love is the inspiration and motivation to practise Sathya Sai Baba's teachings. He says that happiness begins to dawn when desires are eradicated, and that we should place a ceiling on desires for our own peace of mind. Therefore, SSIO members should reduce desires and consume less, live more simply and more responsibly so that we do not harm Nature, especially since a healthy planet is needed to sustain all life forms.

Sathya Sai Baba said the five elements are being severely contaminated by man's unbecoming behaviour. He also warned us that the pollution we see outside is a reflection of the pollution within us. Therefore, we should rejuvenate our efforts and spiritual practices to remove the anger, greed, jealousy, lust, and other negative qualities within us. We might practice greater loving kindness and consideration, not only for friends, family, and other people, but also for animals, plants, and the environment itself. Sathya Sai Baba says the best way to love God is by loving all and serving all.



Serving Animals in Guatemala

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### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The SSIO's educational activities create awareness of Sathya Sai Baba's frequent reminder that Nature teaches man his greatest lesson: to live selflessly for all others, expecting nothing in return. Just as the sandalwood tree gives off its aroma even to the person hacking at its trunk, we should always help ever and hurt never.

The SSIO's educational activities, including study circles and Sai Spiritual Education classes for children, should foster greater understanding of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba about the environment. Effort should be made to help SSIO members understand: the relationship between God, Nature, and man; the spiritual perspective on the causes of environmental change and how to live in harmony with Nature; and how to lead a holistic lifestyle, utilising natural resources gratefully and consuming less.

This is particularly poignant as Sathya Sai Baba said that the misuse of Nature's resources by man accounts for the calamities, like earthquakes, famines, floods and volcanic eruptions, which are Nature's response to the ecological imbalance that man has created because of his selfishness.

From the work done under the leadership of the Young Adults in the 'Serve the Planet' project, a lot of material is available for study circles in Sathya Sai Centres/Groups and



public venues. Additionally, the SSIO has created two illustrated booklets on protecting the planet and posters to highlight man's relationship with Nature, all of which will be useful material for distribution during any Public Outreach event, including Walk for Values, Public Meetings, Interfaith Meetings and Community Engagements. The Public Outreach events can be opportunities for awareness campaigns and advocacy for the environment.

The educational activities foster greater understanding within and without the Sathya Sai Centres/Groups of the importance of practising the five universal human values, which will lead to placing a ceiling on desires. In this way, the SSIO can play an important role in promoting greater awareness in the local community of how, through values-based education, we can transform people's thinking and habits.



Walk for Values in Colombia

## SERVICE ACTIVITIES

The SSIO's service activities emphasise that selfless service to all creation is the very essence of devotion and manifestation of the love within us. Selfless service teaches humility and reverence for the Lord's creation.

When Sathya Sai Baba reminded us that much land is being spoiled by plastic waste, not only should we consume less plastic at home and in Sathya Sai Centres/Groups, we should also avoid other non-biodegradable items, like styrofoam cups and meal boxes, both inside the Sathya Sai Centres/Groups and in our community service activities. We need also to become conscious not to waste water and electricity and to learn to switch off, and to become mindful of the need to reduce, reuse and recycle paper and other resources. By practising the teachings earnestly at all times with discipline and diligence, we become exemplars of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings.

In addition to using eco-friendly materials in regular Sathya Sai Centre/Group and in community service activities, many projects have been undertaken by the SSIO around the world as part of the 'Serve the Planet' programme, such as tree planting, beach and river clean-ups, local park beautification and other activities. Such projects should be continued and enhanced, not only to inform, educate and motivate SSIO members, but also for public outreach and education.

Conducting workshops and participating in community events to educate the local population of the causes and effects of environment changes, the science and technologies presently available to us to reverse the effects, and of the need to change our attitudes and habits will go a long way towards encouraging people to join us in protecting the planet.



Clean Up Australia Campaign

## CONCLUSION

The SSIO is a unique organisation that can play a leading role in the efforts to protect the planet by the holistic transformation of every member and its devotional, education and service activities in the community.



# Role of the International Organisation

## SSIO Projects Around the World

With an increasing awareness of the environmental challenges our Mother Earth is facing, the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) has stepped up with a variety of initiatives around the world to protect the planet. For example, the SSIOs in Australia and USA have initiated national Envirocare programmes and the Young Adults have produced structured study circle material, as part of the ‘Serve the Planet’ (STP) programme, to foster greater understanding of environmental issues and to suggest practical means to reduce our ecological impact on the planet.

The SSIO’s ‘Protect the Planet’ initiative, started in 2017 and continued in 2018, has brought to the fore Sathya Sai Baba’s teaching on ‘Ceiling on Desires’, which is a practical means of reducing our environmental impact. SSIO members are encouraged to make changes to their personal consumption habits, move towards eco-friendly foods, products and lifestyle, and to reduce their carbon footprint.

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At the community level, SSIO members are increasingly initiating or participating in public programmes or activities that promote the Earth’s wellbeing, such as Walks for Values, interfaith events focused on the environment, and community service projects such as river/beach/park/neighbourhood clean-ups, tree planting, electronics waste recycling, promoting use of reusable bags, organic vegetable gardening, serving food in reusable/biodegradable dinnerware at public events and carpooling to events.



Green Walk for Values in Suriname

In this chapter, we list only a few of the many initiatives that SSIO members across the globe have undertaken to restore man’s harmony with Nature.

### PROTECT THE PLANET PROJECTS – AUSTRALIA

Sathya Sai Centres have started an environmental awareness programme titled “Project reSAIcle”. Launched on Earth Day, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017, it is a collection drive for reusable or recyclable items including, spectacles, sunglasses, printer cartridges, mobile phones and plastic bags.



Reusable Cloth Bags

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Nationwide workshops have been conducted by the Young Adults at Sathya Sai Centres on plastic reduction techniques. Since then, young adults have painted personalised cloth bags to replace plastic shopping bags. Plastic containers and bags used for distributing food at SSIO events have been replaced by reusable containers and cutlery. At the 2017 National Conference, a reusable water bottle was supplied to every delegate in place of disposable plastic bottles. Plastic name badges have been eliminated.

In May 2017, 22 SSIO members came together for a “Bushcare” service activity to sow seeds for approximately 280 plants, including four native Australian species, thus taking advantage of Nature’s regeneration cycle. And in July 2017, SSIO members joined Clean Up Australia Day service activities – approximately 90 participants teamed up with a local council to clean the parklands.



## ANNUAL TREE PLANTING – CANADA

In the City of Mississauga, Ontario, volunteers from the Sathya Sai Centre of Cooksville gather at the Aquinas Park for an annual tree planting event in partnership with the City. In September 2017, the volunteers, including SSE children, planted about 150 saplings in loving service to the environment. This initiative is complimented across Canada by the tree planting activities of other Sathya Sai Centres – on Earth Day in May 2018, the Sathya Sai Centre of Toronto-York joined a community effort to plant 400 trees in a park in the city



Annual Tree Planting

## PLASTIC WASTE RECYCLING – INDONESIA

Since its first STP initiative in hydro-phonic gardening in 2017, the Sathya Sai Centre of Denpasar has carried out several activities that focus on the many ways to reduce waste and recycle. One such activity is the plastic waste collection system. Since public recycling facilities are not available, the STP Team invited Sathya Sai Centre members to bring their plastic waste from home. The collected plastic waste was weighed and sorted and then sent to a vendor recycling facility. Each member's plastic contribution was recorded so that they not only would know their personal plastic consumption but could also work towards reducing plastic usage.

## ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDENING FOR ORPHANED CHILDREN – SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

In June 2012, a Sathya Sai volunteer, an agronomist, assisted by his three sons, planted an organic vegetable garden for orphaned children in San José, Costa Rica. Fourteen children learned to tend the garden and grow their own food, whilst learning about sustainability. They planted spinach, radish, beans, corn and carrots, and herbal plants such as oregano, rosemary, and thyme. The children learned to eat healthy foods and were proud to consume



Organic Gardening



Walk for Values

what they had themselves grown. The project inspired self-confidence, satisfaction, and enthusiasm in these young children.

## INTERFAITH WALK FOR VALUES TO PROTECT THE PLANET – HONG KONG

On 26 March 2017, the SSIO of Hong Kong, in conjunction with other faith-based organisations, hosted an interfaith Walk for Values on the theme, 'Protect the Planet.' At the opening ceremony, after devotional prayers, a Zoroastrian priest, the Chief Imam, a Jewish Rabbi and the devotional coordinator of the SSIO of Hong Kong all spoke about our duty to live in harmony with Nature and to protect Mother Earth. Members of the Sikh Temple blessed the gathering of 300 people with a few words on Nature from their tradition. African drums then heralded the start of the 45-minute walk around Hong Kong Peak, overlooking the famous skyline and harbour of the city.



After the walk, participants listened to inspiring talks by Buddhist and SSIO leaders on the universal human values and Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on Ceiling on Desires. SSIO provided walkers with a reusable water bottle to discourage the use of disposable plastic bottles, which are used in the millions each day in the city.

### **EARTH DAY CELEBRATION – KAZAKHSTAN**

In April 2017, the SSIO of Kazakhstan observed Earth Day by organising activities to clean homes, workplaces, beaches and amusement parks. Together with residents and children, Sathya Sai volunteers planted trees and flower seedlings. In addition, the volunteers served hot meals to more than 60 people in the neighbourhood.



