



## FAQs

### Sathya Sai Organization of the United States

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### **1. What is the purpose of the Sai Organization and of the Sai centers?**

Sathya Sai Baba says that the purpose of the Sai Organization as a whole is to awaken people to the Divinity inherent in them, to realize the unity in all, to foster Love, and to help its membership regain self-confidence and faith in God. It is not intended to promote any religion but to lead people toward the understanding of the underlying spiritual principles present in all religions; to make a Hindu a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian, a Jew a better Jew, a Muslim a better Muslim, etc.

On a practical level, the Sai Organization represents Sathya Sai Baba throughout the world. It is responsible for ensuring that programs are carried out in accordance with His instructions and that the teachings disseminated are genuine. It seeks to protect His Name. It strives to inspire, guide, and support the Sai Centers and their affiliated institutions.

Practical spirituality is the theme of the Sathya Sai Baba Organizations. Practical spirituality is not just contemplating Divinity when at our traditional place of worship or at a Sathya Sai Baba Center. Practical spirituality strives to incorporate the universal human values in all aspects of our lives during every conscious moment. The purpose of the Sathya Sai Baba Organization is to help us achieve this sublime quality of human life.

The booklet *Guidelines for American Sathya Sai Baba Centers* states that the purpose of a Sathya Sai Baba Center is to practice and exemplify the divine teachings of Sathya Sai Baba in order to encourage and assist people to lead genuine spiritual lives. The Sai Center strives to provide an environment where people who aspire to spirituality can assemble and learn from one another. This is accomplished by engaging in devotional, educational, and service programs recommended by Sathya Sai Baba, which help us to progress along the spiritual path. These programs embody the universal values given to us by Sathya Sai Baba: truth, right action, inner peace, unselfish love, and nonviolence. An important program is the rendering of selfless, loving service to our fellow human beings.

### **2. Are Sai Centers reflective of any one religion?**

Sathya Sai Baba has said, “*I have not come on any mission of publicity for any sect or creed or cause; nor have I come to collect followers for any doctrine. I have come to tell you of this universal unitary faith, this path of Love.*” He asks us to plant the seed of His teachings in the soil of our own culture so that it can grow up reflective of our culture; He asks us to cultivate the attitude of oneness between people of all creeds, all countries, and all continents. He has said, “*Let the different faiths exist and let the glory of God be sung in all languages and tunes.*” This loving and expansive direction should be reflected in our Sai Centers.

In practice, many Sai Centers in the USA tend to be strongly influenced by Hindu practices, both because the majority of the members are of Hindu origin and because western devotees love and respect the practices and rituals they see performed in Sathya Sai Baba’s ashrams in India.

The result is that our Centers can seem less welcoming than we would like to newcomers unfamiliar with the rituals and practices that are common in our centers.

Sai Center members should ask themselves what impression a Sai Center makes on a visitor. Does the visitor see the Sai Center as a Hindu organization or as a group that is (1) centered in the local culture and (2) focused on the spiritual principles taught by Sathya Sai Baba?

Sai Centers should focus on the essential truths in Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings that are the foundation for all the world’s major religions and should express those essential truths in ways that are consistent with local culture. Centers must reflect the fact that all religions teach one basic discipline. Members should strive to overcome egotism and selfish desire and to fill themselves with the Glory of God. Members should strive to ground their every thought, word, and deed in love and selfless service.

The Sai Organization cannot mandate how Sai Centers are to be centered in the local culture. It cannot give rules and regulations for this. The need for centering in the local culture must be felt in the heart. Center members must dedicate themselves strongly enough to the cause of unity for the Center to change.

Several other FAQs in this document touch on this issue.

### **3. How do we strike an appropriate balance in the centers between members from eastern and western backgrounds in spiritual understanding?**

Sathya Sai Baba instructs us to seek to see “Unity in Diversity” through striving to see the divinity inherent in all, regardless of caste, creed, nationality, gender, etc. He says,

*There is only one religion, the religion of Love.*

*There is only one caste, the caste of humanity.*

*There is only one language, the language of the Heart.*

*There is only one God, and He is omnipresent.*

If we, as members of Sai Centers, make a sincere effort to put this simple principle of Unity into practice, we will find ways to speak with the language of the heart and to see through cultural and religious differences so that we can respect and learn from one another. We will then create an atmosphere that is spiritual rather than religious in nature.

