Celebrate Earth Day - The Sai Way

“There are many valuable lessons to be learnt from Prakrithi (Nature). Trees distribute their fruits and grant their shade to everyone, even to those who lay their axe on them with intention to destroy them! Mountains suffer heat, rain and storm without demur (protest), and are plunged in meditation for ages. Birds do not hoard for years together, the wherewithal for food or shelter; they do not use more than is absolutely necessary for their survival. Nature is your school, your laboratory, the gateway to liberation and the reflection of God’s manifold majesty. Seek to know the lessons it is ready to teach; all things in Nature are Brahman (God) just as you are. So, every act is Divine; all work is worship; build the mansion of your life on the strong foundation of the faith that all creation is Divine.” (TFTD July 28, 2007)

Beginning this year, as the spring awakens, we will start observing Earth Day (April 22) in proximity of the Maha-Samadhi Day (April 24). This will always remind us to strongly develop Constant Integrated Awareness (CIA) of His presence in every aspect of the Nature and guide us to wonderful opportunity to express our love to Swami by loving Mother Earth. Beautiful photographs of Swami swinging on tree branches, strolling in the mountains or on the seashores, which capture His love to Mother Earth, reminds us of the wonderful times the physical form of the Lord walked amidst us. But the most significant message that these pictures convey is the entire Cosmos is His extension and He is not separate from it. Now that His physical form has left us, it is time we make our lives His message by putting into practice His teachings. Let us put a ceiling on desires for materialistic goods that exploit Mother Earth’s resources, tread softly upon Her and love Her as we love Swami because His presence can be profoundly felt in all components of the Earth. So let us observe Earth Day and the Maha-Samadhi Day by dedicating our efforts to lift up the level of environmental consciousness in the community, to value the importance of purity of thoughts and environment and to express the joy of Sai Inspiration as benevolence to the group and the community.

On this auspicious occasion, the Sai Go-Green House, one of the Sai National Youth Way Forward Initiatives of USA, offers a few ideas on collectively serving Mother Earth and performing eco-sadhana (eco-spiritual discipline) in a group as loving dedications to Mother Sai. The main idea is to keep it simple, embark on one green practice at a time, understand the significance of the Nature and connect with Sai. Kindly note that the proposed ideas for service may not be universal to all Sai centers in the country because the nature of service depends on the geographical location, local community needs, and dynamics of each Sai center (Center). We recommend everyone to review the appropriate approaches to serve Nature and the needs of the local community with humility and devotion.
**Green and Sustainable Service Projects**

**Tree Planting:**

Organize a tree-planting event in the community with the Center(s). Generally, trees can be planted in public places such as state/county parks, township curbs, and in school districts. Prior to the activity, find out about any regulations or ordinances by contacting appropriate authorities, such as park commission, township, municipality, or school district. As a group/Center we can join in tree-planting events organized by local non-profit environmental organizations/groups such as State Tree Foundation, State Department of Environmental Commission/Protection, Arbor Day Foundation, etc. Planting native trees especially helps to preserve and provide natural habitat for local and migratory birds, beneficial insects and other animals. And, in addition to absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and releasing oxygen, trees cool the air by providing shade and transpiring water from their leaves.

**Beach/Marsh/Stream/Neighborhood/Highway Cleanup:**

- Local civic groups, environmental organizations (e.g. Sierra Club chapter, River Coalition, Watershed Council, Adopt-A-Stream, etc.) and township, municipality, or environmental commissions conduct cleanup activities throughout the year.
- Adopt-a-highway cleanup programs [http://www.adoptahighway.net/] are run by State Departments of Transportation and your local government may have a program for other roads or neighborhoods.
- River cleanups are organized by Sierra Club local chapter [http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/] or local river or watershed River Coalition or American Waters [http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AR7_NationalRiverCleanup].

**Green Surplus Produce:**

Gleaning is an ancient practice of salvaging food that would otherwise go to waste. Non-profits throughout the country have teamed up with farms to glean the tons of produce that is left in the fields after commercial harvesting is complete. This produce is then donated to food pantries or shelters.