Riverbed Cleanup

### **RIVER BED CLEANUP – CROATIA**

In early 2015, when the water level in the Rjecina River dropped, exposing large amounts of nylon, tin, and plastic waste on the river bed, 11 SSIO volunteers, including eight women, cleaned the river bed on International Women's Day. In less than two hours, the volunteers collected twelve bags of garbage! Learning of their work, the environmental protection coordinator for the City of Rijeka informed the volunteers that their exemplary service had inspired the formation of the Green Clean Up 2015 project, which was held on Earth Day that year, attracting many community residents, volunteers, schools and other institutions.

### **STP ENERGY EXHIBITION – DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

In April of 2018, an Energy Exhibition, comprising an exhibition and game stalls, was set-up over two days for members of the public as part of the 2018 STP programme. The exhibition – which was organised by the Young Adults – consisted of numerous stalls that explained the various kinds of energy man uses, their positive and negative impacts, and the importance of conservation. It highlighted the environmental problems, particularly the carbon footprint, associated with non-renewable energy and it showcased renewable energy projects worldwide.

On the second day, participants were invited to join games and fun activities, titled 'Gadgets Off, Green On', to test what they had learnt the day before. Each of the activities



Beach Cleanup

were tailor-made for specific age groups and spread the message of energy conservation and protecting the planet. Sai Spiritual Education children put on skits on making the world a better place by reducing consumption.

### **BEACH CLEANUP – GHANA**

As a part of the Protect the Planet programme, on 23 October 2017, Young Adults of the SSIO of Ghana organised a beach cleanup along five beaches in Tema Fishing Harbour. Hundreds of young adults participated in cleaning the beach and its environments. Mandatory personal protective equipment was provided to ensure safety and a First Aid team was on standby. Breakfast and lunch were served to the participants as well as the fishermen and needy children living nearby.



## RIVER RESTORATION – LÜBECK, GERMANY

Following the European Union's Water Framework Directive in 2000, members of the SSIO of Germany took action in 2004 to improve the Schwartau river flow so that it meanders and brings benefits to sedimentation and water quality and helps establish biodiversity. Members created a bioretention area in the river, planted trees along the river banks, cleaned up the river while kayaking, placed stones to create a vortex in the water and dug inlets on the riverbed.



Planting Saplings on the Shoreline

During Easter 2008, Sathya Sai Young Adults in Germany gathered in Rohlsdorf to reflect on the 'Ceiling on Desires' programme and to serve the environment by planting trees, pruning willows, and digging overflow outlets near the riverbank to connect water pools with the river. They left behind small pieces of art alongside the planted trees as tokens of their love for God in Nature.

## SHORELINE PLANTING – HAMILTON, NEW ZEALAND

About 20 members of the Sathya Sai Centre of Hamilton, New Zealand, celebrated the Guru Poornima festival in 2017 by planting about 600 *Phormium cookianum* (mountain flax) saplings along the north-western banks of Lake Magellan as part of a project to rejuvenate its natural surroundings.

## WASTE REDUCTION AT EVENTS BY USING REUSABLE DINNERWARE – ATLANTA, USA

There has been increasing awareness that discarded styrofoam and plastic remain in existence for a very long time and are a threat to the land, sea animals and eco-systems.

In 2011, the Sathya Sai Centre in Atlanta purchased 200 steel plates, cups, tumblers, and silverware sets from India. Now, at an event where about 1,400 meals are served throughout the day, only one bag of food waste and one bag of paper waste is collected. In the last seven plus years, the Sathya Sai Centre has served over 10,000 meals on reusable dinnerware.

## TEACHING CHILDREN TO RECYCLE, REUSE, REDUCE – TAIWAN

Sai Spiritual Education children were taught that Nature is a manifestation of God's Will



Teaching Children to Recycle, Reuse, Reduce

and the importance, therefore, of protecting Nature by recycling used household items that are commonly disposed of. With the guidance of their teachers, they were taught to recycle disposable plastic bottles into pen holders, to make lovely carry bags from old clothes, etc. These activities emphasised the importance of reducing waste and also the benefits from reducing, reusing, and recycling what we consume.

## TREE PLANTING – KENYA

As part of the STP's "Protect the Planet" initiative in 2017 and 2018, members of the SSIO of Kenya conducted a large-scale tree planting initiative with the Friends of Environment Conservation Trust (FOECT). Over three days in November 2017, the SSIO of Kenya planted 2,000 indigenous trees in the Kabage Forest in Nyeri County. On 7 April 2018, Young Adults from the Sathya Sai Centre of Nairobi drove to Ontululi Forest in Laikipia county and donated 6,667 indigenous and exotic species of tree seedlings to FOCET, planting many themselves. Both forests come under purview of the Kenya Forest Service, a governmental agency that owns, manages, and protects all state forests.



## WORLD HUMAN VALUES DAY – BRAZIL

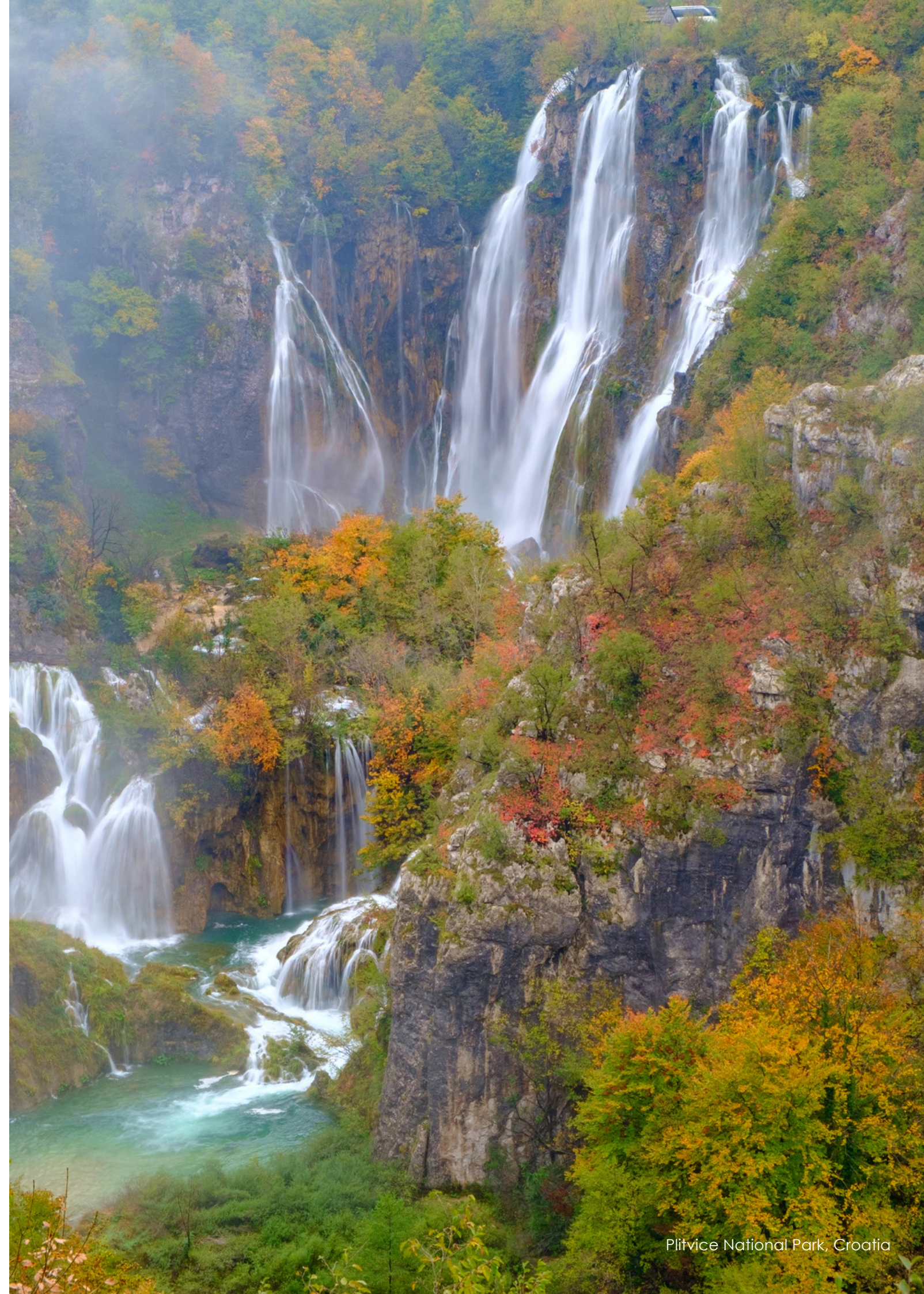
SSIO volunteers in Brazil commemorated World Human Values Day on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018 with a Walk for Values for students and staff of the three Sathya Sai Schools in the country. The Walk was the final phase of the SSIO's Environmental Improvement Project in Sao Paulo in which volunteers repaired public access areas that serve the local community. These areas were adorned with placards made by the students that contain messages about preserving Nature and the environment.



