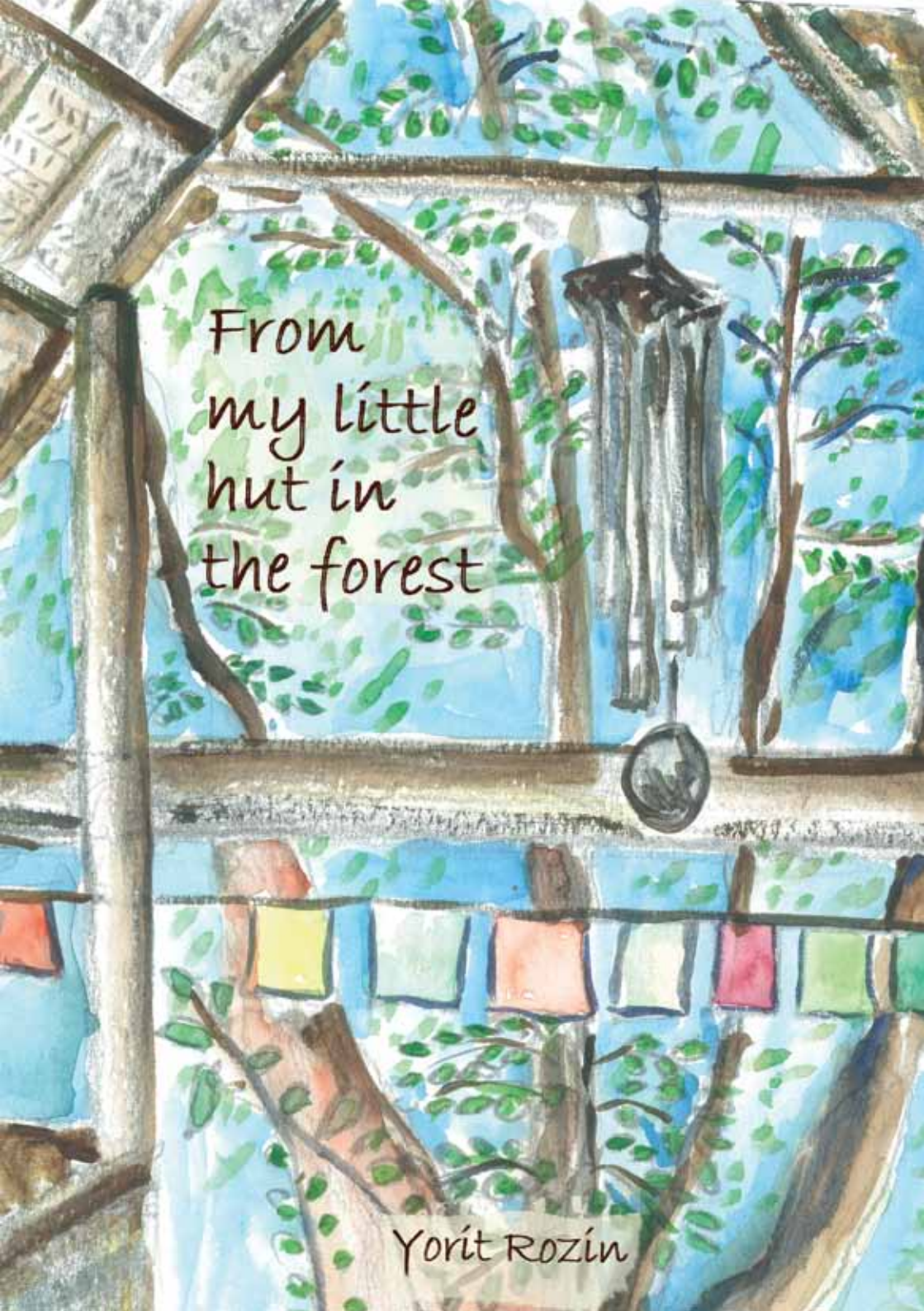




From
my little
hut in
the forest

Yorit Rozin



*From my
little hut
in the forest*

written and illustrated by
Yorit Rozin



I dedicate this book to my beloved family -
Aviram, Osher, and Shalev - who co-create this
meaningful life with me.

I hope you will enjoy reading this book.
Please share your thoughts with me at:

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Introduction

by Elizabeth Kamundia

Your enthusiasm and love for the forest for nature, shines through from the first page. It's a beautiful love story (with nature, family, volunteers and yourself!)

I love your attitude, your positive spirit – it is not that you claim that things are always easy, it is the way you meet challenges.

You make parenting sound like the best adventure one could ever take!

You express so clearly what it means to live one's life in accordance with one's values, and to try to do that not just when it's convenient, but all the time, as a way of life.

Elizabeth Kamundia is a disability rights scholar and lawyer



From my little hut in the forest

'From my little hut in the forest' is a collection of stories about my life in Sadhana Forest.

My name is Yorit. I grew up in a small city in the center of Israel. My parents raised me in an urban lifestyle very far from nature.

But whenever the first autumn rain showers came, I was joyously dancing in the rain.

In May 2002, my husband, our daughter and I

settled in Auroville, an international township in southern India. We were following our hearts, trying to explore different ways of living.

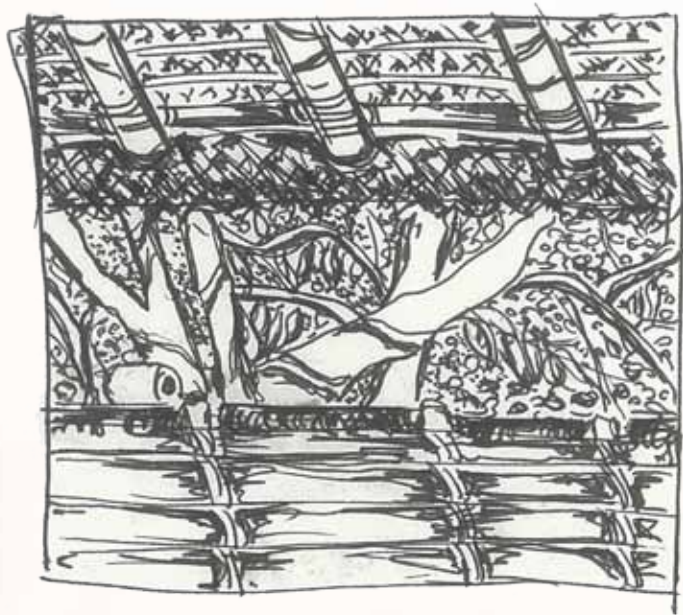
On December 19th, 2003 - we slept the first night on the land that would become Sadhana Forest. I will never forget that night. I was so excited I couldn't fall asleep. We were living in a scrap bullock cart with a roof made from coconut leaves. It was pure magic.

Sadhana is a word in Sanskrit, an ancient Indian language, that means a discipline undertaken in the pursuit of a goal or a spiritual practice.

We named the forest '*Sadhana Forest*' to indicate that living in and creating the forest is our form of spiritual practice.

This book contains short stories from our first 12 years in Sadhana Forest. I want very much to share these stories with you because many people know a lot about Sadhana Forest, but not everyone knows that there is a little family behind it all, simply living their lives.

Thank you



Squatting on the toilet early morning...

Squatting on the toilet early morning... This is one of my favorite moments of the day. Most of the universe is still in silence. Birds are talking to each-other.... bright and shining leaves are moving gently, spraying drops of morning dew... the lizards are chasing bugs in the grass... and I can feel the freshness of the air... My heart fills with peace and beauty... Looking to my left, the sun is peeping through

the trees. Looking in front of me, there is a beautiful picture of a thick forest....

Magical moment.....

I close my eyes and I open them, and then I close my eyes and open them again, and again, and again. I can't believe the sight in front of my eyes.....

This is a real piece of forest!!!

And I always was afraid that the trees would never grow!!!

Doors

Shalev was a small girl, maybe 3 years old, when we came back home after spending few days resting at Park Guest House in Pondicherry.

She had a request:

"Ima (mama in Hebrew), can you make us a door to our hut?"

"Mm... Interesting, why do you want a door?"

"I want to open the door and shut the door when I come home...I want to hear the sound of the door: 'Boom!' I want the mosquitoes to stay out...I want a door! Please, please Ima make me a door!"

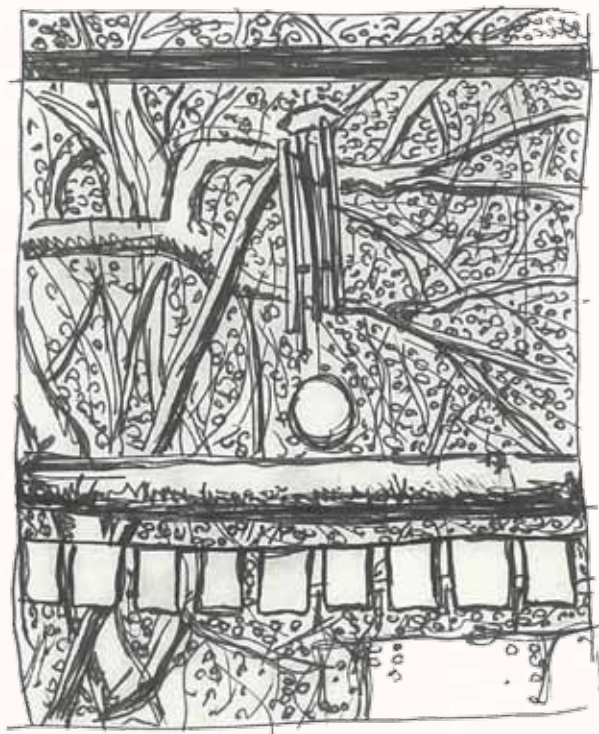
I paused. I needed to think about it. What should I answer this little one who simply wants a door to open and close?

