



NATURE IS LOVE

GREENFRIENDS & HEALING OUR WORLD

Swami Jnanamritananda Puri

Our love is the best protection for nature.

- Amma



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PREFACE

Greenfriends is the international environmental initiative of Embracing the World. It is a volunteer-based movement that promotes environmental awareness and participation at the individual and community levels. We seek to inspire people to serve and protect nature so that all life-forms may live in harmony upon the Earth.

Greenfriends' initiatives are all about action and putting Amma's practical suggestions into practice in our own lives. The way we use the Earth's remaining resources and the way we interact with our natural world are at crucial points. Even simple choices on a daily basis, like conserving water or keeping reusable shopping bags, can collectively make a big difference.

Swami Jnanamritananda Puri is one of Amma's senior monks and under her guidance, he founded Greenfriends in India in 2001. Today there are thousands of members throughout the Americas, Europe, Australia and Asia.

People of all ages take part in tree-planting drives, vegetable and flower gardening, soil restoration, beekeeping, environmental education, upcycling plastics, and fundraising for farmer relief projects in India.

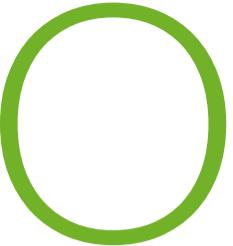
Swami Jnanamritananda shares how making the effort to take responsibility for the damage done to Mother Nature actually results in healing our inner hearts.



Sadivayal, Tamil Nadu

CHAPTER
01

**THE MAJESTY
OF NATURE**

f course, Amma's words, as always, say it beautifully, "True happiness exists in all of nature, around us and within us, as it is the very core of our existence. From the highest of mountains to the smallest of atoms, everything is filled with love. To realize this is the essential purpose of our lives."

But, if this is the very base of existence, how is it we human beings have become separate from it? Amma tells us that if we look carefully at nature, we can see only joy. The bees swing from flower-to-flower to extract their nectar, having been attracted by the vibrant colors and sweet smells. The birds soar to the highest clouds and sing from their very hearts. Even lightning strikes radiate beauty with their gigantic flashes from the sky to the ground.

I moved to Amritapuri in 1983 and since then, Amma has been teaching me how crucial it is to take responsibility for protecting Mother Nature. Amma sees how this world of ours is interconnected and if one piece is threatened, that pain spreads to others.

When Amma returned to Amritapuri from her first world tour in 1987, she explained that for her the whole world is

a flower and each nation is one of its beautiful petals. But if one of those petals becomes infected and you do not take care of it, it will eventually destroy the entire flower. That is one of the reasons Amma has travelled around the globe all these decades. She is trying to help remove the pests of suffering from each petal.

Our environmental projects started in the eighties as part of our youth movement, AYUDH. But as the need to protect and support Mother Nature as a collective became more evident, in 2001 we launched Greenfriends. Many of the people with whom we connected were not much interested in spirituality, but they did want to learn how to take action and address issues such as global warming, pollution, recycling and tree-planting.

As Amma often shares, the creator and creation are not two. There is no separation, as everything is a vast, interconnected web. But we are not able to experience that view because our thoughts are focused upon 'I' and 'mine'. This essential key is what keeps us from experiencing our true nature. Amma does not experience the world like that. She sees her connection with everything and the love that she perceives flows not only to human beings, but also to

birds, animals, the sky, trees, mountains, stars.... The list could go on and on.

When Amma is walking on a path and sees a plant, she touches a leaf or branch just as she would touch a small child. People, plants and animals all exist at the same level for Amma. She cannot see anything as separate from herself. Every moment of every day is so fresh for Amma because there is only love. Nothing else.

I remember a time in the early days when construction work was underway in Amritapuri. Back then, Amma and all of us who lived here would carry the building materials, cement and metal frames from the backwaters to the construction site. One time, as someone placed sand on the ground, some of its dust fell onto a small plant.

Amma came running over and gently took each small branch and tender leaf into her fingers to wipe it off. It was just as a mother would bathe her child when he returned home after playing outside, his clothes all covered in dirt.

Most of us would not take such attentive care of a tiny plant—it may even break in our hands! But Amma took so

much time and care because for her, it was not just a plant. She connected to its pain beyond a level we can see.

Amma started Greenfriends to help us learn that we also have that same relationship with nature. When we move through the steps of growing a garden, from digging the soil to watering the plants to harvesting the fruit and vegetables, we feel that link and that retunes our hearts to our connection with Mother Nature.