Human Values Day

*“The avoidance of pollution of the atmosphere or of natural resources like rivers is one of the ways in which an enterprise practices nonviolence. In these different ways, a great deal of good can be done to our people and nation by business managers who adhere to basic human values and who adopt a spiritual approach to the tasks of the business world.”*

–Sathya Sai Baba, 10 February 1990





# Role of the International Organisation

## Public Outreach

There are four well-established strategies for public outreach: Public Meetings, Walk for Values, Interfaith projects and Community Engagement. Additionally, social media, traditional print media, community collaboration opportunities, etc. may be used to create greater public awareness of the Sathya Sai mission and teachings.



Interfaith Meeting in UK

The prerequisite for the SSIO's public outreach efforts is the practice of human values and the consequent spiritual transformation of its members, a transformation and awareness that should be coherently reflected in the Sathya Sai Centres/Groups around the world. These should manifest the highest ideals that can bring change to the world. In the present context, these ideals, when properly understood and practised, will bring a change in man's interaction with Nature, which is a manifestation of God.

In 2017, the SSIO's public outreach activities started to focus on the theme 'Protect the Planet' to raise awareness of the need to protect the planet, to preserve ourselves and all creation. The three objectives of 'Protect the Planet' are:

- To provide practical methods to practise the Ceiling on Desires programme (saving Energy, Money, Food and Time) in order to achieve sustainable living and protect the planet.
- To care for and serve the planet as a spiritual practice by studying and sharing the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and leaders of other faith traditions on the inter-connectedness of God, Nature, and man, so that there may be Unity and Purity in our lives and we may achieve Divinity.
- To develop innovative initiatives relevant to our present-day needs and to engage members of the global community through the four well-established strategies and the additional methods above to achieve the outcomes of the 'Protect the Planet' programme.

Put simply, these objectives seek to raise awareness of man's responsibility to Nature and to bring meaningful change to our daily actions.



Beach Cleaning in Mexico

Sathya Sai Baba said that the pollution in the world is due to the pollution within us. Therefore, any public outreach will be most effective if we start with ourselves, i.e. we need to change ourselves before we can be instruments of change in the world. By transforming ourselves within, we transform the way we interact with Nature.

In as much as Sathya Sai Baba has warned of the dangers of pollution and the degradation of Nature, he has also suggested the ways and means to restore the natural balance in Nature, so that man and Nature can co-exist in peace and harmony. The five elements of Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth sustain all creation, including Nature and man, and demonstrate their inter-connectedness.

Each one of us has an impact on the environment every day, starting from the amount of water, energy, and plastics we consume and the waste we generate – we each have a carbon





Waste Reduction at events at the Sathya Sai Centre in Atlanta, USA

footprint. Our positive thoughts also impact the environment. In every action, we can choose to be more aware and act in a way that protects our environment.

It is here that the Ceiling on Desires programme is of fundamental importance, for it emphasises moderation in consumption and utilisation of the savings for serving others, including Mother Earth. The quality of life for future generations on this planet will be determined by our actions today.

Eliciting the human values of Truth, Love, Right Conduct, Peace and Non-violence inherent in each one of us by our spiritual and secular practices will enable us to effectively practice the Ceiling on Desires programme. Our spiritual transformation through the practice of these human values will lead us to achieve social, economic and ecologic sustainability, a better quality of life, and greater well-being of all individuals, nations and Nature.

The practical means by which our Unity, Purity and Divinity manifests in the environment is:

### UNITY

- Unity of global action by all governments of the world on sustainable living.
- Unity in action by individuals/families in practicing Ceiling on Desires.
- Unity of effort of spiritual/business/community organisations in conserving Energy, Money, Food and Time.
- Cooperation in exchanging technologies that help reduce our carbon footprint.

### PURITY

- Individual transformation (both mental and physical) to reduce inner pollution.
- Purify Mother Earth by greater awareness and efforts in the community.
- Keep our home, roads, parks, lakes and its environs clean. Grow more trees.

### DIVINITY

- Reduce our desires for material objects and pleasures.
- Use science and Human Values Education for the good of our community.
- Be more aware of our responsibility to Protect the Planet for future generations.

Recognising that the five elements are inherent in all creation, traditional and innovative strategies may be adopted by way of personal commitments and community initiatives (discussed elsewhere in this book).

### EMPLOYING THE FOUR WELL-ESTABLISHED STRATEGIES FOR OUTREACH

- Organise Public Meetings and Walk for Values to create greater public awareness in all faith communities, educational institutions, resident associations, corporations, government agencies of the ideals and practices necessary to protect Nature.
- Mobilise the local Inter-faith community to plant trees and participate in other environmental projects, that foster greater religious, spiritual and values-based understanding of man's interconnectedness and responsibility towards Nature.
- Foster greater Community Engagement to protect the planet by organising concerts and dramas, beach and country side clean-ups, leadership symposia, Go Green campaigns, and promoting Reduce, Reuse and Recycle initiatives.

### CONCLUSION

The spiritual, selfless service, and educational activities carried out by the SSIO are means for the transformation of the heart and the manifestation of love in our thoughts, words, and deeds. These activities promote spiritual transformation and create loving vibrations that benefit Mother Earth.

*“What is the lesson to be learnt from the observance of Nature?  
It is excellence in the performance of duty. It is because Nature  
ceaselessly performs its duty that the world is able to derive so  
many sacred benefits. The secret and mystery of creation lies in the  
due performance of one's duty with earnestness and sincerity.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 28 May 1990



# Role of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation of India

*“Whosoever worships the Supreme Lord should also worship Nature (Prakriti). He should love and adore Nature because Nature is not different from the Supreme Self. Nature is the effect and God is the Cause.”*

–Sathya Sai Baba, SSS 28.8, 9 April 1995



Mass Tree Planting Initiative

The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation in India (SSSSOI) implements ‘Go Green’ initiatives and serves Mother Earth based on the fundamental principles, teachings and directives of Sathya Sai Baba.

India is the second most populated country and accounts for around 18% of the total population of the world. Having its roots across the length and breadth of India, in every state and in more than 500 districts, the more than 5,000 Sathya Sai Centres/Groups comprise a working force of more than one million people, consisting of members, active workers, volunteers and more than 500,000 Bal Vikas Children and their parents. The SSSSOI has the will and the resources to make a significant contribution to making India ‘Green’ again, an endeavour critical to the entire world.

## THE WORK OF THE SSSSOI IS FOUNDED ON THE FOLLOWING PHILOSOPHY:

1. The problem of imbalance in Nature and disturbance of the Earth’s ecosystem is not merely a scientific one and, thus, cannot be resolved only through scientific means or interventions. It is the collective result of the imbalance in individuals arising out of their uncontrolled desires, for satisfying their wants/greed rather than their needs.
2. As Sathya Sai Baba always emphasised, it is the change in the individual that can bring about change in the world. He said individual change will lead to association change, which in turn will ultimately result in societal change. Thus, it is the duty of every individual to respect and contribute to Nature’s well-being. While the government may play a regulatory role and create policies, restrictions and prohibitions, these alone cannot bring the desired results until everyone contributes at his level.



Solar Panels Installation at a Village

Based on these principles, the SSSSOI has undertaken a plethora of initiatives that involve active protection and mitigation strategies that embrace both sustainable development actions and climate change issues. These projects target various segments of society – from children to intellectuals – to have a direct impact on people in more than 1,000 villages, 900 schools adopted under the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Jyoti programme, 100 Sathya Sai Schools, schools under the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vahini programme, the parents in these schools, members and volunteers of the SSSSOI, and millions of beneficiaries in different parts of India. These initiatives can be broadly classified under two categories:

- Education and Awareness Camps and Workshops: Practical workshops and sessions based on spiritual and scientific principles and practices.



- Service Projects and Activities: To address environmental needs and setting inspirational models for adaptation by society at large.

## EDUCATION AND AWARENESS, CAMPS AND WORKSHOPS

It is only through education that change and transformation happens. Given our rapid modernisation and the penetration of technology, which many times makes people unaware of the needs of our ecosystem, these initiatives focus on educating people and creating awareness about the need for conserving Nature's resources and avoiding pollution, as outlined below:



Education

### Awareness Camps on Waste Management and Plastic Pollution

India faces major environmental challenges associated with waste generation and inadequate waste collection, transport, treatment and disposal. The existing systems are inadequate to cope with the huge volumes of waste being generated, which impact the environment and public health.

Plastic pollution is one of the largest environmental threats faced by India. In order to create awareness about the harmful effects of the ill-management of waste, these camps and workshops are conducted by professionals and trained volunteers in districts all across India, with a focus on waste reduction and waste segregation at source. The instructions include methods and activities, demonstrations on the hazards of plastic waste and their prevention, based on the three R's of waste management – Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.

Knowledge about biodegradable and recyclable waste, the time taken for disposal of each category of waste, emerging waste categories, viz. biomedical waste and E-waste, are also highlighted with audio-visuals aids. These workshops have resulted in changes in

lifestyles and habits and have cultivated a sense of concern and care about Nature and the environment at different levels on the part of participants.

### Workshop on importance of trees, plants and the green-cover

Vegetation plays an important role in mitigating climate change. The destruction and degradation of green-cover contribute to excess carbon-dioxide emissions in the atmosphere, thereby escalating the Greenhouse effect. Trees and vegetation are known to effectively restrict the increase in global average temperatures.



Education

These workshops focus on the importance of the green-cover in our lives and in sustaining the natural balance of the earth's ecosystem. They aim to create awareness and impart knowledge on the role of trees and plants, which are an integral part of Nature and responsible for the various ecological systems of our planet, like its water cycle, the level of carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere, and the prevention of soil erosion and natural disasters.