**Community Gardening:**

The arrival of spring season and beginning of the harvest season is a perfect time to explore community gardening opportunities in the neighborhood. Some townships or philanthropy groups (neighborhood estate) provide community gardening plots at no or minimum cost per plot for the season. The American Community Garden Association [http://www.communitygarden.org/] lists locations of community gardens by city or state. This is a wonderful way to foster the spirit of unity by involving all age groups, connect with Nature regularly, and teach our future generation the importance of green and healthy living. Offer the vegetables and fruits grown in this Sai Garden to Swami by dedicating them to the Center’s service projects such as Narayana seva (soup kitchen service) or a community food bank.
Composting:

Start a compost pile by working in a group and helping each other. Consider starting a compost pile at your Center (if this is possible) or the home of devotees. Document all the steps and share the movie clip with the Sai center(s). Alternative to backyard compost pile can be buying a compost bin to place your kitchen scraps inside.

Devotion:

Express your love for Mother Earth and Swami by composing prayers or poems. Make a humble request to include the prayer/poem as an offering to Swami at the center during the Earth Day-Maha-Samadhi Day week. Share this unconditional love with all members of your Sai center/group. Consider taking these prayers to a place where you feel connected to Mother Earth and make your offering there. Take time to meditate or contemplate in silence and express your gratitude and willingness to serve Her.

Eco-Spiritual Discipline:

Work in harmony with all members to start a Sai Eco-spiritual discipline or Enviro-care initiative at the Center. This could be a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly practice on green and sustainable living.

• 4R (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle): Young Adults (YA’s) can consider initiating a Sai Recycling Program or workshop to promote awareness and provide guidelines for the daily implementation of the 4R (refuse, reduce, reuse, and recycle) concept at the center/home/Sai events. Share information on local (municipality or county) free Electronic and Household Hazardous Waste Collection Events to members or Host an Electronics Recycling Day and encourage adults’ participation in planning and during execution. Prior to hosting an E-waste recycling day at your Center, locate a company, such as Best Buy, that will take the electronics that you have collected. To find a local recycler, visit www.earth911.com.

• Refrain using plastic and Styrofoam cutlery at Sai Events: Replace one-time used items with reusable products that can be used multiple times and will generate zero waste. Several people who would be willing to store the reusable products can be put in charge of this effort.

• Ceiling on Desires: Consider buying less, not spending money by eating in restaurants or ordering take-out food. Every penny you save, dedicate it towards center service activities. Swami says, “Man should realize that there should be no excessive indulgence in any desire, whether it be food or other necessities.” (Sathya Sai Speaks 30:24).

• Live a plastic free Earth Day and continue it in future: Introduce this practice to Center/group, request all to avoid use of plastic bags, chewing gum and food packaged in plastic viz., cereal bars, chips, frozen food, fast food/restaurant container/wrapper, etc. Request some members to share their experience with all at the next Center/group meeting.

• Reusable bags by SSE students: Consider distributing reusable cloth shopping bags to Center members. SSE students could decorate the bags.

• Study Circle: Conduct study circle(s) on Swami’s teachings on Nature.

• Carpool/Share ride to Center events: Consider offering or sharing rides with your fellow YA’s or center members. Post a sign-up sheet at your Center’s Welcome Desk and encourage devotees to carpool to Center meetings and off-site events. Note the difference you and your ride-share members make to the environment. Even better, walk or ride your bike to Center events, when possible.

• More eco-spiritual discipline: For additional green living ideas for Sai Eco-spiritual discipline initiative, please find “85 Green Living Tips” word document by visiting http://iammetherearth.wordpress.com/presentations-articles-books/. The list provides ideas to start green practices at the individual or group level.

• Lastly: Extend the Earth Day celebration by keeping it going all year long.
We encourage all Centers/Groups to observe Earth Day with an awareness of connecting with Mother Nature. If you have any questions on implementing these ideas and would like to share your progress and any other creative alternatives with the Go Green House, please email us at saiggh@gmail.com. We also highly recommend you to take pictures, as appropriate to the activity, compile a list of events, and share experiences on what they meant to those who did them with your local/regional membership and also with the Go Green House.

“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 world. Proceed from less Love to more Love, narrow Love to expanded Love.” - Baba

Jai Sai Ram!