

# VASUNDHARA



***Resource Guide for Faith Leaders to Raise  
Environmental Consciousness***





# Resource Guide for Faith Leaders to Raise Environmental Consciousness





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# Introduction

The world is witnessing a drastic change in the climate, resulting in extreme natural calamities that frequently lead to devastating consequences. The complexities posed in a globalized world create vulnerabilities at the local level, where the actions of a few have a huge impact on many. According to the World Bank,<sup>1</sup> climate change is deeply intertwined with global patterns of inequality. As the impacts of climate change mount, millions of vulnerable people face disproportionate challenges in terms of extreme events, health effects, food, water and livelihood security, migration and forced displacement, loss of cultural identity, and other related risks. Despite contributing the least to the situation, the marginalized suffer the maximum brunt.

Climate change is a multifaceted problem that arises from various factors, including population growth, rapid industrialization, excessive consumption, unsustainable lifestyles, and changes in land use. These factors collectively impose significant strain on the environment, leading to environmental degradation. Consequently, this degradation contributes to more frequent natural disasters, which have detrimental effects on livelihoods, health, and the availability of resources. Unfortunately, marginalized communities suffer the majority of these consequences.

In every crisis, children are the most vulnerable. Climate change is no exception. According to UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), 1 billion children – nearly half the total – are already at extremely high risk of suffering from the impacts of climate change. Over the next 30 years, children will face increasing risks unless we take urgent action to address this crisis. As the impacts intensify, more children will be harmed and more will die.

In a world grappling with the urgent need to address climate change, research has revealed the extraordinary potential of sustainable lifestyle changes. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), implementing these changes could lead to a staggering reduction of 40 to 70 per cent in global emissions by 2050.

Embracing this imperative, India has firmly committed to reducing the emission intensity of its economy by an ambitious 45 per cent by 2030 (PIB 2022).<sup>2</sup> Central to this crucial endeavour is Mission LiFE, a transformative initiative of the Government of India, that holds the key to combating climate change and shaping a sustainable future through enabling lifestyles, which are in harmony with the environment.

1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-dimensions-of-climate-change>

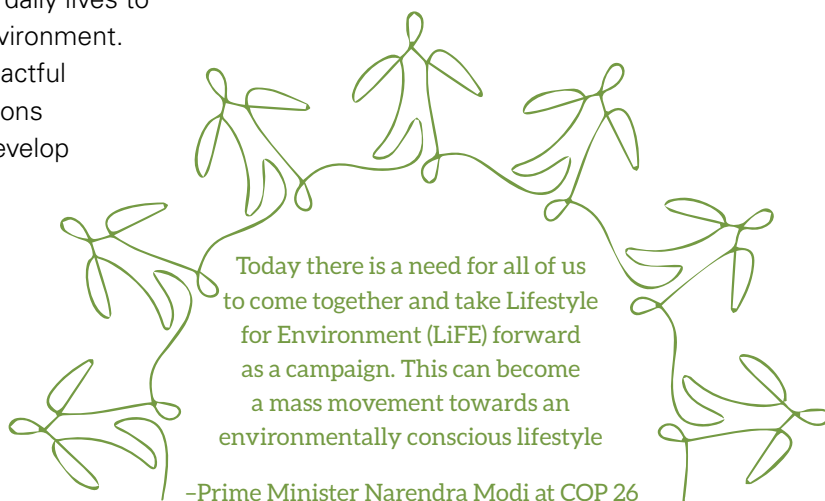
2. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1885731>



# Raising Consciousness for Environmental Regeneration: Introduction to Mission LiFE

Mission Lifestyle For the Environment (LiFE) aims to inspire individuals to adopt sustainable practices that align with their cultural and spiritual values. The Mission aspires to mobilize at least one billion Indians and global citizens, encouraging them to take both individual and collective action in their daily lives to protect and preserve the environment.

By practising simple yet impactful environmentally friendly actions (LiFE actions), people will develop a heightened environmental consciousness. This transformative shift will foster a deep appreciation for the planet, enabling individuals to live in harmony and love with the natural world, realizing that we are all connected as we are one family.



LiFE envisions replacing the prevalent 'use-and-dispose' economy – governed by mindless and destructive consumption – with a circular economy, which would be defined by mindful and deliberate utilization. The Mission intends to nudge individuals to undertake simple acts in their daily lives that can contribute significantly to climate change when embraced across the world.<sup>3</sup>

## Key Objectives of LiFE

According to the Mission LiFE, there is a need for all to come together and, with collective participation, take Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) forward both nationally and internationally. This includes conscious action from government, industry and civil society.

- ⦿ LiFE inspires people to adopt an **environmentally conscious lifestyle**, which **is mindful and promotes deliberate and conscious utilization**.
- ⦿ More **conscious choices** are promoted every day.
- ⦿ **Many sectors are encouraged to operate more sustainably** such as in diverse areas of fishing, agriculture, packaging, fast moving consumer goods, hospitality, tourism, fashion, water management and energy generation.
- ⦿ New government policy is created that **supports positive social changes**.

3. <https://www.niti.gov.in/life>



## Key Objectives



In view of Mission LiFE being launched in the 75<sup>th</sup> year of India's independence, a comprehensive and non-exhaustive list of 75 individual LiFE actions across 7 categories is identified such that most actions are:



Specific and measurable



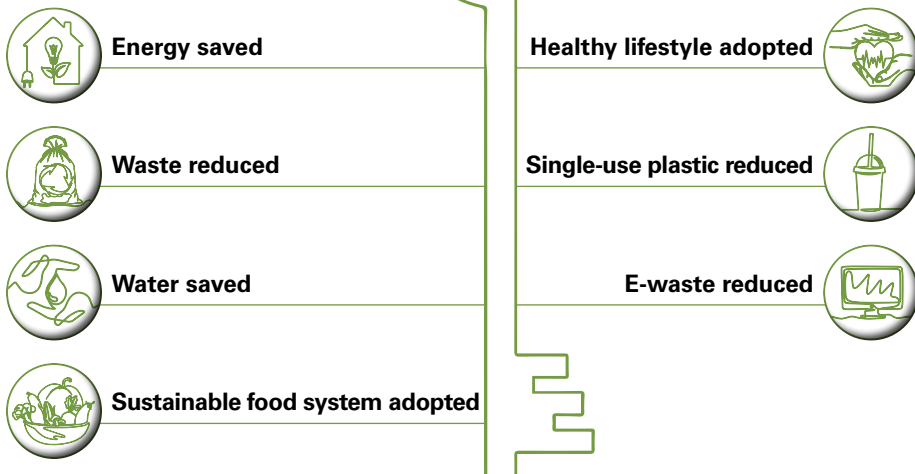
Easy to practise by individuals, communities and institutions, with minimal supply-side dependencies



