

# Operations Manual for Centers and Groups

## International Sathya Sai Organization

September 2012



*The Organisations named after Me are not to be used for publicising My Name or creating a new cult around My worship. They must try to spread interest in recitation of God's Name, meditation, and other spiritual exercises that lead man Godward. They must demonstrate the joy derivable from devotional singing and remembering the Lord's Name, the peace that one can draw from good company. They must render selfless service to the helpless, the sick, the distressed, the illiterate, and the needy. Their service should not be exhibitionistic; it must seek no reward, not even gratitude or thanks from the recipients. [1968.2.23]*

Sathya Sai Baba

*The main objective of the Sathya Sai Organisation ... is to help humanity recognize its inherent divinity. ... So, your duty is to emphasise the One, to experience the One in all you do and speak. Do not give any importance to differences of religion, sect, status, or color. Have the feeling of One-ness permeate all your acts. Only those who do so have a place in this Organisation; the rest can withdraw. [1975.1.6]*

Sathya Sai Baba

The symbol that appears on the front cover is the logo of the International Sathya Sai Organization. It contains the five universal values given to us by Sathya Sai Baba: truth (*sathya*), right conduct (*dharma*), inner peace (*santhi*), divine love (*prema*), and nonviolence (*ahimsa*). Also in the symbol is a tall pillar, called the *sarva dharma stupa*, with a lotus flower on it. The pillar, with its concentric rings, represents *yoga*, or union with God. The rings indicate the stages of yogic discipline required for unfolding the "lotus of the heart", whose petals are at the top of the pillar. The flame of inner illumination is in the center of the lotus. Just as the lotus plant lives in dirty water but remains uncontaminated by it, so we should live in the world but be uncontaminated by it.

This logo was adopted in 2006. Prior to that, a logo depicting either five or six World Religions was used. These logos, together with the name Sri Sathya Sai Baba (and variations of it), have been trademarked in many countries in order to protect them from misuse. See [www.sathyasai.org/trademark/trademark.html](http://www.sathyasai.org/trademark/trademark.html). Devotees should refrain from using the logo on personal websites and elsewhere and should restrict the use of the logo to official Sathya Sai Organization websites, reports, and communications.

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## 1 Introduction

The International Sathya Sai Organization and the All India Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization were officially formed through a Charter granted by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba on 14 January 1981.<sup>1</sup>

In 2010, after receiving approval from Sathya Sai Baba, the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation formed the Guidelines Committee to review the guidelines currently in use in the various geographical Zones of the world in order to develop one set of guidelines applicable to all the countries outside India. The committee's work was also guided by recommendations that came from the Ninth World Conference of Sathya Sai Organizations held at Prasanthi Nilayam in November 2010 as well as the pre-world conferences held around the globe in 2010.

The document *Guidelines for Centers and Groups of the International Sathya Sai Organization* is a general one that describes the programs and practices of the Organization. While intended for use by office bearers and members of the Organization, it is also suitable for persons interested in joining the Organization and the public. The *Guidelines* discuss

- The purpose of the International Sathya Sai Organization,
- Membership requirements,
- Nine-point code of conduct and ten guiding principles,
- The structure of the Organization, including the World Foundation, Prasanthi Council, zones, regions, and countries,
- Programs and practices, including short, general introductions to the three wings (devotion, education, service), the officers of a Center and Group, the Young Adult Program, and types of Center/Group meetings,
- Sai education initiatives outside the Sai Center,
- Financial matters, and
- Websites

This *Operations Manual for Center and Groups* describes in detail duties and responsibilities of officers as well as the rules and regulations that apply to the various programs conducted in the Centers and Groups. It relies on the above-mentioned *Guidelines* document for the basic information given in it. A third document will give guidelines, rules, and regulations that apply at the country, region, and zone levels.

Each Zone may provide an addendum that gives additional information for that Zone.

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<sup>1</sup> The Charter can be found here: [www.sathyasai.org/organize/charter.html](http://www.sathyasai.org/organize/charter.html)

## 2 Centers and Groups

*These organisations are exclusively for spiritual development [1969.11.21]. They are established to translate the principles of love and nonviolence into daily practice. They have also to promote inquiry into four basic problems: (1) The body —what is it? (2) The body — I am not it. (3) Then who am I? (4) I am That (God)! [1970.11.20]*

Sathya Sai Baba

*It is as a means of spiritual discipline that the Organisation is to be understood. Take it in that attitude. Do not consider the rules as restrictions imposed by Me or as shackles on your freedom of action. They are devised to help you and others in the spiritual practices you have entered upon. [1971.12.22]*

Sathya Sai Baba

This section provides guidelines for the operation of Sathya Sai Centers and Groups<sup>2</sup>.

In some countries, Center Presidents will report to a Central Council; in others, they will report to a Regional President, a Central Coordinator, or other entity. In order to reduce lengthy references to the person or group to which a Center or Group President reports, we call this person or group *the presiding body*.

The main goal of a Center is to provide an environment in which individuals may progress along their spiritual path toward self-realization. Accordingly, a Center has three major components: a Devotion Wing, a Service Wing, and an Education Wing, corresponding to the three major paths toward self-realization: devotion (*bhakthi*), action (*karma*), and spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). These three wings, though administered separately, work together.

*Three paths are laid down for the awareness of the Immanence of the Divine: action (karma), devotion (bhakthi), and spiritual wisdom (jnana). These three are not distinct and diverse; they are composite and complementary. [1970.5.21]*

Sathya Sai Baba

*Feelings and activities move along three courses: the emotional, actional, and rational, otherwise denoted as the devotion (bhakthi), action (karma), and spiritual wisdom (jnana) paths. The first type does everything in a dedicatory spirit of worship ... The second type does actions that are service-oriented ... The third type is moved by the spirit of inquiry into the basic principles governing life and nature. ... These three types are actually three strands intertwined into one rope. They cannot be untwined. For the mansion called human life, devotion, selfless service, and spiritual wisdom are essential, just as heart, hand, and head. [1981.8.31]*

Sathya Sai Baba

### 2.1 Formation of Centers and Groups

**Formation.** A group of persons interested in forming a Center or Group may obtain a copy of the Guidelines and the Operations Manual and an application for accreditation and submit the completed application to the presiding body<sup>3</sup>. If the group is meeting regularly and in conformity with the Guidelines for a

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<sup>2</sup> A Sathya Sai Center must have at least nine members and must conduct the program activities in at least two of the three “wings”: devotion, education, and service. Otherwise, the designation “Sathya Sai Group” is used. Throughout this document, we use “Center” for both Centers and Groups.

<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above, the presiding body is the unit to which the Center reports —e.g. a Central Council, Regional President, or Central Coordinator.

period of six months, the presiding body may recommend to the Country Central Coordinator or Zone Chair that the group be accredited as a Center or Group.

**Names of centers and groups.** Sathya Sai Centers generally carry the name of the local community in which they are located. In English-speaking countries, the standard is “Sathya Sai Center [or Centre] of ... (town or city in which it meets)”. Similar naming conventions should be adopted in other languages.

**Cancellation of affiliation.** The Zone Chair may, in consultation with the presiding body of a Center, cancel the Center’s affiliation with the Sathya Sai Organization and dissolve the Center. Possible reasons for this include: flagrant violation of rules and regulations found in this document, financial dealings that are against the principles of Sathya Sai Baba and the Organization, actions that tarnish the name of Sathya Sai Baba, and actions that work against the interest of the Center and the Organization.

A Center that is being dissolved must follow the laws of the country (if any) regarding the dissolving of such organizations and disbursement of any property and funds held by the Center. Remaining funds are to be transferred to other units of the Sai Organization, with approval of the Zone Chair.

## 2.2 Membership

The *Guidelines* give the basic requirements for membership in a Center or Group. In addition, the following points apply.

Membership will cease if the member resigns, declines to participate in Center activities, or engages in conduct deemed a discredit to the Center. Members may visit and take part in the activities of other Centers but should have membership in only one Center.

The Center should maintain a list of members. The list is private, is not for distribution, and will be used solely to facilitate communication to members about approved Center events. This list will contain the member’s name, whether they are a youth or adult, male or female, their address, and contact details (phone and email). This list should be communicated to the Presiding body for purposes of reporting on membership status.

Members who attend Center events only sporadically may take part in discussions at Center meetings but should not participate in making decisions (e.g. selection of officers).

## 2.3 Officers

*Choose men and women who have unshaken faith in this present Avatar, with this Name and Form. The leaders of these units lead because they have the vision and the yearning, not because they have the votes or the purse. The bliss they derive is the only reward they are after. [1970.1.13] Offices should not be regarded as positions of authority or as ‘prizes’ for devotion. They should be accepted with humility and exercised with love.*  
[1968.5.18] Sathya Sai Baba

As mentioned in the *Guidelines*, a Sathya Sai Center has five officers: President, Vice President, and a coordinator for each wing of the Center: Devotion Coordinator<sup>4</sup>, Education Coordinator, and Service Coordinator. A Group may have fewer officers, the exact number of officers to depend on the makeup and

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<sup>4</sup> In some Centers, *Spiritual wing* and *Spiritual Coordinator* are used instead of *Devotion Wing* and *Devotion Coordinator*. We ask that they use *Devotion wing* and *Devotion Coordinator*. Reason: All activities of a Center are spiritually motivated, and to call one wing the spiritual wing and the others not is unreasonable. Sathya Sai Baba talks of three spiritual paths to enlightenment: devotion (*bhakthi*), action (*karma*), and spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) — which is achieved through education. We have one wing for each of these paths.

needs of the Group.

The Executive Board of the Center consists of

- The five officers
- The YA Representative, if there is one (see Section 2.8)
- The Treasurer, if the Center requires one (only Centers who are incorporated or own a building or land should need a Treasurer)

The Executive Board is responsible for all aspects of operating the Center. Decisions should be made by consensus. If a consensus is not achieved, the President makes the final decision.

**A. Restrictions on officers.** An officer of a Center may retain membership in their traditional religion or in other spiritual organizations but may not serve as officers of such organizations. Professional teachers of yoga, meditation, etc. are not permitted to be officers of the Center because their professional work may be confused by the public with the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba.