Sathya Sai Baba emphasizes that His message is universal, based on love, truth, right action, peace, and nonviolence, and that all religions teach the same basic values.

In our Sai Centers, the emphasis should be on the values taught by Sathya Sai Baba, and not rituals. We must build

awareness that His teachings must be put into practice to be effective. It is the responsibility of the Center leadership to foster an understanding of the essential unity of all religions, which is based on Love. Center members must remain steadfastly true to the universal essence of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings.

At the same time, in order to reflect the culture of our country, members will have to let go of some of the familiar rituals and forms that they may have come to associate with Sai Centers. This may involve reducing the number of Sanskrit chants and prayers, including chants and prayers from the various religions, and providing English versions of non-English chants and prayers. When foreign language chants are included in our devotional programs, or scriptures from religious texts are referred to in study circle, members must remember that the universal nature of the thought should be made clear to all participants.

Centers must also pay attention to the impact of such details as the items placed on the altar, seating arrangements (floor vs. chair seating), the content and style of the devotional singing programs, and the attire of the participants, including removal of shoes. All these details contribute to making our centers seem either welcoming and friendly or unwelcome and foreign.

Placing importance on understanding and practicing the basic human values taught by Sathya Sai Baba in our study circles and service projects can provide valuable opportunities for transcending cultural biases. Always remember that, when members of the Centers are truly practicing Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, there will be no imbalance between East and West because the teachings are universal and apply to all humanity.

#### **4. How do we make our centers open and welcoming to all members of our communities?**

*"Members of Sai Organizations should consider UNITY as their very life breath. He who sees Unity wins the Grace of the One."*

*"Love, respect, tolerance, mutual, cooperation, forbearance – these must flow from the hearts of each to all. Once there is Love, all else will follow. Love attracts and expands."*

Sai Baba Centers must be examples of the universality of Sai teachings. They must be conscious of the local environment they operate in, and they must promote a congenial, loving, and mutually supportive environment for all attendees. Newcomers should not feel that they are entering a "cultish" environment. The actual number of attendees or ethnic composition of a center is irrelevant.

Avoid giving the impression to others that they are "preaching". Sathya Sai Baba says, *"My life is My message."* Strive to follow that example so that we make others aware of

Sathya Sai Baba and His message only by putting His teachings into practice and through practical example.

Some recommendations:

- Welcome western newcomers with a smile and a handshake, rather than "namaste" or "Sai Ram", to make them feel comfortable.
- Offer a written program to everyone as they come into the center.
- Make song sheets or songbooks available to all.
- Do some singing in the language of the local culture.
- Include universally accepted prayers from different religions.
- Offer translations of songs, prayers, etc. if they are not in English.
- Emphasize activities, such as service and study circle, that transcend cultural differences.
- Allow time to introduce newcomers (e.g. a simple go-round of first names at the beginning of study circle).
- Provide a balance of western and eastern food items during potluck gatherings.
- Give newcomers a copy of the Council-approved Newcomers Guide.

Centers can introduce Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on spirituality and human values to the local community through occasional meetings that are open to the public. Center members can bring friends or coworkers who may be interested in knowing more about Sathya Sai Baba. These meetings can focus on His teachings and their practice in daily life. The devotional programs at these meetings can be made up of prayers and devotional songs that are universal in nature, reflect Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, and are in a language that is dominant in the local community (e.g. English or Spanish). The meetings could feature a speaker, who introduces Sathya Sai Baba and His teachings and answers questions. Approved books can be made available through the center library for those interested in knowing more.

#### **5. What prayers and rituals are required in Sai Center devotional programs?**

*"Bhajans (devotional songs) charge the atmosphere with divine adoration; that is why I insist on group singing of the Names of the Lord."*

*"After bhajans ... there should be meditation for five to ten minutes."*

*No prayer or ritual is required.* Develop devotional programs that suit your culture, that are broad in scope, incorporating elements from all major religions, thereby demonstrating unity in diversity. Use only prayers and rituals that are universal in nature. Do not focus on practices common to any one religion.

Don't repeat rituals and prayers by rote. Members should understand the meaning of the rituals and prayers offered,

and the Center leadership should make instruction available. Make translations of non-English prayers and songs available in Center songbooks alongside the foreign-language versions.

Center programs may include some of the following prayers and rituals. With each, we provide some comments.