Non-disruptive to ongoing economic activity, and, in fact, promoting economic activity in the foreseeable future

The mission has identified a list of 75 messages that can be adopted by individuals. These key messages are divided into 7 areas.<sup>4</sup>

## Key Actionable Areas in Mission LiFE



4. Refer to the annexure for detailed messaging and action points.

## Faith Leaders and Environmental Consciousness

Addressing the issue of climate change and environmental sustainability demands deep synergies between various actors and stakeholders. Along with political will, there is a dire need for a deep shift in attitudes and behaviours in order to address and rectify the issue. Reforms to address this planetary crisis have been implemented globally but have had limited results. It is critical that individuals, communities and institutions come together, change their behaviours and practices to have significant impact on climate crisis.

Faith leaders hold crucial positions in the society and have always played a critical role in reaching out to the communities in promoting positive behaviours. They are key in shaping and driving attitudes along with informing and influencing the values and practices among communities.

To create social movements on sustainable lifestyles, it is crucial that faith leaders come together to promote positive values through dialogues, community engagement and mobilization, leading to change in behaviours and attitudes and creating environmental consciousness among the masses.

## Kathas as a Medium of Communication and Behaviour Change

### What are Kathas?

Storytelling is a powerful tool for delivering any message. It appeals our senses and emotions, draws attention more easily and leaves a lasting impact. This participatory and immersive experience is entertaining and allows one to consider new ideas and insights into different traditions and cultures, empathize with unfamiliar people, places and situations, and appreciate universal human values.

Storytelling has different forms and mediums across the globe. 'Katha' is an Indian style of storytelling, an oral tradition, which has been a vital part of the Indian culture. Kathas are narratives that can be historical, legendary, religious or folk in nature, and have been passed on through generations. Often, Kathas have a common purpose in instilling values by revealing the consequences of human actions.

This oral tradition of storytelling is widely popular, and even today individuals assemble to listen to stories, tales and proverbs. It often involves professional storytellers who share the stories, which is later followed by a commentary explaining the meaning and application of the



lessons in the present times. With so much diversity in India, the act of storytelling or Katha is diverse and gets adapted to unique local cultures and languages. While some narrate, others employ props like puppets, masks, musical instruments, song and dance. The ancient stories of wisdom are typically selected from mythology, epics and religious scriptures, which are principally common in all regions.

Global Interfaith WASH Alliance along with UNICEF India's technical support have developed first-of-its-kind resource guide to support faith leaders and Kathakars (storytellers) to make their interpretations and messages environmentally sensitive and influence communities towards positive climate action.

## Objectives of the Resource Guide

The overall objective of this resource guide is to empower Kathakars to engage populations in positive behaviour change through the age-old oral tradition of songs and storytelling. Using the resource guide, Kathakars can provide an environmental lens to the interpretations and commentaries of the age-old stories that have been shared with communities. The ability to distil the key message and lessons from the stories has been honed by Kathakars over the centuries, and is revered and sought after by countless faithful across the world. Using these skills, it is possible for them to convey complex philosophy and profound ideas, leaving deep impression and clear understanding among individuals and communities, especially those relevant to their lives. Kathas, therefore, are specifically very powerful and transformative events for connecting people with spiritual ideals and aligning with the necessity for individual and social action.

This resource guide has brought together a brief selection of riveting stories from the Hindu mythology, paired with scriptural references that have been specifically written and interpreted to impart important sustainable messages and lessons related to climate change. It is hoped that these messages, when shared by faith leaders and Kathakars, will result in changing attitudes and behaviour and shift towards more sustainable lifestyles.

By harnessing the power of these narratives, faith leaders can effectively support the Mission LiFE campaign, contributing to the creation of a robust national and international peoples' movement (*Jan Andolan*).

The resource guide focuses on key themes of Mission LiFE, including individual and collective action, ecological restoration, and the vital importance of curbing mindless consumption. Through these themes, faith leaders are expected to inspire individuals to embrace sustainable lifestyles that prioritize the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants.



## The resource guide will:



- \* Orient faith leaders to Mission LiFE for creating national and international peoples' movement for transforming and inspiring people to adopt sustainable lifestyles.



- \* Support Kathakars and faith leaders to inspire people to reflect on their actions through the use of pro-environmental spiritual stories, and adopt positive behaviours for their well-being.



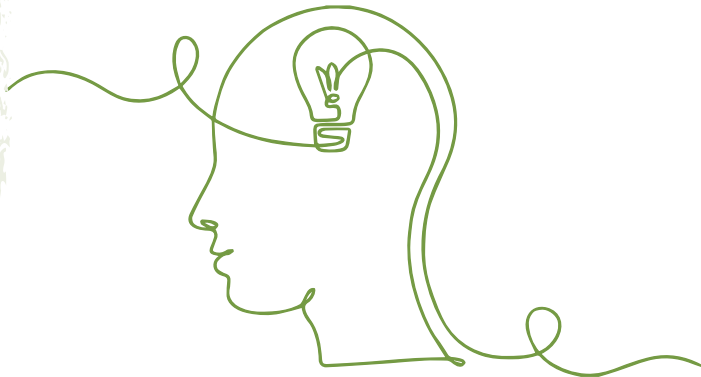
- \* Empower people spiritually to change their relationship with nature, take positive actions and forge a sustainable future for generations to come.

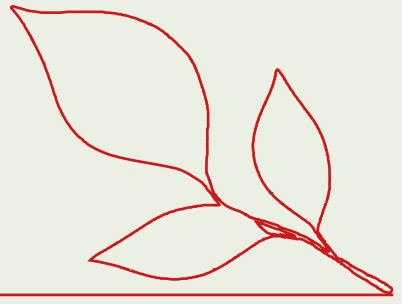


- \* Inspire Kathakars and faith leaders to integrate green messaging and conscious lifestyle for environment messaging in all their programmes and interventions.



- \* Provide guidance on holding 'green Kathas' or green events, with helpful tips for Kathakars on recommending sustainable actions that are easy to undertake by participants in the programme – such as providing bins for recycling, using sustainable materials and providing adequate WASH facilities.