**B. Term of office.** Officers are selected for a term of two years and may serve two consecutive terms, if so selected. Officers may not serve in the same position for a third consecutive term. However, in the case of small Centers, the presiding body may waive this rule. In small Centers, one person may hold more than one office, if necessary. In case an officer vacates an office, the position can be filled for the rest of the term by the selection process or by appointment, after consultation with the presiding body.

**C. Selection of officers.** Selection of officers is not a political event, and there should be absolutely no lobbying. Of course, discussion among members is appropriate and desired. The Center members should work together in a spirit of unity to select officers who can work together for the good of the Center. The President, Vice President, Devotion Coordinator, Education Coordinator, and Service Coordinator will be selected by the Center using the following procedure (a more detailed explanation of the procedure appears in Appendix *Selection of Center Officers* on page 24):

Officers of the Center are chosen by a process of “selection”, as opposed to “election”. A nomination committee develops a list of nominees for each office. A membership meeting is held to select officers: a ballot is conducted, the results are announced, and nominees are given the chance to remove themselves from consideration — this process is repeated until unanimity is achieved for each office. If unanimity for any office cannot be achieved, the matter is submitted to the presiding body for resolution.

In exceptional cases, the presiding body, with approval of its presiding body<sup>5</sup>, may alter the procedure.

**D. Resignation or removal of officers.** Officers failing to meet the obligations of their office may be removed from office by the presiding body with the approval of the Central Coordinator or Zone Chair. A special selection process will be held to replace officers who resign or are removed.

**E. Duties of officers.** It is the responsibility of the officers of a Sathya Sai Center to ensure that the Center is run in accordance with the Guidelines and this Operations Manual. Unity, harmony, and cooperation form the basis of a properly conducted Center. Officers are expected to be of high character, with love in their hearts, to set an example by practicing Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings in their daily lives.

The duties of the five officers are given below.

1. **The President** is the administrative authority within the Center and has responsibility for all aspects of the Center. It is the President’s responsibility to provide leadership by personal example,

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned on p. 5, the presiding body is the unit to which the Center reports —e.g. a Central Council, Regional President, or Central Coordinator.

including participating actively in the Center's programs and coordinating Center meetings and activities. The President should promptly pass on to members all official communications received from the Central Council. Informational flyers or announcements from other organizations should not be read or distributed at Center meetings. The President's duties include:

- Ensuring that the Center conducts itself in accordance with established Center guidelines.
  - Ensuring that the Center maintains a complete program of devotion, service, and study activities, including newcomer welcoming and orientation.
  - Conducting periodic officers meetings as the need arises and regular membership meetings.
  - Providing support to regional officers for conferences, reports, and regional initiatives.
2. **The Vice President** assists the President and presides in the President's absence.
3. **The Devotion Coordinator** has responsibility for the various elements of the Center's devotion program, including group devotional singing, study circles, and the display of books and other forms of informational material. The Devotion Coordinator's duties include:
- Coordinating devotion meetings and practice of devotional singing.
  - Establishing and maintaining a program of newcomer welcome and orientation.
  - Maintaining Center premises and an altar that is simple, universal, and in accordance with guidelines.
4. **The Education Coordinator** has responsibility for the Center's Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) program.
5. **The Service Coordinator** has responsibility for the various activities undertaken by the Center, including the determination that there is a need for the service, that there is sufficient interest among members, and that appropriate resources are available. The Service Coordinator will work with Regional Service Coordinators when national or regional projects are undertaken by the Organization. The Sathya Sai Organization should engage in humanitarian service activities within the scope of its own resources. It should not seek assistance from other organizations. The Service Coordinator also provides articles and pictures of service projects in their Centers to the National Service Coordinator for publication in the *Sanathana Sarathi*.

## 2.4 Cultural relevance

The best Center meetings are those that (1) provide spiritual upliftment to Center members and (2) are welcoming to people in the community in which the Center resides. To satisfy point (2), Center meetings have to have a spiritual basis but not be oriented to any one religion or language.

It is essential to remember that the Sathya Sai Organization is universal, spiritual, and non-religious. It is therefore strongly advisable to exhibit only the *Sarva dharma* logo at the Center meeting and a picture of Sathya Sai Baba in the devotion area. If necessary, and if there is a consensus about this among the members, an image or symbol of the local main religion may also be placed in the devotion area. Guidance on these issues may be requested from the presiding body.

The festivities recommended to be celebrated are Baba's Birthday, *akhanda bhajans*, *Guru Purnima*, and festivals of the predominant local religions. These festivities may be open to the public. In case a Center has a number of members who follow a particular religious tradition, the main festivities of their religion could be celebrated (e.g. Buddha Purnima, Christmas, Passover, Easter).

The Center should be open to the public whenever devotional singing is performed or during the public study circle sessions as well as for periodical public information meetings or such other public events that have been approved by the presiding body. The Center should try to satisfy the expectations of each newcomer who approaches the Sathya Sai Organization, in agreement with the universal teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, which state that He is here "*to nourish the roots of all religions*", without any distinction.

We may summarize as follows:

- A Center meeting does not have to have *any* Sanskrit prayer or song.
  - A Center meeting does not have to have an altar with pictures or statues.
  - A Center meeting does not have to have people sitting on the floor with shoes off.
  - Sai Centers can experiment with different types of meetings. For example,
    - A meeting that is simply a study circle on some aspect of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, with people sitting in a circle, on chairs or on the floor.
    - A devotional song meeting, in which unison singing in many languages is the major attraction, with no Sanskrit prayers.
    - A meeting for newcomers, with people sitting in chairs, being introduced to some aspect of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings.
    - A meeting in which devotees talk about their spiritual experiences, what drew them to Sathya Sai Baba, etc.

The possibilities for meetings that are completely religion-neutral are endless. We have only to start with the conviction that Sathya Sai Baba's teachings are universal.

Appendix 4 attempts to make this clear by outlining a devotion program that allows all sorts of alternatives.

## **2.5 Education Wing**

The primary task of the Education Wing is the operation of the *Sai Spiritual Education* (SSE) program, whose purpose is to provide spiritual education to the children of members of the Center. The four age groups are:

Group I: ages 6–9,  
Group II: ages 9–12,  
Group III: ages 12–15,  
Group IV: ages 15–17

Each region or country may adjust these four groups, with the approval of the Zone Chair, to take into account local and cultural considerations. In addition, lessons for parents may be given, as well as seminars/workshops/meetings on human values for children, young adults, parents, or adults.

The Education Coordinator of the Center leads the Education Wing and its programs. But the SSE program is a cooperative effort of the Education Coordinator, SSE teachers, the Center, the parents of the children, and Education Coordinators at the regional and national levels.

In some regions, the maintenance of a library of literature, audio tapes, CDs, and DVDs is the responsibility of the Education Coordinator (page 22).

SSE teachers must be trained before they may teach. The presiding body (at the regional or national level) provides this training. If the region or country has an *Institute for Sathya Sai Education* (ISSE), the ISSE may be involved in this training. Dynamic parenting comes also under the purview of the ISSE's, although it may operate these programs with the help of Sathya Sai Centers.

The Organization also has programs for education in human values in the community and schools. Called SSEHV (Sathya Sai Education in Human Values), these programs are carried out under the auspices of the ISSE and not the Center, although, of course, they may work together on these programs. Before assuming the role of an SSEHV teacher, a Center member must receive training sponsored by the Sai Organization or an ISSE.

### **2.5.1 The Five Basic Human Values and the SSE program**

As explained by Sathya Sai Baba, the five basic human values are Love, Truth, Right Action, Peace, and Nonviolence:

Love in thoughts and words is:	Truth
Love in action is:	Right Action
Love in feelings is:	Peace
Love as understanding is:	Nonviolence

Sathya Sai Baba tells us that these human values, as well as their practical value aspect (e.g. from truth springs honesty and integrity), are inherent in all humans, and it is just a matter of drawing them out and letting them flourish. The five human values have been demonstrated to be the essence of all faiths.

Here are important points about the SSE program in Sathya Sai Centers.

- The goals of the SSE program are to help children become aware of their divine nature, to draw out the Human Values (which are inherent in them) and put them into practice, to teach the children about the unity of all faiths, and to prepare them to live a spiritual life in this world.
- The life and teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, the five human values, and the essential unity of all faiths comprise the substance of the SSE program.
- There is a syllabus and curriculum for each SSE age group as well as various components of teaching (story telling, singing, prayer, silent sitting, and group activity). The SSE teacher learns about them during training. Each region or zone of the Sathya Sai Organization may have an Education Manual, which provides the syllabi, curricula, etc.
- The philosophies and teachings of many religions are taught in the SSE program. Practices of any one specific religion are not appropriate on a weekly basis —no one religion should be emphasized over others. Parents wishing to strengthen their children's faith in the family religion may find a suitable avenue for this in their community.

The SSE program generally takes place weekly, for one or two hours. A certificate of completion of a course may be given at the end of the year, perhaps in a ceremony at a Center meeting.

### **2.5.2 Children and their parents**

*To instill in the minds of young the values of prayer and of humility and loving service to others, the homes where they have grown have to be the first schools. The parents have to be imbued with faith in the basic truths of this Universal Religion [1967.4.3]*

Sathya Sai Baba

- It is strongly suggested that Center members enroll their children in the SSE program. For maximum effect, members with children in the SSE program should partake in Center activities.

- There is no SSE class for children under the age of six. Where there are many children below the age of six, a child-care group could be a service of the Center.
  - Annual required orientation meetings should be held for parents to share concerns and ask questions. Establishment of a parent group, which meets monthly, can help parents to learn about the education their children are receiving and provide support for the education at home.
  - SSE classes are open to children of non-members, regardless of their faith and the Form they worship —the teachings in SSE are universal. It may be necessary to hold special orientation sessions for such non-members. In special cases, separate classes for non-members' children may be established after consultation with the presiding education body (e.g. a regional Education Coordinator).

