



# Mindfulness, Children and Nature



## Building Nature Awareness Skills in Romania

### Workshops with Ruai Gregory

The Neohumanist Education Association and AMURTEL Romania organized two workshops in Romania, September 21 -23, on Raising Nature Awareness in Children. The workshops looked at ways to nurture and reinforce children’s innate sense of wonder and fascination with nature, and how best to rekindle it in adults so they can model and integrate nature awareness and appreciation in their daily work with children.

Inspired by Richard Louv’s book, “Last Child in the Woods,” they examined the needs for outdoor time and experiences with nature for healthy development in children of all ages. Practices to maximize outdoor time and bring nature indoors, in order to enhance physical, social-emotional, and cognitive growth were also explored.

# Mindfulness, Children and Nature

### By Didi Ananda Devapriya

In our increasingly sophisticated and technologically driven world, many children are primarily exposed to discovering the world through the screen of a tablet, TV or computer. They become habituated to these highly concentrated doses of information and their young minds readily adapt and crave greater and greater stimulation. It is then no wonder that it becomes difficult for them to sit quietly, to have long periods of concentrated attention. We adults complain that ADHD has reached epidemic proportions, yet if we observe ourselves, many of us have become accustomed to being constantly available on our cell-phones, filling up the spaces of our lives while we wait in line, drive in the car, or go for a walk with checking email, messenger, Facebook, or making calls. How much calm, quiet spaciousness do we grant our own minds? How much do we flit rapidly from task to task?

Mindful time in nature is both antidote and medicine for this condition. The natural world operates in spontaneous harmony with its Divine source and thus exudes peace, beauty and truth from its very essence. Poets and artists throughout the ages find metaphor and inspiration in the natural world as it is a pure mirror of subtle, spiritual truth. Only human beings have the ability to choose consciously whether or not to act in harmony with their Divine nature or to ignore it. The rest of Nature is on auto-pilot. As a Zen teacher I heard speak once said, “Human beings are number one bad animal because human beings don’t know what human being’s job is.”

Most conscientious parents and teachers are aware that children need opportunities to spend time outdoors. However, if that time is only spent in playgrounds with rubberized or asphalted surfaces, playing on brightly colored plastic equipment, though the contact with sunlight and fresh air is beneficial, it is not truly contact with nature. Children, including adult children, need time to explore Nature in its pure and unadulterated form. To enter in contact with dense forests, rushing streams, magnificent mountains, peaceful lakes. To run barefoot in the grass, to enjoy sand and water, to dig in the earth, not only a sandbox, to observe worms and insects and wild animals in their own habitats. I love the vast parks in Bucharest. These green spaces are big enough and well populated with trees so that you don’t see or hear the surrounding city. They provide an invaluable oasis to an otherwise dense, concrete labyrinth. However, they are still artificially constructed environments that lack richly layered spontaneous ecosystems of the wild.

Even then, I observe that most families remain crowded together in the designated playground areas, rather than allowing their children to play with the grass, pinecones and acorn shells, rather than help them to make little boats out of bark and leaves to sail on the calm surface of the lakes.

Immersing ourselves in contact with Nature creates spaciousness in our thoughts and minds. When we gaze at white clouds drifting in the blue sky – our mind expands. As a child, I remember lying on my back in the grass for what seemed hours, watching in fascination at the shifting shapes of the clouds. When the mind expands, when there is spaciousness, then subtler qualities, like compassion, artistic sensibility and creativity can emerge naturally and spontaneously. When it remains tight and contracted, stress increases and our nobler qualities remain dormant, while qualities like irritability and impatience increase. This is true for both adults and children.

So when we spend time in Nature with children, if we allow ourselves to cultivate a quiet mind and open heart as we walk slowly and attentively, noticing our bodies and breathing, noticing the breeze and the sunlight filtering through the leaves, noticing minute details of patterns in bark and leaves, noticing cloud shapes and colors in the sky – only then will we be able to share and transmit this to children. Joy and wonder are contagious, and when shared they only multiply. When we cultivate our authentic sense of wonder by noticing such details, and then point them out to a child, the child will also share in our delight.

Nature is a great repository of wisdom, truth and peace – but to access these treasures, it must be approached with openness and stillness. If the mind is stuffed with information, restless with agitation and worry, even if immersed in the most tranquil and peaceful lotus garden, it will not be easily transformed.

We can develop the skill of learning to switch off that chattering stream of thought and to open ourselves to the full beauty of the present moment so we can experience the Divine Spirit that is all around us, awaiting our notice. Taking time to practice this awareness together with children helps to cultivate their spiritual sensitivity and enhances your relationship. There are specific meditative practices in yoga that can help to awaken and nurture this awareness – in the path of yoga that I teach, there is a practice known as “madhuvidya” which means “knowledge that sweetens”. Indeed, when we can slow down, open up and perceive the Divine in everything around us, life is filled with sweetness.

