



What we see is God percolating
through Nature.

Swami Vivekananda



LOOKING INWARDS (Reflecting on Mother Nature and our Nature)

Nature has always held us in awe of her majesty. Mother Nature inspires us to look within her for answers to our eternal questions. Since ancient times we have tried to conquer nature. Over the years we have made rapid strides in conquering external nature. The recent pandemic showed us our helplessness as well as our intelligence and ability to conquer and arrest the devastation. Conquering our internal nature is an even more difficult task. Every stumble in our life reminds us of our weakness in controlling our thoughts. This month of spring, our contributors honor nature in their articles – festivals that celebrate her, the intensity with which nature touches our innermost selves and the different ways we connect with Mother Nature.

The Editorial Team

Lessons on Infinity and Interdependence from a Carrot, by Suresh Raghunathan from Bangalore

One morning, I was asked to get some vegetables from the bazaar. I am not one for early morning vegetable shopping, but having no choice I went reluctantly. As I approached the vegetable shop, the fresh brightly coloured carrots, dark purple brinjals and newly harvested green leafy vegetables attracted my attention. It was refreshing to behold such vibrant colours. It was as if the vegetables had come alive for me, sending thrills through my body.



I slipped into a deep unexpected contemplation. Nourished by minerals in the soil, the elixir called water, sunlight, moonlight, air, manure and timely care from the farmer, a refreshing carrot finds birth. There is a subtler but gigantic force that makes Mother Earth rotate on her axis and revolve around the Sun to make day and night and the various seasons possible; and the Space that enables everything to be, so that the orange wonder can grow. At the thought of this marvel, tears of joy rolled down my cheeks and a strange peace engulfed me. From a carrot to the infinite cosmos or was there infinite cosmos in a carrot? I wondered also at the human endeavour that makes vegetables available across the cities, towns, mountains, plains, and across the seas to nourish lives. Life is a wonderful interdependence. To participate dynamically in this play of interdependence with an awakened intellect is 'yajna'. This 'yajna' awakens infinite human potential. Let us wholeheartedly give and take.

Previous issues of VIVA newsletters (in both English and Hindi) can be accessed at <https://viva.rkmm.org/>



VOL No. 3. Issue No. 3 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

Practical Spirituality for All

How can I connect with nature? by Namrata Mukherjee from Kolkatta

Nature is an essential and inseparable aspect of our existence. It's able to show us true beauty without modifications, exaggerations and falseness. We have all been graced with God's steadfast love in the magnificent form of nature. Watching the Sun rise and set induce different feelings of reverence. Just find a good spot, keep our eyes open, and watch as the colours of the sky change. Making it a practice to watch the Sun come and go helps us to connect and realize the beauty that Earth has to offer, no matter where you are located. We often overlook the benefits of connecting with nature. Stargazing is the perfect opportunity to realize our place in the vast universe and express our gratitude to the Earth for protecting us from the rest of Space. Taking the time to notice how beautiful and unpredictable nature is, can naturally minimize our ego and cultivate a foundation for spirituality. If we are trying to become more spiritual, nature can give us the boost we need. If you are a lover of nature, expect to become more spiritual as a result.

Mother Nature and my Nature, by Sunanda Ganguli from Delhi

Mother Nature in all its glory is really overwhelming to me. Yes, our mother treats us like her children, the way she accepts our inhuman acts, the acts of greed and ruthlessness, the so-called acts of civilization. I often think whether we love her or not. A Mother is mother, silently working on her own for us, creating life and continuing with the life cycle.

Winter seems to freeze everything but is followed by spring, which brings new life and harmony to Earth. Summer symbolizes the peak of growth and maturity. And it goes on and on.

Often when I see a green shoot coming out after a heavy rain on a barren piece of land, I stop in wonder, thinking that Mother was really working inside in spite of the apparent inactivity on the surface. Likewise, we can introspect, look inside while being physically inactive and then act thoughtfully, mindfully.

Mother Nature is my greatest teacher as I try to appreciate and respond to her beautiful acts of resilience and love.



On Nature, by Rishu Sehgal from Gurugram

Nature is everything that surrounds us - the air, the water, the sun, the moon, the landscapes, the birds, the animals and much more. It is bedrock of life. It is life giving and nurturing, Nature has the power to please, to comfort, to calm, and to nurture one's soul. Hence, it's Mother Nature. We human beings take so much from it like we take from our mothers.

In Nature, nothing looks perfect but still everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, but they're still beautiful. The beauty of nature lies in its freshness, openness, slow breeze and the warm sun – offering a relief for our mind. Connecting with nature has profound benefits for human health and well-being, both physically and mentally. Time spent outdoors has been linked to reduced stress, improved moods and enhanced cognitive function. Moments of solitude with Mother Nature is sunshine to the soul.

In essence, preserving Mother Nature is not just a moral imperative; it is an investment in our own future. By safeguarding the natural world, we ensure a sustainable and thriving planet for generations to come. Having reverence for Mother Earth and ensuring we don't harm her – that's the least we can do.

