

Awakening TO THE ENVIRONMENT

THE LORD'S BLESSING FOR GREATER SELF-AWARENESS

Many privileged people in the developed and developing world have never given the environment any serious consideration even when there has been an explosion of information in the mainstream media about the effects of climate change and pollution. Our attachments to the comforts and conveniences of modern life have been spell-binding.

We have become addicted to the abundance of relatively cheap material things, made possible by globalisation and world-wide supply chains – powerful marketing engines have changed what and how much we consume as we are spoilt with an excess of affordable choices.

Amongst many, there is an unmistakable ambivalence towards the slow degradation of the environment. Experts warn about climate change and advocate for significant reductions in our use of fossil fuels but our political leaders reach international agreements on cutting emissions that are only to be implemented many, many years on. Then, there are the deniers. It appears that transformational change is not coming any time soon, and so the concern of many for the environment remains in a coma.

This is easy to understand because the bulk of the costs are being borne by the less-privileged who live in faraway places we don't think too much about. The adverse effects of climate change is just another misery they have to bear ... thank God we do not have to confront their difficulties. But how can those blessed with the education and wit to earn a

comfortable living at the same time be so oblivious to the responsibility this privilege brings? And so, for many, life goes on ... in 'blissful' ignorance.

In my case, after many years an inner shift did eventually take place and slowly, but surely, there has been an unambiguous awakening to the environment. In truth, this didn't just happen, I believe it was orchestrated by Sathya Sai Baba Himself to help my spiritual journey towards Self-realisation.

For some time in recent years, I have prayed to Swami for His physical *darshan*. However, each time there was an 'instinctive knowing' in reply that He actually wants us to see Him everywhere, to take His *darshan* in His creation. I realised His physical *darshan* would only be fleeting whereas seeing Him in His creation would be the ultimate experience of living constantly in the Divine presence, or in constant integrated awareness.

The confluence of events to bring about this inner shift was a blessing granted in response to my prayer to have His *darshan*. Lesson number one: Yearn for God, He listens!

In November 2016, the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) announced a Go Green Conference in Prasanthi Nilayam in July 2018. Sometime in the following year I was prodded by Divine Hands to put together an inter-faith booklet entitled [*Mother Earth*](#), which set out some teachings from different religious and faith traditions on man's duty to God's creation. Little did I know then that it would be an audition for a seva opportunity.

AWAKENING TO THE ENVIRONMENT

At the beginning of 2018 I was offered a chance to be a part of the editorial team to produce the conference book, *Nature: Vesture of God*. Knowing little about environmental issues, the only skill I brought to that seva was the ability to research environmental problems and solutions, and write/edit with a modicum of intelligibility. It appeared that was enough! Lesson number two: One only has to be willing.

Swami was deftly focusing my attention on the environmental catastrophe the planet is facing and how His teachings and those of other faith traditions provide the only real answer, for they don't just tackle the problem but go to the root of it, viz. human ignorance, greed, and a lack of Self-awareness. He presented me with a saying of Swami Tripurari: "The environmental crisis is in essence a spiritual crisis"

This quote is better understood if one comprehends the essence of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on man's relationship with Nature: God manifests in Nature and is to be realised by man through Nature, and there is actually no difference between God, Nature and man. It is clear Swami Tripurari was drawing attention to the same point that Swami had been making for about 40 years: we humans have lost our reverence for Nature and by our actions we have destroyed the balance necessary to keep that relationship pure, and so there are dire consequences as Nature reacts.

The Go Green Conference itself was an important reaffirmation of man's interconnectedness and interdependence on Nature and an opportunity to