### Awareness camps on Energy Conservation

Man uses Nature's resources to meet his needs, or more accurately his wants! As the desire for comfort rises, the requirement for energy also goes up. This is responsible for the excessive exploitation of Nature. The workshops highlight this important correlation between man's needs and his exploitation of Nature. They focus on creating a sense of responsibility in every individual to reduce the emissions that arise from non-renewable fossil fuels and to focus on the use of alternative sources, like solar energy.



### Awareness Camps on Water Conservation

Water is known as the elixir of life. The shortage of water is one of the greatest threats to mankind. Besides motivating the participants in being diligent in the use of water, the workshops also impart knowledge on water conservation strategies, through rain water harvesting structures and ground water recharge, to maintain desirable levels of the water table underneath the ground.

### Training on Farming Methods

Organic farming and reduction in the use of pesticides is one of the important components of the “Go Green” initiatives. Training in the preparation of organic compost from organic waste collected from residents, waste vegetation (not used as fodder for cows or goats), cow-dung and cow’s urine is given to farmers in different parts of the country. Besides this, training in the preparation of organic pesticide from cow’s urine, in the use pest repellents, and in foliage sprays from solid waste is also given to farmers, reaping positive results.



Farming

### SERVICE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

The SSSSOI has undertaken constructive and regular service projects for the preservation of the environment and to improve the ecology of our planet. These initiatives are need-based and conducted in various parts of the country to inculcate a sense of responsibility and ownership in participants for the well-being of Nature, while inspiring various segments of society to join this important task.

### Mass Tree Planting Initiative

Tree planting on a massive scale has of late become a regular activity all across the nation. In 2017, as a part of the nation-wide drive entitled *Swatchata se Divyata Tak* (from Cleanliness

to Godliness), from 2 to 20 October 2017 more than 100,000 trees were planted in various parts of the country by volunteers from different Sathya Sai Centres/Groups. Around 380,000 man-hours were spent on this initiative, which also included massive cleaning and sanitation drives in several areas across the nation.

It is estimated that annually the SSSSOI plants more than 300,000 trees in different parts of the country and ensures their sustenance. In many cases, in addition to contributing to environmental conservation, the trees help the needy as their fruit become a source of earnings. This acts as an incentive for the beneficiaries to preserve the trees.

### Cultivation of Dry/Fallow Land

To ensure food security for the poor, as a pilot programme in the state of Kerala, an action force was created in an adopted village to convert dry land into cultivable agricultural land. To ensure soil health, biodiversity, and the health of the community, only organic amendments were added in the conversion process and chemical pesticides were avoided. The initiative has yielded positive economic results for the farmers and has simultaneously contributed to environmental health. The programme will be extended to other states.

### Desilting of riverbeds and revival of water bodies

Pollution of the waterbodies is a major environmental hazard that affects the availability of water for consumption and use. In several parts of the country, action has been undertaken by volunteers to restore the water holding capacity of rivers and rivulets. In many villages, dried up ponds have been revived by utilising low-cost machines for digging the waterbed. This initiative is ongoing in a few states.



Cleaning Riverbeds



## Sanitation and Cleaning

In many parts of India, sanitation and cleaning is an area of concern, especially in public places. While this activity also serves as one of the most effective spiritual activities for the annihilation of ego, its impact on society is tremendous, particularly in motivating the public to ensure cleanliness and the proper disposal of waste. Volunteers from Sathya Sai Centres/Groups in almost all parts of the country undertake regular cleaning of public places, including streets, public toilets, fair venues, government hospitals, cremation grounds, temples, churches, mosques and burial places to ensure the proper disposal of waste.



Cleanup

## Preventive action to ward off land slides

To prevent landslides due to overflowing of rainwater from blocked drains, a massive drain cleaning has been undertaken every year since 2007 to clean the 65 km long drain that runs alongside the NH55 on the hilly terrain on of the Himalayas, which connects the town of Siliguri to the hilly habitation of Darjeeling. This gargantuan activity is undertaken in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal each year in May, with active participation from more than 3,500 members, which include Bal Vikas students, parents, and volunteers who work tirelessly from early morning to late afternoon.

## Ground Water Recharging

Ground water everywhere is quickly being depleted for various reasons, such as increased construction work, deforestation, hardening of upper soil level and erratic rainfall. An active drive to recharge ground water has been under way in West Bengal on a pilot basis for the past few years. Ground water is the source of drinking water in almost the entire state. Even in the Himalayan hills, water is dependent upon streams flowing through the hills, locally known as 'Dhara'.

To increase the level of ground water, a small bamboo size hole of 1 to 2 feet is dug in waste lands in the plains and hills. In the hills, it is dug at upper catchment areas of streams at an angle of 60 degrees before the rainy season. Results show that wherever such holes were dug, water flow increased both in the plains and streams. In one of the villages, water flow increased 3 times within three years. Given the positive results, this mechanism is expected to be replicated in various parts of the country.

## Seed Balls for increasing the Green Cover

This technique is used to increase the green cover drastically in areas near highways and other barren lands. Seed balls have been found to be an effective means of increasing the green cover. These are made by mixing clay soil thoroughly with cow-dung. This mix is shaped into dough by adding seeds to it. Once dried, the dough shaped balls, called seed balls, are scattered at designated areas before the monsoon to ensure that the monsoon rains provide the required water for the seeds to germinate.

This experiment has been conducted with the participation of children from a few schools adopted under the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Jyoti programme, and the results have been very encouraging. The initiative has since been rolled out to all the 900 schools under this programme to ensure a green cover for barren lands.



Ground Water Recharging



Seed Balls

*“Education must instil the fundamental human values; it must broaden the vision to include the entire world and all mankind.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 5 February 1981



# Role of Human Values to Protect the Planet

## Sathya Sai Education in Human Values

*“Education must instil the fundamental Human Values; it must broaden the vision to include the entire world and all mankind.”*

–Sathya Sai Baba, 5 February 1981

Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings on human values are not only for character development in children, or to enrich our daily lives or our individual needs for peace, they are also for interacting with the world around us, including Nature. The practice of human values transforms us and endows us with special capacities to meet challenges in our daily lives and in society. Human values open the heart, sharpen the intellect, and liberate the spirit, thus enabling a life of love, joy, and authenticity.

However, human values have an infinitely larger span. They have two distinct dimensions – a horizontal dimension of engagement with the external world of objects, living beings, and humans, and a vertical or spiritual, inner dimension of enhancing connection with divinity. These two are completely interlinked because human values influence both the dimensions simultaneously. Thus, even ordinary activities infused with human values assume spiritual dimensions. By their universal nature, human values embrace all creation.



SSEHV Training Programme in Haiti

One very important aspect of human values, although somewhat less visible, is that they enable us to sow invisible seeds of a harvest yet to come. This is the aspect of human values that is explored here for protecting the planet.

### SATHYA SAI PHILOSOPHY, *EDUCARE* AND PLANETARY ECOLOGY

Sathya Sai Baba has described the relationship of Earth, Nature, human life and human purpose by giving a completely new and layered meaning to the word “*Educare*”.

The first layer of *Educare* is the concept of creation as a manifestation of divinity. Creation commences with the sound “Om” and divinity manifests as the five elements of Space, Fire, Air, Water and Earth. These elements are, therefore, intrinsically sacred and so is Nature, which is composed of these five elements.



SSIO Conference in Singapore, 2015

From these inorganic five elements evolved the initial microscopic organic life form, which in stages evolved into all life forms on the planet, to reach its pinnacle in human life. The Oneness principle links the entire creation as fundamentally inseparable.

The five senses evolved subsequently for gathering information and ‘feeding’ the mind. However, the senses are strongly drawn to the material world and the mind follows the senses. This creates strong attachments to the material and the secular. Strong attachments to the material world distort thinking and consequently humans engage in activities that pollute the elements and creation.

This has caused enormous man-made ecological and social challenges on a global scale. Impure thoughts and deeds arise in impure human hearts and minds that are polluted by greed, lust for power, and control. The lack of equilibrium in Nature and the perilous state of the planet now reflect the impurity in human minds and hearts.





Trash Pickup, Kazakhstan

The second layer of *Educare* is of bringing out the latent divinity in man through appropriate enquiry and practice. Sathya Sai Baba said: “*Educare is that which brings out the latent divinity in human being.*” How is bringing out our latent divinity related to the practices we may adopt to protect the planet? Management of the senses and the mind to discern the sacred basis of creation and to realise inherent divinity is the major goal of life.

Since *Educare* supports the development of *buddhi* (intellect, discriminative faculty) and the drawing out of human values from within, it enables the perception of the sacredness of the five elements and creation.

This means we may advance in our inner spiritual life if we consume all resources mindfully and treat creation as sacred. This attitude and the actions that flow from it lead to evolution of human awareness and form a vital connection with the Universal Consciousness.

All spiritual traditions regard human life as a special opportunity to realise one’s relationship with divinity through *buddhi*, since it enables the realisation of an intimate and inseparable relationship with the divine through our lives. With *buddhi*, every action performed with the right intention becomes a step in that direction. Conscious living and a sincere commitment to living mindfully and consuming the Earth’s natural resources moderately allows us to reduce pollution and waste, and protect the planet as a spiritual practice.