- Chanting *Om* is an appropriate way to begin, for it calms the heart and mind and prepares it for the rest of the program. When properly explained, *OM*, the sound of the Universe, is universal in nature.
- Devotional singing can be (1) appropriate for the local culture and (2) include songs from all cultures and religions. It is not necessary to begin with a *Ganesh bhajan*.
- Chanting *Om, santhi, santhi, santhi* at the end of a program segment. This chant is not mandatory, but it is simple and short enough to include in any program, as long as the meaning of *santhi* (supreme peace) is clear to all participants.
- Maintaining silence prior to and following the program. This is a sound (*sic*) practice in any culture.
- Singing *Arathi* is not required, and waving the flame isn't either. If sung, consider singing an English version as well.
- Distributing *vibuthi* and singing the *vibuthi* prayer is not required. If performed, sing the prayer in English as well as in Sanskrit.
- The *Gayathri* and *Sai Gayathri Mantra* are not required.
- A short period of meditation is appropriate.
- The *Asathoma* and *Sarva Dharma* prayers are not required.
- One need not end with the *Loka Samastha* prayer. Some Centers end with the following song, which includes the prayer. This is a wonderful example of adapting an Eastern custom to the local culture.

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

*Loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu*; may all the people in all the worlds be happy.

*Loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu*; may all the people in all the worlds know you, Swami.

## 6. What decorations, pictures, and statues are appropriate in a Sai Baba Center and why?

Sathya Sai Baba has said that our altars should consist of a flame. He has said that a picture is not necessary, but if we want one, have one of Him.

The Sai Center altar should be adorned simply and without unnecessary embellishments. Appropriate adornments include a candle/flame, some flowers, and perhaps *vibuthi*

containers. Some centers also have a chair for Sathya Sai Baba, signifying His subtle presence at the meetings.

*"It is recommended that only the Sarva Dharma Symbol, photographs of Sathya Sai Baba and possibly Shirdi Sai Baba, quotations from Sathya Sai Baba, and universally accepted quotations from the world's major religions be posted in a Center." Guidelines for American Sathya Sai Baba Centers, section 6.*

Displaying pictures and statues of various gods and goddesses is inappropriate because it implies that accepting or worshipping these gods is a necessary requisite for being a member or devotee. Such images also reinforce the incorrect impression that one or more particular religions are favored in the center over others.

## 7. How can we best welcome newcomers and help new members, who may still have much to learn about Swami and his teachings?

*"Office bearers in this Organization are leaders who bear the brunt themselves, guides who walk along a path they wish others to take. They shall not command or punish; they can only persuade or advise."*

Loving common sense must be the guideline here.

Some recommendations:

- Provide a copy of the comprehensive newcomer booklet adopted by the USA Council.
- Have ushers available at the center to greet newcomers, guide them, and seat men and women separately.
- The ushers must have read the newcomer's information booklet themselves and be ready to answer questions with love and patience.
- Make sure that a designated Center member is available following the program so that newcomers have the opportunity to ask questions or get clarifications.
- Hold periodic (monthly or quarterly) orientation meetings to help newcomers/members understand the organizational setup and the guidelines. Explain the rationale behind the guidelines as well as the various practices at the Centers and their significance. An officer may be able to cite an appropriate quote from Sathya Sai Baba that will answer a newcomer's question.

If a newcomer does not adhere to the procedures recommended by our Guidelines, for example, if they are inappropriately dressed, have children who are causing disturbance, do not maintain silence, or repeatedly speak out inappropriately during study circle, a Center officer can gently take the person aside at the end of the program and make a suggestion. Usually, a gentle request will suffice. Be mindful of cultural differences in interpreting the guidelines.

Officers or meeting coordinators should constantly strive to:

- Pray for His guidance as Conscience.
- Set personal examples in public.
- Inform, persuade, and advise in private.

### **8. How do we balance the spiritual emphasis of the center with members' social and cultural needs?**

According to the *Guidelines for American Sathya Sai Baba Centers*, the purpose of a Sathya Sai Baba Center is to provide a place for studying and practicing the divine Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, in order to assist people in leading genuine spiritual lives.

The Sathya Sai Baba Center accomplishes this by providing devotional, educational, and service programs recommended by Sathya Sai Baba. These programs embody the universal values given to us by Sathya Sai Baba: truth, right action, peace, love, and nonviolence. Participating in these programs helps us realize our "True Self", our own "Innate Divinity".