"A door... mm....a door...."

I think I never gave her an answer. I didn't have a good one at that time. I thought she would slowly figure it out by herself.

In the end, Struggling lifting up and down the mosquito net of our bed ... Running like a rabbit in and out from the hut twenty times a day... turned out to be enough for her. She gave up on the idea of opening and closing a door and never mentioned it again.

Now when I think about it, I realize that one of the main features of our structures in Sadhana Forest is having no doors. We simply opened our house and never shut the door behind us.



Cyclone Thane

We received some warnings - a cyclone was on its way. So many times we had gotten these warnings and nothing had happened!! Aviram had to leave that evening. There was a conference in Kerala that he was invited to many months before. I told him not to worry, that it would be fine and he could go on with his plans. But still, preparations needed to be done, just in case it would come - Thane the cyclone. Aviram gave us some last instructions to follow, and we felt safe!



We decided that we would all move into the Training Dorm. The "training dorm" is our biggest hut after the Main Hut. It got its name because when groups of students are coming to stay and learn in Sadhana Forest they sleep on the ground floor and study up on the first floor. The hall upstairs is like a huge charming attic with a wooden floor made from something like bamboo. The lower part of the hut has 32 strong granite pillars and an earthen floor, and in between the pillars we have traditional village rope beds for volunteers to sleep on. It's a very sturdy structure. It would be the safest place in Sadhana Forest for 100 people.

Actually 104 volunteers were staying with us that day. At around midnight Niki came to our hut to call us. She said that the wind was getting stronger. We decided it was time to go to the Training Dorm. I wanted to stay in our hut where I felt safe. I didn't want to wake up Shalev from her sleep, but Osher preferred to be with everybody else. So I woke Shalev up. She was a bit confused... I grabbed two sleeping bags, an umbrella and started walking towards the

Training Dorm. It was a struggle walking from our hut to the dorm that night. What usually takes us two minutes, took us maybe fifteen minutes. Shalev in one hand, the umbrella in the other hand and me pushing against the wind and the rain. The path was completely muddy and slippery. The rain was doing a good job of soaking everything around us. Trying to stay balanced, I was dancing like a ballerina on the muddy earth ...

At one point I could not walk further. I was just standing in the same place, trying to go forward fighting against the wind and the rain... finally we reached the dorm. Everybody was already there, lying on the beds and on the earthen floor.

The beds
were all full,
so we had no
choice but to
find a spot
on the floor.
We found
a place next



to a nice mother and her two boys Lior and Shahar, who were staying with us at that time in Sadhana. Shalev went immediately back to sleep with no difficulty at all. She was a three-year-old who wanted to continue her night's sleep peacefully. Osher couldn't fall asleep at all, she was really excited. She was roaming around all night, helping out whoever needed help. The wind got stronger and stronger. It didn't stop for a moment. The rain got stronger as well and didn't stop either. Our hut was very strong but very open, really open! We got rained on, a lot. It was like being under the shower!

I was lying inside the sleeping bag with Shalev holding it up so the rain would slip off and we would not get wet. Suddenly, Shalev woke up and asked to pee. I told her it was better not to go out of her sleeping bag now because it would be completely wet after. Not to mention that to go out to the toilets which are only 100 m distance from the dorm was out of the question! Too far away in a middle of a cyclone. But she insisted, she cried that she had to

pee!!!

Knowing the result of this move, feeling helpless, I took Shalev out of the sleeping bag to pee in the corner of the hut.

Of course we couldn't go back to our sleeping bag. It was completely wet!!! We got wet as well, so wet and cold....Shalev started crying. The other mother, Yally, made a space for us on their bed and invited us to join them. Being very thankful for this invitation we squished into the bed (2 mothers with a 13-year-old boy, a 10-year-old boy and Shalev). We were not on the wet floor any more, but still we were quite wet because of our peeing adventure. And on top of being wet the wind made us shiver... I took off one of my shirts that was half dry and dressed Shalev with it... She was still cold and unhappy. She was crying, wanting to go home!...Suddenly from nowhere Osher came with a dry blanket: "Hey Ima, look what I found, do you need it?" I wrapped Shalev with the blanket and in two minutes she went back to sleep. After that I didn't move an inch for many hours. There were maybe

three or four more hours of rain and wind. The wind became like a violin soloist, reaching higher and higher pitches...the conductor had left and it was playing by itself. It sounded like the symphony would never end, it got stuck on repeat ...

Shalev was sleeping on my lap, my back was hurting, my legs as well, I was cold and tired. All these hours I was sitting in silence, surrendering to the situation, waiting for the morning to come.

While sitting with Shalev on my lap, some information started coming to my ears.

"We lost a hut! And another hut!"

My heart had stopped for a moment! Wow! Damage! I didn't think in those terms until that moment.

After an hour it continued,

"we lost one more hut, and one more hut...."

"What are they doing there outside?"

"It is dangerous!!!"

"Don't roam around! We will see the damage in the morning! It will not run away!"

"We lost 11 long-term volunteers' huts"

My heart was dropping. My goodness so much damage! up until a few days ago, there had been twenty of them. (20 private huts of the managment team of Sadhana Forest).

Now only nine were left standing.

One of the boys who was with us on the bed was nervous as well. He was a bit afraid of this unexpected situation he had gotten into. He was just traveling with his mother, not really looking for 'adventures'.

Suddenly, like in the fairy tales, someone came and distributed hot tea to all... They were incredible, our team, they were making tea in the middle of this storm...They were supporting each other so beautifully (104 people...)!!!

After a while in the middle of this storm, between the drumming of the rain drops and whistling of the wind a sweet sound came to my ears...The sound of people 'Om-ing'. The Om sounded louder and softer, louder and softer...It continued for some hours.... I was meditating on the relaxing

sound, waiting for the storm to be over!

At 8:00am the wind became quiet. It had stopped!!!

Finally after six hours or more it had stopped!

Everybody left the dorm except for me and Shalev.

Shalev was still sleeping, not really noticing that something had happened the night before.

I had to move and stretch for a bit, my body was paralyzed and aching... I really needed to pee...

I tried not to wake her up... I was gently moving my arms and legs, until I couldn't sit without moving anymore and with a heavy heart I decided to grab Shalev and move us to the Main Hut. It was not easy to go back to the Main Hut. The same path I was struggling on the night before was again a challenge. We had to hop over some trees that had fallen down and jump over little puddles.

The sun was very bright. I opened my eyes wider and wider... and looked around myself into the new reality of Sadhana Forest.

We found a dry spot in the old part of the Main Hut and rested for awhile. Then, I was looking for Osher... found her, she was completely O.K.!



Shalev woke up with her usual smile.

We called Aviram and talked to him quietly on the phone.

I tried to stay calm, to show the girls some confidence ... Everything was good!

But...actually everything was different!

There was a lot of mess... a lot of mess...

my GOODNESS !!!!

There was a lot of MESS!!!

It was very quiet, so so quiet...one could hear the sound of a snail. Some people were sleeping, some were cooking breakfast... It was 2 days before the end of 2011.

I took my accordion and started playing.

I was peacefully sinking into the sounds of my accordion... The sun was shining, the trees were bright and clean, fresh air entered the tip of my nose... It was a beautiful new day. I decided to make a journey to my hut and get some dry clothes for me and for the girls. Shalev insisted on joining me for this trip. The walk to our hut was so much fun for Shalev. Climbing up on the

broken trees, falling into water holes, removing branches which blocked our path...

Finally we reached the hut. I was shocked!

It wasn't a pleasant scene at all! It was quite a disaster! Wow! There was not even one thing that had stayed in its place. No! Actually this is not true, luckily our books, on the side shelves, were completely protected. I couldn't believe it. I was so happy to find my photo albums and my favorite books safe and dry. I was looking for dry clothes. Many of them were scattered on the ground, outside of the hut fully wet and muddy, but I managed to find a few dry pieces. I put the stuff in a big bag and returned to the main hut. The sound of the gong came to my ears. It was breakfast time... In a strange way it didn't sound like the everyday breakfast gong. It was different this time. We knew that we all had the same secret to share. Everybody entered the Main Hut and sat quietly. It was a special moment. We felt like a big big family, a family of 104 people, caring for each other in a very beautiful way.

No one was selfish, people were thinking all the time how to help and support each other. We counted the dry bed sheets that were found in the dry cupboard. We had only 75 dry sheets! But we were 100 people. What should we do? (4 volunteers left for Pondicherry, the nearby city. They needed a hot shower. But then it turned out that they couldn't have hot showers since there was no electricity in Pondicherry for many days after the cyclone).

Everybody wanted a dry spot to rest after the hectic night. With a lot of collaboration many people doubled up and slept two in one bed with one sheet, adjusting happily to the situation.

Suddenly Osher asked innocently:

"It is a Friday night today, Eco Film Club.

Should we screen the movie?"