Sathya Sai Baba has called this initiative the Ceiling on Desires programme. This programme is the final common pathway for human values in daily life applied to protect the planet.

The third layer of *Educare* is a pedagogic tool which utilises the above two concepts to underpin the approach in Sathya Sai Education, in which both human values and divinity are recognised as inherent in the learner and the goal of education is to enhance the inner

connection with divinity. Thus, any induction of children in protecting the planet can utilise the strategy of teaching by drawing out human values from within them.

This nurtures the development of conscience towards the use of natural resources, as well as consumable goods, food, energy, time, and money.

### SATHYA SAI BABA’S TEACHINGS AND THE PRESENT STATE OF THE PLANET

Currently we are faced with making choices and decisions not only for the well-being of the planet now but also for the long-term future. These decisions will have significant impacts for all life forms and for generations of humans to come.

Sathya Sai Baba initiated Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) to raise awareness that each one of us can become an active spiritual agent with a good conscience to serve humanity, not only in our current span of life but for the future of the planet and all creation for time to come. Towards this end, Sathya Sai Baba gave discourses, wrote the *Vahini* series and gave direct instructions to the hundreds of thousands of people who came to listen, including members of the schools, colleges, university, medical institutions, industry, governments, NGOs and other institutions.

He gave personal instructions on the techniques to raise the level of awareness in every section of the community. Sathya Sai Baba elaborated on the possibility of a planetary future of prosperity and hope.

As humanity, we are sitting on the cusp of momentous decision making. We are confronted with two alternative future scenarios:

Scenario 1: If we continue to live as we have been we will make the planet inhospitable for life, as it will continue the trajectory of deteriorating climate conditions, unmitigated global warming, increased risks of floods, heatwaves, rising oceans, natural disasters and



Human Values Day Proclaimed in Canada



diseases, and damaged biodiversity. We will face shortages of water and food. Aquifers that took centuries to form will become more and more depleted through extraction that exceeds recharge and, additionally, arable land will continue to steadily decline in the face of increasing population and irresponsible farming and animal husbandry practices.

### SATHYA SAI BABA'S TEACHINGS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Scenario 2: In the past, humanity has waged wars over land, economics, religious or political ideologies and not paid attention to sustainability as an important concept. But this need not continue. Implementing His teachings, we can inaugurate a new, glorious and prosperous global civilisation based on the Oneness principle.

We need not exploit people or natural resources, or pollute the land, atmosphere, oceans and rivers by chasing a more comfortable lifestyle, while creating mountains of waste. We can base our civilisations on sustainable living, respect for all life, accord and amity between people with different beliefs, and on the welfare of the Earth's biodiversity and humanity.

In scenario 2, a global revival can be brought about by raising the level of awareness of humanity by propagating Oneness-based spirituality as the guiding principle of all production and consumption of material goods and services and energy, including food production and farming practices. Combined with advances in many fields of science and technology, including communication and information technology, ecology, medicine, genetics, neuroscience and positive psychology, this will open an era of capacity beyond our present imagination.

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Information technology that expands in accordance with Moore's laws - doubling capacity every 18 months - will enhance our computing capacity to reach Singularity in the next few decades (i.e. when artificial intelligence exceeds human intelligence). This can be utilised for global education and building strong international alliances for the protection of the planet. A combination of neuroscience with extraordinary machines with human-like intelligence will bring amazing possibilities of civilisations no longer driven by greed, excessive consumption and pollution, unrestrained commerce, politics of military power and economics.

It is clear that the future is not bright if we continue living as we have done for the last couple of centuries. The question before us is whether we move proactively in a sustainable direction based on the Oneness principle or whether we are forced to move by natural disasters and calamities caused by humanity.

The proactive course is an ancient path declared in all the religions, the path of conscious human evolution, a path revived by Sathya Sai Baba. His teachings give us an amazing opportunity to create a turning point in the growth of human awareness and usher in a Golden Age. These will enable us not only to undo the degradation of the planet but also ensure a permanent change in the way we use finite natural resources and treat the five elements as sacred, with a reverential attitude.

### CHALLENGES FOR PROTECTION OF THE PLANET

But, before we can herald this glorious and prosperous civilisation we need to confront certain challenges, develop new understandings, beliefs, attitudes and capacities. Generally,



Serve the Planet Project in Indonesia

people are too preoccupied with their day-to-day affairs and are too time-poor to become aware of the wider global issues with long time horizons.

Further, generally, the vested interest of the multinational conglomerates, the short term and lack of will on the part of politicians, and the inertia and ignorance of the gravity of the issues makes it imperative that a proactive approach is developed by vigorous advocacy of human values for the protection of the planet. There is a tendency to over-rely on purely technological solutions to ameliorate negative trends.

But the deteriorating state of the planet is a symptom of the malaise of the Spirit for which there are no technological solutions. For this, there are no quick fixes. We are not mindful of our own vital interconnectedness with everything in creation. What is required is a radical change in our thinking and values, a transformation of human awareness to higher levels of wisdom as to what it means to live well.

We have learnt over the last 250 years how not to live; we now need to learn how to live responsibly and sustainably. We must use technology creatively to enhance our lives, protect the environment and ensure the long term future of the planet and all its habitats, rather than place our faith in finding short term band aid technological solutions.

### PRACTICAL AND PROACTIVE APPROACH FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE PLANET

Given the enormity of the challenge, the protection of the planet requires a multi-pronged approach both at the individual and collective levels. At the heart of the solution is creating awareness of the need for urgency of action, together with motivating people to move from excessive consumption and waste to more sustainable living.

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At a collective level, this transformation in awareness requires united and concerted action by parents at home, teachers at schools and Education Ministries to create appropriate curricula, politicians and governments to provide incentives for industry to change from fossil fuels to green energy, and religious and spiritual organisations to create awareness of spiritual Oneness.

For the Sathya Sai International Organisation, it means incorporating awareness of the need to protect the planet through parenting programmes; study circles; SSE classes; SSEHV initiatives in the community; engaging society in conservation programmes right around the world by holding public meetings; Walk for Values; community engagement and becoming a strong voice in the community through groups such as interfaith forums.

At an individual level, each person changing within and living a life infused with human values for the protection of the planet not only makes a small but important contribution towards the future of humanity and the planet, it affirms their own spiritual connection with the planet through the Oneness Principle.

When many people make even small changes in their daily life to tackle the challenges to the future of humanity, it creates a major shift in awareness and values. This sets a new cultural norm. This is how cultures shift to new heights.

Thus, human values are not merely for the benefit of our students and children but for the protection of the planet, for raising awareness, and for establishing a spiritual connection with Nature.



SSE Initiative: H.E.L.P – Heal The Environment – Love The Planet, Australia



Geyser at Yellowstone National Park, USA



# Role of Human Values to Protect the Planet

Human Values inspired Individual Transformation

## UNDERSTANDING CREATION

Today, as we grapple with the dire need to save our planet, if we remain oblivious to the fundamental aspects of creation, we will risk falling short – our efforts will be like treating a gangrenous wound with a bandage. We must inquire into the principles that govern this creation and lend meaning to human life.

These fundamental principles were described by Sathya Sai Baba to be the universal human values of *Sathya* (Truth), *Dharma* (Right conduct), *Shānti* (Peace), *Prema* (Love) and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence)<sup>1</sup>, five simple terms with enormous spiritual and secular significance. These words can be compared to ‘zip files’ (in computer science terminology) which contain in themselves the totality of all the forces that sustain creation; they also contain the secrets of the Creator. To understand these words, at first, we must understand the fundamentals of creation.



Figure 1: Genesis of creation via five elements and three *gunas*. Courtesy Radiosai

## FIVE ELEMENTS AND THREE *GUNAS*

The fundamental building blocks of creation are the five elements (*pancha mahābhūta*) and three attributes (*trigunas*) as shown in Figure 1<sup>2</sup>. The five elements are *Ākāśa* (space), *Vāyu* (air), *Agni* (fire), *Āpah* (water) and *Pṛthvi* (earth). Each of these is constituted of three *gunas*, namely *Satwa*, *Rajas*, and *Thamas*.

These *gunas* also constitute the three aspects of creation, namely *Sṛishti* (creation), *Stithi* (sustenance) and *Laya* (dissolution). Anything, sentient or insentient, gross or subtle, tangible or intangible, goes through this three-step process of creation, sustenance, and dissolution.

The topic of the five elements and three *gunas* is large and detailed but a brief explanation is given below. Broadly, the *gunas* in the context of creation refer to the three tendencies or qualities, namely *Satwa*, *Rajas*, and *Thamas* (Figure 2).