### 2.5.3 SSE teachers

*The first task of the teacher is the cultivation of virtue in the hearts of the pupils. This is much more vital than the promotion of learning.* [1979.11.20] Sathya Sai Baba

- The Education Coordinator appoints SSE teachers in consultation with the Center President and the presiding education body.
  - Before assuming the role of teacher, a Center member must receive training sponsored by the Sathya Sai Organization or an ISSE (Institute for Sathya Sai Education).
  - The SSE teacher agrees to make a commitment to the ideals of Sathya Sai Baba and thus to be an exemplar. The teacher will work cooperatively with the Education Coordinator and fellow teachers, sharing ideas, concerns, and problems, and will communicate regularly with the parents of the children they are teaching.
  - The SSE teacher will work with the Education Coordinator (and perhaps the ISSE) on seminars/workshops/meeting on Human Values for children and youth, for parents, and for adults, as appropriate for the Center.

## **2.6 Devotion Wing**

*Devotion has been defined as supreme single-pointed intense attachment to the Lord. [1972.4.8] It is the easiest way to win His Grace and to realize that He ... is, in fact, everything. [Mahasivarathri 1955] Devotion is the easiest and most effective path, for it is a spiritual discipline of the heart ... [1976.11.14]* Sathya Sai Baba

Typically, a Center should have a weekly devotion meeting that includes devotional singing, prayer, and meditation (or silent sitting). The Center should also have a weekly study circle, which may be combined with the devotion meeting —the combined meeting could last for 1.5 to 2 hours. The format of a universal devotion meeting is discussed in Appendix 4 on page 25.

The Devotion Coordinator has overall responsibility for the various elements of the Center's devotion program, including the following (various aspects may be delegated to others):

- Maintaining Center premises and an altar that is simple, universal, and in accordance with guidelines,
  - Coordinating devotion meetings (page 12), study circles (page 14), and practice of devotional singing (page 13),
  - Establishing and maintaining a program of newcomer welcome and orientation (page 16),

- Maintaining a library of literature, audio tapes, CDs, and DVDs (page 22) —in some regions, this task may be the responsibility of the Education Coordinator.

### 2.6.1 General principles

- A Sathya Sai Center is a spiritual center where universality of faith and practice of human values are emphasized. Sathya Sai Baba's teachings are universal. He came not to start a new religion but to tell us of "*this universal unitary faith, this spiritual principle, this path of Love, this virtue of Love, this duty of Love, this obligation of Love.*" [1968.7.4] Accordingly, we must conduct Center activities, especially our devotion programs, in a way that makes spiritual seekers from all faiths and all walks of life feel welcome.
  - The Center premises should be neutral to all religions and religious traditions. Quotations from Sathya Sai Baba may be placed on the walls, together with universal quotations from the major World Religions. Sai Baba has said that no picture is necessary, but if you must have one, have one of Him.
  - No Center program should include rituals or practices that relate to one faith or religion in particular. The aim should be to create harmony between Sathya Sai Baba's teachings and local traditions.
  - Over-focus on the use of Sanskrit does not consider the fact that Sathya Sai Baba's message is universal and is to be shared with all, regardless of one's religious orientation. Accordingly, it is strongly recommended that the Center's devotional program be conducted in a manner that persons from all the different faith backgrounds can easily understand and relate to. The focus must be on unity, with appropriate consideration given to cultural relevance.
  - As Sai Baba's devotees, we study and respect all religions. Study circles on other faiths are encouraged to emphasize the unity of all faiths.
  - The one rule given to us by Sathya Sai Baba is that men and women should sit separately at all Center activities. He said, ... *at devotional singing and other meetings, men devotees should sit apart from women devotees. The rule is applicable to all members —whether Indians or non-Indians, in India or elsewhere. It is a part of the spiritual discipline that is necessary for devotees. ... If even Arjuna found it difficult to control his senses, how much more necessary is it for us to have some regulations to control our own minds?* [1980.11.22]
  - Center devotion meetings, including devotional singing and study circles, are open to all — members, newcomers, and visitors.
  - The section on *cultural relevance* on page 8 and Appendix 4 on *universal devotion meetings* on page 25 contain material relevant to the devotion wing.

### **2.6.2 Devotion meeting**

*Where my devotees sing, there I install Myself.* [1960.9.27]

Sathya Sai Baba

*Group devotional singing has a different purpose from silent individual prayers. It is a mutual effort of spiritual practice to overcome the six foes of man: lust, anger, greed, attachment, conceit, and hatred.* [1975.4.1] Sathya Sai Baba

Sathya Sai Baba

*Singing the name by a group of people can help the process of liberation not only for the members of the group. It will benefit those who listen and even those beyond the circle of listeners —the whole world can benefit from the vibrations.* [1982.1.26] Sathya Sai Baba

The weekly devotion meeting, with its devotional singing, is the highlight of the week for many devotees.

tees. It can be an intensely spiritual activity in which the focus on each song and its meaning brings one closer to the Lord. Achieving this state requires cooperation from all — those preparing and coordinating the program, the lead singers, the musicians, and the participants. It should be kept in mind that:

- Cooperation is essential for the most spiritual benefit. The aim is to experience unity.
- Selfless service is what we give to the Center during the devotion meeting. Singers, musicians, etc. must concentrate on this selfless service and leave out the concept that their performances are a chance for personal aggrandizement.
- Knowledge and wisdom can also be achieved through understanding the meaning of the words and concepts in the speeches and songs.
- Devotional singing must be done with great discipline; punctuality, concentration, and mutual respect must be observed.
- Devotion involves offering our best efforts to the Lord.

The Center may develop its own format for the devotion meeting. Some ideas on developing a format for a universal devotion meeting are in the Appendix on page 25. A typical devotion meeting will be 60 to 90 minutes (perhaps up to 2 hours if there is a speaker and a study circle). Generally, devotional singing (called *bhajans* in India) forms the heart of the devotion meeting.

The Center (the Devotion Coordinator and President together) may appoint a person to coordinate all aspects of devotion meetings. It may also be appropriate to appoint a Devotional Singing Coordinator, to handle all aspects of devotional singing, including practice.

Below, are listed some points about the meeting as a whole and also about devotional singing.

- Completely prepare the meeting hall at least 15 minutes before the devotion meeting starts. Keep the altar simple —some flowers, the *sarva dharma* symbol, perhaps a picture of Sathya Sai Baba. There should be plenty of chairs so that those who do not want to sit on the floor can be accommodated. If there is a consensus about this among the members, an image or symbol of the local main religions may also be placed in the devotional area. Guidance on these issues may be requested from the presiding body.
- Microphones are recommended for the leading voices and the main instruments (tablas, harmonium, guitars; other instruments may be used). There should be at least one microphone for the women lead singers and another for the men. The musicians should have their own microphones.
- The complete program should be available to all, with words of the songs to be sung. A white board or flip-chart may be used to display the program and the numbers of the songs in song books (available to all). Alternatively, use a computer-projection system, with which the words of songs can be displayed, obviating the need for song books.
- The removal of shoes is not necessary, though this custom is often observed.
- Devotees should take their seats several minutes before the meeting starts and can use the time to internalize the silence that precedes the meeting.
- Females sit on one side of the hall; males on the other.
- In Prasanthi Nilayam, *Arathi* and *Samastha Loka* are sung at the end of the meeting. A region or zone may decide not to sing *Arathi* or to sing it in the local language.
- *Vibuthi* may be made available to all, either by distributing it after devotional singing or by making it available as people leave the hall.

- After the devotion meeting, it is best that people leave quietly in order to allow the joy and peace produced during the meeting be retained in everyone's heart to remain.
- Devotional singing:
  - The devotional singing session is normally between 30–45 minutes, depending on the Center and the total length of the meeting and its content.
  - The most gifted singers should be lead singers, so that the audience gets the most spiritual benefit from the session. The larger the Center, the more important this guideline becomes. Don't go to the extreme; chances should be given to people who are aspiring to lead and who are attending practice sessions. In small Centers, this guideline is relaxed, depending on the situation.
  - Some Centers reserve a song or two for children or Young Adults to lead. It is also permissible to have a session in which only Young Adults lead.
  - When singing, alternate between men and women lead singers where possible.
  - Maintain continuity between songs —reduce the interruptions to a minimum.
  - Songs may be sung in lead-repeat style or in unison. In the lead-repeat style, the song is generally repeated twice, the first slow and the second faster. The first time, repeat each line twice; the second time, repeat each line once. For long songs, do not repeat each line twice during the first time.
  - Sing songs that reflect the local culture (e.g. sing in the local language), and encourage singing songs from different religions.

### **2.6.3 Devotional singing coordination and practice**

The following points may be observed.

- A devotional-singing coordinator, appointed by the Devotion Coordinator and President, is in charge of all aspects of devotional singing, including selection of songs, selection of singers and musicians, and arranging devotional singing lessons. This responsibility could be rotated among several people.
- Devotional singing lessons may be held on a regular basis (e.g. monthly), depending on the need. Anyone may attend. The lessons could focus on whatever is needed —singing in tune, learning about rhythm, learning new songs, training in singing with a microphone, instruments etc.
- In a large Center, musicians and lead singers should practice the songs beforehand, to make sure that there is agreement on the key in which a song is to be played, how often the lines may be sung, etc. This practice session could be done  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour before the devotion meeting starts.
- Do not introduce more than one new song in a devotion meeting. This song should be practiced beforehand with a substantial number of members so that it is not entirely new.

### **2.6.4 Study circles**

*Knowledge about what this author says or that sage teaches is not what your study circle must aim to acquire. Not information but transformation, not instruction but construction should be the aim. Theoretical knowledge is a burden unless it is practiced, when it can be lightened into wisdom and assimilated into daily life. [1974.3.3]      Sathya Sai Baba*

Sathya Sai Baba tells us that spiritual growth is best achieved through an integrated practice of devotion, study, and service. He says that the proper study is: reading, reflection, and regular application in

daily life.

The study circle is the main group activity in the Sathya Sai Center. Guidelines on study circles can be found on the International Sathya Sai Organization website:

[www.sathyasai.org/files2010/studyCircleGuidelines2004.pdf](http://www.sathyasai.org/files2010/studyCircleGuidelines2004.pdf)

The website [www.sathyasai.org/devotion/study/study.html](http://www.sathyasai.org/devotion/study/study.html) contains additional useful information, as does the book *Pathways to God*, by Jonathan Roof. Here is a list of important points about study circles in the Center.