Extraneous social and cultural interactions between members should take place outside the realm of the Center. This does not preclude social interaction. Social get-togethers may help to build community spirit and may improve member participation in Center activities. However, these gatherings should be separate from official Center activities. A clear line should be maintained between spiritual and social activities. Care should be taken not to exclude any members from functions in which substantially all the members are invited.

### **9. Are centers allowed to incorporate or create non-profit organizations?**

According to the *Guidelines for American Sathya Sai Baba Centers*, Sai Centers may not incorporate or create a foundation for any reason. A center is not part of a tax-exempt corporation or foundation and is not entitled to federal or state tax-exempt status.

### **10. What is the organizational structure of the Sathya Sai Organization?**

The governing body of the International Sai Organization is the *Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation*, a not-for-profit organization registered in the United States. Its members were appointed by Sathya Sai Baba. The World Foundation is responsible for the governance of all functions of the International Sai Organizations. Its mission is:

- To ensure the authenticity of all programs engaged in by the International Sri Sathya Sai Organizations.
- To ensure that all programs, publications, and interactions with other legal entities is conducted in a manner that is compatible with the principles embodied in Sathya Sai Baba's teachings.

- To ensure that the actions of the International Organizations bearing the name of Sri Sathya Sai Baba are conducted according to His express guidance and the teachings that He has expounded all these years.

The Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation is headquartered in Prasanthi Nilayam, Andhra Pradesh, India. The *Prasanthi Council* administers the policies and programs developed by World Foundation and oversees the functioning of the Sai Organizations worldwide. The five-person Prasanthi Council was appointed by Sathya Sai Baba.

The policies, decisions, and directives of the Prasanthi Council are disseminated through the Coordinators of nine World Zones, each overseen by a Zone Chair. Each World Zone may contain a number of national Sai Organizations. The national organizations typically have a Central Coordinator and a National Council composed of regional presidents and members at large. From the National Council level down through the regional level to the individual centers, there are five officers at each organizational level: president, vice president, devotional coordinator, service coordinator, and education coordinator.

In the United States, Sai Centers are grouped into ten geographical regions. Members in a region belong to a Sathya Sai Baba Center, which is the primary focus of activity of the Sai Organization.

The Sathya Sai Baba Central Council of the USA is composed of the Presidents of the ten Regional Coordinating Committees, the Central Coordinator, the Zone Chair, and Members at-large. The Central Council coordinates national policy and serves the Regional Coordinating Committees and the Centers.

Within the U.S., affiliated organizations include:

- Sathya Sai Society of America, a charitable, tax-exempt foundation;
- Sathya Sai Book Center of America, which publishes and distributes materials concerning Sathya Sai Baba;
- Sathya Sai Education in Human Values Foundation, which promotes Sathya Sai Education in Human Values. This organization will be replaced in the near future by an Institute for Sathya Sai Education (ISSE).

### **11. Is it necessary for members to participate in all facets of the center's programs, or is it enough just to go to devotional singing programs?**

According to the *Guidelines for American Sathya Sai Baba Centers*, an individual may join a Center after becoming familiar with its purpose and the guidelines under which it functions. In joining, the individual acknowledges having carefully read the Center Guidelines, agrees to honor them, and makes a commitment to work in harmony with other members to achieve the goals of the Center. Members are expected to undertake spiritual discipline as an integral part

of their daily lives and abide by the following Nine Point Code of Conduct:

- Daily meditation and prayer (according to one's own religious practice).
- Devotional singing/prayer with members of their family once a week.
- Attendance by their children in the SSE Educational programs conducted by the Center.
- Participation in community service and other programs of the Organization.
- Regular attendance in group devotional singing organized by the Organization.
- Regular study of spiritual literature with special reference to Sai Teachings.
- Practice of the principle of 'Ceiling on Desires' and the utilization of any savings thereby generated for the service of mankind.
- Soft and loving speech with everyone with whom one comes into contact.
- Not indulging in talking ill of others, especially in their absence.

It is clear that Baba expects us to participate in all activities of the Center, so it is important that we strive to take part in as many Center programs as possible. However, there is no one policeman! Individuals are responsible for their own spiritual exercises.