# Narratives Depicting Sustainable Lifestyle

This resource guide has selected some Kathas that can be used by the Kathakars for encouraging and inspiring communities to adopt environmentally sustainable practices. These stories depict a close relationship between nature and human actions, and are closely aligned to the objectives of Mission LiFE. The interpretation of the stories and linkages to environmental consciousness are intended to inspire and ignite reflection on current lifestyles and what can be done to change it. While these examples are not exhaustive, the hope is that these stories will serve as catalysts for individuals and communities to think about the teachings and apply them in their daily lives through small positive actions to save the planet.

These stories can be used by anyone, adapted and translated in different mediums for promoting conscious living.



# Lord Krishna Lifts up Govardhan Hill

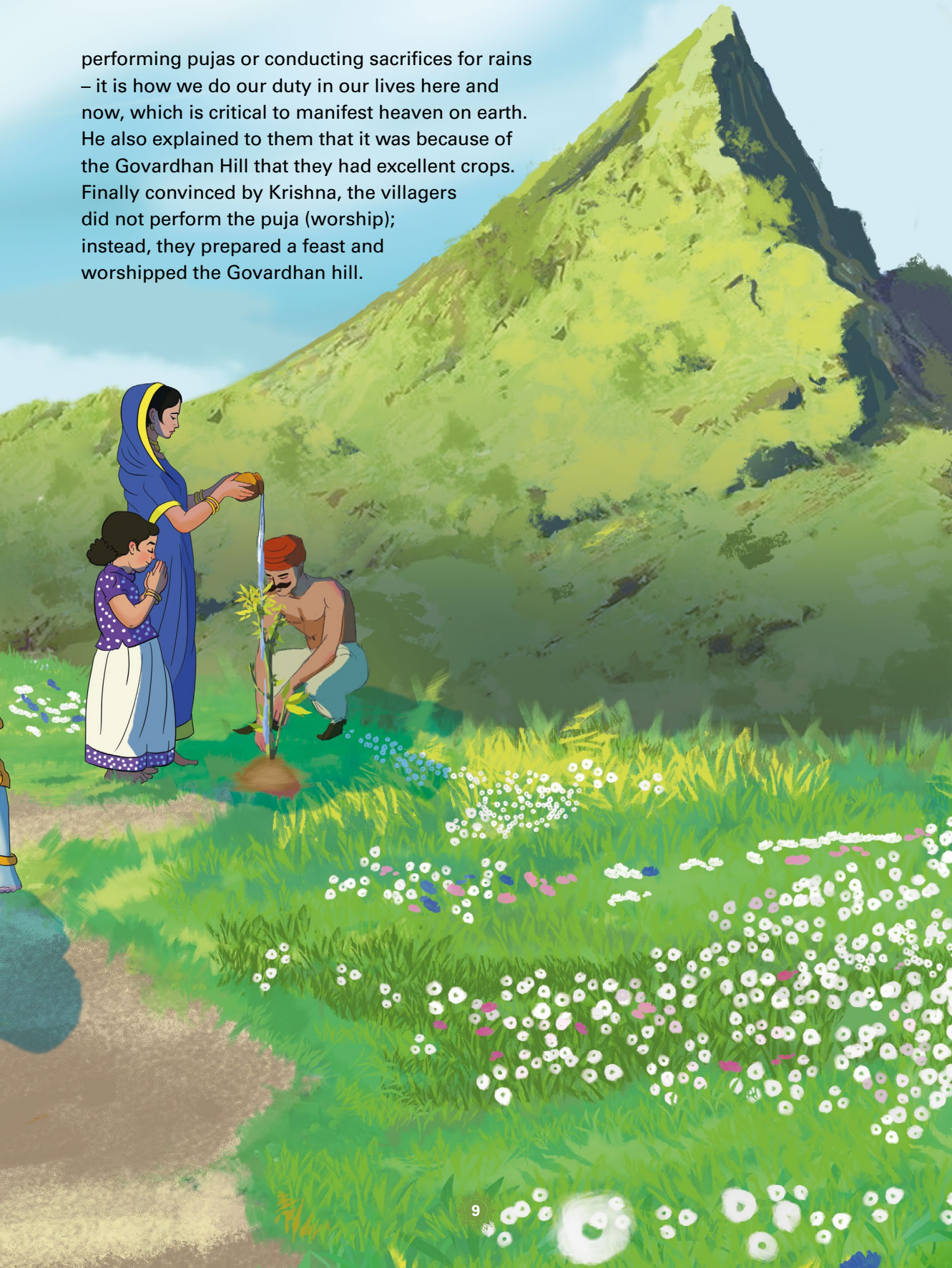
One day, the people of Braj (Vrindavan), and their King, Nanda Maharaj (the father of Lord Krishna), were planning for the puja of Lord Indra (God of rains). Lord Krishna, a child then, questioned them as to why they were doing so. Nanda Maharaj explained to Lord Krishna that this was done every year to please Lord Indra so that he would continue to grace the people of Braj by providing ample and regular rain.

Krishna, who was divinely aware of the increasing pride this power had brought to Indra, wanted to teach him a lesson. Also wanting to establish the superiority of devotional humility in the face of such pride, Krishna told his father they should instead worship the Govardhan hill, which was near Braj.

Krishna implored the farmers that they should do their duty (karma) to the best of their abilities, by concentrating on putting their love and care into tending their fields and protecting their cattle, rather than



performing pujas or conducting sacrifices for rains – it is how we do our duty in our lives here and now, which is critical to manifest heaven on earth. He also explained to them that it was because of the Govardhan Hill that they had excellent crops. Finally convinced by Krishna, the villagers did not perform the puja (worship); instead, they prepared a feast and worshipped the Govardhan hill.



During the feast, to the sheer surprise of all, Krishna, upon this offering, suddenly using his mystical powers, assumed a colossal spiritual form. Taking advantage of the moment to universally emphasize the idea that worship of the hill was just as devotionally significant as worship of God, as God resided in all of His creation, he declared, "I am Govardhan," and proceeded to eat the feast with great satisfaction.

## Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

For the unenlightened eyes, the idea of honouring a physical hill may seem out of place, but it was that land which supplied them with the necessary nourishment for life. From the spiritual perspective, all aspects of nature and creation are imbued with the divine personality. This hill meant far more to the people of Vrindavan than Indra did and so they sent their love and devotion to the land that provided for them as a mother for her child. It is in this state of thanksgiving, gratefulness and love to the natural world that Lord Krishna encouraged the people to live by.