- The Center should aim for weekly study circles, of 45 minutes to 1 hour. So that everyone can make substantial contributions, it is best to limit the size of the study circle group to 15 —add more study circle groups if necessary.
- The study circle can be part of the weekly devotion meeting, along with devotional singing, or it may be at a separate time.
- Study circles are open to visitors. A Center may also have “public study circles”, which are designed to educate the public about some topic.
- The resource materials for study circles are, generally, (1) the writings and discourses of Sathya Sai Baba, (2) The *Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram* series, and (3) material developed by the Organization.
- A Center could devote a series of study circles to reading a discourse or one of Sathya Sai Baba’s *Vahinis*, spending one session on a page or series of paragraphs. Alternatively, a study circle may be about a specific topic, drawing from many resources. Examples of topics are:
  - The purpose and transformational effect of belonging to a Sai Center.
  - Understanding some aspect of the rules and regulations of the Organization.
  - The relevance of the Nine-point Code of Conduct or the Ten Principles.
  - The spiritual significance of and benefits of practices such as silence, vegetarianism, eschewing alcohol, ceiling on desires, meditation, and repetition of the Name of the Lord.
  - The meaning and effect of various mantras, like *So-Ham* and the *Gayatri Mantra*.
  - Themes of different religions, with the aim of understanding the unity of faiths.
  - What Sathya Sai Baba says He has come to give us: liberation (self-realization, *moksha*).
- It is best to appoint a *facilitator* for study circles, to be responsible for the overall function of the study circle, coordinate the choice of topics and study material, encourage attendance, ensure that participants know the rules, moderate the study circle (if several study circle groups are needed, a person to moderate each can be appointed), etc.
- Each week, a *presenter* may make a short introduction of the topic, in 5-10 minutes, to act as a catalyst in sharing thoughts and opinions. The presenter must come prepared with the reading for the topic and may also have a few questions prepared to stimulate discussion. It is best if each member takes a turn at being the presenter.
- During discussion, each member in the circle (say, in clockwise fashion) has a chance to speak for a few minutes (if they wish to). All should feel open to respond without fear of rebuttal, and there should be no judgment of right or wrong. Criticism of others’ viewpoints is not allowed.

- Individual discussions of the effect of the topic on personal daily life is a good way to emphasize Sathya Sai Baba's point that study circle is meant for personal transformation, not just for gathering information.

## 2.6.5 Welcoming newcomers and visitors

*Do not proclaim that you are a sect, distinct and separate from those who adore God in other Names and Forms. Thereby, you limit the very God whom you are extolling. Do not proclaim in your enthusiasm, "We want only Sai; we are not concerned with the rest." You must convince yourselves that all forms are Sai's, all names are Sai's. There is no "rest", for all are He. [1968.5.17]*

Sathya Sai Baba

We welcome visitors and newcomers from all faiths and religions, we study religions to understand the underlying unity of all faiths and religions, and we view all spiritual paths with respect. We focus on Sathya Sai Baba because His teachings, our experiences in attempting to put His teachings into practice, our experiences with Him, and the way He lived His life —all these have had a transformative effect on our lives.

Visitors to the Center should get an impression of universality and a loving environment. The meeting place, the meeting itself, and the way the person is welcomed should help reinforce that impression. Here are some important points about welcoming visitors.

- Visitors may attend any activity of the Devotion or Service Wings.
- Have certain people assigned the task of welcoming visitors, perhaps a Welcoming Committee. Members chosen for this task should be open minded; have a broad vision of religious and spiritual subjects; have relevant knowledge of Sathya Sai Baba's message, teachings, and works; have good knowledge of the workings of the Organization; and have a welcoming, positive demeanor.
- Welcoming should allow for mutual acquaintance. The visitor may be requested to tell when and how they happened to learn about Sai Baba, why they approached the Center, and what their expectations are. Welcoming members should offer some explanations on the behavioral rules and habits internal to the Center and give essential information about the structure and aims of Organization.
- All members of the Center should be aware of visitors and help them —where to sit, how to find devotional songs in the songbook, the nature of a study circle, etc.— or answer any question they may have.
- The Center or the presiding body should have a Newcomers Booklet, and it should be available to hand out to visitors, along with other appropriate booklets, pamphlets, and videos.
- Depending on the number of visitors, the Center may establish a weekly, biweekly, or monthly Visitors Session, perhaps ½ hour before or after a devotion meeting, in which the fundamental principles of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings can be discussed, and also the purpose and structure of the Organization.
- Members should avoid proselytizing, asking a visitor to become a member, flaunting personal rewarding experiences, and showing off bookish knowledge and learning.
- The welcoming function does not include spontaneous offering of *vibuthi* and photos to the visitors.

## 2.7 Service Wing

*Selfless service is the very essence of devotion [1967.3.29], the best cure for egotism [1968.1.13]. Consider selfless service as the best spiritual discipline. ... But do not believe that you can by means of service reform or reshape the world. You may or may not; that does not matter. The real value of selfless service, its most visible result, is that it reforms you, reshapes you. Do selfless service as a spiritual discipline; then you will be humble and happy. [1967.3.29]*

Sathya Sai Baba

The path of action (*karma*), embodied in *selfless service*, is one of the three paths to self-realization advocated by Sathya Sai Baba. Sathya Sai Baba emphasizes that small or large acts of service, performed with the attitude of serving God residing in those being served, confer immense spiritual benefit upon the aspirant. Sathya Sai Baba has said that selfless service is the best form of spiritual discipline. Accordingly, from the beginning of the Sathya Sai Organization, the Service Wing has been one of the three main wings of the Center. The Service Coordinator leads this wing.

### 2.7.1 General principles

Selfless service is an individual practice. It becomes a spiritual activity, resulting in spiritual transformation, when performed with an attitude of serving God in the other person, with no focus on the result of the service. Such selfless service has to be performed according to these principles:

- **Equanimity**, by overcoming likes and dislikes and eliminating judgments,
- **Impartiality**, by becoming detached from personal expectations and controlling one's impulsive reactions,
- **Reliability** toward the beneficiaries as well as the people with whom one is serving,
- **Amicability**, expressed through simplicity, pleasantness, empathy, nonviolence, and an attitude of respect toward the beneficiaries.

The first aspect of selfless services is to take care of one's own body, for it belongs to God. The second is to serve one's parents. Third, one's own family is to be served. Fourth, one serves the community and society at large. In this service, we should not neglect service to needy members of the Center itself.

Selfless service must not be restricted to mere social work. Any interaction with others will become selfless service when done with the right attitude. Sathya Sai Baba has said that, "*The core of the spiritual discipline of selfless service is to see everyone as yourself and yourself in everyone.*" [1975.11.14]

Center members may of course perform their own individual selfless service projects. In some situations, and for some people, this may be the best way to serve. But the effectiveness of service can increase when pursued as teamwork. In keeping with the Organization's goal to provide an environment in which individuals may progress spiritually, the Service Wing develops and carries out service projects in the community.

Center members working on service projects should understand the significance of selfless service. Accordingly, it will be useful to have study circles on selfless service from time to time. One could do several study circles on the material titled *Our attitude when doing service* in Appendix 5 (p. 28) It may also be useful to develop *Study Circle Guidelines* in a country or zone, which goes into more depth on the benefits of selfless service.

### 2.7.2 Guidelines for service projects

1. Service performed on behalf of the Organization should be an individual's choice. It may be encouraged, but it must never be imposed. It may be carried out individually or in groups. As Swami says, "*Not force but the Source (the Divine) should inspire you*" [1989.10.4].

2. Work done within the Organization, including administrative activity, is regarded as service, and all members should be encouraged to take part.
3. In compliance with the principles of the Organization Charter, proselytizing and fund raising must be avoided. Service activities must be self-financed. Donations may be accepted, but only in accordance with the regulations and instructions of Organization.
4. A Center service activity must be led by a member of the Center (perhaps delegated to the task by the Service Coordinator).
5. Volunteers working on Sathya Sai Center service projects do not have to be members of the Center or the Organization. However, they should be authorized by the Center President, and they must follow the instructions of those in charge of the project.
6. The Service Coordinator must continually oversee the service projects of the Center and make sure that (1) they are serving a real need and (2) the Center has the resources —in terms of time, funds, energy, appropriately trained volunteers, etc.— to carry out the projects successfully.
7. Service projects that satisfy a local community need and that require hands-on volunteer time are best. A project that consists mainly of donating money or items to some cause may not be as effective as a spiritual activity because the volunteers doing the service are not coming in contact with the people being served.
8. Depending on the country, the Center may be required to have insurance against possible damage caused to people or things during the service activity; this has to be arranged through an insurance policy that has been suitably stipulated by the presiding body. All volunteers, whether Center members or not, should be covered by the insurance policy. In some countries, the insurance policy may require the Center to keep lists of those participating in each service project.
9. In order to guarantee the effectiveness of service activities, especially when performed by several Centers within local and national institutions, an internal code of conduct may be issued by the presiding body. All volunteers will read and accept the code.
10. Center service projects are done by the Center, usually without help from other organizations. Of course, they may involve other organizations, e.g. singing at a nursing home, providing lunch for the homeless at the Salvation Army, holding a medical camp at a church. A Center desiring to participate in a service project with some other organization should get approval from the presiding body.

### **2.7.3 Developing and maintaining service projects**

The Service Coordinator will oversee the service projects of the Center (although leadership of particular projects could be delegated to others).

In deciding on a new service project, the following aspects should be considered:

- Does the Center have adequate funds?
- Are the Center members enthusiastic enough to support the project?
- Does the Center have adequate professional knowledge and expertise to carry out the project? For example, in some countries, any serving of food requires someone who has been professionally trained in food safety.

To answer these questions, the project could be proposed and discussed at a membership meeting. Required funds should be mentioned, and members may contribute in the usual way (see Section 2.14).

Similarly, as projects continue, the Service Coordinator should see to it that the project continues to

serve a need and that it is well supported by the Center:

- Is the Center providing what it committed to provide?
- Is there still a need for this service project?
- How can the service be made more valuable to those being served?
- How are members reminding themselves that this is more than a community service project and that it is a selfless service project with a spiritual foundation?