Actually we were in quite a good situation compared to our neighbors. We had electricity from our solar system, we had water to drink, water for cooking... we were very very lucky, we felt super lucky.

Afterwards we found out that there were places in

Auroville which didn't have water and electricity for almost a month. Later on we realized that all the roads were completely blocked.

After the morning breakfast, we scattered around the community taking rest. Most of the people were sleeping, dreaming... processing the events of the past 24 hours.

In the evening the phone rang:

"Yorit, how are you doing? We were trying to get a hold of you the whole day... The phones didn't work until now... Are you ok there? Is anybody hurt?"

It was our friend Kaarthikeyan on the other side.

Once I had met him when he was hiking in our forest. The next day he came and volunteered with us for a week. Then I found out that he is a neighbour from the other side of the big road.

"We are ok! Nobody is hurt!!!! 104 people are all fine. Some damage to the huts, actually a lot of damage to the structures and a big big mess."

"Please come over!!! At least you and the family..."

"How? It is not possible... The road in the forest is completely blocked! "

"Ok, wait I'm coming! "

Click!...He hung up the phone.

Some pillars in our hut moved, and I decided to spend the night in the Main Hut with some other people. The girls were very excited about this decision! It was just a big slumber party!

After two hours, around 21:00 pm, (my girls were already sleeping, but the others were still tossing and turning in their beds) I heard somebody calling my name. I got up to see who was there . It was dark outside. I came closer to the steps and I saw Kaarthik with another guy standing at the foot of the steps. Their arms were open and they were looking at me with a smile:

"That's it, the road is clear now!!! Come home!!!"

I had tears in my eyes....

"I will not come because the girls are already sleeping peacefully, but take the other families, they absolutely need some comfort tonight."

I sent a bunch of people with Kaarthik - a French family with two daughters, an elderly couple on their second honeymoon, a delicate Parisian lady and the two Israeli boys with their mother.

The Main Hut was silent now...I closed my eyes and went to sleep. The next morning, we got a phone call from the people that stayed the night in Kaarthik's House. They were all super happy... They enjoyed the beautiful welcome and hospitality they had received. The phone was ringing again. It was again Kaarthik on the line:

"Tonight is New Year's Eve, 31/12/2011, I would like to invite you and all the volunteers to come and celebrate the New Year with us and sleep over".

"Are you sure???? Do you have space for everybody?"

"Yes, yes!!!! You just come! All of you, come, we will have a peaceful celebration together for the

New Year."

I passed the invitation on to the rest of the group. They were all surprised and happy. They were not expecting to be able to celebrate this particular New Year.

There was chaos everywhere. We were cleaning all day... it felt good to clean... preparing for a new beginning, understanding that a new phase was starting and that we were very fortunate to take part in it.

I was sure we would continue cleaning for a long time... it would not be a one day process. It would be done, slowly but surely.

At noon time....Aba came home...!!!! (Aviram) we covered him with big hugs and kisses...we were all so happy. Now we could cry, we could loosen the belt... He would take charge... I could go to sleep for some time...

In the evening, after we all rested, we packed a small bag and made our way towards Kavadi, Kaarthik's house.

It was a magical evening, very peaceful and

harmonious....

We were all together waiting for
the New Year to come,
wondering what this
New Year had
to offer...





Gift economy

Noam is suggesting: "Let's do a massage circle. We will sit in a circle and give a massage to the person in front of us and receive a massage from the person behind us".

Amítai makes his comment: "This is exactly Gift Economy! You give to one, and receive from another!"

I comment as well: "Yes! You are right! You got the idea of Gift Economy!"

Amítai: "You see?! We are fast to learn!"

* (Noam, Amítai and Ishai came with their parents to stay for a year in Sadhana Forest as volunteers.)

After identifying a good spot for a new dam...

Avíram and I were taking a rest in our hut.

Avíram was sitting on his red sitting hammock and I was in my usual spot on the long hammock.

Avíram:

"The idea of the dam is excellent !!! It is exactly what we are missing in that part of the forest."

Me:

"Yes I agree, but how are we going to pay for that? It is a huge project! You know that our account will be empty next week...? No budget, forget about this for a while...or forever?"

A moment of silence, no one spoke. The atmosphere was a bit heavy... we were looking at this nice idea slowly vanishing...

Avíram:

"Don't think like this. With your pessimistic thoughts it will never happen... think positive!"

Silence again...

Avíram:

"We should trust the universe...."

Just as Aviram said those words, a woman's voice came from behind the curtains.

The woman:

"Hello...guess who is here...?"

We both were looking at each other trying to guess.

No idea!

Again the voice came...

The woman:

"I'm here...!!!"

The woman jumped from behind the curtain with a big smile on her face...

The woman:

"Tada!.... Here I am!!"

We were completely shocked and surprised:

"Wow, we don't believe it... What are you doing here

Teresa? How are you dear? When did you arrive?

Was it a long trip from Canada?"

Teresa pulled out an envelope from behind her back and put it in Aviram's hands.

"This is for you guys! I have collected this money for you in one night at this restaurant where I used to work. It is a very popular place. I told my

customers that today they are donating money for a forest in South India without asking any questions! They had no other choice! And here it is... \$3000 for you... for the forest."

We were looking at each other like we were going to faint...Is this real??? What a coincidence that Teresa appeared exactly in this moment of despair. It looked like part of a movie. No one will believe this!

We gave a loving hug to Teresa with tears in our eyes, feeling like such lucky guys...

Aviram:

"You couldn't have come in a better moment than just now!"

Me:

"Thank you Teresa, welcome back."

The gong for lunch was heard...

The three of us walked towards the Main Hut hugging each other with huge smiles all over our faces.



Me:

"How can anyone believe our stories when our life sounds like a legend?"

We were all laughing strongly... Knowing that legends do exist.

All my friends are always in my heart
 They are with me where ever I go
 When I'm away I always miss them
 But I will always come back,
 that I know

The biggest thing in the world, is the world.

Shalev Anandi Rozin

March 2014, at the age of 6



Who am I?

I am a creature
one with nature

I am a being
that exists and does not

I exist in my energy
but you humans cannot see me

I blend in with the sky
And fly up really high

My hair flows
My hair glows

The light of the moon
The light of the sun

Brings the energy of peace
to every single one

Who am I?
I am the creature after man!

Osher Shantí Rozín
April 2015, at the age of 14

§§§

"You didn't erase their signatures."

This is what Anandi my friend told us about the way we are raising our daughters.

§§§



§§§

Osher is complaining that she doesn't have enough hours to sleep. Busy lady, my beautiful teenager....

So Shalev answers: "no problem we just need to make a phone call to the moon and ask him to make the night longer."

§§§

Bicycle ride

Shalev and I were going on our weekly bicycle ride. While crossing the forest, Shalev started a conversation.

Shalev:

"You know Ima, when I am older, I want to cycle every day, do yoga, dance and eat good food!!!"

Ima:

"Wow! This is great!"

"Are you happy now Shalev?"

Shalev shouted:

"Yesssss! And I love everybody - even the thieves and the one who does bad things... I love everyone!"

Ima:

"You know Shalev, if you never stop doing whatever it is that makes you happy today, you will always stay happy... Remember that, it is very simple."

I was smiling to myself thinking about my daughter...



We continued our ride through Morattandi village
(the village close to the main road)....

The kids were calling towards us:

"Today function in Sadhana Forest?"

We answer:

"Yes! Please come"

They were talking about the open stage we have
every Wednesday after dinner. I thought that it
would be nice to have our friends from the village

with us tonight.

Ima:

"Shalev, where are we going now?"

Shalev:

"To Koot Road, we will make a round..."

Mama, can we go to the Pink Temple?"

Ima:

"Why not?"

We crossed the blue tollbooth, and rode on the big road. We cycled carefully concentrating on the traffic; each one was in her own world. The people were looking at us - giving smiles or expressions of surprise at this picture of the small barefoot Shalev on the bicycle. On the way, Shalev was greeting everyone:

"Wanakam.... Wanakam" (Hello in Tamil, the local language)

Some were answering; some were smiling.

Two ladies were giggling and pointing with their fingers towards Shalev.

At the Pink Temple the priest welcomed us, giving

us some flowers and blessing us with a small puja (ceremony). He put two colors of powder on our face between our eyes, one was white and one was red. Embracing the blessing, putting our hands on our hearts we said: "Wanakam" and went to grab our cycles.

"Soon it will be dark... We need to be back home on time for dinner."

Again hopping on the cycles, the mother with the barefoot child, we crossed the last village before home, Chinna Patanur.

The kids were shouting at us:

"Hi... Yorit! Wanakam ... Hello... Yorit ..."

It always makes me happy to hear the children call my name. I feel they are my friends.

One more sandy patch and.....

Bursting through the gate... Parking the cycles ...

Taking a deep breath.... We are home at Sadhana Forest.

'Open Stage'

Max was playing a nice song at 'Open Stage' evening....

It was a rainy day... Everybody was singing along... A big cockroach landed in front of Max...



Max was really surprised; he smiled at the cockroach... And continued singing... We all laughed a gentle laugh... Together with the rain.



Sharing

While washing our lunch plates at the washing station, Shira, a beautiful girl, was sharing her story with me.

"All my life I had this allergy - my nose was always dripping.

And guess what? - for the first time since I can remember -it's not!!!

Can you believe it??? I don't know what has changed? But no dripping anymore. Since I entered the gate of Sadhana Forest, it stopped!"