Just as Lord Krishna demonstrated that worshipping Govardhan hill was as significant as worship of God, all spiritual faith traditions do emphasize that the Divine resides in all of creation and thereby, when we act to revere, protect and preserve Mother Nature, we are bringing worship into action. In this spirit, we are able to see the importance of helping preserve, honour and regenerate the nature that supports us. Pledging to plant trees for birthday celebrations or coinciding

with religious festivals is a great way for individuals and communities to get active and participate in regenerating nature. We should aim at protecting our environment at any cost.





Lord Indra, the King of the Devas, decided to punish those gathered by sending terrible rain clouds to flood the land of Vrindavan. He called in the Samavartaka (clouds of devastation), commanding that torrential rains and thunderstorms descend on Vrindavan, thereby causing extensive floods and suffering to the inhabitants who would have their livelihoods severely impacted through the submerging of their lands.

The fearful and helpless inhabitants of Vrindavan approached Lord Krishna for help. Krishna, who understood the situation perfectly well, lifted up the entire Govardhan hill at once with his little finger and held it up like an umbrella. He beckoned the inhabitants to bring their sticks to help hold up the hill. For seven days the citizens stayed under the hill, safely sheltered from the terrible rains.

## Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

What is the purpose of the people coming to hold the mountain with their sticks while God is omnipotent and all powerful? It demonstrates that we each need to show up with our metaphoric stick to do our part, with our service, our commitment and our action to preserve and protect the creation. Our sustainable actions can be seen as sticks which we are picking up to collectively abate the scourge of climate change.

The mountain can also be thought of metaphorically as an insurmountable problem, like climate change – while these problems seem to be a crushing weight, if we all come together and do our part individually in line with God's Will, everything is possible. In this way, if we take collective and individual action and become members of green groups taking environmental service on the weekends together, we will succeed. We can make an effort to have sustainable and reusable products as a central part of our social gatherings to be an example for others and help them join with us.



Stunned and mystified with the order of events, and in realizing the identity of Lord Krishna, Indra called back the clouds of devastation, thus stopping the thunderstorms and the rains. The sky became clear again and the sun shone brightly over Vrindavan. Lord Krishna asked the inhabitants to return home without any fear, and gently placed the Govardhan hill back to exactly where it was. All the inhabitants of Braj including Nanda Maharaj, Yasoda (mother of Lord Krishna) and Balarama (elder brother of Lord Krishna) hailed Krishna and embraced him with happiness.

ॐ ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ॥ १ ॥

Ishaavaasyam idam sarvam yatkijcha jagatyaam jagat |  
tena tyaktena bhujjithaa maa grudhaha kasyasviddhanam || 1 ||

– Śrī Īsopaniṣad, Mantra 1

**Meaning:** All things that are part of this world are abodes of God! Looking after them is as if looking after yourself; one should accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and one must not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.

**Interpretation:** Lord Krishna demonstrated that worship of Govardhan hill proved that the divine personality was present in all of nature. There is nowhere, especially no living being, whom the Divine does not pervade. All of creation is, therefore, Divine. Our tradition asks us to protect all life that God has created. In doing so, we ensure that generations to come will benefit from bountiful natural areas that give us clean water, clean air and abundant food to nurture and support mankind.

**Lifestyle message:** If we want to secure our future and that of our future generations we must stand up with our metaphorical sticks and care for our world – it is in our hands.

उपस्थास्ते अनमीवा अयक्ष्मा अस्मभ्यं सन्तु पृथिवि प्रसूताः ।

दीर्घं आयुः प्रतिबुध्यमाना वयं तुभ्यं बलिहतः स्याम ॥

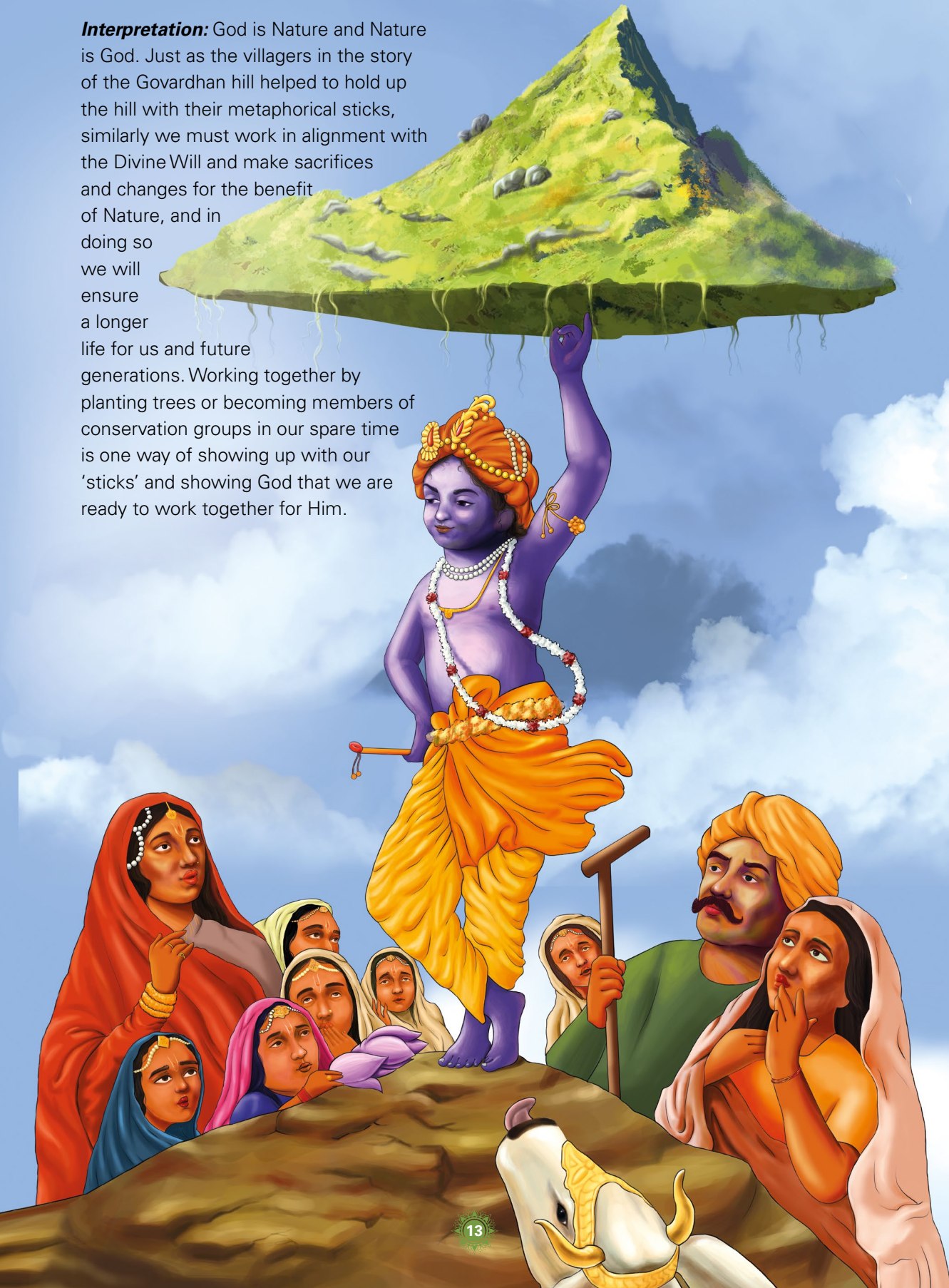
Upsthaastanmivaa ayksmaa asmbhyn sntu prithivi prsutaah  
dirghn aayuah prtibudhymaanaa vya tubhyn blihritah syaam