Sathya Sai Baba has offered us a perfect venue for self-realization, formulated along the three established spiritual paths of selfless service (*karma* or action), devotion (*bhakti*), and spiritual knowledge (*jnana*). Sathya Sai Baba's program for our spiritual transformation is best if viewed as a recipe rather than a smorgasbord. It is not a program from which we pick and choose only what appeals to us. It is more like a recipe in which the flour of service is mixed with the sugar of devotion and leavened with the yeast of wisdom gained from Sathya Sai Baba's teachings. The entire mixture is baked in the heat of spiritual effort (*tapas*) to yield the sweet cake of Self understanding. If any of the ingredients are missing, we cannot expect to attain the proper result.

## **12. How can Centers increase participation in service and study circle?**

All members should participate in the selection and planning of Center service projects, and service activities should be selected and scheduled in such a way that they are as convenient and appealing to as many members as possible. This includes a careful assessment of needs and an equally careful assessment of Center resources. Periodically, Centers should conduct study circles that address the spiritual purpose and value of selfless service and include talks by Center members who are especially dedicated to the path of service.

Also, since these activities should not be forced on members, members should feel that they want to participate.

Successful projects often allow for members to participate up to a level at which they are comfortable. For example, some facets of a project may require little of a newcomer but may fully engage those who want a more substantive project. Let participants engage in a project to whatever level they are physically and emotionally able at any given time. Service projects are usually successful when championed and coordinated by an individual who takes responsibility for the project and encourages joyful attendance.

Study circles will be most successful when they follow the Study Circle Guidelines published by the USA Council. These guidelines are carefully considered to guide the interactions of members along a format that has proved successful in centers around the world. Let each participant express their understanding of the subject matter being studied without fear of interruption or rebuttal. The direct participation of all members in the circle is extremely important. Each member should have an opportunity to present the topic of discussion, and the study circle coordinator must respect and encourage all participants equally.

The center officers should play a major role in achieving successful service projects and study circles by encouraging adherence to the service and study circle guidelines. They should encourage members to participate in these areas with the same dedication and devotion that they bring to devotional singing, exemplified by their own active participation in these programs.

## **13. If members are asked about Sathya Sai Baba while performing service activities, how should they respond?**

According to the *Guide to Service in American Sathya Sai Baba Centers*, all members are supposed to

*"Serve, Not Advertise." "Do not imagine that your task is to propagate Sai and Speak of Sathya Sai and His Message. That is not right."*

At some point during a service project, you may be asked what group you belong to. It is appropriate to mention the Sathya Sai Baba Organization. When questioned further, depending on your feelings and how the conversation goes, you may simply say that:

We are a spiritual group that engages in selfless service as an important part of our spiritual practice, we believe in the unity of religions and the oneness of all people, and we are inspired by the life and teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, who is our spiritual teacher and who lives in India.

Explain that He teaches that there are common universal principles and values that are the foundation of all religions and that we strive to live according to these universal values of truth, right action, peace, love, and nonviolence. His mes-

sage is summed up in the following three maxims: “*Love All, Serve All*”, and “*Help Ever, Hurt Never*”, and “*Head in the Forest, Hands in Society*”.

A service project is not the place to go into more detail or provide literature. If a person is interested in knowing more about Sai Baba or the Organization, you can direct them to the Intl Sai Organization website, [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org). If they show greater interest, invite them to a Center meeting.

**14. If I am a member of a Sai Baba Center, may I also be a member of my own church or service organization? What if I am an officer?**

Member: Each person should practice their own religion sincerely. A Christian should strive to be a good Christian. A Hindu should strive to be a good Hindu. A Muslim should strive to be a good Muslim. Let each one be a true practitioner of their religion. No one should criticize or hate another’s religion. “All are one. Be alike to everyone”, declared Jesus. The one God is common in all.

*Sanathana Sarathi* May, 1996, Page 124.

Officer: Officers of a Sai Center have a special responsibility to be of high moral character and to set an example to others by practicing Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings in their daily lives. Unity, harmony, and cooperation form the basis of a properly conducted Center.

Those receiving money as leaders of spiritual programs may not serve as Center officers. Similarly, professional teachers of yoga, meditation, etc., may not be Center officers, because the public might confuse their work with the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. Officers of a Center may retain membership in other spiritual organizations but may not serve as officers of such organizations.