To bring this perspective of the world to our eyes, Amma launches practical environmental projects in which we can take part. As of 2021, Embracing the World's initiatives included:

- Becoming a member of the United Nations Billion Tree Campaign, having planted more than one million trees around the world
- Donating \$15 million US to a Government of India project to clean the Ganges River
- Construction of 12,000 toilets in Kerala's poor villages

- Creation of Saukhyam Pads, a cotton-and-banana-fiber reusable and biodegradable feminine hygiene product
- Public trash cleanup campaigns around the world
- Innovative waste management and comprehensive recycling and composting for institutions
- Supporting 10,000 impoverished people in rural India to grow organic vegetables on their own land
- Solar- and hydro-power solutions for villages in rural India
- Global environmental awareness campaigns
- The practice of permaculture at our centers worldwide

It is in the context of this care from Amma for Mother Nature that Greenfriends started twenty years ago by planting saplings throughout Kerala. Today, it operates on a global level with thousands of volunteers participating in a full spectrum of environmental actions.



Nagla Chand, Uttar Pradesh

CHAPTER
02

A WARNING SIGN

The COVID-19 pandemic is sounding an excruciatingly loud alarm bell. Mother Nature is letting us know to what extent we have destroyed her and how much pain we are causing. The selfishness of human beings is choking her, and if nature cannot provide the basic needs for life, we also will not survive.

The coronavirus is a process of self-healing for Mother Nature and for humankind, as well. We need it. But how did we split from Mother Nature in the first place? It is the experience of the feeling that I am separate.

Because of the pandemic and its health and economic repercussions, many people are suffering from depression. Greenfriends and its emphasis on reconnecting with nature, as well as the larger community, is one way to help people restore their mental health. Where does depression begin? We feel that we are alone. But if we just look around, we are never alone.

Have you ever gotten bored watching the waves of the sea lap against the shore? Have you ever felt it was a waste of time to take in the fragrance of a rose blossoming on a nearby bush? On the night of the full moon, have you

ever regretted taking a walk under her cool rays of light accompanied by glistening stars?

Yet, amidst all this joy, we human beings have turned away from these sweet experiences that surround us and dwell upon moments of pain, even though they are passing. In the beauty of this existence, only human beings are suffering permanently.

So, how can we be free of that state of mind? The only true cure is to realize and experience that permanent happiness is already within everything. But this is more easily said than done. What is the missing link?

One factor is that in this modern age, we are too pressed for time. We feel we cannot ‘schedule’ an evening walk in the park or weekend drive to the countryside. We get pulled away due to our responsibilities and the other demands upon us.

But are those responsibilities and demands as powerful as we think? Many of these ideas have come out of our egos. What can I do to keep myself occupied? What do I need to do to survive? How to please others so I will be loved?

For some, it is a state of panic—maybe even fear. When we live from such a closed mind, how can we ever achieve permanent happiness?

In ancient times, people knew how to safeguard their relationship with nature in order to safeguard all of existence. Due to greed, thinking only about satisfying our own needs, we have forgotten this. What we are doing, in fact, is digging our own graves. Most of us are not even aware of it.

Look at our mainstream farming practices and how pesticides and chemicals are used to grow our food. It is the same thing as injecting the plants, and then ourselves, with poison. We have gravely polluted the atmosphere due to our factory production practices and exhaust from the vehicles we drive.

Across our oceans, we have even created giant swirls of plastic waste that are composed of non-biodegradable microplastics. The North Pacific Subtropical Gyre consists of bags, bottles, cups and straws that circle clockwise across four currents around an area of 20 million square kilometers.

It is so sad and we must accept that in terms of our global community, Mother Nature is disciplining us. We are at a time in human history when our ignorance and greed have caused her unimaginable pain. And so, she responds with calamities such as a pandemic, earthquakes, floods, forest fires and droughts.

Even then, an important lesson comes to us through all this tragedy. Many of us see others at the edge of death amidst these disasters, and that is inspiring us to unite and bring medical aid, shelter and anything else we can to help save the suffering.



Kalinagar, West Bengal

CHAPTER
03

THE TRADITIONAL WAYS

In the philosophy of *Sanatana Dharma*, everything is worshipped on this planet, as nothing is separate. In India's villages, we can still see this ancient tradition. As part of **Amrita SeRVe**—our self-reliant village project—I have travelled to 27 states and more than 100 villages throughout India. The villagers still live with an inherent harmony with Mother Nature, especially in isolated tribal areas where the culture of the modern world has not made much of an impact.