#### **2.7.4 Types of Service**

A Center could engage in several different kinds of service. Those used most typically are:

- Projects that help the aged people, youth, and homeless, who suffer from loneliness and negligence. We must be ready to give our most valuable resource: our time. Doing so, we can make them feel the love they lack.
- Projects that promote good use of the earth —recycling, reusing, planting trees, cleaning beaches, etc.
- Programs that promote hygienic knowledge, vegetarian diet, healthy life styles, and dissociation from drugs, alcohol, and smoking.
- Service activities for the elderly, orphans, disabled, destitutes, homeless, prisoners, and others in need —providing food, singing, or education. This could be done in hospitals, public and private institutions, in their houses, and wherever such needy persons are found.
- Computer training programs and after-school courses.

In communities with two or more Centers, sharing service projects can develop an effective spirit of cooperation. This allows larger, long-range service projects to be undertaken. It also allows members of smaller Centers to take part in large projects without feeling overwhelmed, and it increases the pool of volunteers available for an ongoing service project.

#### **2.8 Young adult program**

*Seventy percent of the world's population consists of 'youth', who are the potential leaders of tomorrow. Unless they are properly trained to take up their role in the future, society, the nation, and the world will not progress in peace.* [1985.1.25]      Sathya Sai Baba

The Sathya Sai Young Adult (YA) Program addresses some of the unique needs of devotees between the ages of 18 and 35. It offers young people the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and to achieve spiritual transformation in the light of the divine teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. It provides a forum in which the YAs may discuss issues they face leading a spiritual life following Sathya Sai Baba's teachings while being active in a world that may lead them in other directions. It provides them with opportunities to serve and to engage in spiritual practices with devotees in their age range.

At the same time, a flourishing YA program that harnesses the energy and vitality of the youth can help the Center thrive. The youth may also help the Center promote initiatives that make for a better matching of the Sathya Sai Organization to the country's traditions and customs. Everyone gains from a well-run YA program.

- Unity. The YA program is not separate from the Organization, and YAs are expected to participate in Center activities as well as in the YA Program.

- Officers. The YA program is supervised by YA Advisors (age at least 36) and organized and led by YA Representatives (age 18 to 35).

The YA Advisors, one each for male and female YAs, are appointed by the President of the Center after consultation with the YAs (in smaller Centers, one YA Advisor is enough). An Advisor serves initially for two years and may continue in the position upon agreement of the President and the YAs.

The YA Representatives are selected by the YAs using the same process as for Center officers. A YA Representative serves a two-year term and may be selected for another two years. The important criteria for selection are demonstration of selflessness, dedication to Sai ideals, and competence to perform a leadership role in the Organization.

YA Advisors, by virtue of their knowledge of Sathya Sai Teachings and the Organization, provide the resources of maturity and experience to the YA programs. They review and approve planned activities prior to implementation.

YA Representatives, in consultation with the YA Advisors, provide leadership in the planning and implementation of all YA meetings and programs. They submit regular reports on YA activities as requested by the presiding body. They work with the YA presiding body and are responsible for the distribution of information and materials to the YAs in the Center that come from the presiding body.

- YA program activities. YA meetings and programs should include educational and devotional activities, with a strong emphasis on selfless service. Discipline, modest attire, and the separate seating of the young men and women should characterize the meetings, since the gatherings are for the pursuit of spiritual purposes. Participation in the SSE program is desirable —in fact, a smaller age gap between teacher and SSE pupil may make communication easier, may provide inspiring freshness, creativity, and spontaneity, and may enhance the understanding of what is being taught.

YAs should develop activities suitable for their age, with the aim to bring forth and develop their talents and self esteem. Personal development through these activities will be furthered through the study of Sai teachings. Possible topics include: character building; leadership training; developing self confidence; developing communication skills; guidance in relation to professional growth; and participation in sports, theatre, and music activities.

The YAs may initiate activities that make for a better matching of the Sathya Sai Organization to the country's traditions and customs. Examples are: composing devotional songs in the local language, arranging debates and study circles about cultural relevancy, studying and discussing biographies of exemplary leaders to evaluate their teachings, and studying and discussing the national literature to draw out its positive values.

The YAs should be encouraged to develop new programs and activities. These programs and activities should be compatible with Sathya Sai Baba's teachings and inspire the YAs into action and reflection on their spiritual journey.

The YAs must consult with and receive guidance from the ISSE of the country or region before embarking on SSEHV-oriented programs.

## **2.9 *Young Adult apprenticeship program***

*The youth of today are the future leaders of the nation and the architects of the new society. The future of a nation depends on its youth. ... The physical and mental strength of the youth is the foundation on which a nation is built. [2000.01.14]*      Sathya Sai Baba

The Sathya Sai Organization has a Young Adult Apprenticeship Program, in which young adults serve

as apprentices to officers at various levels of the Organization. Where appropriate, this apprenticeship program is implemented in each Center, with young adults serving as apprentices to officers, learning about and participating in the responsibilities of the officers as well as learning about leadership. The presiding body may provide advice to the Center about this program.

## **2.10 Ladies program**

*I have initiated this Ladies' day in order to foster respect and love for the mother. Not only the 19th of November but the 19th of every month is being observed as Ladies Day in some states. Whatever may be the circumstances, good or bad, do not forget your mother. [1998.11.19]*

Sathya Sai Baba

In Prasanthi Nilayam, 19 November is celebrated as “Ladies Day”, with the women arranging and carrying out programs, festivities, etc. This has inspired (optional) “ladies activities” within Centers in some countries or regions. Examples are: study circles on the role of the woman as mother, wife, worker, and Center member; service activities oriented to helping women in particular; and cultural programs. In some places, the 19<sup>th</sup> day of each month is dedicated to the ladies, with various activities being carried out.

A Center should feel free to carry out spiritual activities initiated by ladies for ladies and to appoint someone with overall responsibility for the program, if the Center members want it. Before starting the program, contact the presiding body to find out what guidelines and support have been instituted in order to provide consistency within the region or country.

## **2.11 Speakers**

Use local speakers during the regular and special devotion meetings as much as possible —speakers from neighboring areas can be used as well.

Officers in one region of the country or zone wishing to invite a speaker from another region or country of the zone should first consult with presiding body for approval.

Before an international speaker is invited, consultation must take place between the Center President and the presiding body. If there is agreement that the speaker is appropriate, approval is sought from the Central Coordinator, who in turn will confer with those who preside over the speaker’s country (the Central Coordinator or Zone Chair, and also the Prasanthi Council if necessary). If both parties agree, the speaker may be invited.

Generally, speakers, both domestic and international, pay their own travel expenses, but the inviting Center or region may pay the travel expenses if the speakers are not able to do so.

## **2.12 Communications**

It is important that communications from the Organization (e.g. the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation, the Prasanthi Council, Zone Chairs, the Central Coordinator, and the Central Council) be delivered immediately to all members of the Center.

There is scope for improvement in prompt and proper communications. Dissemination of communications can and should be done in several ways, e.g. (1) through email, (2) placing on the password protected Center website, (3) handing out copies at a Center meeting, and (4) reading the communication at a Center meeting.

## **2.13 Incorporation**

Matters of incorporation may be determined by the laws of the country in which a Center operates. In some countries, some form of incorporation is required by law; in others, it is not. A Center may have to

incorporate if it owns a building, and incorporation may be advantageous in reducing the cost of rental of rooms for Center meetings. Therefore, there is no hard-and-fast rule on incorporation of Centers throughout the world.

A Center that wants to incorporate must first get the approval of the presiding body (and ultimately the Zone Chair). Further, incorporation may bring on certain requirements about keeping financial records, reporting to the government, etc. Copies of all such requirements must be forwarded to the presiding body for oversight.

## *2.14 Finances*

*Fund collection is as much opposed to this movement as fire is to water. If you yield on this point, spiritual advance will perish.* [1971.5.14] Sathya Sai Baba

Fees are never charged for any Center activity, nor are donations solicited from members or the public. Centers pay no fees to the Sathya Sai Organization at any level. Centers may meet their expenses by allowing members to make voluntary, anonymous contributions. Generally, officers in the Organization use their own funds to cover personal expenses incurred in carrying out their duties. Exceptions to this rule may be made by the Zone Chair.

Special projects must be discussed and approved by the officers in conjunction with the members and acted upon only after funds have been donated in the above manner. If the amount is insufficient, the officers may either make up the deficiency among themselves or cancel or modify the project. Centers should never embark on projects for which there are insufficient resources of money, time, personnel, energy, or skills.

Any financial considerations will be the collective responsibility of all the Center officers under the direction of the President. Careful records of all financial transactions (e.g. sale of books, rental of rooms, retreat accounts) will be kept and reviewed by the Center officers on a quarterly basis and may be reviewed by the presiding body. Those assigned to deal with book sales at Centers or conference accounts should be rotated on a regular basis, like officers. A Treasurer may be appointed if the volume of work dealing with finances warrants it.

If someone requests information, details may be given about donations to a Sai Trust in the country, to the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, or to any funds that have been set up to help with emergency relief (earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.).

These rules are in keeping with Sathya Sai Baba's injunction that Centers should have as little to do with money as possible, since it draws attention away from the members' spiritual focus.

### **2.15 Publications**

The Center may publish and distribute a “Sathya Sai Center Bulletin”, containing a calendar of events, announcements giving information about upcoming programs, and so forth. The officers of the Center must approve the content. Copies should be sent to the presiding body for oversight.

Where appropriate, an electronic version may be the best way to disseminate such information.

## 2.16 Center library

The maintenance of the library is the responsibility of the Devotion or Education Coordinator, depending on the Zone in which the Center resides. The following points should be considered:

- The library should contain at least one copy of material published or sold by the Organization. This includes the *Guidelines for the International Sathya Sai Organization* and this *Operations Manual for Centers and Groups*.

- The Center should subscribe to *Sanathana Sarathi* and other newsletters of the region, country, or zone. Current issues along with subscription information should be available.
- A variety of free literature on Sathya Sai Baba and the Center's programs, including reprints of appropriate articles and discourses, should be available at all meetings.
- The Center is encouraged to have a selection of books, audio tapes, CDs, DVDs, and photos available for sale or loan. Items are restricted to those sold by the Publications Division of the Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, the International Sathya Sai Organization, or an Institute for Sathya Sai Education. Approval should be obtained from the presiding body for any other items.
- Besides the items mentioned above, the library may include important texts of the major religions.
- Items must be made available at the lowest possible price, and sales should not overshadow or dilute the spiritual atmosphere of the Center. The Center must comply with all relevant laws of the country regarding sales of such items.