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Festivals that Celebrate Nature, by Arun Rajak from Assam

Nature's comforting beauty inspires and heals. In the serene embrace of nature, Northeastern India unfolds its vibrant tapestry of life. From misty mountains to verdant forests, every landscape tells a story of resilience and beauty. Here, nature isn't just a backdrop; it's a cherished companion, guiding souls with its soothing melody.

Amidst this harmonious dance with the elements, festivals emerge as radiant celebrations of gratitude and unity. Bihu, Hornbill, Chapchar Kut, and Wangala festivals paint the landscape with vibrant colors of culture and tradition. Through spirited dances, sumptuous feasts, and timeless rituals, these festivities honor the sacred bond between humanity and the natural world.

But beyond their cultural significance, these festivals are profound declarations of our collective responsibility to preserve and protect our environment. Through music, dance, and shared reverence, Northeastern festivals weave a tapestry of unity and respect for the land that sustains us. They serve as poignant reminders of our interconnectedness with nature and the imperative to safeguard its precious gifts for future generations. In the heart of Northeastern India, amidst the whispering winds and dancing trees, these festivals stand as beacons of hope, illuminating the path towards a more harmonious and sustainable future.



The Bihu festival in Assam, occurring in April, marks the Assamese New Year and the harvest season. Filled with traditional dances and feasts, it underscores the deep connection between the people and the agricultural bounty of the region.



Meghalaya's Wangala festival, is a vibrant celebration of the Garo tribe. Featuring traditional dances, it accentuates the significance of nature in their lives.



Sikkim's Pang Lhabso Festival, unique in its blend of culture and nature, commemorates the consecration of Mount Kanchenjunga.



Arunachal Pradesh's Torgya Festival, observed by the Monpa tribe, combines religious rituals with masked dances to ensure a prosperous harvest.

ANSWER TO READER'S SECTION (from VOL. No. 3. Issue No. 2)



Vrindha from Chennai writes:

This image makes me feel of how we love and cherish our children. When they are little, they implicitly trust us. However, as they grow our expectations of them creates rifts and children start distancing themselves from us. Although love remains on both sides, communication breaks down. Maybe adults could be more accepting of children whatever stage of life they are in just like we did when they were young.



In Nagaland, the Hornbill Festival brings together diverse tribal cultures. While celebrating traditions, the festival also promotes environmental awareness, reinforcing the harmonious relationship between the tribes and their natural surroundings.

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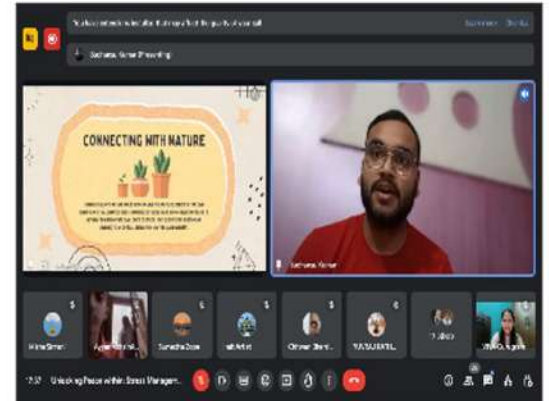
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MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

1. Awakened Ambassadors for Community Transformation (AACT) – On February 10, 2024, we had a special AACT session that was conducted by AACT Ambassadors, ‘Meghna Dixit, Amrita and Sudhanshu Kumar’ titled “Unlocking Peace Within: Stress Management for students”.

The session was very well-received, with over 50 students participating and interacting with the presenters. Revered Maharaj Swami Shantatmanandaji Maharaj also joined for the last 20 minutes and shared a strategy on how a strong and broad identity can enable students to deal with temporary stresses. In the feedback received, all students indicated that they wish to attend more such sessions, with suggestions for topics for upcoming sessions.



2. ACP Implementation Visits – The dedicated resource persons of VIVA often undertake exhausting journeys to meet the implementation requirements of the Awakened Citizen Program. In the month of February our resource person Saurav Bisht, visited 9 schools, in 3 districts namely, Chamba, Kangra and Hamirpur in 8 days. He traversed a total of 1117 kilometres for this work. He interacted with nearly one thousand students. It's this selfless devotion to service towards the cause of nation building that makes our work possible. Kudos to all our resource persons.

ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

A reader writes:

Is our nature ‘given’ or can we change it?

Swami Shantatmananda replies:

Our nature is conditioned by our samskaras (mental impressions of our previous thoughts and actions). However, we do have a window of ‘free will’ which we can exercise through hard work, intense struggle, vichara (reflection) and by gaining viveka. Through shravana (listening to realized souls), manana (unbiased and deep reflection) and nididhyasana (immersion through intense meditation) we can manifest our divinity and conquer any aspect of our nature that is hindering this process.

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