– Atharva Veda 12.1.62

**Lifestyle message:** All of creation is divine, we are to protect all life as it is God.

**Meaning:** We aspire to live long, our children too should live long and be free from sickness. We are reared in the lap of Mother Earth. May we have a long life provided we are watchful, alert and sacrifice our all for Her.

**Interpretation:** God is Nature and Nature is God. Just as the villagers in the story of the Govardhan hill helped to hold up the hill with their metaphorical sticks, similarly we must work in alignment with the Divine Will and make sacrifices and changes for the benefit of Nature, and in doing so we will ensure a longer life for us and future generations. Working together by planting trees or becoming members of conservation groups in our spare time is one way of showing up with our 'sticks' and showing God that we are ready to work together for Him.



# Lord Krishna Encounters Kaliya the Serpent

A vicious (naga) named Kaliya dwelt on the Ramanaka Dwipa (island) of the Yamuna River but fled the island out of fear of the Garuda (vehicle of Lord Vishnu), a celestial entity with features resembling both humans and eagles. Eagles eat snakes, hence Garuda was Kaliya's adversary. Kaliya came to Vrindavan and hid in a lagoon. The venom that seeped out of its multiple mouths boiled the water around him and killed any living being that came in contact with the contaminated water. It killed all the fish in the river, and even the trees and grass surrounding the lagoon were wilting from the effects of the poison – except one lone Kadamba tree on the banks that continued to live, thanks to the divine nectar that was sprinkled on it by Garuda.



## Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

The serpent in this story is considered to be a metaphor for the toxic pollution in the rivers and how it is necessary for all of us to eradicate those sources of pollution. Let us banish this pollution once and for all by being mindful of not pouring toxic chemicals down our sinks, and by disposing of waste properly in a bin – especially near our water sources! If our local areas are polluted, we should stop doing harm and participate in clean-up drives of cities and water bodies. It should be noted that religious waste and flower offerings placed in the river also contribute to raising waste levels.

Once, Krishna and his friends were playing near the river and as it was very hot they were all feeling very thirsty. Unaware of the toxicity of the water, they drank and collapsed seemingly lifeless.

Krishna naturally felt that he had to find the root cause of the problem. He climbed up the Kadamba (Burflower) tree. From that vantage point, Krishna could see the nefarious snake Kaliya sleeping in the middle of the river's water. He jumped into the waters making loud noises and creating so much disturbance that the water spilled a hundred yards over the banks.

Infuriated by the commotion created by Krishna, Kaliya immediately emerged to face the intruder. Kaliya pounced upon Krishna, striking him right in the chest and then coiled his gross and evil body around the delicate form of young Krishna.

Without warning, Krishna, the Supreme Mystic, started to expand His body, and quickly contracted His form so that He was able to escape from the deadly coils. Krishna then leapt up onto the hoods of the terrifying serpent and started a cosmic dance. He had assumed the weight of the entire universe in His tiny feet and almost crushed Kaliya to death.

At that time, the many wives of Kaliya arrived at the scene and pleaded with the Lord with folded hands to spare the life of their dear husband. Krishna recognized their sincerity and mercifully decided to banish Kaliya to move on to the great ocean never to return again. Kaliya begged, "I have taken shelter here in the Yamuna River because I am petrified of Garuda. He devours snakes like me. Since He is your Vahana, I know that he would never kill anything that lives in Vrindavan. If I am to make my way beyond this land to the ocean he will surely swoop down and kill me."

Krishna assured Kaliya not to worry about Garuda, "When he sees the marks of my feet on your heads, he will leave you alone." Krishna then touched all His friends and calves who were lying motionless on the river bank. Just the touch of His hand brought them back to life. Seeing that Krishna was triumphant, safely among them, the group became overjoyed. They praised Him over and over again for saving them all and the river from this toxic plight.

## Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

Lord Krishna banished Kaliya in recognizing that his stagnant presence was causing contamination in the environment. Kaliya demonstrated his fear of change through his unwillingness to move on due to the presence of Garuda. If we are to create positive changes in our world and environment, we must recognize where we are causing pollution in our lives - this is a representation of Kaliya - eventually we will have to suffer unless we are ready to make changes.

While change can be a challenge for us, it is with surrender and a will to become active and dynamic workers, and to clean up our habits and our world that we make life better for ourselves and all others in the long run.



Let us write a list of all of the sustainable and unsustainable actions we take in our lives and make a pledge with our families and communities to take corrective actions.

**Lifestyle message:** Water is the source of our lives, therefore we must keep it pure.

अप्सु अन्तः अमृतं, अप्सु भेषजं ।

Apsu Antah Amritam, Apsu Bheshajan

– Rigveda 1.23.248

**Meaning:** There is nectar in water, there are medicinal properties in water; so it is very important to maintain the purity and cleanliness of water, because the existence of not only living beings but the entire humanity is contained in water.

**Interpretation:** Kaliya Nag's presence caused the poisoning of the water source, which was responsible for taking the lives of many living beings and making the entire area inhospitable. Water is nectar, water is life. If we do not protect and preserve its purity, there is no doubt that much harm and sickness will befall many people and other living beings.

**Lifestyle message:** Let us keep our rivers and waterways clean, serene and pristine!

शुद्धा न आपस्तन्वे क्षरन्तु।

Shuddha na aapastanve ksharantu

– Atharva Veda, 12.1.30

**Meaning:** The purity of water is considered absolutely necessary for a healthy life, so do not let garbage flow into the water.