## **2.17 Websites**

The following table gives the major official websites for Sathya Sai Baba and the Organization:

sathyasai.org	International Sathya Sai Organization. From this website, one can get to websites for zones, regions, countries, etc.
srisathyasai.org.in	Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, in Prasanthi Nilayam, Sai Baba's main ashram
sssbpt.info	Discourses and writings of Sathya Sai Baba, with a search engine
saicast.org	Videos
sailoveinaction.org	Accounts of Sai service projects throughout the world
sssbpt.org	Website for the Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division
theprasanthireporter.org	Website of the Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division, reporting on events in Prasanthi Nilayam
radiosai.org	Radio Sai Global Harmony: 24-hour audio on the computer as well as Heart2Heart, an online journal

A Center may have a website upon approval of the presiding body. There are essentially two reasons for having a website:

- Let the public, as well as members, know about the Center (when and where it meets, etc.), and
- Provide for communication among members. This part of the website should be password protected (one password for all is enough) and made accessible only to members.

A complete set of guidelines for Sathya Sai Organizations, including Centers, appears on the *Reports and Documents* page of the International Sathya Sai Organization website:

[www.sathyasai.org/organize/reports.html](http://www.sathyasai.org/organize/reports.html)

## **2.18 Public Meetings, Publicity, and the Media**

This section is not yet written.

### 3 Appendix. Selection of Center Officers

*Choose men and women who have unshaken faith in this present Avatar, with this Name and Form. ... The leaders of these units lead because they have the vision and the yearning, not because they have the votes or the purse. The bliss they derive is the only reward they are after. [1970.1.13] These offices should not be regarded as positions of authority or 'prizes' for devotion. They must be accepted with humility and exercised with love.*  
[1968.5.18]

Sathya Sai Baba

Selection of officers is not a political event, and there should be absolutely no lobbying. Of course, discussion among members is appropriate and desired. The Center members should work together in a spirit of unity to select officers who can work together for the good of the Center. The President, Vice President, Devotion Coordinator, Education Coordinator, and Service Coordinator will be selected by the Center using the procedure outlined below. In exceptional cases, the Regional President or National Chair/Coordinator/President may alter the procedure.

We recommend having a study circle a week or two before the selection process begins to discuss the duties of the officers and the selection process.

#### Selection process

1. A nominating committee, appointed by the President, is responsible for creating a list of nominees for each position. The purpose of the committee is to facilitate the nominating process, and not to make final decisions on who can be nominated. If a person is nominated for a position and the nominating committee believes it is inappropriate, they may talk to the nominator, but if the nominator insists, the nomination will be accepted.

The nominating committee may develop an initial list of nominees for each office. Any Center member may also nominate someone for an office. The nominating committee should check that each nominee is willing to hold the office if selected; if not, the nomination is removed. If it is impossible to obtain at least one nominee for each position, the Center should consider becoming a Group or merging with a neighboring Center.

2. Once the nomination process is complete, a membership meeting is held at which selection takes place; The President (or their delegate) reminds the Center about the eligibility of being a voter. The following procedure is then used. It may be used once to select all five officers, or it may be used five times, first to select the President, then the Vice President, then the Devotion Coordinator, then the Service Coordinator, and finally the Education Coordinator.

- 2A. There is a ballot, and the results are announced.
- 2B. After the announcement, any nominee can withdraw their name. They may do this, for example, because they see that there is more support for other nominees. Or, a nominee might withdraw because they think that another nominee can do a better job and has support from others.
- 2C. If there is only one person left for a position, that person has been selected for that position.
- 2D. If there is still more than one nominee, the process continues at 2A. The process thus repeats until a single nominee remains.

The selection results are then sent to the presiding body, which must approve the selection. The new officers assume their roles upon such approval.

Should the Center not be able arrive at a consensus using this procedure, the list of nominees is submitted to the presiding body, who will choose the officers.

## 4 Appendix. Universal devotion meetings

To the right is a possible schedule for a devotion meeting. Almost all aspects of it are optional, including the order of items. For example, some Centers will end with items 5 and 6 so that people may leave the Center in silence.

The meeting should be arranged for a balance between two goals: (1) it helps Sathya Sai Center members along their spiritual journey and (2) it is a balanced meeting, representative of the culture of the country, universal in nature, and thus not oriented to any particular religion.

### Notes

1. The altar area should be inviting to all people; it should be appealing to people of religions as far as possible. Swami has said that no picture is necessary, but if you have to have one, have one of him.
2. Men and women should sit separate. This directive comes from Sathya Sai Baba. There is no need to take shoes off if that is not done in the culture of the country, and chairs should be available for those that want them.
3. The meeting format is flexible. A Center can have any format with which they feel comfortable, especially when considering the various cultural needs of their devotees/location.
4. Devotional songs could be in the language of the country, in Sanskrit, in English —whatever the group feels comfortable with. When a newcomer is present, the Center should sing songs to which the newcomer can relate.
5. Tradition in Prasanthi Nilayam may call for a *Ganesha bhajan*, a *Guru bhajan*, and then others, but this is not necessary at the Center meeting. The audience in the Center may be entirely different from that in Prasanthi Nilayam. Any sequence of devotional songs will do, as long as attendees can focus on the direct and inner meaning of the songs, establishing a connection with the Divinity within.
6. Songs may be sung in the leader-response style, in unison, or a mixture of both.
7. Prayers in a language foreign to the country should be kept to a minimum. If a Sanskrit prayer is said, consider repeating it also in language of the country and making the translation available to all.
8. Practices that are not part of the culture of Center members and would be foreign to visitors should be kept to a minimum.
9. The optional meditation could be a silent meditation or Sathya Sai Baba's light meditation. The length would depend on the Center members, probably no more than 5–10 minutes.
10. The spiritual talk, 10 minutes or less, could be a reading of and discussion of some paragraph from Sathya Sai Baba's discourses or the *Vahinis*. It could be a reading from the text of some religion and then a discussion of how it is similar to and reinforces some teaching of Sathya Sai Baba.
11. Study circle is an important part of devotion. As Sai Baba said, "A study circle does not mean only just reading and discussing and taking information into the head but also putting into practice what is learnt. ... What is eaten should be digested, and then only should you eat again. In the same way, you should listen (eat) in the study circle and put into practice (digest) what you have learnt." [1985.1.30] The study circle can be held during the weekly devotion meeting or as a separate meeting.
12. The *vibuthi* prayer is optional; consider singing it in the language of the country. *Vibuthi* may be

- |                               |
|-------------------------------|
| 1. 3 <i>Oms</i>               |
| 2. Devotional songs (30 min.) |
| 3. Prayers (optional)         |
| 4. 3 <i>Santhis</i>           |
| 5. Meditation (optional)      |
| 6. Prayers (optional)         |
| 7. Spiritual talk (optional)  |
| 8. Study circle (optional)    |
| 9. Announcements (optional)   |
| 10. Prayers (optional)        |

passed out or received at the back of the meeting room as devotees leave.

13. *Arathi* need not be sung, but if so, consider singing it (also) in the language of the country.
14. In Prasanthi Nilayam, after *Arathi*, one sings *Samastha Loka* three times. The following song illustrates how this can be adapted to fit a different culture. Some Centers sing this as the last item in their devotion meeting:

MAY THE LOVE WE'RE SHARING:

May the Love we're sharing spread its wings, fly across the Earth, and bring new joy to every soul that is alive. 2X

*Samastha loka sukhino bhavantu*; may all the people in all the worlds be happy.

*Samastha loka sukhino bhavantu*; may all the people in all the worlds know you, Swami.

## 5 Appendix. Sathya Sai Baba's Teachings on Selfless Service

In our Centers, selfless service is just as important a spiritual activity as devotional singing. The purpose of this appendix is to explain why. As a start, we can see that Sathya Sai Baba Himself spent His life in service.

*You should follow Swami, the leader. This is because from morning to night, Swami performs even the smallest task Himself, and all His work is for the good of the world. It is in this context that I often say, "My Life is My Message."* [Summer Showers 1979, discourse 2]

Sathya Sai Baba

*Avatars of God are engaged in service; that is why Avatars come. Hence, when you offer service to humanity, the Avatar will naturally be pleased and you can win grace.* [1977.6.3]

Sathya Sai Baba

### 5.1 Service and the Sathya Sai Organization

*The members of our Organisation must be ready and eager to help students, the sick, and the poor. Feel that this is work that pleases Me ... Spend your days and years in activities that help those in dire need, and thus make this human existence of yours worthwhile and fruitful.* [1974.23.11]

Sathya Sai Baba

*Let me tell you that nothing is impossible of achievement if an organised society is set on achieving it. Even liberation from material entanglement can be won through serving and promoting the progress of society. Through the sense of unity, the willingness to sacrifice, and the softness of compassion, all objects can be gained. So, the Sai Organisation must move forward with hearty enthusiasm in the field of service to society.* [1981.11.19]

Sathya Sai Baba

But don't limit your service to Center activities. Make service a lifetime activity, which begins with yourself and your family. Service to those in need, performed with a loving attitude, while recognizing the Divinity in those we are helping, and done selflessly, is an example of Sai selfless service, whether it is done at home, at work, or alone. Love and selflessness is the foundation of service in the Organization. While these examples of Sai selfless service may not be tallied in an Organization report, they can be true experiences of Sai service.