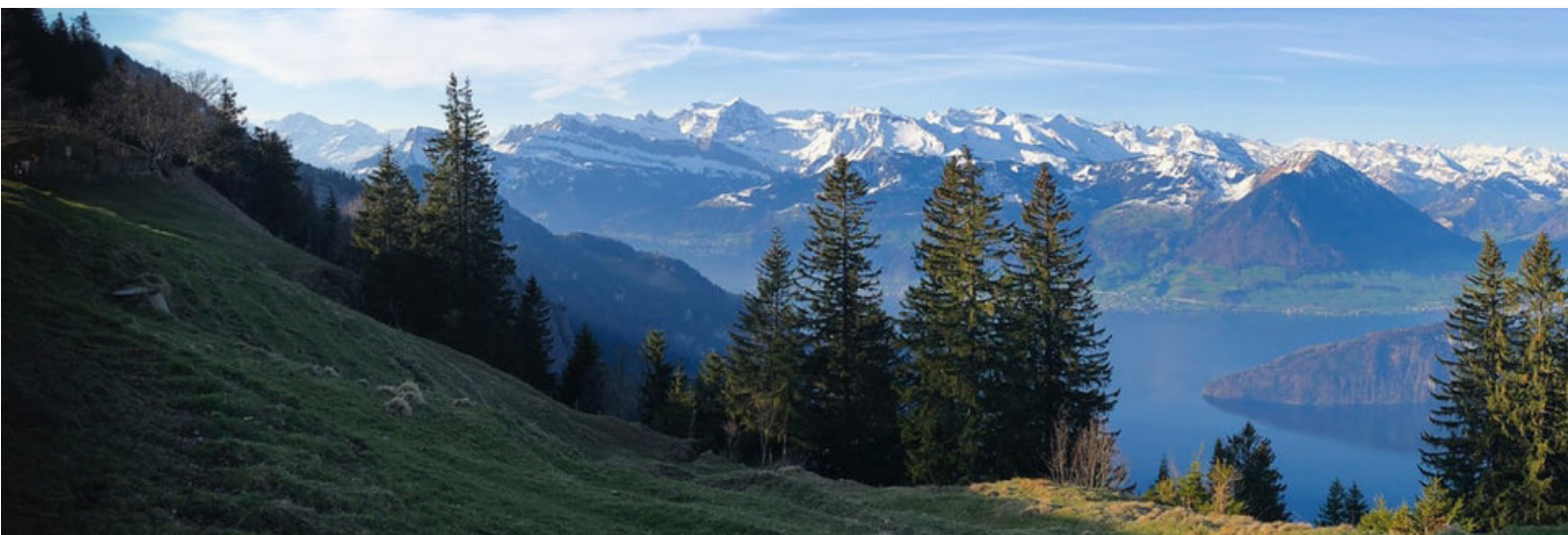
showcase the environmental work the Sathya Sai Organisation has been doing and still has to do. As a participant, unknowingly I was being prepared to imbibe the lessons shared there and reflect on my own relationship with Nature, and hence God Himself. The Go Green Conference linked my love of my Guru and God, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, to my relationship with Nature, and indeed all creation. That is how drastic the impact was!

Soon after the conference, in about August 2018, I was offered the chance to serve on the SSIO's Environmental Sustainability Committee (ESC). Why me? What did I have to offer on a subject I had been neglectful about only the year before? I soon realised these were the inconsequential musings of an overactive mind. One needs only to know one thing: if the opportunity to serve Sathya Sai Baba's Mission is given, in whatever capacity, accept it without question and with gratitude.

I was heartened by a message I had just heard during the July 2018 trip to Prasanthi Nilayam (orchestrated or just coincidence, one might ask rhetorically) – at one of the sessions of the Sathya Sai International Leadership Programme for Young Adults, one of the speakers quoted Swami: "God does not call the qualified, He qualifies those whom He calls."

That is all we need to know – having chosen us to serve, He will teach us. That is lesson number three.

It has been a blessing to work with career experts in environmental work. With His grace and the dedicated contribution of every member of the



AWAKENING TO THE ENVIRONMENT

committee, a fair bit has been achieved – there is coherence in our efforts and output, which are part of an inspired vision that we humans need to, and can, reconnect to the God within in order to rejuvenate our reverence for Nature and live in harmony with it. The [ESC's webpage](#) on sathysai.org is full of useful wisdom and practical tools.

This harmony can easily be built upon the personal foundation of consuming moderately and responsibly in accordance with Swami's Ceiling on Desires programme and the five universal human values, so that we live more simply, with our attention not on pleasing our senses but on pleasing God. The committee realises that transformation must first begin within us personally and within the SSIO because, individually and collectively in Sathya Sai Centres, we must be the change we want to see in the world. We need to be "heroes, and not zeros" in living in harmony with Nature.

Being a member of a committee engaged in environmental work brought in me an increased sensitivity to the sublime beauty of our trees, the majesty of our mountains, the fragrance of the harbour, the abundant blessings of the sun's illumination and the radiance of the moon on a dark night, to name a few observations. If one looks closely, one will begin to revere Nature, this beautiful home that nourishes us and on which we are totally dependent for our very existence. God's creation is truly magnificent, we humans cannot destroy it!

These observations are available in high density cities just as they are in natural areas, vast vistas,

etc. We just need to open our hearts so that we see the glory of God everywhere.

The awareness of the breath-taking beauty of God in His manifested form can be transformational as it breaks down the egotistical basis of individual separation, allowing the universality of all creation to reveal itself to us.

Members of the committee do increasingly speak to devotees around the world who too have a vision to protect the environment and live in harmony with Nature. One knows that Swami is leading this effort by bringing people together to create greater collective awareness and mutual support.

In truth, the unique contribution of the SSIO to the discussions on climate change and environmental pollution is in the message that God, Nature and man are of the same Divine principle and that there exist simple programmes that, when properly understood and practiced, can transform the hearts and minds of earnest seekers and ensure change. It is incumbent on all to take these teachings into the wider community.

We need not fret at the enormity of the challenge. He will change the world as He Wills, we are just along for the ride to Self-realisation. It starts with turning the tap off when water is not needed and switching off unused lights, because everything is a gift from God, nay, is God Itself.

With Loving Sairams,
Ashok K. Sakhrani