**Interpretation:** Just as in the story of Lord Krishna and Kaliya Nag, we ought to become mindful of our actions as they pertain to our relationship with water and our waterways. We must endeavor to make changes and create positive behaviours in relation to keeping our rivers and water sources healthy.



# Lord Rama Channelizes the Power of Nature

Born as the eldest son of Kausalya (first queen of Dasaratha) and Dasaratha (king of Kosala), Rama was the embodiment of the Supreme Brahman (cosmic principle of existence) and Dharma (duty). Prince Rama, the oldest of four sons, was slated to succeed his father as king when he abdicated the throne. However, destiny had other ideas. Keikeyi (Lord Rama's stepmother), began to selfishly desire for her son Bharata, Rama's younger brother, to become the king.

Under normal circumstances, the King would have prevented this request from coming true, but Rama's father Dasharatha had once pledged to grant Keikeyi any two desires she chose in appreciation for previously saving his life.





She argued that since Rama was about to be crowned, he should be exiled for 14 years instead, and Bharata should take over as ruler of Ayodhya.

The virtuous monarch, who had a duty to keep his pledge to his wife, made the decision to exile Rama with a heavy heart. Rama readily complied with the decree. He told his stepmother, "I will of course obey father's command." The nobleness of his character was further displayed when he said, "I would have gone, even if you ordered it." Rama, Sita (his wife), and Lakshmana (his younger brother) left for their 14-year exile in the wilderness as a result.

Many of these forests were home to sages. But these forests were often ravaged by demons who destroyed everything and occasionally even disrupted the sages' lives. All of the sages greeted Rama, Sita and Lakshmana when they arrived in the forest because they recognized their holiness and nobility, and provided them with fruits and nuts, while a thatched tent was constructed especially for them. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana made the decision to spend the night there after being pleased and content with this generosity.

However, the tranquilly of this greeting was short-lived, as a horrifying monstrosity suddenly appeared in front of them. It had a diabolical shape, with enormous bulging eyes and a gaping mouth, and a horrifyingly bloated and ugly stomach. 'Viradha' was the name of this dreadful, demonic beast. He was holding a Trishul (trident), which he would use to attack and seize prey. The sages in the forest were terrorized by Viradha, who also interfered with their revered rituals. In addition, Lord Brahma (God of creation) had given him a boon, making him an opponent that no weapon could possibly beat.

Viradha and Rama engaged in battle and Viradha's body was severely injured, yet he remained unconquerable. He maliciously wrapped Rama and Lakshmana under his arms and fled into the jungle, but Rama and Lakshmana suddenly cut off his arms, causing Viradha to fall to the ground, but he was alive! There was no solution despite these continuous efforts.

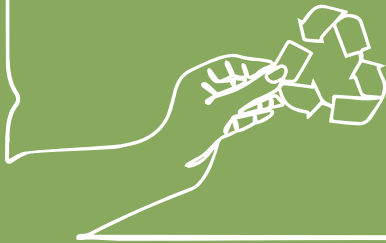
Finally, Rama and Lakshmana thought of a solution and buried Viradha by digging a pit. They filled the pit with enormous boulders, making sure it would never be moved again.

## Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

In this story, the demon presents itself as a malevolent force that may on face value seem as impossible to defeat in our lives – just as climate change and environmental degradation may seem to be. We may try to remove our negative behaviours or sources of pollution to no avail, however it is through our persistence, by trying new things and working together we are shown that we can and will succeed.

If we give up after our first efforts believing that we did all we can, we can be sure to not succeed. Just as Rama and Lakshmana demonstrated, it may seem that we have come up against an undefeatable adversary,

but there is always a solution and we must keep fighting on. Begin by thinking about the issues in your neighbourhood that cause unsustainability, choose one cause and begin taking regular action – persistence is the key!



In the life of Lord Rama, the forest is shown to be a wild place of mystery and challenges, and a deep place of spiritual transformation that naturally attracts the presence of saints and sages. It is through the trials of the forest and the transformative power of nature that Rama was able to return victorious. It can be said that the experience of the forest empowered and facilitated his governance of the nation, which brought equality and righteousness, enabling the golden age of 'Ramraja' to dawn.

Mother Nature is the school or academy where we can gain the highest knowledge. To this day, many significant and sacred temples and ashrams, including the beautiful Char Dhams, are in pristine areas rich in biodiversity and nature. These ashrams not only served as the earliest forms of education but were guideposts for families and elders to nurture their communities with human values and impart dharmic lifestyles to the inhabitants. Wisdom can be gained when we are in nature and are connected to nature.

# Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

Protecting nature is our duty; it is our collective responsibility. As Rama worked tirelessly to save the sages and restore righteousness and harmony, we too must protect, preserve and save nature from the clutches of destructive forces.

When we begin to have more experiences with Mother Nature, we learn that nature/forest is 'all giving' and something to be protected and preserved.

Connecting with nature from a young age helps in understanding and nurturing it. Let us encourage the formation of and participation in green groups and conservation initiatives (such as planting trees) for our children and youth to learn and become active protectors of nature on the weekends. Let us make efforts to visit natural places on our holiday periods to develop this relationship.



**Lifestyle message:** We are all interdependent, we are all connected, we are one family; therefore we must also work together.

अयं परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

Ayam nijah paroveti ganana laghuchetasam, udaracharitanantu Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

– VI-72 in Maha Upanishad which belongs to Samaveda tradition.

**Meaning:** Only ignorant people think in terms of me, mine, not mine. For those broad-minded ones of noble conduct, the whole world is one family.

**Interpretation:** The unity of all life is the fundamental principle of Hinduism. We are all related, interconnected, interdependent beings, and therefore reverence for all life and the practice of non-violence are the paramount ideals of Hinduism.

We are all one family. In our family we live together, we love together, we share together and we need to serve together. Therefore as we approach environmental issues, we must act to preserve and protect Mother Nature. If we don't, she suffers and our human family suffers. Just as in the story of Rama's life where He, Sita and Laksmana would constantly work together finding new solutions to overcome evil, it is our duty to stand up, work together and protect our environment for the benefit and wellness of all.

# Goddess Durga Defeats Mahishasura

Mahishasura was a monarch with a buffalo's head. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Brahma. After years of penance by Mahishasura, Lord Brahma was finally pleased by his devotion and offered him a wish. Mahishasura, possessed by his power, wanted immortality. His wish was to not be killed by "man or animal" anywhere on the planet.