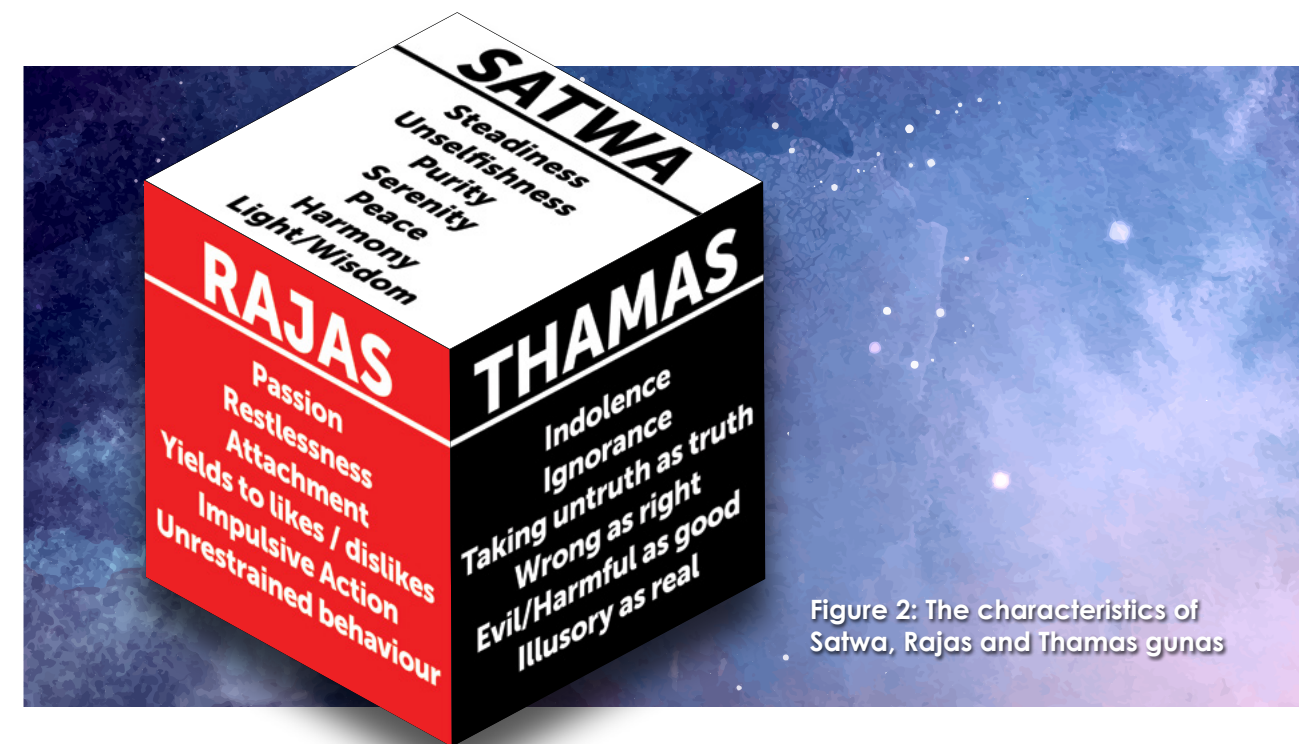


Figure 2: The characteristics of Satwa, Rajas and Thamas *gunas*

## SOURCE OF CREATION

The question then arises as to where from do these *gunas* and *mahābhūta* manifest? It is from *Consciousness* or Pure Existence, which is referred to in the Veda by various names, such as *Chaitanya*, *Sath*, *Brahman* and *Ātman*. The basis of all that is known and unknown is *Brahman* or *Ātman*, which is the Truth, and hence Truth is the basis of all creation. Sathya Sai Baba had declared,

*“The creation emerges from the truth and it is truth into which all merge; Is there a place in the cosmos where truth does not exist? Visualise this pure and unsullied truth.”*<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, *Sathya* is the seed from which the entire creation has manifested – the galaxies and stars, this planet, the forests, the mountains, rivers, birds, beasts and man. Creation is the permutation and combination of the same five elements and three attributes that manifested into the world we see, including us.



Since the building blocks of man and cosmos are the same, mankind is not only intricately connected with one another but also with the entire creation. As the famous physicist David Bohm said about creation: “*The notion that all these fragments are separately existent is evidently an illusion, and this illusion cannot do other than lead to endless conflict and confusion.*”<sup>4</sup>

There is a beautiful Sufi saying which explains the unification of all creation, “*God sleeps in the rock, dreams in the plant, stirs in animals and awakens in man.*” That entity called God is the truth and basis of creation. The statement ‘God awakens in man’ places man in a unique position in this vast creation.



Figure 3: The five elements forming the 16 faculties in man. Courtesy Radiosai

### THE SOLUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM: THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN

Understanding human nature is key to unravelling the natural scheme of creation. As mentioned earlier, creation is made up of the five elements and three *gunas*. Sathya Sai Baba vividly describing the genesis of man said, “*In relation to the human being, the process of panchē-kritam makes man a mixture of the five elements and creates diversity from unity.*” This is shown in Figure 3, with further elaboration of its inner significance<sup>2</sup>.

Sathya Sai Baba enunciated how the five organs of perception (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin) and the mind complex (*antahkarana*) emanated from *Satwa gunas*; while the five organs of action (hands, legs, vocal organs, excretory organ and reproductive organ) and the life-breaths from *Rajo gunas*. Highlighting this unique feature of creation, Sathya Sai Baba pointed out, “*In the natural scheme of creation, what should be received is that which is Satvic and what should be rejected is all that is Rajasic.*”<sup>2</sup>

### THE PRACTICE OF AHIMSA: PROPER USE OF SENSES

Non-violence, or *Ahimsa*, is non-violation of Nature’s laws. Sathya Sai Baba defined *Ahimsa*, or non-violence, as not limited to refraining from hurting others through one’s thoughts, words, and deeds but fundamentally not hurting oneself. Those who hurt themselves are bound to hurt others. An excessive use or misuse of all the ten sense organs is to be considered as violence<sup>5</sup>.

The nature of the five senses of perception are *Satwic* and if one ensures that the ‘food’ that one takes in through the five sense organs are pure and sacred, they will be at ease. The five senses of perception are the information providers for the mind complex (*antahkarana*), which was also carved out of *Satwa gunas*. The practice of *Ahimsa* would be to provide *Satwic* inputs through all senses to ensure a mind at ease.

If inputs contrary to the nature of the senses are provided to the senses and, hence, to the mind complex, their ease is disturbed, and they find themselves in a state of ‘dis-ease’. A human being with a diseased mind inflicted by the virus of selfishness and self-interest is bound to hurt both Nature and society. Hence, proper utilisation of the senses is the first and most important step.

### THE HUMAN VALUE TREE

If *Sathya* (truth) is the seed, then this experiential world of matter and energy is the germination of the seed. For the germination or sprouting to take place, there needs to a conducive atmosphere consisting of fertile soil, nourishing water, and nurturing sunlight. This ambience is the value of *Prema* (love). It is the fostering/cultivation of *Sathya* by *Prema* which results in this manifest creation.

In the process of the seed transforming itself into the tree, it follows a set of laws and principles. Those set of laws or principles is *Dharma*. *Dharma* is the syntax of the materialisation or the algorithm of creation. The roots (unseen and foundation) of this tree is *Ātma-Dharma* (fundamental principle) and the trunk with all its branches (seen and ever-evolving) is *Para-Dharma* (applied principles). The trunk and branches of this tree cannot exist without its roots.

Similarly, we cannot practice our applied principles without them being rooted in the fundamental principle. The branches may grow in all directions, yet no two branches look alike. In the same way, our application of principles may vary according to the *Desha* (situation), *Kāla* (time), and *Paristithi* (circumstances)<sup>7</sup>.

This ‘Tree’ has innumerable leaves, each like the other and yet very different. This can be compared to the various hues of action and reactions in our day-to-day life. It can be inferred that on this tree of *Dharma*, the leaves constitute the manifestation of *Dharma*, which is nothing but *Ahimsa*. It is said, ‘*Ahimsa Paramaha Dharmaha*’ — Non-violence is the highest of principles. The Human Value Tree implies to us that *Ahimsa* must be the basis for our transactions with the world. It answers the question, “What is the modus operandi of living the day-to-day life?” How to achieve this equilibrium, or harmony?

Absolute non-violence is not practical. For example, through the mere process of breathing in and out thousands of organisms are killed. For the very material existence of the body, other organisms must perish. Cells in the body are killed through metabolism. The old has



to make way for the new (the principle of creation, sustenance, and dissolution). How then are we to practice non-violence or *Ahimsa*?

As mentioned earlier, practical non-violence (*Ahimsa*) can be simply understood as non-violation of natural laws – non-violation of *Dharma*. When equilibrium or harmony is disturbed, it results in disorder and disease. This affects the very survival of the tree. For example, when cells begin to grow within the body, unbridled and unhindered, it is termed as cancer. When excess weed begins to grow, it destroys crop. Excess of anything is violence. So, excess of desires is tantamount to violence. Control of senses and desires ensures *Ahimsa*.