Guidelines for American Sathya Sai Baba Centers,  
rev. June 1998, pp 20–21

**15. How do Centers handle the expenses to run a center or fund service activities?**

Fees or dues are never charged for any Sai Center activity. Donations are never solicited from members (except as described below) or the public. Centers pay no fees to the Sai Organization at any level. However, some necessary fees may be charged at cost for room and board at conferences/retreats. Officers of the Sai Organization use their own funds, not donated funds, to cover personal expenses incurred in carrying out their duties.

Centers may meet their expenses by allowing members to make voluntary, anonymous contributions. The method indicated by Sathya Sai Baba is to place a box in a private room; each person may go in to the room and place the money in the box, if anything. If the amount collected is insufficient to meet the project expenses, the officers may elect to make up the difference, modify the project to require only the donated

amount, or abandon the project. If a project is abandoned, any money collected is returned to the members.

No one should divulge who has given or promised to contribute to a project. No one should feel pressured to contribute or should be embarrassed by their inability or unwillingness to contribute to a center activity.

Special projects must be discussed and approved by the members and acted upon only if there are sufficient funds. Centers should not embark on projects for which there are insufficient resources of money, time, personnel, energy, or skills to successfully complete the project.

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) will be kept and reviewed by the Center officers on a quarterly basis and may be reviewed by the Regional President. The Centers do not have “treasurers”, since Centers do not amass treasure. Those assigned by the Center to deal with book center or conference accounts should be rotated on a regular basis (perhaps on a two year term, like officers) to avoid accumulation of influence or attachment to their positions.

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

*“Fund collection is as much opposed to this movement as fire is to water.”*

Sathya Sai Baba

Centers should guard against amassing excessive funds by analyzing the cause of the excess and take steps to remedy the situation. If excess funds are developed, temporarily stop voluntary contributions. In addition, excess funds can be made available for special projects such as public meetings, medical camps, or other member-approved service activities aimed at serving the community. Some funds may need to be preserved in an organizational account for conference deposits, etc.

**16. How should centers accommodate the needs of families with young children who might be disruptive during center meetings?**

It is primarily the responsibility of the parents to supervise their children and, if necessary, to take them out of a Center function if they become disruptive. The adult members of the Center have a responsibility to set the tone and expectations of behavior in the center. Also, if the children are guided with clear expectation of acceptable behavior during the Center programs, then there is a much better chance that it will happen.

New families will generally follow the example set by both other adults and other children. If that does not seem to be

happening, then a designated Center officer, perhaps the SSE Coordinator, should communicate with the parents in a loving manner to resolve the issue. Centers may also assign volunteers to facilitate activities that will keep the children busy and engaged, such as story telling or play groups.

If there is downtime between SSE classes and other Center activities such as devotional singing, SSE children may be asked to remain in their classes with their teachers until they are ready to join these activities. Volunteers may be assigned to see that children are not disrupting other activities. During devotional singing, it might also help to have the children sit with their parents or older SSE children or other adults to make sure they are not disrupting the activities.

### **17. How do we support our teens and young adults in the Centers who are living between the world of East and West and between childhood and adulthood?**

During the Sixth World Conference, Sathya Sai Baba laid emphasis on the formation of Youth Wings. This was the impetus in launching a formal Young Adults Program in the U.S. in 1996. Sathya Sai Baba enunciated the challenges and the potential of this critical stage of youth in life:

*Youth should imbibe the right ideals and plunge into society with the thirst for service as a spiritual duty, and this will make their humanness worthwhile. They should cultivate basic human traits like humility, readiness to serve and commiseration at the suffering of others.*

The Young Adult (YA) program, designed for those 18 to 35 years old, is intended to meet the challenge of providing an opportunity for them to develop leadership skills, find their strengths, explore their creativity, and associate with peers who are also devotees of Sathya Sai Baba and His teachings. It is especially important that these youths be given some independence, even if it means that they sometimes make mistakes or take longer to accomplish a goal than it might take an older adult with more experience. These youths, many of whom are of Indian origin but have grown up in the USA, are a bridge between East and West, as well as between childhood and adulthood. We must be willing to learn from them and to treat them with respect.

A new program for those aged 15-18 is under development.

As long as YAs operate within Sai Organizational guidelines, Center members can support them by giving them responsibility within the Center. They can be a valuable resource for older Sai Spiritual Education students, for example. Given the opportunity, they can take leadership in organizing and implementing service projects, and they can bring creative ideas to enliven study circles, etc.