*The first lesson in selfless service has to be learnt in the family circle itself.* [1981.11.19]

Sathya Sai Baba

*I do not attach any value to the turning of rosaries by hands that know no help.* [1967.3.29] *Do not keep yourself apart, intent on your own salvation through meditation; instead, move among your sisters looking for opportunities to be of help, with the Name of God on your tongue and the Form of God before the mind's eye.* [1970.2.1]

Sathya Sai Baba

*Service is a lifetime program; it knows no rest or respite. This body has been given to you so that you may devote its strength and skills to the service of brother-man. Serve humanity until you see God in all people; then, what you do will be elevated to worship.* [1975.6.1]

Sathya Sai Baba

### 5.2 The effect of selfless service

Naturally, we want to help others, and that is the intent of selfless service. But Sathya Sai Baba says also that we are doing selfless service for our own sake. The real value of the service, He says, lies in helping us along the spiritual path in various ways — provided we do it with the right attitude, as a spir-

itual discipline. He says that selfless service helps us to:

- Control and purify the mind
- Put a ceiling on our desires
- Erase our karmic burden
- Remove the ego
- Bring love into our lives
- Experience the Unity of all
- Become aware of the God within all
- Win the Grace of God

*You are doing selfless service for you own sake. You are engaged in service in order to become aware of the divine Spirit in you, in order that you may discard the allurements of your ego, in order to know yourself and to get the answer to the question that torments you, namely, "Who am I?" You do not serve others, you serve yourself; you do not serve the world, you serve your own interest.* [1977.3.6] Sathya Sai Baba

*Constant work in loving service to others covers the seeds of past sinful and harmful actions, so that they die away and do not grow into a new round of misery.* [Hislop: My Baba and I] *Selfless service is the best spiritual practice for eliminating the nefarious pull of the mind toward desires.* [1970.10.4] Sathya Sai Baba

*To remove the evil of egoism, service is the most efficient instrument.* [1976.8.28] *How is this possible? By saturating with love, work can be transformed into worship. When it is offered to God, it gets sanctified as worship. This makes it free from ego. It is also freed from the earthly desire for success and the earthly fear of failure.* [1977.6.3] Sathya Sai Baba

*When a devotee seeks with humility and purity to give service and love to My creatures who are in need of such selfless service, as his beloved brothers and sisters, as the blessed manifestations of My Immanence, then in fulfillment of my role as Sathya Sai, I descend to help, accompany, and carry that yogi. I am always near such a yogi to guide him and to shower My love on his life.* [Hislop: My Baba and I]

So, while service helps to meet the needs of the underprivileged, it helps our worldly self. But at another level, we are serving the One God that is within us all, the supreme, absolute SELF, and this will help us become aware of the Unity of humanity.

*The core of the spiritual discipline of selfless service is to see everyone as yourself and yourself in everyone.* [1975.11.14] *You are not doing service to others, you are doing service to yourselves, to the God in you, the God who is equally present in others.* [1981.11.21] Sathya Sai Baba

*Service will also impress the unity of all mankind on the person doing service.* [1976.8.28] *Selfless service can instill more intensely than any other activity the sense of the basic ONE. ... There can be no higher austerity, nothing more rewarding.* [1971.7.8] Sathya Sai Baba

### 5.3 Our attitude when doing service

*God will not ask you when and where you did service; he will ask what your motives and intentions were.* [1981.11.19] *The attitudes of mutual help and selfless service develop the "humanness" of people and help unfold the Divinity latent in them.* [1981.11.19] Sathya Sai Baba

Our attitude during a service activity determines whether or not the service helps us grow spiritually. Service performed with a sense of pride or superiority will hinder our spiritual growth.

Also, service should be performed without expectations for results.

*Do not serve for the sake of reward; serve because you are urged by Love. [1969.5.19]  
Service is its own reward. [1976.8.28] Do not worry about the result. Help as much as  
you can, as efficiently as you can, as silently as you can, and as lovingly as you can;  
leave the rest to God, who gave you a chance to serve. [1967.11.6]* Sathya Sai Baba

*Do not believe that you can by means of selfless service reform or reshape the world. You may or may not. That does not matter. The real value of selfless service, its most visible result, is that it reforms you, reshapes you.* [1967.3.29] Sathya Sai Baba

Sometimes, members try to do what they want to do rather than what needs to be done. They may perceive some task as more important and others as “less desirable”. For example, some would rather serve the food than pick it up from supermarkets and bakeries or clean up afterwards. This attitude is not correct.

*Do not consider any act of service as demeaning. Sweeping the streets, for example, is not below your dignity. Do you not sweep the floor at home, do you not scrub and wash off dirt? [1982.12.1] Serve people with no thought of high or low; no service is high, no service is low; each act of service is equal in the eye of the Lord. It is the readiness, the joy, the efficiency, the skill with which you rush to do it that matters. [1967.10.4]*

Engage in all service projects willingly and with love. If you have a constructive criticism, bring it up at the Center when the opportunity arises.

*Others desire to bring down units that are doing good work, for they cannot tolerate the fame those units earn! Out of sheer malice, they try to harm the units so that their good work may suffer. But there is another way of ... making your own unit more liked. The teacher draws a line on the backboard and asks the pupils to come up to the board and, without touching the line drawn, make it shorter! The pupils are puzzled, but the teacher shows them the way: draw a longer line a little distance above it; the line is now the shorter of the two! Let your unit do more acts of service more efficiently to more people. That is the proper way to carry on the activities —not calumny or criticism, but work.*

#### **5.4 Service and repetition of the Name of God**

We worship God in different ways —prayer, meditation, devotional singing, repeating His name, self-less service, etc. All of these ways are helpful to us, and to different degrees at different times for different people. Sathya Sai Baba Himself emphasizes different forms of worship from time to time. However, two forms of worship seem to stand out in Sathya Sai Baba's teachings: service and repetition of a Name of God. These two spiritual disciplines reinforce each other, one being an outer activity, of the world, and the other being an inner activity that helps us continuously to remember that God is resident in all beings. *Heads in the forest, hands in society.* [1978.11.22].

One can see the same message in Sathya Sai Baba's statement, "Love all, serve all." The service as-

<sup>6</sup> This quote appears in the discourse of 1967.11.6 in the first 11-volume series of *Sathya Sai Speaks*. The discourse on 1967.11.6 given in the revised series of the 1990s is entirely different.

pect is clear in the second phrase, and the first phrase cannot be achieved unless we are constantly remembering the God that resides in every person.

*You must be engaged in constant remembrance of the Name of God, so that you remain a true servant of God while claiming to serve humanity, or rather, so that you may see in people the God that is their real nature.* [1971.2.21] Sathya Sai Baba

*Move among your sisters looking for opportunities to be of help, with the Name of God on your tongue and the Form of God before the mind's eye. That is the highest spiritual practice.* [1970.2.1] Sathya Sai Baba

## 6 Appendix. Guidelines for Sai Spiritual Education (SSE)

*Sai Spiritual Education (Bal Vikas in Sanskrit) is the primary basis for the great movement to restore righteousness (dharma) in the world ... The ideal is to raise a generation of boys and girls who have a clean and clear conscience. The actual syllabus is not as important as the creation of an atmosphere wherein noble habits and ideals can grow and fructify.* [Bal Vikas Teacher's Training Camp, 1979.6.6] Sathya Sai Baba

## ***6.1 Basis and Definition of the Sai Spiritual Education Program***

1. Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) is the spiritual heart of Sai Education.
  2. The five values (love, truth, righteous conduct, peace, nonviolence), the essential unity of faiths, and the life and teachings of Sathya Sai Baba comprise the substance of the SSE program.
  3. These ideals are demonstrated to be the essence of all faiths.
  4. SSE is the vehicle through which the children of Sai devotees nurture and express their devotion to God.
  5. The program is based on the precept that true education is spiritual education and culminates in character.
  6. Spiritual education ennobles life through the realization of one's Divinity.
  7. The realization of Divinity is expressed through one's thought, word, and deed.
  8. SSE nurtures the innate goodness of the child by creating an environment that is devotional, loving, and experiential.
  9. The Ten Principles from Sathya Sai Baba (see the *Guidelines for Centers and Groups of the International Sathya Sai Organization*) are used as a guide for students, teachers, and parents; they support all aspects of the curriculum.

## **6.2 Curriculum Overview – Educare**

The word educate means “to bring out that which is within”, namely, the human values hidden in every human being: truth, righteousness, peace, love, and nonviolence. One cannot acquire them from outside; they have to be elicited from within. However, people have forgotten their innate human values, so they are unable to manifest them. Educate means to bring out the human values. To bring them out means to translate them into action. [2000.09.26] Sathya Sai Baba

The curriculum contains the following topics:

1. Five Human Values: Truth, right action, peace, love, and nonviolence
  2. Brotherhood of man, Fatherhood of God
  3. Ceiling on desires program
  4. National and religious holidays
  5. Stories and accompanying lesson plans from the childhood of Sathya Sai Baba
  6. Annotated bibliography of children's literature
  7. Stories of saints and role models of heroes and unsung heroes
  8. Service activity suggestions and guidelines
  9. Biographies

The objective of all lessons is to nourish the *spiritual principal* within the child. The ideal lesson provides direct experience of the spiritual principle through group activities, and not just through moralizing

and memorizing. The practice of the values in daily life is essential to the manifesting of Divinity from within. Service activities and field trips are recommended to enhance experiential learning.

### **6.3 Elements of SSE lessons**

1. Recitation of Om, Prayer, Repeating the Name

*I suggest that you have prayer as an important item in the timetable of the classes; through prayer, you can draw down unto yourselves the Grace of God. [1970.5.12]*  
Sathya Sai Baba

2. Silent Sitting/Meditation

*Two roads lead to fulfillment: prayer and meditation. Prayer makes you a supplicant at the feet of God; meditation induces God to come down to you and inspires you to raise yourselves to Him. It tends to make you come together, not place one on a lower level and the other on a higher. [1967.1.22]*  
Sathya Sai Baba

3. Devotional Group Singing

*Let melody and harmony surge up from your hearts, and let all take delight in the love that you express through that song. [1976.11.14]*  
Sathya Sai Baba

4. Lesson/Story – Spiritual Principle

*You must examine every story or account that you place before the children from the point of view of individual faith and social harmony. Does this lead the child to a better, more harmonious, and more God-oriented life? That is the question you should ask yourself. [1974.1.3]*  
Sathya Sai Baba

5. Group Activities – Life Application Activity

After telling the story and discussing how the story illustrates the focus value, introduce a group activity to reinforce the value and integrate it as part of the student's experience. Activities that follow stories are of two types. The first is a Group Activity in which the entire class participates. The second is a Life Application Activity to be practiced during the upcoming week(s).

