

Pass It On®...

The Little Things that Make the Biggest Difference. *How one man created a forest the size of Central Park by planting one tree a day.*

It's hard to imagine the impact of the little things we do in our daily lives. A few degrees in course correction today could put us in a completely different universe in a few years. And that's a good thing.

Jadav Payeng lives in a remote part of India, in a place mostly unknown to the rest of the world. The Brahmaputra River is one of the largest rivers in the world. It begins at the base of the Himalayas, at the confluence of a fan of rivers that drain snowmelt. In the midst of this miles-wide river, there is an island, Majuli. And on that island is a community of fishermen. This is where Jadav was born.

At 16 years old, Jadav noticed a number of snakes washed up on the dry sandbar after a flood. Villages redirecting the river upstream had created more forceful currents around the island, and erosion was quickly taking its toll on the land and the natural habitats of its fauna. In fact, much of the island had become barren sand, and an entire community was at risk of being displaced.

Jadav also noticed that nobody was doing anything about it besides watching their part of the world disappear. So, he started planting trees — every day, one or two or three at a time on the barren sandbars. He took note of how they grew, harvested their seeds, grew saplings in his hut and planted before going off to work.

Standing beside one of the first trees he planted 40 years ago, Jadav will tell you that it is a little thing, something anyone can do. The tree is easily five times Jadav's girth. It stands in the middle of a forest the size of Central Park: 550 hectares. There are now native grasses that have taken root in the shade and varieties of native trees grown from seeds that have washed ashore. The forest has become home to myriad animals: deer, Bengal tigers, Indian rhinoceros and even a herd of 100 elephants that visit every year. But most importantly, the island that is also home to a few hundred people is holding its own against the elements.

Each of us has our row to hoe in this life, a small piece of the world to cultivate. By doing the little things right, we take care of those around us and those who will come after us.

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