She continued:

"You know, I don't know if this story is related;

one month back I twisted my foot. It was in Rishikesh. I had enormous pain. Even now I have this pain. But what you don't know is that I'm a dancer!

Nobody here knows! Nobody can recognize it, because I cannot show it. I cannot dance now."

We reflected a moment and then I offered her my observation:

"I think that your nose is not dripping anymore because of your foot. You can be yourself now. No shows for the moment! The mask is gone, and with this... the stress of being on stage all the time. No stress....no dripping nose!"

"But I want my foot back... And I want to dance again... But I don't want my dripping nose."

"I believe you will find a new way of dancing. A dance that comes from within, a dance that will help you to be your true self, the beautiful Shira, without the dripping nose."

She told me: "Don't push!!!"

She told me:

"Don't push!!! Don't push!! It's not there yet"

But it was pushing strongly ... And ploop...

In one push it was out!!!

It was a girl...a baby girl.... We already knew what her name would be: Shalev Anandi.

The hut was full of jasmine and roses that Nadav had brought earlier in the day. I knew already in the morning that the baby would come that day. Seven years ago it started exactly the same way with Osher...even the same timing of delivery, two weeks earlier than the expected date. I was looking at Shalev, I was looking at Aviram, I was looking around me. There were many more people in the hut. I was crying. Osher came and gave me a hug. After a minute all the volunteers came. They were standing behind the curtain and around the hut, singing to us:

"Deep inside my heart
I've got this everlasting light
It's shining like the sun
It radiates on every one
And the more that I give,
the more I've got to give
It's the way that I live
It's what I'm living for"



Stepping out of Sadhana Forest

It is always a challenge to step out of Sadhana Forest. We know that we are stepping out of our comfort zone and challenging our values.

The first challenge is: Garbage. After being used to separating our waste, it is very difficult to look at others mixing all their garbage together. Once I had decided to collect all the garbage during a long trip to the Himalayas. All the plastic bottles, all the plastic bags...I wanted to collect whatever had been used on the way, even the newspapers of the driver. I made everybody crazy; I didn't let anybody throw anything out of the van.

The car looked like a recycling center.

The garbage was all over us, till we almost didn't have space to sit.

After collecting lots of material, I started to create these plastic creatures out of our garbage, and hung them in the car.

Still today we have some of them hung in our hut.

They are looking at us smiling, reminding us of the Himalayan journey.

The second challenge is: Toilets. In India we have learned a completely different way of handling ourselves in the toilet. First of all, we don't have a seat, we have a hole. Actually, in Sadhana Forest, we have two holes: one for pee and one for poo.

This design is called a 'dry compost toilet'. We call it 'dry' because instead of flushing our waste away with water, we mix it with sawdust so that it will decompost into fertile food for our trees.

This method enables us to use all our human waste as fertile food for our trees. The second component in our toilets, which we copied from the Indian culture, is not using toilet paper. Instead of using paper, we wash our bums with water. This water and the urine from the toilets are treated naturally in a reed bed and used for irrigation.

Of course this matches well with growing a forest. My girls were more or less born into this habit of squatting on the toilet and using water instead

of toilet paper.

Whenever we used to visit some other countries with different toilets, it was always an issue! First of all, we would always find them squatting with their feet on the toilet seat itself. Now... it is not simple at all to pee in this position. So often they used to miss and wet the seat and the floor. Secondly, what are you supposed to do with the toilet paper?

Once, when Shalev was around two years old, she held the toilet paper and took it for a tour around my mother's house.

If you wanted to find Shalev, you could follow the toilet paper to its end.

Today, these happy days with the toilet are finished. The children are bigger now, and they know how to adapt themselves to various cultures around the world.

But... they are always happy to go back home to their familiar compost toilet! And so are we!

Shanthi

Today an Indian girl came back to Sadhana Forest, a very sweet girl.

"Do you remember me?"

I was asking myself for a moment to remember.

She was giving a few more details and my memory came back to me:

"Yes, yes of course! How are you? "

"Good?! And you?"

"Yeah, good."

"Can I talk to you for ten minutes?"

"Sure! Let's go to my hut..."

While walking to my hut I had already figured out what story I was going to hear.

"Please come, have a seat....yes I'm here to listen, please tell me..."

"I have run away from home! I can't believe myself that I have done it, but here I am! I had a big fight with my parents and I couldn't stand it anymore. My father wanted me to stay in my room and not to get out... I decided that I am fighting for my freedom today. He was really upset!"

"Is it connected to your boyfriend? Is he in New Zealand now?"

"Yes, he is. Yes, it is. He told something to his mother and the information went the wrong way. It got to my father's ears and sparked this fight. You know the same thing happened before with my ex-boyfriend. He was Muslim, and my father didn't approve of the relationship. But now we are even from the same caste... And I checked seven generations back to see if there is any relation between the families and if any problems can occur, and there is nothing! But still the society is the one to decide about our life. My parents cannot detach from the society! Why???? They are

good people, but why do they behave like this?"

"You know, there is nothing and nobody to blame, not them, not you... This is what they know. They are doing the best for you.... They have sent you to England to get a good education but didn't think about its cultural influence on your personality. They have to understand that you are their creation. They cannot blame you for who you are. The way they have raised you, the way they have talked to you... Or shouted at you... The places they have sent you to... This is you. You cannot take responsibility for their behavior. It belongs to them."

Shanthi:

"There is always this thing with the photo... When I was 10 years old, I found a photo of my parents and I had torn it completely. I made maybe 100 little pieces out of this photo. I don't really know why. Maybe because my sister was born at that time and I was upset?"

"Of course! And you turned your anger toward your parents and not to your sister, which was great because she was only an innocent baby. It is very understandable that you were upset with your parents, who were completely yours until your sister was born and then you suddenly had to share them with her. You were missing them and upset with them, and this was your way to say it."

"Yeah! But they never understood it that way.

They became obsessed with this torn picture.

Yesterday my father took every card that I have given them in the last 10 years and did the same.

He broke them into small pieces and threw it in my room. I was shocked!!! Who is the child?

I decided it can't continue! I'm getting free! I have no friends, no money... I took only the necessary things to survive and I came here. This is the only place I could think of that I would be received with no judgment."

"You made the right decision!"

"I want to stay here if it is possible until I will find a job, and I will pay you back for my food..."

"What are you talking about? First relax, don't think about anything! Are you hungry? Do you need more clothes?"

"I took the minimum. I didn't want to take anything bought with my father's money!"

"Come, I will get you some of Osher's clothes, let's find a place for you to sleep... We will take it day by day. Don't think about tomorrow...."

"I can't believe that my life is like a Bollywood movie...!!!"

"I don't believe it either. Now I'm part of your movie too!"

Later that evening, I told Osher about Shanthi, the

girl from Bangalore, who had been here with her boyfriend Vishnu just a month ago:

"She is here. She ran away from home."

Osher:

"What??? Really? Is she ok? Did you give her Rescue Remedy?" (Rescue Remedy is a blend of five Bach Flower Remedies especially beneficial when you find yourself in traumatic and stressful situations)

"No, you are right! I should go now and give her some."

I took some Rescue Remedy and I was looking for Shanthi. I found her talking on the phone...

"Who is that?"

"I'm talking to my father."

"Are you serious?" I whisper to her.

She whispers back.... "It's ok."

"I want to give you some drops. Open your mouth.... It will relax you and take out all the shock from your body and your mind."

She opened her mouth like a little girl. I put the drops in.... said goodnight and went to sleep.

We met the next day at lunchtime. I sat next to her on the bench and asked her how was she doing.

"My father is on his way to Sadhana Forest."

"What?!"

"Yeah we had a really good conversation, especially after you gave me these drops..."

What are these drops? It was like magic!

I was relaxed and the whole conversation took a great direction. He apologized for everything and was very soft and kind towards me. I called today and he told me that he is on his way to Sadhana. I asked him why and he said that he was worried that I had no money.... So he decided to come and give me some money."

At lunch time I saw an elder Indian man sitting next to Shanti, looking at her with warm eyes. It was her father. Shanti seemed relieved and happy.

After a few hours, Shanthi came to see me. She had a smile and looked very pleased. I already understood that she was going back home. The runaway episode had come to its end.

"He promised to go to therapy.... And we will take it easy, step by step... I will never in my life, as long as I live, forget this place. You were there for me in the most difficult moment of my life... I was not alone!"

"We will remember you as well ... Sadhana Forest is always a second home for you."

We hugged each other, feeling very safe... Shanthi entered the car... and as the car drove slowly and disappeared in the forest, 24 dramatic hours have ended.

Silent Meal

Today we had a silent meal. No talking during the meal. It was Shalev's request. I found it wonderful, but I have learned that it was a challenge for many of the volunteers. Some people were really reluctant, some people liked it.

I wonder what it brings up?

Maybe some childhood memories of scary parents who want their children to eat quietly not saying a word around the table?

For me it is a very powerful moment to be silent as a group while eating. Eating becomes more present in more aspects. It leads to many places which were unknown before...

The ones who really enjoyed this silent moment were Mushka and Shalev. Mushka was a two-year-old volunteer, who stayed with her mother in Sadhana Forest. She came back after two years. She was the second baby after Shalev to be born in Sadhana Forest.