*Teachers should also check another point. Their students may behave well in class, i.e., for the length of the class, but how do they behave once they are outside the class? How is their behavior at home and outside? How is their conduct in school and with their friends? Your students' conduct should be exemplary —in your class, at home, with friends, and outside. [unknown]*  
Sathya Sai Baba

### **6.4 Spiritual objectives by age group**

In a very true sense all these spiritual objectives carry through from level to level and cannot be called separate. Each spiritual objective can be considered a building block for lifelong practice of spiritual principles. At the younger ages, the ideas are presented in a simpler form in ways appropriate to the age group. As a child matures, the concepts are applied and practiced in increasing depth.

*The enumeration of human values as five—truth, righteousness, peace, love, and nonviolence—is not correct. They are all facets of the foundational humanness. They grow together, are interdependent, and are not separable. [1984.12.31]*  
Sathya Sai Baba

#### **6.4.1 Group I (Ages 6, 7, 8)**

- Develop faith in and relationship with God.
- Encourage respect for parents, teachers, elders, and the environment.

- Foster self-esteem and self-discipline.
- Nurture truthfulness.
- Promote the practice of placing a ceiling on desires.
- Cultivate a spirit of loving service to self, family, school, and others.

#### **6.4.2 Group II (Ages 9, 10, 11)**

- Demonstrate increasing integration of objectives from Group I.
- Foster the understanding of Divinity in all.
- Develop the faculty of discrimination.
- Promote the practice of placing a ceiling on desires.
- Impart noble ideals.
- Foster understanding of the unity of faiths.
- Encourage the practice of selfless service.

#### **6.4.3 Group III (Ages 12, 13, 14)**

- Demonstrate increasing integration of objectives from Group II.
- Develop awareness for the *Atmic* reality.
- Strengthen moral living.
- Emphasize selfless service.
- Promote the practice of having a ceiling on desires.
- Foster a sense of one's role in society.
- Facilitate learning to control negative emotions.
- Provide practice in applying spiritual principles to concerns and challenges faced in the wider community.
- Develop communication skills, in oral and written form, that reflect spiritual principles.
- Develop a spirit of mutual trust and love, especially with parents and peers.

#### **6.4.4 Group IV (Ages 15, 16, 17)**

- Demonstrate increasing integration of objectives from Group III.
- Encourage self-motivation and regular routines in spiritual practice.
- Establish a sense of the interdependence of self and society; deepen the understanding of one's role in and responsibility to society.
- Increase ability to make *dharmaic* choices when facing moral dilemmas.
- Demonstrate human values by meeting life challenges with love, confidence, and understanding of others.
- Establish habits of non-waste of resources and continue all disciplines of the “ceiling on desires” program, including:
  - Developing keen awareness of the effects one's choices of media, companions, and activities.
  - Deepening the practice of controlling negative emotions.
- Foster excellence in all endeavors without straying into egoistic competition.
- Apply all aspects of the curriculum and develop awareness of self as exemplar, through leadership roles. For example: assisting/mentoring roles with younger children.
- Provide increasing emphasis on selfless, loving service through:

- Participating in local and regional service projects and activities.
- Initiating service project with age-group peers.

## **6.5 *The Sai Spiritual Education Teacher***

*When you teach the children, you must remember that you are engaged in a noble task for the sake of the children entrusted to your care. You must feel you are educating yourselves when you are educating the children. When you impart knowledge to the children, your own understanding of the subject improves. When you study information for teaching, you derive joy from that study. Always have the feeling that whatever you do for others is in reality a service done to the Divine that resides in everyone. When teachers do their duty in this spirit, they will imbue the children with the spirit of universal love.*

*Teacher's Training Camp, Prasanthi Nilayam, August 1983, Sathya Sai Baba*

### **6.5.1 Teacher beliefs and actions**

*Teachers, be aware that the world is watching you with sharp eyes—your conduct, your practice, your words, and your deeds. Unless your conduct is exemplary, our whole bal vikas (SSE) program will be undermined. How can such a teacher expect other parents to feel enthused about sending their children to class? [Spiritual Sadhana, 1978]*

Sathya Sai Baba

Who are the SSE teachers? Sai Spiritual Education teachers are members of the Sathya Sai Centers and well-versed in the Sai teachings. They are senior students on the path to Self-Realization. Teaching Sai Spiritual Education is part of their personal spiritual practices for purification and enlightenment.

The teacher serves as a vital role model and exemplar in the life of a child. Therefore, in the context of the SSE program, the teacher should believe in the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and live the spiritual principles He expounds.

### **6.5.2 Teacher guidelines**

- Pray for guidance.
- Make a commitment to the ideals of Sathya Sai Baba.
- Be properly trained as an SSE Teacher.
- Treat the children as your own.
- Observe the child's individual needs.
- Practice tolerance for the child's level of progress.
- Build self-confidence in the children.
- Use a positive approach in teaching.
- Make sure each child understands the lesson.
- Enforce discipline.
- Communicate with parents.
- Prepare materials ahead of time.
- Be punctual.
- Foster a positive class environment, conducive to the teachings of spiritual truths.
- Demonstrate equal-mindedness and broad acceptance.

## **6.6 Involving parents**

*To instill in the minds of the young the value of prayer, humility, and loving service to others, the homes have to be the first schools. The parents have to be imbued with faith in the basic universal truth of all religions.* [1967.4.3] Sathya Sai Baba

The lasting effect of the SSE program upon the child depends upon parent involvement. What is taught in the SSE classroom is effective only if the parents support the teacher and the SSE activities and are willing to reinforce the teachings at home.

Centers are encouraged to provide a parent program that involves parents with their children's education in the SSE program. The aims of such a program are to:

1. Provide a meaningful channel of communication and to encourage mutual support between parents and teachers.
2. Enhance, reinforce, and integrate at home what the children are experiencing and learning in the SSE class.
3. Build a strong sense of family and community within the Sathya Sai Center, encouraging activities in which children, parents, and members may participate.
4. Assist parents to incorporate Sathya Sai Baba's teachings into parenting practice.

## **6.7 Mutual commitment and responsibilities of teachers and parents**

*Children's minds are innocent and pure. Each child is like white marble for the teacher and the parents to sculpt into an image of God, a bud to be helped to blossom in all its divine glory so that it becomes a worthy offering to God.* [cannot find; replacement below] Sathya Sai Baba

*Students are like the stones out of which the sculptor chisels the figures he wants. The sculptor produces a thing of beauty out of a piece of rough rock. Parents and teachers are the sculptors, who have to mould the shape and figure of the students for whom they are responsible.* [1986.1.20] Sathya Sai Baba

1. The teacher shall provide a spiritual and experiential educational program through which the children will develop their divine human nature following the guidelines of the SSE program in cooperation with the Center.
2. The parent agrees to reinforce the goals and objectives of the SSE program in the home, to see that the student attends regularly, and to participate in regularly scheduled activities.
3. Teachers arrange occasional meetings with parents to discuss their child's progress, as well as invite them on special occasions to sit in the class.
4. Teachers regularly inform parents about the goals and objectives for the class through lesson plans, written communications, or any other means that is mutually acceptable to teacher and parent.

*Teachers, if a child misses class, call the home and find out why the child was not in class.* [Teacher's Training Camp, Prasanthi Nilayam, August 1983] Sathya Sai Baba

## 6.8 *Sai's words to teachers*

**Q: What is the goal for the teacher?**

**A:** *Students are very tender and pure-hearted; give them that which is sacred and pure ... Fill your hearts with love and you will be fit to teach. Even if you are forced to do discipline, do it through love. Let love be your guiding star.* [Spiritual Sadhana, 1978]

Sathya Sai Baba

**Q: How can we have a positive approach to discipline?**

**A:** *When ridiculing, reprimanding, or disciplining a pupil, teachers must try to picture themselves in the child's position and decide how they would have reacted to the same situation when they were students. This kind of self-inquiry is very useful.* [1984.3.23]

Sathya Sai Baba

**Q: What is the responsibility of a Sai Spiritual Education Teacher?**

**A** *Teachers must endeavor to help each pupil unfold their native talents and innate skills and recognize their latent potential. When you plant a sapling, you provide water and manure; you insure that the plant receives sunlight and air. With all this help, it is a wonder the plant does not turn into air, soil, manure, or water. Instead, it becomes the same plant, true to its seed. As teachers, recollect your struggle to preserve and promote your individuality when you were a child. Keeping that in mind, deal accordingly with your students, who have the same problems and the same purpose.* [1984.3.23]

Sathya Sai Baba

**Q: What is the essence of the SSE teachers' message to the children?**

**A:** *Be convinced that there is a God, guiding and guarding us. Remember Him with gratitude. Pray to Him to render you pure. Love all, serve all. Keep good company. Visit places of worship and saintly people.* [1967.1.1]

Sathya Sai Baba

**Q: What qualities should teachers cultivate in themselves?**

**A:** *Above all, the teacher must be equipped with tolerance and a calm and quiet temper. Be prepared to face the buffeting of the environment without becoming ruffled ... When you must speak harshly to a child or parent because all other means of bringing home a point have failed, let your heart be soft, let it not be hardened by prejudice or hatred.* [1978.6.6]

Sathya Sai Baba

**Q: What are the qualities to cultivate in the children?**

**A:** *Children must have fear, humility, and faith. Fear of what? Fear of doing wrong, of falling into falsehood. Humility before whom? Before elders, teachers, parents. Faith in what? Faith in God, in your own strength, in your own victory.* [1969.5.16]

Sathya Sai Baba

**Q: Sometimes teachers find fault with other teachers. How should this be handled?**

**A:** *Teachers should not indulge in jealousy or fault-finding. They can undertake the task of teaching only after they have rid themselves of such traits. If teachers speak ill of other teachers and promote misunderstanding and factionalism, the children can never improve. Resolve now to adhere to the right path.* [1979.11.21]

Sathya Sai Baba

*Teachers should take care that the weeds of hatred, envy, and similar vices do not take root in their own heart. These weeds are rampant in the political field, and they creep into other fields too. Teachers should not form rival groups —some proud of their achievements, some envious of the praise others earn— that engage in recriminations. See others as your own brothers and sisters, for all are One when viewed as divine.* [1979.11.20]

Sathya Sai Baba