We think that we are well-educated and of high culture because of our educational systems, social structures and technological advancements. Trust me, the world's real cultured people are in the villages. In mainstream India, for example, what used to be 'agriculture' is now called 'agribusiness'. When it is called 'culture', it is for the support of the community as a whole. When it is called 'business', it is about how much 'I' put in and how much profit 'I' get back.

This business attitude leads to greed, which leads to the desecration of natural resources and environments. When we only think about individual profit, we do not evaluate the larger repercussions of our actions. As this lack of discretion has continued to spin over the last couple of

centuries, we have broken our responsibilities to care for Mother Nature.

In contrast, I remember a beautiful tradition in some of the villages in Himachal Pradesh in India's North. There is a practice where they plant a tree in a community space and every year, they hold a three-day festival to worship that tree. All the villagers come together to share food, play music and dance. It is a joyous event. I have seen traditions like this in all our villages.

But it is true, modern times have taken their toll on villages and Amrita SeRVe is seeking to help heal that. In the olden days, families were larger and lived together in broader bloodline connections. Together, they held more land, too. They were able to work collectively to take care of the animals and the fields and provide for each other's needs.

Today, families have fewer children and many villagers head to the big cities for employment as migrant workers. Because of environmental destruction, they can no longer rely just on farming to make a living. One approach Amrita SeRVe is taking is to foster group farming among neighbors. Collectives of farmers are formed in villages to share land,

farm equipment and decide what crop each one will grow. They work together to plant, cultivate and harvest.

When the produce is sold, they split the profits. Their relationships as community members who are there to help each other are being re-established and the ancient traditions of loving and caring for Mother Nature are again strengthening.

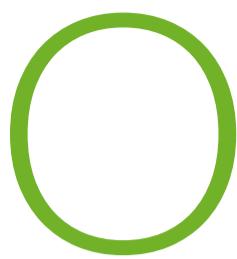
Amma often says before you eat something, reflect upon how it arrived on your plate. A farmer sewed seeds, cared for the crops, harvested them and sold them on the market. Next a processing plant packaged the goods and sold them to the retail outlets. Then you went to a store to buy it and the shopkeeper earned for his family. Think about the person who cooked it, too, even if it was yourself. Look at how intertwined our human community is even when it comes to just one simple meal.



Laranur, Bihar

CHAPTER
04

YOU ARE NEVER ALONE



ne day, if you feed just one crow a bit of bread, the next day she will bring another friend along for the meal. After three or four days, a whole company of birds will have joined in. You can observe each one to see the happiness you have brought them.

We are not alone. When we connect with nature, we can come out of that notion. If we only love other human beings, we become like beggars desperate to belong. When we look around and love all of creation, a higher frequency of love opens in our hearts. It is the best way to heal our feelings of loneliness.

Another method is to plant a flower seed, take care of it every day and watch what happens. After a few days, the sprout will come out of the soil. Eventually, leaves will unfold and after that, its flowers will bloom. Just reading these words cannot convey the joy of the connection that is established. It is something you must try for yourself. One of Greenfriends' goals is to help people achieve this experience.

What is stirred is a feeling within our own hearts, and that does not come from what we are seeing externally. It generates from the love that resides within our true selves.

If we are thirsty, watching someone else drink water does not quench our thirst. We must drink the water ourselves. To experience love, first it must blossom within.

Sometimes you may begin crying out of sadness and the people around you rush over to hug you and hold your hands. They say, “Don’t be sad. Don’t cry. We are with you.” But if you refuse to feel the love that already exists within, it will not make a difference if even a thousand people come to comfort you.

It is a dilemma within which most of us have put ourselves. We say that nobody loves us, but we must open the doors of our hearts and allow that love to shine within. It is not a problem of the external world. It is because we are not ready to selflessly love others. Once we express selfless love—the real source of happiness—only then does the experience of pure love manifest.

This is exactly what has happened between us and our Universal Mother. We ran away to experience the pleasures of life and now we think we are alone, but we are not. She is always there because she is that within which we experience existence. Because of our ego, we

think we are separate from her and that is the cause of all our problems.

She is calling us to return to her arms, but we are lost in the crowd. Once we realize and experience that our true mother is Mother Nature, then we will know we are never alone. We can always see her beside us, smiling with pure love. She is always holding our hands with infinite compassion. It is she who is guiding us upon the path of life.

Once we cultivate these feelings, then we can feel we are one with the whole universe. This is how Amma lives. She cannot feel anything as separate from herself. When she sees someone laughing, she also laughs. When she sees someone crying, she also cries.

