



SPIRITUAL SOLUTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sathya Sai International Organisation's Position Paper

“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 realizing this truth, some people embark on the exploitation of Nature, out of arrogance and self-conceit. This is highly misconceived.”

Sathya Sai Baba, 25 June 1989

The Sathya Sai International Organisation's (SSIO's) vision is for humankind to realise the unity between God, Nature and Man. The SSIO encourages society to become aware of its interconnectedness and interdependence with Nature and to live in harmony with Nature, using her resources sparingly, with reverence and gratitude.

Sathya Sai Baba said the world is losing its ecological balance because people, out of selfishness, are robbing the Earth of its resources. Humankind's excessive desires and greed – the negative qualities that the major religions and indigenous spiritual traditions warn against – are causing negative impacts on Nature and consequently on all communities around the world.

The actions that need to be taken are challenging but clear. They can be broadly grouped under two heads: education to increase our awareness and knowledge about Nature as a manifestation of God's Will, and implementing strategies to

harmonise our relationship with Mother Earth. Specific actions include reducing the reckless consumption of natural resources, highlighting the urgent need for intensive afforestation, adopting clean and sustainable forms of energy, reducing the discharge of pollutants to air, land and water, recycling waste, protecting important habitats for wildlife, and preserving the planet's biodiversity.

It is imperative for society to move more rapidly towards ecologically sustainable development for peace and prosperity, and a healthy, liveable world. The priority is to shift from a society with a financial and economic focus to a more holistic society that incorporates ethical and spiritual values in decision making.

This requires an understanding that we are not separate from Nature but are, in fact, part of Nature and entirely sustained by Nature. It requires greater awareness of ourselves, our role in the world and our ability to experience God in Nature.



Nature Pulsates with Divine Consciousness

The major religions of the world all propagate the message that Nature proclaims the Will of God and that the Earth is a gift of God. Thus, for example, in Psalm 148, it is said: *“Let them praise the name of the Lord for He commanded, and they were created.”* In the Quran, it is said, at verse 30:37: *“And it is He who begins creation ...”* And, in the Vedas, it is proclaimed: *“I am One, I shall become many.”*

Sathya Sai Baba, a revered spiritual teacher to millions of people, spoke of the sacred relationship between God, Nature and man. He said, *“Nature is the effect and God is the cause. You should recognise the immanence of the Divine in the entire cosmos.”* He went on to say that *“Nature is the vesture of God,”* and that *“God is to be worshipped by man, to be realised by man through Nature.”* Nature is the demonstrable proof of the existence of God.

Additionally, spiritual masters and leaders from the major faith traditions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, as well as those of indigenous cultures – proclaim that humanity is meant to live in harmony with Nature and care for Mother Earth. They all recognise that we have strayed from this ideal and consequently we are causing an environmental crisis that may become irreversible.

Most religious beliefs, in fact, profess that humans are closest to God in Nature and, as such, we have a unique role to serve as custodians of the Earth’s beauty and riches, with the obligation to ensure the wellbeing of the Earth.

Through traditional cultures and faiths, we learn of humanity’s long-held, sacred relationship with Nature. But over recent centuries, scientific and technological advances have moved us away from this close spiritual relationship. Many of us have become so removed from Nature that we are unaware of the increasing degradation of our land, rivers, oceans and atmosphere until it affects us directly.

The Environmental Crisis

Since the early 19th century and beginning in earnest during the 1960s, scientists, environmentalists and others have drawn attention to the environmental degradation occurring around the world. Humankind has already exceeded several boundaries or limits, which have caused irreversible damage to Nature, including loss of species, permanent damage of air quality, water sources and land resources, and increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that are driving climate change.

Despite the various solutions that have been proposed or employed, the forces of economics, greed, politics and self-interest continue to provide a formidable challenge. Nations and individuals are ambivalent to calls to reduce greenhouse gas emissions urgently and stop the misuse of Nature’s resources. Too many people erroneously believe that increasing production and consumption will promote personal and national well-being, leading to peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, many nations and people fundamentally consider Nature as an instrument for exploitation and enjoyment.

Although laws and regulations have been passed in almost all countries and at an international level to protect and preserve the quality of air, water and land, the extent and success of these actions depend on implementation at personal level and political decisions, among other factors.

Spiritual Solutions

For billions of people of faith around the world, living in a sustainable manner and showing gratitude and compassion to Nature is principally a spiritual issue that goes to the core of one’s beliefs and the sanctity of Nature. The environmental crisis has come upon the planet – our only home – because humanity has forgotten the intimate relationship between God, Nature and man.

Just as we have developed science and technology to disrupt the planet’s natural cycles and we have taken ecosystems to the brink of irretrievable

loss, so can we develop the means to minimise our adverse impact and live in harmony with Nature. However, this requires a fundamental shift in priorities, values and behaviour of society at large.

In truth, as humans we have the unique ability to realise the beauty, goodness and harmony in Nature and to practise love, compassion, and caring, not just towards other humans but towards all beings and the whole of Nature. This is our responsibility and proper role on Earth.