This silence was her stage. There was nobody to



interrupt her or bother her. She had her solo on the stage. Shalev joined her happily and together they were playing without words for almost an hour... Only body movements and faces full of expressions. From time to time Mushka was calling her mama: "mama!... mama!" to make sure that she was paying attention to her. They were dancing, jumping and running around and into other people's arms. Everybody's eyes were on them... People enjoyed the lively flow in the silence... I hope that this silence helped us to hear more!

How do my daughters pee?

There used to be moments in the day that caught all the volunteers' attention....

It was when our daughters needed to pee.

Both were always naked all day long. They didn't like the feeling of having any clothes covering their bodies. They liked to be without clothes all day (actually we would dress them up just before going to sleep at night to not be cold).

While playing, they were too lazy to go all the way outside of the Main Hut when they needed to pee, not to mention going all the way to the toilets!

So... they would hang like monkeys off the edge of the Main Hut roof and pee outside in an arc, enjoying the freedom of life.

It was always a very funny moment that made people smile while watching them.

I always asked myself:

"Why? Is it because each one of us secretly wishes to pee like this?"



Moments in the forest...

Shalev and I were walking around the compound. It was early evening and the sounds of the night had started to be heard. We were sitting behind the main hut on a log.... looking up to the sky. The color was purple... We gazed silently around us, becoming one with nature.

It was a peaceful moment when nature was penetrating our hearts. Our eyes landed on a tree. It was the Neem tree...the auspicious healing tree of India, and there in front of our eyes...there was... not one, not two, not three but four!!!

Four beautiful owls sitting next to each other on a branch.

It was a family! Mother, father and two kids.... Shalev and I looked at each other with big open eyes without a word, not believing our good fortune. We sat with them in silence until it got dark....



I was sitting with a friend on the pool steps talking bla bla... while two-year old Shalev was playing around us. Suddenly we heard Shalev in a deep voice singing Om.

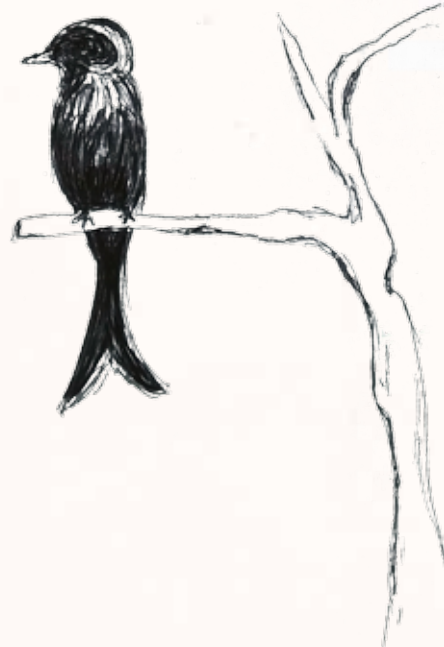
Following the voice, we found Shalev sitting in the small empty pool with closed eyes "Om-ing" with a smile.



Today we had a visit ... Many children and parents from Auroville came to spend some hours in Sadhana Forest. At the end of the visit, one of the boys told his mother:

"This was the happiest day of my life!"
We felt ... WOW....And very happy...

When Shalev and I went for swimming in the pool, we used to watch the birds. We had noticed one special one, a Drongo, a beautiful black bird that was always sitting on the same branch of the dead tree opposite the pool. Every day while playing in the water we would stop for a moment to look for our Drongo. It became our friend. It didn't disappoint us ever. It was there every day looking at us from its high spot on the tree, greeting each one of us in silence....



One of the places Osher loved the most in Sadhana was the mud pool. When we used to come back home on our moped, she always asked to stop at the mud pool at the entrance.

She took off her clothes and ran into the water, without stopping or hesitating for a minute. She liked so much to play and swim in the water, but what she liked the most was to cover herself all over with mud. She used to put the mud on every part of her body, including inside her mouth, and then come out of the water, making a monster face.

With the monster look, all covered with mud, she would walk into the community and roam around the whole day...

Only her big brown eyes were peeping out from the mud mask with lots of jolliness!



Swami's phone call

One week ago, when I was already in my bed, when the girls were falling asleep and Aviram was giving a talk in the Main Hut about Sadhana Forest values, my shiny yellow phone rang....

Brr..... Brr..... I answered ... On the other end was Swami.

Swami was our first watchman. He came with us to the land when the land was completely empty. His real name is Kupusammi, but everybody calls him Swami.

"Yo..rit, good evening... emmm."

"Swami? Is it you?"

"Yes! Swami! Night watchman not coming. Balu calling. Aviram answer no."

"One minute, I didn't get it..."

Then Swami trying to speak more slowly...

"Night...watchman...coming...no! Aviram..."

calling... answer no! Balu calling... answer no...
Swami calling Yorit!"

"Oh, I have got it!
You tried to call
Balu or Aviram to
let them know that
the night watchman
is not coming today?"

"Yes, yes."

"Do you know why?"

"Watchman eating Sadhana food... He like too
much!!! Eating eating no stop eating... After
stomach problem...After hospital going!"

While telling me the story about the watchman
over eating, Swami started laughing so strongly
that I couldn't stay calm and joined his laugh,
trying not to wake up the girls...

It was so funny... And Swamí was repeating himself again and again...

"Watchman eating...eating too much...like Sadhana Forest food too much!"

(And just for your knowledge, most typical local people will not always be so enthusiastic about brown rice and dal?!)

I tried to finish the conversation... but couldn't stop laughing, while Swamí on the other side of the phone couldn't stop laughing either!

"Ok Swamí...no problem. I'll see you tomorrow morning, good night."

Swamí was trying to say "goodnight" with his mouth full of laughter. The next morning, on the side entrance of the Main Hut, Swamí's eyes met my eyes... And... we couldn't hold it!

We started laughing...looking at each other made our laughter even stronger... While writing this story for you I'm also laughing remembering Swamí's description of the new watchman overeating... And it's not only about having a good joke! It's about a moment of unity and joy!!!

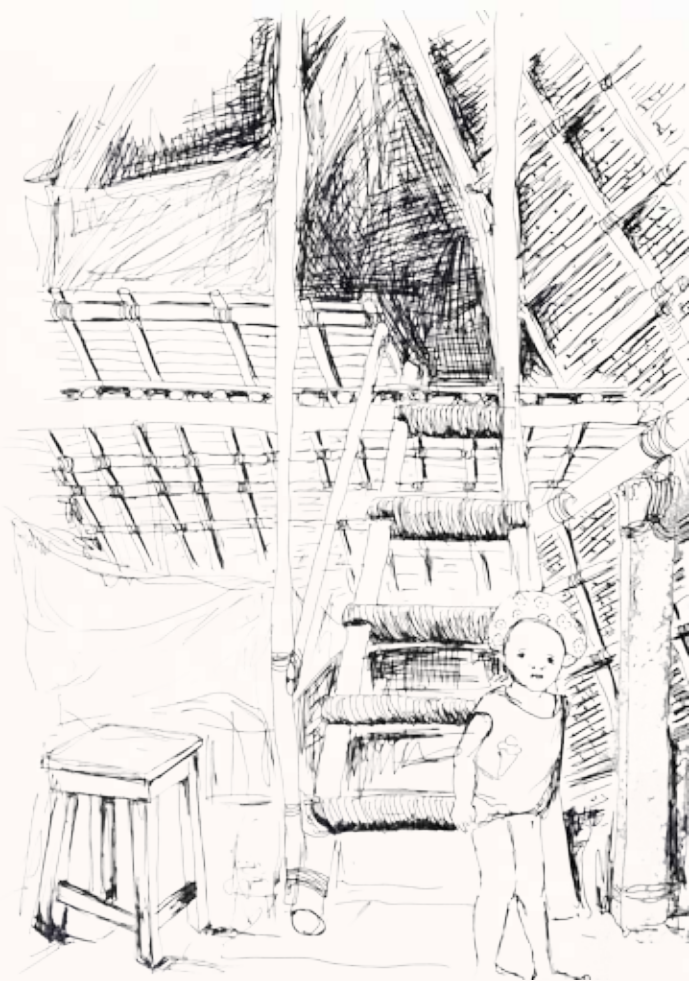
Olga was sharing with me a moment that happened yesterday...

Olga went to the toilet and asked a friend to look after Mushka. Somehow after two minutes Mushka walked out of the Main Hut looking for her mother without anybody noticing she had disappeared. Olga came back from the toilet and looked for Mushka... But no Mushka...

Olga was a bit uncomfortable. She called for Mushka again and again, looking for her everywhere around the Main Hut....no Mushka! Trying to follow Mushka's steps, a bit anxious, Olga roamed around Sadhana... She found herself walking to the hut next to the toilet. At the entrance of the hut in front of the curtains she found two little pink shoes with flowers standing next to each other nicely (Lily's shoes, Mushka's four-year-old friend's shoes that Mushka was very fond of!)..... And inside the hut, behind the curtains, Olga found Mushka standing and crying: "Mama, Mama" She was turning around

in all directions looking for her Mama...

This was the hut where Mushka was born. It was her first exploration by herself of Sadhana Forest. The two-year-old Mushka brought her mother to the spot where they had met for the first time in their lives.



More Beautiful Moments...

Osher loved having her bath in a bucket.

I used to fill the bucket with water from the hand pump, and ask somebody to carry it out of the kitchen, sometimes with Osher in the bucket.