YAs have a voice in the regional and national Sai Organizations. YA male and female representatives sit on the National Council. We encourage the YAs to make decisions on

how they want to serve Sathya Sai Baba. Center and regional officers should also communicate on a regular basis with the YA leaders and YA advisors in their region to see how the young adults can best be involved in center-related activities and how the centers can support YA activities.

For more information about the YA Program, contact the Center President or YA Advisors of the Region.

### **18. How do we handle differences of opinion within the centers?**

If questions or disagreements arise in a Center regarding any matter, they should be discussed in a spirit of unity, harmony, and cooperation. If a consensus agreement is not reached in the Center, the President of the Center may refer the matter to the Regional Coordinating Committee in order to obtain the advice and participation of the regional officers.

*(Guidelines for American Sai Centers, rev. June 1998, Page 14)*

Differences of opinion arise within any organization, and the Sai Organization is no exception. It is important to communicate openly and clearly about any differences of opinion. Communication does not just mean talking; it also means sincerely trying to understand the other person.

Sathya Sai Baba has given us many guidelines to facilitate good communication. Several of these are:

- Never speak ill of others, especially in their absence.
- It is not always possible to oblige, but always speak obligingly.
- First understand a problem; then make adjustments.
- When one finger points at another person, remember that there are three fingers pointing back at oneself.
- Everything is reflection, reaction, resound.

Remember that not all people are comfortable talking about difficult subjects, especially when strong emotions are involved. Individual differences must be respected. The *process* by which we handle differences of opinion is often more important than the result. Also remember that the Center, like the ashram in India, is Sathya Sai Baba's workshop; a place where all of our ego attachments can come to light. If we can remember that the same *Atma* is resident in all, then differences can be an opportunity for rapid spiritual growth. When we become more interested in correcting our own errors than we are in correcting the errors of others, there is great opportunity for compassion and harmony.

### **19. When officer selections are conducted in the Centers, how do we ensure that all members' voices are heard and respected?**

The process of selection, as opposed to election, of officers represents an important spiritual principle. We should select as officers people who have demonstrated selflessness, dedication, and competence. While differences may occur, the process should not degenerate into a popularity contest. Ideally, the process will culminate with unanimity among the Center members.

A membership committee may propose nominations for the offices. A Center membership meeting is held to announce the nominations and solicit other nominations from members. (In order to provide enough time for consideration, these additional nominations may be made in a next meeting.) The selection is held in another membership meeting.

All members that are nominated should be informed so they can decide whether to accept the nomination. All members nominated and willing to serve should be present at the selection meeting.

The selection is designed to achieve consensus, or unanimity. A ballot is held, on paper and respecting the privacy of all members. The results are announced, in an orderly and loving manner. Nominees are then given the chance to remove themselves from consideration. If more than one candidate remains in the selection process after a discussion, they may be given the opportunity to talk among themselves to decide on who would serve for the position. This process is repeated until one candidate remains for each office.

If unanimity for an office cannot be achieved, the matter is submitted to the Regional President for resolution. Center members should do their best to reach unanimity in a spirit of harmony and humility so that referral to the Regional President will not be necessary.

*“Choose men and women who have unshaken faith in this present Avatar, with this name and this form. Officers should not be regarded as positions of authority or as “prizes” for devotion. They*

*should be accepted with humility and exercised with love.”*

It is important that all members' views and opinions are heard and respected. There must be full opportunity for nominations and time for consideration before final selections are conducted. It is contrary to Sai Organizational principles for officers to “appoint” their successors or otherwise guide selections as they wish without respecting the full participation of Center members.

In a small Center, where the choices for officers are few and there is general consensus among the members on who should be the next officers, the process outlined above can be shortened. However, if there are any real differences of opinion occur, the process should be followed.

## **20. What is the difference between educare, SSE, and SSEHV?**

Educare is a philosophy of education that pertains to all individuals, whether young or old. Educare recognizes one's inner Divinity and seeks to awaken this Divinity. Sathya Sai Baba has said, “The word *educare* means to bring out that which is within. Human values are latent in every human being; one cannot acquire them from outside. They have to be elicited from within. *Educare* means to bring out human values. 'To bring out' means to translate them into action.”

SSE is an education program for the children of Sai Center members. Children learn about the basic five human values (truth, right action, peace, love, and nonviolence) and also study various religions.

SSEHV is an education program for all children and others in the public sector, in schools and in the community. The five human values are taught in 3 ways, through direct, indirect, and co-curricular lessons.