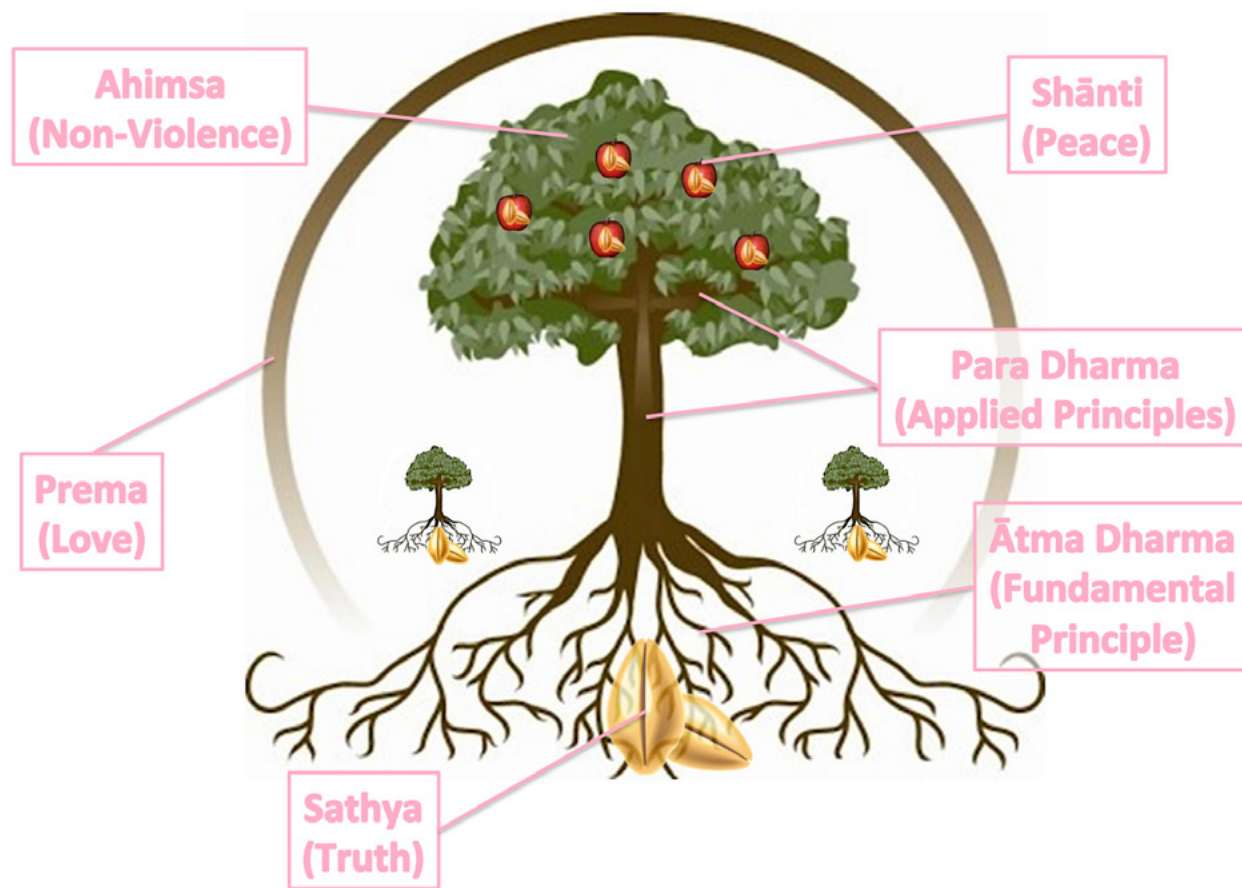


Figure 4: The Human Value Tree

When can we say that a tree has reached its full potential? A tree reaches its fruition when flowers bloom and transform themselves into fruits. What is the fruit of this Human Value Tree? *Shānti* or Peace is the fruit. Bear in the mind this fruit of *Shānti* contains the seed (truth) for a future tree (Figure 4). This *Shānti* is, therefore, omnipresent, because it contains elements of the ‘past tree’ and has potentialities of the ‘future tree’. Hence, it can be called *Prasānthi* (Supreme Peace).

From the above Human Value Tree analogy, we can take several lessons. Some of them have been enumerated above. However, there is one lead that we would like to take from this analogy and that is: The basis of each one of the trees is a seed that has come from a previous tree. Similarly, each of us has emerged from a seed and, altogether, the whole mankind, nay, the entire world, forms a forest. We are intricately connected to each other because the tree depends on the forest and forest depends on each tree.

Going by the tree analogy, if each one of us is a tree, then mankind put together is a set of trees, which is part of a larger forest, Nature (all species), which in turn is a part of the overall forest, creation. Hence, Sathya Sai Baba says, “*Man is part of society which in turn is part of Nature which is but a limb of the supreme. Vyashti (Individual) – Samashti (Society) – Shryshti (Nature) – Parameshti (Supreme)*”. This can be depicted, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Illustration of the interconnectedness of Individual-Society-Nature-Supreme

If any change has to be brought about in the overall forest, it has to start at the level of an individual tree. Similarly, if we want to bring about any change in the world, the change must begin at an individual level. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”<sup>8</sup>

“*Love is God. God is Love. Live in Love.*”

–Sathya Sai Baba, 3 April 2005



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*The entire universe must be considered as the temple of God.  
The external world will reflect your thoughts. If you view the  
world with love, it will appear as filled with love.*

*—Sathya Sai Baba, 24 July 1983*

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# Benefits of Go Green Initiatives

How can we measure the benefits of implementing Go Green initiatives? Though this may be challenging, we can easily count the costs of doing nothing. It does not take much to understand the high price we will pay if the Earth keeps getting warmer and climate keeps changing, or if toxic pollutants continue to accumulate in the air, soil and water.

Or, indeed, if more and more ecological systems are destroyed and many species of life forms become extinct, or if extreme weather events, famine, poverty, diseases become widespread, and the Earth witnesses ever more loss of pristine environments globally. Mankind and civilisation are presently at grave risk.

Go Green initiatives will help avoid or mitigate the impacts described previously in Chapter 2, which impede, harm and destroy many aspects of life on Earth at the physical level.

At the spiritual level, how can we love God and God's manifestation in Nature and continue these harmful actions? As seekers of our divine Self, we need to understand that this is simply not righteous conduct.

As we practice Go Green initiatives, we serve as role models, sources of inspiration, to motivate others seeking a remedy to the Earth's plight. By working in tandem with purity



Walk in Nature

and unity the balance of actions will tip towards healing and away from harming the Earth and its people.

We each bring our individuality to bear on the problems in our own culture, with our unique skills, ability, knowledge and commitment. The most important aspect is our willingness to selflessly serve one another and Nature. This will bring us to where we seek to be: closer to God.

Our actions to preserve this "small planet Earth", which Sathya Sai Baba told us is "unique in the universe", will allow generations of people to seek the path to their own divinity if we leave behind a healthy planet well suited for the journey. In the meantime, benefits will accrue to ourselves and all others from this much-needed service to Mother Earth.

## PHYSICAL BENEFITS

Substantially reducing pollution in the air, waters, food and soil will benefit all life. Diseases in humans and other life forms will drop dramatically and the cost of treating water and growing nourishing food will be reduced and medical expenses will decrease, enabling people to live longer, more fulfilling lives. A healthy mind and body is a prerequisite for enjoying life on this planet, but these cannot be sustained without a clean and unpolluted environment.

Toxic and harmful chemicals currently used can be replaced by natural, perhaps ancient ecological practices for growing food and producing other necessities of life. This will lead to many benefits in health and well-being, including our economic well-being and the sustainability of our communities.

As we reduce the use of non-renewable resources, like fossil fuels, minerals, and synthetic farming chemicals, we decrease human disruption of important biogeochemical cycles (e.g. carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorous, sulphur), reduce the harmful impact on wildlife habitats, and reduce pollution in the air, soil and water.

By using renewable resources, such as solar, wind, or geothermal energy, as alternatives to fossil fuels, we can limit the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere, while meeting our growing energy needs. By practicing conservation and Ceiling on Desires, the reduction in consumption of electricity, water, fuels and other resources will require us to pay less, allowing more money to be available for nobler purposes, such as helping the less fortunate.

Reducing consumption also produces economic benefits for industrial and residential consumers. Driving hybrid and electric vehicles, installing solar panels on the roofs of our homes and businesses, and taking public transportation whenever possible reduce our carbon footprint and improve our health and social outlook.

The less petroleum-based plastics we use and the less waste we generate will help to preserve our lands, the oceans, and the precious freshwater sources on the Earth. The discovery of alternatives, including natural products from local sources, draws upon human intelligence and creativity, and will likely employ many people locally. Ending reliance on limited fossil fuels only found in certain parts of the world will likely reduce political tensions and unfair competition between nations and peoples.

As we limit our use of natural resources, like water, trees, and soil, we will benefit all those who rely on their life-giving properties. For instance, when we conserve water from rivers



and lakes we benefit animals and aquatic life. More water in rivers and lakes provides a cooling effect and lowers pollution, which helps aquatic ecosystems and reduces the cost of drinking water treatment. Leaving more water in limited aquifers benefits villages and farming far into the future.

Maintaining vast tracts of forests helps ensure carbon is taken up and oxygen released, while protecting biodiversity and the many foods, medicines, and building products a healthy forest can give, especially for indigenous people who rely on them. Maintaining healthy, forested watersheds produces plentiful pure water with less possibility of dangerous landslides during heavy rains. Conservation of precious soil helps ensure plentiful food for future generations.

As we reduce, reuse, and recycle consumer products and conserve water and energy, we must also consider planting more trees and improving various natural habitats. We can clean streams and roadsides, create habitats for different kinds of animals and plants in our communities, walk or bicycle to our destinations, spend time in natural areas, and do so many other things that will help us stay in good health and physically connected to the natural world.

## MENTAL BENEFITS

Fostering an attitude of selflessly giving, rather than selfishly taking, automatically improves our mental outlook. Rather than feeling helpless about the problems we encounter, we can act to do our part and feel good about our contribution to Mother Earth. Helping to clean the atmosphere, the waters, and the land, while not wasting natural resources, enables us to live in a way that avoids harm to others. Our heart opens ever more and nurtures our connection to Nature and the divine in all. We experience the satisfaction of knowing that the way we live nurtures all creation rather than wantonly destroys it.