After finding a good spot for a bath, there between the plants, there was another unique plant growing, playing in the water.

It was always a joy to watch this moment....



When I used to walk with Shalev to the mud pool, for such a small child, it was always a long journey. What would usually take adults five minutes took Shalev and I half an hour at least.

We would stop next to every tree and stone... sit with them, talk to the plants and to the ants. Then just before reaching the mud pool, there was a nice sandy area where she liked to sit again and play with the sand. Our trip was supposed to end with swimming in the mud pool, but it didn't always happen. The journey was a big part of the mud pool

experience. Shalev taught me to give significance to every step I take....not to ignore the way itself, thinking only about swimming at the end of our journey... She taught me to look to the sides, to open my eyes, perhaps something somewhere was happening just under our nose that had a message for us.



How long have you been here?

One of the things I like to do is to pretend that I'm a new volunteer.

When I meet a new person and start a conversation, usually it is near the dishwashing station...

"Hi how are you? What is your name? Where are you coming from? Nice! Do you like India? What do you do back home?"

The new volunteer is happily answering all these questions...

And then the conversation is turning towards me.

He wants to know more about who I am, the one who is bothering him with so many questions.

So he starts asking:

"What is your name? Where are you from?"

And I answer:

"My name is Yorit."

"O.K."

"I'm from here!"

"Oh... What do you mean? No, no, where is your native place, where are you coming from originally?"

"Ah, Israel...."

"How long have you been here?"

"Mmmm....soon 11 years...."

"What do you mean? 11 years???"

They make their surprised question mark face...
and continue:

"So...11 years? Wow! That is a long time.

How long has this place existed?"

I answer:

"11 years..."

"So.... (fast they are making a calculation...)

Wait, are you...? Oh... Sorry sorry for not realizing that you are one of the founders...

Are you one of the founders of this place?"

I smile and answer:

"Yes I am. It's O.K. there is nothing to know....."

"Oh... You have created a beautiful place, thank you for hosting me in your home... Thank you!"

"You are most welcome!" I answer and smile...

It is nice to feel like a fresh volunteer from time to time...

It keeps me young, and lets me get close to the new volunteers.



Amitai performing on 'Open Stage'

Yesterday Amitai came back to Sadhana after two weeks in Thiruvananthapuram, a holy city not far away from Sadhana Forest.

He missed Sadhana too much. Shalev asked him:

"Who did you miss the most?"

He answered:

"The mud pool and you!

I missed calling you Cutie..."

Last night he was eager to perform on 'Open Stage'. He couldn't wait for his turn. Shalev was the first to perform. She put on her shiny dress, makeup and decorations, chose a nice piece of music for Bharatanatyam dance and danced her own style.

It was a spectacular performance. She was dancing with the rhythm, smiling to the audience and giving us a magical moment of divine presence. When the performance was over, Shalev ran to my arms in a very shy way, and hid inside my clothes, not to be seen.

After Shalev, finally it was Amitai's turn.

He took two guitars and looked at the audience with no fear at all!!! He smiled his mischevious smile, bowed to the audience and said:

"Thank you thank you...."

He took a pillow, sat on it with a great pose, looked at the two guitars, trying to decide with which one to start with.

He took one, wanted to tune it...

But then everybody was shouting at him:

"No no... Already tuned!"

Convinced by the public, he took the blue one and started to play random sounds with so much passion. We were all listening carefully, enjoying the flow of the sounds and the presence of Amitai on the stage. He was looking like a big star!

He gave the show and we were all really enjoying the music and the play of a young spirit showing us that life is being on the stage at every moment...

And we are all stars!!!

4:44

Sometimes in the middle of the night, or at the beginning of the morning when I wake up,

I need to know what the time is, so I can

calculate how much more time I still

have to sleep until the alarm on

my phone will invite me to

start my day...and...

today the time was...4:44

Isn't it magic?

I felt it was!

I decided to wake up before

the phone had the usual

dialogue with me

and started my day

writing about this

moment followed

by the sound of the

birds having a

peaceful discussion.



Tom

Shalev loved Tom. He was her best friend. Shalev was two years old and Tom 20 years old.

One day Tom asked to talk to me privately. He was very shy and quiet. He needed to tell me something that happened:

"Yesterday Shalev came and asked me to take her to the toilet. I was so proud of myself! Shalev trusted me enough to take her to the toilet. Feeling very happy I followed Shalev. She was running so fast... I had to rush to keep track of her. She opened the door of the toilet and disappeared. I went after her, opened the door of the compost toilet and....

I found Shalev hanging inside the poo barrel... barely supporting herself with her two little arms.

Immediately I pulled her out, washed her....

And she did her 'business'.

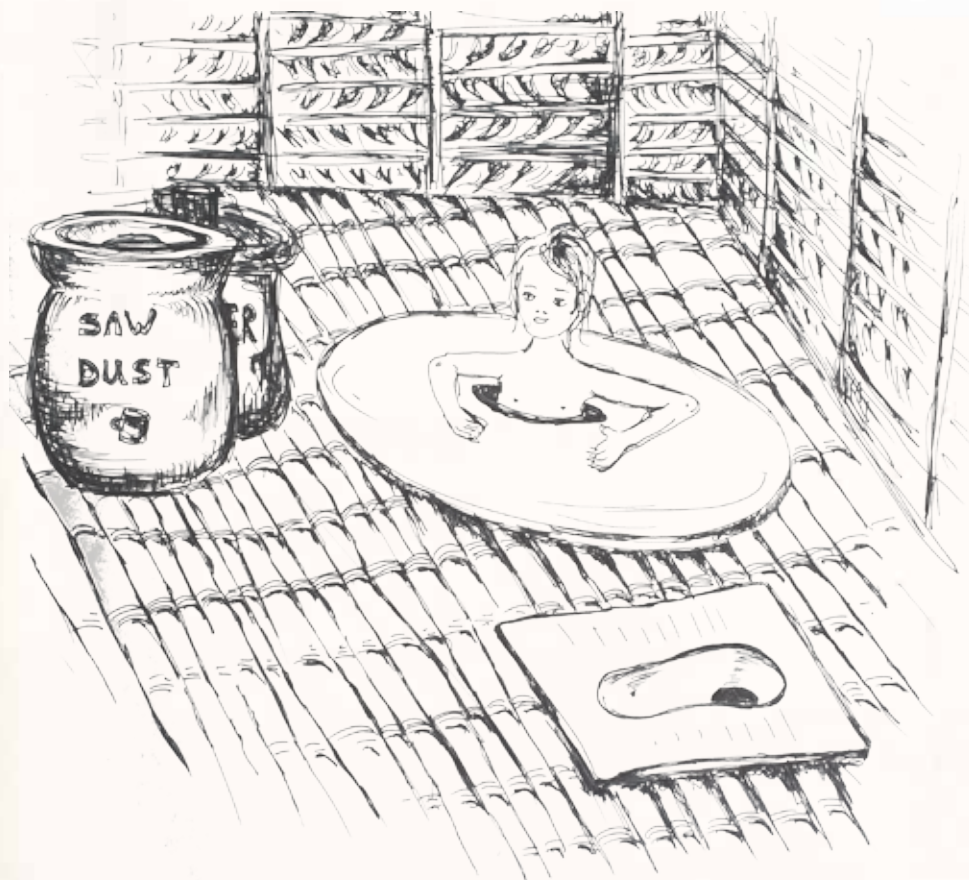
I felt so embarrassed and stupid, my first trip with Shalev to the toilet and I messed it up big time!

I'm afraid she will never trust me again to take her to the toilet."

I was laughing while hearing the story, imagining the picture of Shalev holding herself up with her two little arms. I wish I could have had my camera in that moment.

I trusted Tom completely, and I told him that I was sure that Shalev would continue to trust him as well.

"But.... pay attention next time in the toilet!!!"



Today I went to give the rest of the saris we distributed yesterday in the Tamil New Year to the widows of the neighboring villages. On the way back, I saw Naga Raj, Elaykia's brother...I came back home and wrote this story:



The story about Elaykia

Banu, Saraswathi, Sudha and Sangita came recently to visit Osher. They are all now fully grown up...beautiful young women, around 20 years old. They brought the young children of China Pattnur, the nearby village. The children were so happy to play in the Main Hut, to jump on the trampoline, to swing on the saris which are hung from the roof beams all the way to the floor,

to laugh and have lots of fun. (A sari is a piece of clothing worn especially by Indian women. It consists of a long piece of thin material that is wrapped around the body.) Osher was having a chat with the big girls. The girls were talking in broken English and Osher answered in broken Tamil. Overcoming the language barrier, you could see the love and the flow in the communication between these girls, how close they are to each other.

As children, they used to spend endless hours playing together, making food, putting flowers in Osher's hair...Every holiday, as the day started at six o'clock in the morning, they entered the gate of Sadhana Forest and at six o'clock in the evening they went back home. They have spent the whole day with us unless their mothers would call them to help find a missing cow or for some other help that was needed.

When I looked at the girls recently, I felt lots of joy and happiness. I understood the idea of human

unity....But then I had a moment of grief.
I was missing one!

Elaykia was one of the girls... Big black eyes full of wisdom, always kind, always smiling, helping, playing peacefully....She was the group judge, saying what was right and what was wrong, defending the small children! She was always leading and guiding all the children in a quiet respectful way...She was beautiful!!!