After fulfilling his dream, Lord Brahma warned him that a woman will be the end of him. Mahishasura believed that there was no woman in the world who could cause him any harm. The legend continues, Mahishasura, high on the power of “immortality”, attacked Trilok (the three worlds of earth, heaven and hell) with his army. He even tried to capture Indralok (the kingdom of Lord Indra).

The Gods resolved to fight Mahishasura, but because of Lord Brahma’s miracle, no one was able to win the battle. Thus, the Gods sought Lord Vishnu’s assistance. After giving the problem some thought in order to destroy Mahishasura, Lord Vishnu chose to take on a female form as Goddess Durga.

Goddess Durga was the Supreme Shakti (power), the governing force of the cosmos. She then fought Mahishasura over a period of 15 days during which he kept changing his shape to become different animals to deceive her. Finally when he transformed into a buffalo, Goddess Durga stabbed him with her trident and that was the end of him.

# Lifestyle for Environment COMMENTARY

Goddess Durga defeating demon Mahishasura teaches us how we can overcome the darkness in the world caused by unsustainable lifestyles.

Mahishasura's behaviour towards Goddess Durga can be seen to signify egoism and greed, and a belief that one is bigger and greater than Mother Nature. Maa Durga here can be seen to represent spiritual elevation – Shakti (power) and Prakriti (nature), the divine feminine in the form of Mother Nature.

We can see the influence and destruction that comes in our society from the forces that Mahishasura represents. These negative influences can be felt within us personally when our actions don't match our environmental ideals. Mahishasura's shapeshifting can also be seen as our endless and insatiable desires that can lead to mindless consumerism. Let us return to more harmonious ways of living by reducing our wants and only using what we need.



**Lifestyle Message:** We should aspire to have healthy and harmonious lives inside and out.

आयुः सत्वबलारोग्य सुखः प्रीति विवर्धना : ।  
रस्याः स्निग्धा : स्थिरा हृद्भया आहाराः सात्विक प्रियाः ॥

Aayuah stvblaarogay sukhah priti vivrdhnaa  
rsyaaah snigadhaa : sthira hridhyya aahaaraah saatvik priyaaah.

– Bhagavad Gita Chapter 17 Verse 8

**Meaning:** The food that prolongs life, the food that gives strength to the heart, happiness and satisfaction, the food that makes life happy is loved by virtuous people. The foods which increase life, purity, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness (good appetite), which are savoury and oleaginous, substantial and agreeable, are dear to the Sattvic (pure) people.

**Interpretation:** Reducing our wants and overcoming the tamasic qualities that Mahishasura represents require us to look towards how we can live healthier and more harmonious lives, which can start by living in harmony with ourselves. Being disciplined by eating only pure and healthy food is one way to help us reduce our wants, to move from tamas to sattva, thereby helping to defeat Mahishasura in our lives.



# Tips for Holding Green 'Kathas'

In the quest to create environmental consciousness among the masses, it is imperative that while holding Kathas or any events we take steps to hold green events.<sup>5</sup> Organizing green events will help in exposing the masses and communities to how sustainable green events can be held and help them in making substantive changes and enhancing their environmental consciousness.

Simple actions can be taken to make Kathas green and clean, and these are easily replicable. One needs to understand that holding green events is not just environmentally friendly but also economical.



5. This resource guide is not limited to Kathakars or Hindu religion only. These points discussed can be used by anyone.

# Pointers to Hold Green Events



## Think Green! Green by Design

- \* Find ways to enable the congregation to participate in as many green actions at the Katha, and make sure they are aware that these actions are green.
- \* For example, make highly visible dustbins available to encourage the segregation of waste from recyclable material, and sensitize people on the importance of doing so.



## Plastic Reduction

- \* Stop the use of plastics in your Kathas and Bhandaras.
- \* Try as much as possible to make Katha completely single-use plastic free and inspire participants to understand the dangers of plastic.
- \* Inspire them to participate in a Jhola Andolan, using cloth bags instead of polythene when going shopping.



## Team Spirit

- \* Encourage a group spirit and shared responsibility by organizing clean-ups before and after the Katha.
- \* Inspire participants to understand their carbon footprint, making the sacred space where your Katha is being heard to be clean and green.



## Ensure Adequate WASH

- \* Ensure availability of clean, safe and sufficient drinking water stations for all participants.
- \* Ensure access to adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, especially for women, children and differently-abled.
- \* Provide facilities for the safe disposal of any hygiene and menstrual materials in the bathroom.



## Give Green

- \* Opt for green gifts and mementos such as plants, or items made from sustainable materials, or made by Self Help Groups run by women.
- \* Draw attention to these gifts and the benefits they give to promote these ways of living in our homes and communities.



## Plant a Tree

- \* Encourage celebrating our Kathas or events by ending with tree plantation, if that is possible and the season is conducive to tree plantation.
- \* Ensure to take a pledge to protect and nurture the planted sapling.



# Make Every Katha Green Katha

Intentionally incorporating messages of sustainable behavior into Kathas offers a powerful means to inspire congregations towards positive behaviour change. For faith events seeking impactful messaging themes, the following sustainable actions serve as a valuable source of inspiration. By weaving these actions into the fabric of Kathas or other events, faith leaders can effectively encourage their congregations to embrace sustainable practices and contribute to a more environmentally conscious world.

## Key LiFE Messages



### Keep Maa Ganga Clean

- \* Let us remember that the River Ganga is an embodiment of the Divine Goddess – a floating temple. Please keep her clean and pristine.



### Plant Trees

- \* Gift saplings to friends and family as Katha souvenir or as blessings.
- \* Plant trees and flowers in memory of Katha and Holi Utsav.



### Shop Green

- \* Use organic, non-toxic, household products, soaps, etc. instead of the toxic chemical versions.
- \* Carry your jute bags (jhola) when shopping instead of asking for plastic carry bags.



### Buy Vegetables Locally

- \* Shop at local weekly bazaars in your colony or nearby markets.



### Reduce Waste

- \* Always use reusable cutlery and plates or biodegradable alternatives, instead of non-reusable plastic items



### No Detergents

- \* Do not use detergent while washing clothes in any river or water body.



### No Plastic

- \* Make sure while making offerings to river Ganga or any other river that your offering is completely natural and biodegradable. In case your offering is in plastic, remove it and make the offering. Ganga is sacred and plastic will pollute it and kill its ecosystem.



## Recycle

- \* Reduce, reuse and recycle as much waste as possible.



## Reuse Paper Products

- \* At home and work, reuse items like envelopes, folders, files, paper clips, etc.