I now treasure the countless experiences with my father, who took me nearly every weekend, sometimes alone and sometimes with my siblings, on adventures in nature. Sometimes we rode out with bicycles through cranberry bogs, sometimes we drifted silently in a boat through a cypress filled swamp, sometimes learning to recognize deer tracks in the forest. We rarely spoke during those times, as my father was a very introspective person, but that silence is probably what helped create a predisposition in me towards meditation and enjoyment of silent spaces, not filled with words yet abundant in meaningfulness. Taking the time to be in nature with children is an invaluable gift – so much more precious than buying the latest tablet, clothes, or toys. It is a gift that creates lifelong memories and imprints the mind with a deep love and respect for Nature.

#### Also In This Section

- Download PDF and Content Issue 41 – January 2016
- Inside cover issue 41
- Knowledge and Goodness
- AMGK 25th Anniversary Conference Report – part 1
- AMGK 25th Anniversary Conference Report – part 2
- AMGK 25th Anniversary Conference Report – part 3
- Bio-Psychology – A Necessary Romance
- Evolving Intelligence: From atoms to higher organisms
- Why Neohumanism?
- What Makes Children Happy
- Ending Punishment in Our Schools
- ECE 25 Years Ago and Today
- Neohumanist Economy and Future Vision
- Focus Training at Lotus Project
- Indonesia’s Early Childhood Teacher Training Project
- Education and Child Protection for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
- Education Training – India (ETC) & Ghana
- AMGK Campus – Marshall NC, USA
- Ananda Dhara, Yoga Village
- Project Internship: SpiritShip
- Ending Unemployment Now: How to Eliminate Joblessness, Debt, and Poverty Despite Congress by Ravi Batra
- New York Sector – USA & Manila Sector – Indonesia
- Georgetown Sector – Venezuela & Nairobi Sector – Ghana
- Delhi Sector – India
- Berlin Sector – Iceland, Qahira Sector – Egypt & Suva Sector – Australia
- Yoga Adventure Camp for Teenagers
- Yoga Detox
- Back cover

<p>About</p> <p>About us</p> <p>Vision &amp; Objectives</p> <p>Philosophy</p> <p>Founder</p> <p>Headquarters</p> <p>Chancellor</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Bookshop</p> <p>Articles &amp; Papers</p> <p>Conference Proceedings</p> <p>Resources for NHE Staff</p> <p>Videos</p>	<p>Gurukula Contact Points</p> <p>Online form and general contact page</p> <p><b>North and South Americas:</b></p> <p>Ananda Marga Gurukula (AMGK) Inc. Arete Brim, Ithaca, NY amgk.glo@gurukul.edu</p> <p>Field Office Neohumanist College of Asheville Dr. Sid Jordan, President, AMGK Inc. Marshall, North Carolina, USA sidjordan1@gmail.com</p> <p><b>Europe, UK &amp; Iceland:</b></p> <p>College of Neohumanist Studies, Gamla Skolan, Ydrefors 598 73 Gullringen, Sweden.</p> <p>Ananda Marga Gurukula c/o Kohli, Aprikosgatan B1, Lgh 1001 Hässelby, 16560 Sweden 46+0702132237/+46-73-9525340 kulapati@gurukul.edu</p> <p><b>Indian Subcontinent:</b></p> <p>Ananda Marga Gurukula (Regd.) Dr. Satish Chander Kohli C-8/243 Yamuna Vihar, NE Delhi 110053 satishkohli1@gmail.com +91-9953101378</p> <p>Field Office: TT College, Anandanagar, P.O. Baglata, Dist. Purulia, West Bengal (India)</p> <p><b>Far East:</b></p> <p>Dada Shambhushivananda 99/129 Soi Annop Narumit Bangkok 10400 Thailand</p>
<p>Post Categories</p> <p>Newsletters</p> <p>Announcements</p> <p>Conferences</p> <p>Events</p> <p>Upcoming Events</p> <p>Articles</p>	<p>This website</p> <p>Sitemap</p> <p>Produced by iConsultancy</p> <p>Powered by Wordpress</p>	
<p>Participate</p> <p>Events</p> <p>Conferences</p> <p>Discussion Forums</p> <p>Associations</p> <p>Eco-Communities</p> <p>Volunteers</p>	<p>Website Policies</p> <p>Privacy Policy</p> <p>Terms of Use</p> <p>Disclaimer</p> <p>Cookie Policy</p> <p>Data Subject Access Request Form</p>	
	<p><b>MANAGE COOKIE PREFERENCES</b></p>	