We were not there when it happened. At that time we were visiting our family in Israel. We came back home ... and Elaykia was no more. No more beautiful little girl who smiled, danced, sang, and cooked the dosa...no more the little girl who, when I would say: "Thank you Elaykia!", would answer: "No thank you!? We are friends!!"

It was summer time. The kids were playing in an open water tank. Elaykia jumped in, and her head hit a pipe in the water.

She lost her consciousness and drowned.

We were missing her a lot!

We are missing her a lot!



Elaykia's death changed Osher, Banu, Saraswathi, Sudha and Sangita.

Some innocence was gone forever. On the other hand, a strong bond between these six little girls was created. Each one of them will carry a piece from this childhood for the rest of their lives.

More about Elaykia

After writing the story about Elaykia, I realized that I wanted to give a sari to Elaykia's mother for the Tamil New Year.

I went to Koot Road, the nearby town, with the kids and bought a new sari. On the way back we stopped at Elaykia's house. They have a small 'paka' house now. 'Paka' means proper, strong. It means no more traditional natural house from mud and coconut leaves, but a house built from bricks and cement, the dream of every family in the village.

The mother came immediately. She was surprised and very happy. She was alone in the house. She went to the other room, brought a plastic chair and made me sit on it as an honored guest. After a minute she brought a bunch of recently picked peanuts, still covered with mud, and offered them to us. I stood up and handed her the new sari.

She was smiling, moving her head from right to left saying thank you. I was smiling too doing the same with my head. I returned to the chair and



have continued feeding the children the peanuts. My eyes were traveling around the small room. I saw a picture on the wall, above one of the doors. Her face was covered with flowers. I showed the kids the picture of Elaykia and told them the story about her death.

Suddenly the mother disappeared again to the other room. After few seconds she came back holding in her two hands a picture of Elaykia that we had given her after the incident. We had framed a picture of Elaykia and wrote some words in her memory in Tamil. The mother showed me the picture and started crying. I stayed frozen in my chair and started crying as well. I held the picture in my hands....I couldn't remove my eyes from Elaykia. She was so beautiful! We took this picture in Sadhana, on one of her many visits in the summer holiday, the same year she passed away, just before we left for the visit to Israel. Noam, the big, sensitive, beautiful boy, got up and hugged Elaykia's mother. He hugged her like he was her own son... Amitai and Shalev were a bit

uncomfortable and asked to leave...

Finally I got up from the chair with the picture in my hand, and hugged Elaykia's mother. We were crying together for a while, until we felt peace in our heart... Looking at her eyes ...

I said "wanakam" (the greeting word in Tamil).... stepped out of the house, jumped on the bike and drove back to Sadhana Forest.

A Visit from Israel

Two months before my due date, my mother came to visit me in India. I was so so pregnant ...my big belly was protruding before me and to satisfy my cravings I gave my mother a list of my favorite foods from Israel to bring over. Osher was so happy!!!! Grandma would come for a visit.

Osher loved grandma visiting her in India.

I asked Arumugam, our best friend and the taxi driver who gives his services to Sadhana Forest, to bring my mother from the airport. Osher and I prepared a nice board in Hebrew:

"Welcome Grandma"

It looked like this:

ברוכה הבאה



In Hebrew grandma is Savta. Savta was so happy to be back in India. Savta loves everything about India, especially the people, the streets, the trains, the ashrams and the food! (And of course Sadhana Forest. She is in love with Sadhana Forest) She even dreams about one day moving to Sadhana Forest in India for a part of the year.

Going back to food - whatever we ate in the restaurants she ate as well and then asked for the recipes:

"Wow I must make it for your papa at home. Get me the recipe please."

We decided to go on a small trip to Ananda Ashram in Kerala. Aviram and I had wanted to go there for maybe 6 years, ever since we landed in India. We felt it was the ideal place for us, because Osher in Sanskrit means Ananda (bliss in English). Finally it was going to happen.

We started our journey on the train. It was the first train journey for my mother in India. She was so excited! We wanted the real experience, so we bought second class sleeper tickets. The journey was a lot of fun. It was lovely to spend some time together, and not in anybody's house. There was nice harmony most of the time, except for maybe one small clash between Aviram and my mother.

(You must have a little bit of action, no?

Especially between a son and a mother in law?!).

In Ananda Ashram we were singing all day:
"Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram"

It was a very unique experience for all of us.

Looking at Osher walking round and round all day with Savta, singing Om Sri Ram was quite a scene!!! If my father would have seen that, he would have been sure we had all gone crazy!!!

One afternoon between singing and more singing, we played a pantomime game.

Everyone, at their turn, acted in pantomime and the rest needed to guess what the other person was doing.

It was Aviram's turn. He sat on the bed opposite to us and started making funny noises...

We all looked at each other asking ourselves what was he doing??? He continued... more moans and shouting ... more strange faces...after some time we got it, my mother and I, but Osher not yet.

We let him continue... Osher was shocked. She was staring at him, asking herself what happened to her dad? Being with Aviram already for 15 years, at that moment I understood him very well.

Aviram wanted to prepare Osher for the home delivery that was about to come. She was going to be part of the whole scene. It was better for her to have an idea of how deliveries usually look, what was going to happen more or less.

Finally I shouted:

"You are having a baby!!!"

Aviram answered with a shout, like he had just had the baby:

"Yes!!!"

We were all laughing... Osher was confused:

"Is it really like this?"

"Yes it is."

We all answered seriously together.

The Ashram trip was wonderful. But like every good thing, it ended and it was time to go home. After a few days, my mother went back to Israel. We were crying as we said goodbye....

After two months, the baby came with a surprise ... Two weeks early..... I guess we were all well prepared and ready to receive her.



Water

We had just finished building the big dam inside the forest. We were very lucky. Just one day before the rain came, we completed the work. Everybody was so proud. The dam looked strong and sturdy! The biggest dam we had built so far in Sadhana Forest. I was so proud of this dam because I was the one who spotted this location in the forest.

One afternoon we were walking alone in the forest, Aviram and I. It was so lovely to walk between the small trees trying to imagine the big forest that would grow in 30 years ... While walking around, I had noticed that there was a space to build a dam between two little tiny hills in the forest:

"This will be a great spot for a dam."

"Yes!" Aviram said, thinking it was a brilliant idea.

I was very satisfied with myself for observing this potential. (Usually it was Aviram observing such things).

We asked Balu to organize the JCB (a bulldozer) and it came true... A few days in the hot sun, moving earth from here to there, Osher at 5 years old, sitting with the JCB driver Balu giving instructions to go right, go left and...our new dam was done.

Nice work!!! The dam looked great. It was a nicely built dam. After a day, the rains came, just on time!!!

The mud pool we had created, started to fill up.

More rain came ... and more rain came...

And more rain came...

We were observing the rain filling up the pool slowly. It was a big pool but apparently it filled very quickly. The amount of rain was unpredictable, and it was a lot. We didn't expect so much water in such a short time. We knew that we would have to

follow the rain and do some studies on our new dam, to learn how it behaves and how we should go forward, but this was running too fast. The rain didn't stop and the pool was too full. We started to be stressed about it. The day passed by, and the rain was knocking on the door... "Let me in"...

Aviram understood that we must do something fast. He called all the volunteers to come and help to dig another overflow... Otherwise we were afraid that the water would break the dam and Sadhana Forest would be flooded. Everyone with a pickaxe in their hands was running in the rain to dig and open an overflow. They were all digging so strongly, digging and digging without taking a break for a moment, working against time. It was a long way to run... the volunteers were working so hard that the salty water of their sweat was mixed with the fresh sweet water of rain drops...the sun went down. It was dark already ..

"One more effort, we will do it..."

We encouraged each other to keep on digging.

People were very tired but full of intentions to open

the overflow. I could hear the sound of the pickaxe hitting the soil:

"one two three, one two three."

We were dancing the rain waltz...

until we did it!!!!!!

We opened the overflow!!! Water was gushing through the newly dug trench and the level of water in the dam started going down.

The risk was gone.

A big sigh of relief was heard, a scream of joy and happiness.

It was an important lesson that night...

Mother earth was directing us, showing us the way...

We had learned to listen, to obey and to surrender to the voice of nature.

The Baby Is Coming

It was three weeks before the baby was supposed to come. There was a nice lady in the community. She had come from Australia the week before. I came to know she was a midwife. As with every midwife, she was attracted to my big belly. We became friends and we shared many things about babies, deliveries, motherhood ... It was really nice. After a few days, she approached me and offered to make for me an ancient American Indian ceremony in the next few days, before the expected baby was supposed to come, a blessing for the mother and for the family that is going to receive a new baby. I was very touched and accepted this offering. Our role was only to set up a time and to follow... so we did. She organized all the rest. The day of the ceremony arrived. I knew nothing about how it was going to be!!! It was all a surprise for us. We had dinner in the Main Hut, which was just a piece of shade net held by a few posts, and immediately afterwards she called everyone to follow her.

I was the first to be led by her, and following me were Aviram and Osher. We started walking towards the entrance...being led by a candle light path.

Behind us was a big snake made of human beings, maybe 70 people, making their way quietly in the dark forest.

We went along the road towards the front of the mud pool. When we arrived, there was a fire waiting for us and a comfortable place for me to sit with my huge belly. The rest of the group made a big circle around the fire and everybody sat quietly. The midwife greeted us all and explained how this evening was going to be performed and what the meaning of the ceremony was.