Sathya Sai Baba has stated that the pollution outside is a reflection of the pollution inside us, which has infected our hearts and minds. Therefore, change must begin from within each individual. The impetus for individual change will increase as we recognise the omnipresence of God in Nature. When we rediscover our spiritual identity and our relationship with the Divine in Nature, balance in Nature will be restored.

It is incumbent on us as individuals to transform our thinking and behaviour, and thus transform the behaviour of business and government, so that we demonstrate love and compassion for the Earth.

Sathya Sai Baba has provided guidance for our constructive behaviour, which requires practicing the five human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence, and placing a Ceiling on Desires. He has said that selfless service is the expression of love in action and that when this selflessness is directed towards Nature, it can point us back home to God. He also warned us that irresponsible behaviour towards the environment will rebound in greater harm and destruction to life on Earth, as seen in recent times.

“Love All, Serve All” and “Help Ever, Hurt Never” are the two hallmarks of Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings, which apply equally to how we treat one another as well as how we treat Nature.

The Five Human Values

The five human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence are universal;

they are common to all religious and spiritual traditions, and they underpin the norms of morality in secular societies, both ancient and modern. These human values embrace all of Creation. They provide a clear, comprehensive and practical framework to guide our behaviour.

The five human values incorporate a complete understanding of the human personality and human potential. Sathya Sai Baba taught that these five human values are latent in the heart of every person and need to be brought forth not just in our homes, places of worship and workplaces, but in our education systems.

The five human values have two distinct dimensions: an external dimension of engagement with the world of objects, living beings, and Nature itself; and an inner dimension of enhancing connection with one’s inner self. These two are completely interlinked because human values influence both dimensions simultaneously. Thus, worldly activities infused with human values assume a spiritual dimension.

Unchecked by the practice of the five human values, our senses and mind are strongly drawn to the material world. This creates strong attachments and desires for material objects and pleasures, which distort our thinking and pollute our hearts. Consequently, humans engage in activities that are detrimental to Nature, causing enormous ecological and social damage on a global scale.

Sathya Sai Baba said that man can achieve balance in the five elements of space, air, fire, water and earth in Nature by practicing the five human values and that human life will find fulfilment only when ecological balance is maintained.

The quest for Truth leads us to inquire into the origin, functions and characteristics of Nature, which in turn leads us to God. Truth, which includes discrimination, leads us to want to know how our actions harm the environment and ourselves, and how to apply that knowledge.

Right Conduct, which includes honesty and determination, urges us to live in harmony

with natural and spiritual laws, motivates us to transform our bad habits and to consume only moderately and with wisdom, discrimination and humility.

Non-violence, which includes not harming others, also prevents violence towards the Earth and all its flora and fauna. It teaches us not to pollute the environment or use it indiscriminately, without concern for the negative impacts. It promotes our respect for Nature and the animal and plant kingdoms.

Peace includes self-acceptance, self-discipline and self-respect, inner silence, humility and understanding. We cultivate inner peace by being quiet in the lap of Nature and experiencing the great peace that resides there.

Love towards all creation, including plants, animals and human beings is the hallmark of a spiritual person. Love, which includes selflessness, caring and compassion, inspires a greater awareness of our self, our surroundings and the elements of Nature. Spending time in Nature, we realise that all life is energised by divine Love, which connects us such that harm to Nature also means harm to ourselves.

Ceiling on Desires

Ceiling on Desires reduces our greed, selfishness, and desires for material objects and pleasures. The practice of Ceiling on Desires protects the environment by avoiding the over-utilisation of its resources. It is about conscious living, and also living simply, as a daily spiritual practice, consuming only what one needs rather than what one wants.

Practicing Ceiling on Desires is the natural consequence of practicing human values in daily life and not wasting time, money, food, water and energy but redirecting them for the welfare of

humanity and Nature. It is about sense control and keeping one's desires in check.

By choosing to live life with a Ceiling on Desires, we live in greater harmony with Nature, and tread more lightly on the Earth. Practicing Ceiling on Desires leads ultimately to peace within.

Man's interconnectedness and interdependence with Nature

The protection of Nature and the proper use of its resources is not just a question of survival, it is a question of our relationship with the Divine in all the myriad forms of Nature. At the spiritual level, how can we love God and the Divine manifestation in Nature and yet continue our harmful actions? The truth is that we cannot continue to abuse the planet and at the same time seek to earn God's grace. For God and Nature are one, as are we.

The Sathya Sai International Organisation

The main objective of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) 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 seek to foster this purity through devotional, value-based educational, and selfless service activities. These are not separate, distinct pathways, but integrated spiritual practices that facilitate the vision of unity in diversity and the inter-connectedness of God, Nature, and man.

The protection of Nature, also known as EnviroCare, helps in one's spiritual progress. The SSIO's activities and its environmental initiatives seek to enable all participants to experience God through their interaction and reverence for Nature. Ultimately, Love is the essence, for it is the sublime expression of our divine Self.

“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.”

Sathya Sai Baba, 22 November 1978