## Help Nature Thrive

- \* Keep one earthen pot filled with water on your roof or verandah for birds to drink when thirsty.
- \* Inspire through talks on Gau, Ganga (Yamuna), Gauri, Green.



## Save Electricity

- \* Turn off all lights and fans when you leave the room, and try to use them only when necessary.



## Fix Leaks

- \* Check and fix all water leakages in your home without delay, thus helping to save precious water.



## Save Water

- \* Turn off the taps whenever you are not using water, whether it be when you are brushing your teeth, washing vegetables or washing your car.



## Separate Your Waste

- \* Segregate waste at home; do not mix biodegradable waste with non-biodegradable waste (like plastic, wrappers, bottles, etc.).
- \* Leftover food can be offered to cows or animals, and the rest of the biodegradable waste can be kept for composting.
- \* Do not mix food waste with paper, plastics or glass, as this can harm and even kill animals who eat the scraps.



## Use Public Transport

- \* Avoid using your personal automobiles, like cars and motorcycles, for a day or two in a week.
- \* Use public transport, ride bicycles or walk as often as possible.



### Help Reduce Air Pollution

- \* Do not use fireworks during festivals. Fireworks create a lot of air pollution and are produced using child labour.



### Respect Public Places

- \* Do not engrave or paint on any monuments or heritage buildings; keep public places clean and green.
- \* Do not spit on roads or public places, and also educate others to not do so.
- \* Motivate Shram Daan in personal neighbourhood.



### Waste Less, Live More

- \* Do not throw waste from pujas in the river.
- \* Convert biodegradable waste like puja samagari into compost and recycle plastic and paper.



# Annexure

## Mission LiFE Messages

Energy Saved	
1	Use LED bulbs/ tube-lights.
2	Use public transport, wherever possible.
3	Take the stairs instead of an elevator, wherever possible.
4	Switch off vehicle engines at red lights and railway crossings.
5	Use bicycles for local or short commute.
6	Switch off irrigation pumps after use.
7	Prefer CNG/EV vehicle over petrol/diesel vehicles.
8	Opt for carpooling with friends and colleagues.
9	Drive in the correct gear. Keep your foot off the clutch when not changing gears.
10	Install a solar water or solar cooker heater on rooftops.
11	Switch off appliances from plug points when not in use.
12	Use biogas for cooking and electricity needs.
13	Keep the temperature of air conditioners at 24 degrees Celsius.
14	Prefer pressure cookers over other cookware.
15	Keep your electronic devices in energy-saving mode.
16	Use smart switches for appliances that are used frequently.
17	Install community earthen pots for cooling water.
18	Defrost fridge or freezer regularly.
19	Run outdoors instead of on a treadmill.
Water Saved	
20	Adopt cultivation of less water-intensive crops like millets.
21	Participate in recharge of rural water bodies through Amrit Sarovar Scheme.
22	Practise crop diversification. Move from rice and wheat cultivation to pulse and oil seed cropping system.
23	Use efficient water-saving technologies (like micro-irrigation, bunding, farm ponds, zero tillage, direct seeded rice, alternate wetting and drying and others).

24	Create rainwater harvesting infrastructure in home/schools/offices.
25	Use drip irrigation systems created with waste materials, wherever possible.
26	Reuse water from washed vegetables to water plants and for other purposes.
27	Pre-soak heavy pots and pans before washing them.
28	Do not discard unused stored water every time there is fresh water coming in taps.
29	Use buckets instead of hose pipes to water plants/floors/vehicles.
30	Fix leaks in flushes, taps and water pipes.
31	Use water-efficient fixtures for taps, showerheads and toilet flush units.
32	Invest in a water meter for your house to measure water consumption regularly.
33	Reuse water drained out from AC/RO for cleaning utensils, watering plants and others.
34	Prefer a water purification system that wastes less water.

### Single Use Plastic Reduced

35	Use a cloth bag for shopping instead of plastic bags.
36	Carry your own water bottle, wherever possible.
37	Reuse glass containers/packaging plastic items as storage boxes.
38	Participate in and mobilize participation for clean-up drives of cities and water bodies.
39	Prefer using non-plastic eco-friendly cutlery during gatherings and events.
40	Turn off running taps when not in active use.
41	Use menstrual cups instead of sanitary napkins.
42	Use recycled plastic over virgin plastic, wherever possible.
43	Use steel/recyclable plastic lunch boxes and water bottles.
44	Cut the packaging bags used for milk, buttermilk, etc. only partially to avoid plastic bits from mixing into biodegradable waste.
45	Opt for bamboo toothbrushes and neem combs.

### Sustainable Food Systems Adopted

46	Include millets in diets through Anganwadi, Mid-Day Meal and PD schemes.
47	Compost food waste at home.
48	Create kitchen gardens/terrace gardens at homes/schools/offices.
49	Prepare organic manure from cow dungs and apply to farms.
50	Prefer locally available and seasonal foods.
51	Use smaller plates for daily meals to save food wastage.

### Waste Reduced (Swachhata Actions)

52	Contribute cattle waste, food waste and agricultural waste to biogas plant (provided under GOBARDHAN).
53	Practise segregation of dry and wet waste at homes.
54	Use agricultural residue and animal waste for composting, manuring and mulching.
55	Recycle and reuse old newspapers and magazines.
56	Feed unused and uncooked vegetables leftovers to cattle.
57	Set printer default to double-side printing.
58	Repair, reuse and recycle old furniture.
59	Buy paper products made from recycled paper.
60	Donate old clothes and books.
61	Do not discard waste in water bodies and public spaces.
62	Do not let pets defecate in public places.

### Healthy Lifestyles Adopted

63	Encourage use of millets in food and indigenous herbs and medicinal plants for nutrition and well-being.
64	Prefer consuming natural or organic products.
65	Start biodiversity conservation at the community level.
66	Plant medicinal plants such as neem, tulsi, giloy, mint, curry leaves, ashwagandha, curry leaves, etc. within the household premises.
67	Practise natural or organic farming.
68	Plant trees to reduce the impact of pollution.
69	Avoid purchasing products/souvenirs made from skin, tuskers and fur of wild animals.
70	Create and volunteer at community food and cloth banks and at animal shelters.
71	Initiate and/or join green clubs in your residential area/school/office.

### E-waste Reduced

72	Repair and use electronic devices over discarding the devices.
73	Discard gadgets at the nearest e-recycling units.
74	Use rechargeable lithium cells.
75	Prefer cloud storage over a pen drive/hard drive.