When we open our hearts naturally, everything around us vibrates with love. There is not even a need for another human being—just be in that moment. Even while alone in a room and staring at a wall, a smile will spread across your face.

But to achieve this, our heart must be free from all desires and selfishness. This aspect is subtle and due to our ego,

difficult to achieve. Amma often says that the sun is everywhere, but if we close our eyes, we will not be able to see anything. Even if it is high noon, if we shut our eyes, all we see is darkness. We think, “Nobody loves me,” but it is our own choice. Once we open to the love that is within, we can serve others by expressing it to them, and that will help them to find it in their own hearts.

One of the major steppingstones to finding our way back to the blissful experience of pure love is to retune ourselves with Mother Nature. This is the medicine that will begin to give us relief from our pains and sorrows. After all, we human creatures have come from her, and it is to her that we will return. She is our true mother and she has placed the future inside our very own selves. It is not from somewhere else.

Watch small children. Their minds are very pure. They talk to the animals and plants and feel a real connection. It is as we grow up and our selfish desires develop that we lose that feeling. With Greenfriends, we are trying to re-establish these lost relationships.

In the early days, we distributed saplings to children in elementary schools and told them to give the plants names

when they put them in the soil. There was a boarding school in Kodungallur, Kerala where the students really developed a bond with their plants. There came a time when they were heading home for a month, so each of them decided to write a note to their plants. They said, “Please don’t be sad. I’ll be back soon. Love you,” and each child tied the note to their plant.

For us to get back to this pure and childlike state of mind, we need to clean our minds of negative thoughts and emotions. We need to dissolve the illusion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. This is not something that can be understood through explanation. It can only be experienced, just as honey cannot be tasted by writing the word on a piece of paper.

With Greenfriends activities, we are cleaning our own minds and hearts by reconnecting with Mother Nature. It is a process and it takes time. We need to carefully contemplate upon each action we perform to love and serve nature and then watch what that kindles within.

As Amma says, a small seed must go under the earth to break its shell and grow, or a mother experiences pain while giving birth to a child. But that pain is what teaches

us what everlasting joy is because we need the contrast to understand. It is only because of the darkness that we can understand the beauty of the light.



Indpur, Himachal Pradesh

CHAPTER
05

ECO-MEDITATION

If we take the time to meditate upon Mother Nature and see her for who she truly is, we can reunite with her. Once we see and hear the presence of our Mother's love, which is always there, we will be able to see it in everyone's eyes. Every single person that passes before us will give us the feeling of her presence. When we touch a budding leaf, we will feel her gentle caress. In our lives, there is only Mother Nature and her children. We and all other beings are part and parcel of each other.

We will see that this very existence is all one great whole, nothing is separate. We will always feel, "I am a small child protected by my Mother. Nothing can hurt me." In fact, our whole life purpose is to realize this. Taking the time to meditate on Mother Nature is a pathway to that understanding.

It is best for this meditation to take place in as open a space as possible. If you are in a room, check if there is a window through which you can see outside, even just the sky. Sit quietly and watch nature. See our Mother. See the beauty of her face. See that she is looking at us and watching us.

Then close your eyes and listen to the sounds that are coming from her. What do you hear? What do you feel? Is

there a breeze that touches your body? Then move your attention through your whole body from head to feet. Give yourself a mental massage and release every tension you find. Relax each part of your body.

Next, focus on your breathing. Observe the air travelling through your body. Feel it as it enters through your nostrils, feel it as it exits and blows past the tip of your nose. Breathe in and out counting from one to nine. Repeat the count from one to nine three times. If your attention strays in any way, begin from one again.

Once your focus on the breath becomes clear and strong, begin Amma's Ma-Om meditation. Slowly breathe in and mentally recite 'Ma'. Ma is the Universal Mother, pure love. Take that love fully within. We are imbibing the love of Mother Nature and feeling each cell receive it. As you breathe out with equal care, mentally recite 'Om'. When we exhale and mentally recite Om, we become one with that love and completely merge within it.

Take as much time to focus upon Ma-Om as you wish. Finally, you will feel the sounds merge with the breath. Sit for as long as you like and enjoy that love and peace. If your

attention runs away to something else, no need to worry.
Bring it back to the concentration on Ma-Om.

When you feel your meditation is complete, open your eyes and feel the presence of Mother Nature. Feel that you are sitting there in her lap. She will help you for the rest of the day, as she is always carrying you and protecting you. Surrender to her love and light and you will always see her.



GreenFriends