We started the circle with each one of us introducing him/herself, and the names of all the mothers she/he can recall in her/his family, as many generations back as one could remember. The idea was to connect ourselves with the universal mother, the mother who gave birth to all of us. Then we got a tea kettle to pass among us,

except for me. The group had to pour very hot water in the palms of their hands, with the intention of sharing the delivery pain that is supposed to be there during delivery. Each one who was taking a bit of the pain would make it easier for the mother. After a while, she asked Osher to comb my hair and Aviram to massage my feet, as a symbol of their dedication and commitment during delivery time.

I enjoyed every moment of that evening.

It was magic!!!!

I felt so special. There was so much love towards me, the baby and my family...

I got a gift... a mobile made out of branches. On the mobile, many little things were hung that each person made by himself. It was the most beautiful gift I have ever received. It hung in the main hut for many years after, until slowly it decayed completely.

In the last part of the ceremony, everybody was called to come closer and make a tight circle around us. Aviram, Osher and I were sitting in

the middle of this small warm circle, feeling very peaceful.

We closed our eyes, and many hands were touching us all over and whispering in our ears beautiful words. It sounded like one big Om. Wishing us blessings... sending us energy of love and light.

It lasted for some long minutes...

We all felt so blessed with the Divine presence and with the power of the community.

Om



Again Doors

It is an issue now...

We have a teenager who wants to go to her room and shut the door!

How can we do that?

We need to be creative now!

To find a solution... She wants her space, without her annoying parents, without her annoying sister. She is dreaming about rooms with doors...Shutting doors one after another.

We live in a hut... Beautifully open to nature.

No walls, no doors! The life in the hut used to be flowing like the wind that went through.

I remember the first night sleeping in our hut.

I thought I was in a dream... I was so excited and in love with the space we had created. I felt like a princess in a forest palace. Throughout the years, our hut got different shapes according to the growing needs. After one or two summers, we realized that the space downstairs was too hot...

So we moved to sleep up in the loft. We enjoyed more wind... Then we realized that the volunteer community was growing and we needed another space just for being apart from the Main Hut that served everybody... So we extended the balcony... then Osher needed her own playroom. Her playroom was in the main hut, and she was always sharing everything with everyone... That was her first request for privacy! Then I was pregnant. I needed a toilet and a shower in my hut. Until then we had to run quite far to the toilets... Then Shalev was born, we had to extend our family bed... Then Osher grew up and was asking for her own space... Now she was asking for a door!



Our family is growing... with the trees... And our needs keep changing. Osher hasn't gotten her door yet. I think the next step, whenever she is ready, would be a small separate hut just for her, not far from our hut.

Hopefully we will continue to observe the forest growing with our life within it and be creative in finding solutions...



I was thinking more about the meaning of security.
And this is what came to my mind...

Security is the ability to feel the joy of life.
To see the beauty in every moment, in all moments,
especially the difficult ones!
To embrace life as it is.

Nice afternoon

Nice afternoon. I am washing some dishes,
listening to one of my favorite singers- Matí Caspí.
He sings in Hebrew, my native language, a song
called "On the Hot Summer Nights".

It sounds like this:

Under the strawberry tree in the village
we sit and talk,
We read a book with an old smell
we close our eyes in silence
Nothing else happens
in these hot summer nights,
under the strawberry tree in the village
we sit and talk.

מתחת לעץ התות בכפר
יושבים ומדברים,
קוראים בספר בעל ריח ישן
עוצמים עיניים ושותקים
שום דבר אחר אינו קורה
בלילות הקיץ החמים,
מתחת לעץ התות בכפר
יושבים ומדברים.

As I am listening to the words of the song,
I understand some facts about life and nature.
I would like to share them with you...

We live in cycles: moon cycles, woman cycles, life cycles, season cycles- autumn - winter - spring - summer. Every time of the year has a different energy. We are different in our energy in the different seasons...

Today I realized what is the role of every season. Autumn and spring are the production seasons. The weather is the best to be active, to think



Swami and Osher

properly, to sweat and to work!

Cold winter and hot summer are the slow seasons.

The slow seasons are the time to stop. To sit next to the fire... To sit and talk under the tree....

To do nothing... To regenerate our body and soul...

To tune in with nature... Just to be!

We, the sophisticated human beings, manipulated nature for our 'benefit'. Now it is not cold

anymore in winter, because we are heating our

bums... Now it is not hot anymore in summer...

because we are cooling our brains.... We made a

perfect world that we can live in and function

without stopping!!!!!! Nonstop!!!!!!

A few days of vacation... Flying around the world...

Shopping... Running from here to there...

Exhausting our souls...

If we would let ourselves go through a cold

winter or a hot summer and stop as nature

requires us, we would have the chance to regenerate

our bodies, minds and souls, like any other living

being in nature. Looking forward to the hot

summer, which is coming soon....

Surprise

Night out, we don't have a community dinner tonight. The Main Hut is quite empty. Shalev, Noam and Amitai are swinging on the saris very wildly ... (they had a chocolate dessert tonight...) They are laughing, shouting, giggling ... Having lots of fun.

Yasmin and I are sitting in the other corner of the nice, empty hut, enjoying watching the kids playing.

Suddenly a little 'man' with a big torch comes in...

We ask: "What are you doing here Ishai?"

Ishai answers with his super serious voice:

"I put papa to sleep. I took the torch and I came to play!"

I don't know many four-year-olds that will take a torch in a dark night full of scorpions and snakes, and easily make their way in the forest... I know many adults who would never do it!



Aviram had a dream

Silence. We were all deep asleep in our big gigantic bed, protected under the big romantic mosquito net.

The moon was peeping through the opening of the roof. The rats were playing around and the owls were calling to each other softly.

Suddenly Aviram woke me up.

He was very excited...!!!

"I had a dream!"

"Yeah?" I opened half an eye trying to smile.

"I must tell you my dream, so I will not forget it!"

"Ok," I yawned and tried to open my second eye...

"I'm listening..."

"I was learning how to fly an airplane at the flight school in Pondicherry."

My eyes became bigger and I changed my lying

down position to a sitting position.

"Yeah! I'm listening..."

"A teacher came, dressed in full pilot's gear, and a helmet covered his head. We entered a small airplane. I was sitting beside the teacher and we went on a flight. He explained to me what he was doing.

The next day the teacher came again dressed in his pilot gear with the helmet covering his head and asked me to fly the plane alone while he was sitting beside me. And off we went flying in the air.

The third day...the same story....I came to the class. The teacher appeared with his pilot gear and a helmet on his head... But this time he asked me to fly alone. I felt so scared; I tried to resist...No! I can't do it... It's too early...

But no success. I couldn't change his decision.

I started the engine and off to the sky. I flew and flew up high, looked around me there was only sky... Suddenly I didn't know where I was.

I couldn't see Pondicherry or anything familiar. I was confused; I didn't know where to land and the fuel was running out. I was confused and stressed. I tried to concentrate. It was long moments of fear that lasted for what felt like a lifetime! I decided to just go through the low clouds and land on whatever was there. I lowered the plane and once I was out of the clouds, I was perfectly positioned above the runway... Wow... I took a deep breath...and landed safely. I stepped out of the airplane feeling completely overwhelmed.

The teacher approached me slowly, stood in front of me, and said:

"You see? I told you, don't be afraid, you now know how to fly!!!"

Then the teacher took off his helmet, and I could see it was
Sri Aurobindo*".

* Sri Aurobindo was one of the greatest philosophers, poets and spiritual leaders in India.

That's it for now!

I had never imagined that I could write a book! Not to mention in English?! Not even in my biggest dream!!! But one day my friend Kaarthik had some idea for a project. He asked me to write for him about life in Sadhana Forest. This is how I found out that I can share some stories through writing. And I found out that people were really getting the picture of life in Sadhana Forest. And you know what, I found out that I even enjoy it. Getting up early morning, listening to the birds' conversation (my dearest friends), opening my little phone and letting my fingers run over the little letters.

Writing took me again to these moments of magic...

To feel the excitement of the first day on the land, when it was completely empty and barren. Not a single sound of my little friends the birds. There were no birds in Sadhana Forest. A few years ago a young volunteer made a bird survey, she could

find something like 53 different species! Wow!!!

Those magic moments....

When the first volunteer came, one lady who was helping us to build a children's play slide went out into the streets to collect people to come join us.

A beautiful strong young man came and offered his help.

"Can I stay here with you?"

"Wow, but we are not ready, where will you sleep?"

"Here, on top of the tool shed, I can climb and make a bed"

He was the first. Eyal.

Today we are hosting over 1000 volunteers a year.

The power of the volunteer community made Sadhana Forest grow so beautiful and powerful.

Every volunteer became part of the family.

After the big cyclone this family helped us to recover and rebuild Sadhana Forest.

It is a good time to say again:

'Thank You Sadhana Forest Family'

Those magic moments....

Of watching our children growing between the little trees.

Today my kids are still growing, running on their way through the thick forest, picking some fruits from the trees and sitting under their shade.

Those magic moments....

Of sharing moments with beautiful people, who every day are playing a bigger role in helping Sadhana Forest to make the world a better place.

I enjoyed every moment in this journey, the moments that I laughed, the moments that I cried, the moments that opened my heart.

Om Shanti



Many Thanks....

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