One way to focus our efforts is to practise Ceiling on Desires in respect of energy, food, time and money. If we do this, not simply to benefit ourselves but to benefit all creation, it becomes a selfless act and spiritual practice. It frees us from the struggles of competing in the world from our ego-based selves and the mental anguish associated with it. We live harmoniously with our fellow humans, flora and fauna, and all creation when we live a sustainable, eco-friendly life that fosters peace and prosperity around the world.

When we can spend time in environments free of pollution, where pristine Nature abounds, there is a natural, positive, uplifting effect on our mental state. A positive mind is conducive to positive thoughts, which in turn leads to better mental health, self-confidence, and emotional stability – a perfect state to continue our spiritual journey.

## SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

As we have learned, throughout creation there is a spirit of giving. All living beings, minerals, and the elements are interconnected and dependent on one another – all this is One operating as the many. Sathya Sai Baba gave many examples of the selfless giving that goes on ceaselessly in Nature.

The sun, moon, oceans, rivers, trees, cows, etc. all give with no expectation of reward. They simply practice their respective *dharmas* (code of conduct) and carry out their pre-determined role in the grand scheme of the divine creation. For instance, predators such as

wolves benefit the whole ecosystem by keeping populations of grazers from over-grazing streamside vegetation, thereby helping to keep rivers and streams clean, cool, abundantly flowing, and full of life.

The current imbalances in Nature stem from man's greed and his lack of awareness of his proper role. Sathya Sai Baba told us, "*The human body is gifted to serve others*" (SSS 32:6, 1 October 1999). He also told us, "*The purpose of human life is to realise the Divine*" and, in this way, "*Human birth becomes the rarest among all living beings*" (SSS 27:27, 9 October 1994).

On this Earth, humans alone have been given the discriminative faculty, the means to experience divinity, and the ability to live a life of service. We cannot progress spiritually by living a life of selfishness, taking what is not ours in the first place. The shackles of excessive desires, greed, and living only for ourselves imprison us and are harmful to our spiritual progress.

We must come to understand that selflessly serving the whole of creation, including one another, is our *dharmic* duty. As we practice this with love, compassion, humility, reverence and gratitude (all human traits), we come closer to realising who we truly are. In this way we benefit spiritually by acting practically in ways that benefit others and ourselves, thus completing the cycle of life and preserving Nature's balance.

.....  
*“Cultivate the divine qualities of love, compassion, humility and reverence for all living beings, reverence towards the Earth and all the other elements. You can thus draw upon yourself the Grace of God and render your life beneficial and fruitful.”*

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–Sathya Sai Baba, 22 November 1978  
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# Vision and Way Forward

Sathya Sai Baba said unity is divinity. He urged man to attain the ultimate goal of Self-realisation and experience his inherent divinity. The Sathya Sai Organisation urges everyone to develop a vision of unity, of oneness of all creation, which includes Nature, and the awareness that divinity permeates all creation.

Thus, our environmental vision is to realise man's interconnectedness and interdependence with Nature and to live in harmony with it, using Nature's resources sparingly and with



Way Forward

reverence and gratitude. Sathya Sai devotees must be exemplars of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, and highlight the integral relationship between God, Nature, and man. The life of Sathya Sai is a perfect example of living in harmony with Nature, consuming only what is necessary for sustenance and avoiding waste of natural resources such as food, water, and electricity.

The protection of the planet and the proper use of its resources is not just a question of survival, it is a question of man's relationship with God. One cannot continue to abuse the planet and at the same time seek to develop love for God, for this creation is a manifestation of His love; it is His wonder. Man must learn to look upon Nature as an indivisible part of God.

Man needs to interact with Nature in accordance with the universal human values of Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love and Non-Violence, and practise Ceiling on Desires. It is, therefore, important to extend the practice of Sathya Sai Baba's transcendental and sublime messages – Love All, Serve All and Help Ever, Hurt Never – to Nature.

When man changes, the planet will change! It will provide us with plenty of natural gifts that foster peace, happiness, and prosperity in society. To live in harmony with Nature requires love, faith, conviction, discipline, self-sacrifice and selfless service. It requires man to manifest the very best in him, befitting his true, divine nature at the pinnacle of creation.

## COMMUNICATION AT GRASS ROOTS LEVEL

The first goal of the Go Green Conference is to communicate the environmental vision to all officers of Sathya Sai Centres/Groups so that they increase their awareness and become



Communication

exemplars in their own behaviour and conduct. In this way, they can lead the change so that local Sathya Sai Centre/Group activities and programmes become eco-friendly.

Sathya Sai Baba has said: Be, Do, Tell. Hence, the leaders of Sathya Sai Organisations must first understand and practice the teachings highlighted at the Go Green Conference before taking the message to organisation members and the public. The Young Adults and children will need to play a vital role in developing environmental awareness, taking action, and conducting outreach as they will inherit the future.

With the aid of the conference material, it will be easy to see that there are many action items to reduce our impact on Nature, both in Sathya Sai Centres/Groups and at home and work. The conference material shows ways to reuse, recycle, reduce consumer products, use less energy, use fewer chemicals at home and work, so that we can reduce our



environmental impact and minimize our carbon footprint. We can also reduce emissions of carbon and harmful pollution by changing the way we travel and buying local produce, to name a few changes in lifestyle.

## STUDY CIRCLES

The foundations of change in every Sathya Sai Centre/Group must come from source, i.e. by conducting study circles on Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on God, Nature, and man, and the discussion of practical means to transform our lives and progress towards realising our divinity.

Eliciting the universal human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence inherent in each one of us by our spiritual and secular practices will enable us to effectively implement the Ceiling on Desires programme. Our spiritual transformation through the practice of these human values will lead us to achieve social, economic and ecological sustainability, quality of life and well-being of individuals, nations, and Nature.

The study circle can be a spiritual self-audit. If the study circle is designed as a spiritual self-audit then it can have a practical impact both on SSIO members and the environment. This self-audit will enable each member to realise that the way to progress on the path of spirituality is to draw one's attention away from material goods and comforts, and to focus instead on contemplation, silent sitting, meditation and other spiritual practices, in other words, on inner transformation.

Simple living is an important spiritual sadhana for SSIO members and this inner transformation is a major goal of the Go Green Conference.

## GO GREEN ACTIVITIES IN SATHYA SAI ORGANISATION

Study circles and educational programmes may be followed by reassessing procedures and practices for activities in Sathya Sai Centres/Groups and elsewhere for possible improvements. It is recommended that Sathya Sai Centres/Groups develop Green policies and strategies to reduce their carbon footprint and environmental impact, consistently with their available resources and local laws and customs. Such policies and strategies will help local leaders of Sathya Sai Centres/Groups to educate members about the goals of this landmark conference and how to implement the resolutions.

One of the unique features of Sathya Sai Centres/Groups is the commitment to selfless service as a spiritual exercise (*sadhana*). In this regard, the organisations founded by Sathya Sai Baba have a long history of serving the needy, providing comprehensive education based on universal human values, and offering social services, including much-needed healthcare, to name a few. By careful study and application, we can incorporate Go Green principles in each of these activities, gradually upgrading our knowledge and practices.

The protection of Nature, which may be called EnviroCare, helps in our spiritual progress, and, thus, Sathya Sai Organisation activities may be organised appropriately.

## EDUCATION AND HUMAN VALUES

This first step in environmental education starts with the education of children and young adults in Sai Spiritual Education and the Young Adults Programme (including the Sathya Sai International Leadership Programme) respectively. It is recommended that these two

programmes be adapted to include the material presented at the Go Green Conference – especially the extension of the universal human values to Nature and the practice of Ceiling on Desires out of love for Nature. The learning may be reinforced with practical application at home, school and in public venues, as appropriate.

In the same way, the work of the ISSEs and Sathya Sai Schools may embrace the higher learning that man is interconnected and interdependent with Nature and must live in harmony with it. This is an important avenue for change in all communities.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

The SSIO's Public Outreach activities can be enhanced and promoted using the Go Green material developed for this conference. The practical application of EnviroCare, which is based on the spiritual principles taught by Sathya Sai Baba, will be of immense benefit to societies and nations in many ways. Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on the universal human values and the inherent divinity of man and Nature can be a beacon to the entire world, not just the Sathya Sai Organisations.

In 2017, the SSIO's public outreach activities started to focus on the theme 'Protect the Planet' to protect Nature, humanity, and all creation. Many projects were undertaken as part of this initiative and will be expanded in the future for serving society and Mother Earth.

It is also recommended to:

1. Organise Public Meetings and Walk for Values to create greater public awareness in faith communities, educational institutions, community associations, corporations and governments of the ideals and practices necessary to protect Nature.
2. Mobilise the local Interfaith community to plant trees and participate in other environmental projects that foster greater religious, spiritual, and values-based understanding of Man's interconnectedness and responsibility towards Nature.
3. Foster greater Community Engagement programmes and activities to protect the planet, by organising concerts and dramas, beach and country side clean-ups, leadership symposia, Go Green campaigns and promoting Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle initiatives.

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*“Nature is in essence Divinity itself. All this is Divine. All this is God. So, tread softly, move reverentially, utilize gratefully.”*  
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–Sathya Sai Baba, 15 October 1966



*“Start the day with love, fill the day with love, spend the day with love, end the day with love. This is the way to God.”*

—Sathya Sai Baba, 29 July 1969





