

## CULTURAL INCLUSION AND EXPANSION INITIATIVE OF SSIO-USA

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### WHAT IS CULTURAL INCLUSION AND EXPANSION INITIATIVE?

Cultural Inclusion and Expansion (CIE) is an initiative started by SSIO-USA based on a request from Regional Presidents to raise awareness about Sathya Sai's message of universal love by including practices that reflect local customs and traditions and a place where local residents feel welcome, comfortable, and can relate to activities at our local Sai Center.

#### WHERE DID THE CULTURAL INCLUSION AND EXPANSION INITIATIVE COME FROM?

In January 2018 the National Council of the SSIO-USA held its biennial meeting. During the National Council meeting the regional presidents reported that very few members reflect the demographics of their communities. They added that when the typical local community member visits, he/she rarely returns. The National Officers selected a committee to explore and address this issue.

#### WHO FORMED THE CIE COMMITTEE?

Members on the committee comprise of long-term SSIO USA members of varied backgrounds and experience.

#### HOW DID THE CULTURAL INCLUSION AND EXPANSION COMMITTEE START TO ADDRESS THIS REQUEST FOR HELP?

The first step of the committee was to better understand the issue. Individuals of varied backgrounds who chose not to continue to visit the center (either after one visit or after several years of attending) were interviewed by committee members. Results were shared and discussed. Finally, the committee delved into Sai Literature to understand Sathya Sai's relevant guidance.

**WHAT HAS SATHYA SAI SAID ABOUT THIS TOPIC?**

An addendum of relevant quotes by Sathya Sai on this topic is available at <https://sathyasai.us/cie>

**WHAT DOES THE SSIO MANUAL SAY ABOUT CULTURAL RELEVANCE?**

The section on Cultural Relevance in the Operations Manual of the SSIO, includes “Ideal Sathya Sai Center meetings provide spiritual upliftment to members and are welcoming to people in the community in which the Sathya Sai Center exists. To be welcoming, Sathya Sai Center meetings should have a spiritual basis and not oriented towards set rituals or to any one religion or language. It is important to remember that Sathya Sai Baba came for all people, so the Sathya Sai Center or Sathya Sai Group should not be identifying with one particular religion.”

**HOW CAN THE CIE TEAM HELP MEMBERS OF SAI CENTER TO BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE?**

The CIE team has developed study circle materials that will give devotees in centers many teachings of Sai Baba relevant to this area to reflect upon, and questions to elicit deeper thought and discussion. After contemplating and discussing these teachings in center study circles, those centers or groups, or sub-groups from within centers, may decide to make changes to become more inclusive to all community residents, and expansive in thoughts and words and activities that may advance their sense of “expanding love towards all, at all times.”

**WILL SAI PUBLIC MEETINGS AND OTHER PUBLIC OUTREACH ACTIVITIES HELP?**

Public meetings and other Sai Public Outreach activities will help spread the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and introduce many people to the Sai Centers. But some reports described people who attended a public meeting and were moved by the topics of Human Values and Universality but were disappointed when they attended a center meeting. The meetings were not multi faith or universal in nature.

**MANY SAI YOUNG ADULTS GREW UP IN THE USA. ARE THEY HELPING NEW COMERS FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE?**

Many Sai YAs understand how the perception of some Sai Centers can confuse visitors and those YAs will be a significant help to centers. There is a national effort to help YAs become more active in their centers.

During a breakout session with the Adult YA Advisors during a YA Leadership Retreat in September 2018 the National YA Advisors developed an exercise that solicited the primary challenges that the Young Adult groups were experiencing. The top challenge was “Disengagement” of YAs, many who left the centers as well as the YA gatherings. The reasons shared appeared similar to the reasons many new comers and Americans of Diverse Origins gave for leaving or not returning to center meetings. One pertinent comment by a Young Adult who stopped attendance in center functions that reflects many reasons given was, “The center is more a cultural gathering and not a spiritual group. I want a spiritual group to learn from now.”

**DO WE HAVE TO CHANGE OUR SAI CENTER?**

No. From the beginning the CIE team worked under “Source, not force” in developing the Cultural Inclusion and Expansion Initiative.

**HOW CAN CENTERS SHARE IDEAS ABOUT WAYS TO ENHANCE THE CIE INITIATIVE?**

There will be a value in sharing ideas and efforts to enhance cultural expansion and inclusion, and their successful consequences, and lessons that are learned. Centers may send their thoughts and descriptions of endeavors to their Regional Devotion Coordinator. Regional Devotional Coordinators have access to a special portal on the national SSIO-USA website designed to promote collaboration and exchange of ideas. Every effort will be made to support ideas and actions to help centers become more open and welcoming to Americans of Diverse Origins.

**WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE CIE INITIATIVE?**

The initial goal of the Cultural Inclusion and Expansion initiative is to support devotees in all centers to more fully understand why many visitors, especially Americans of Diverse Origin population looking for ways to connect to a universal spiritual group that respects and embraces members of all

faiths, do not return to Sai center meetings. This will also increase awareness of why many Young Adults begin to disengage from activities in the centers and YA groups. The goal goes beyond understanding by also stimulating reflection and discussion on ways to help centers take advantage of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba to address the needs of visitors and Young Adults in ways that will more fully satisfy their spiritual quest.

**ARE WE TRYING TO INCREASE CENTER MEMBERSHIP WITH THIS INITIATIVE?**

No. The term expansion refers to the expansion of consciousness and self-transformation that comes from an active acceptance of the underlying unity of all creation. “Expansion is my life” says Sathya Sai Baba.

**HOW CAN CENTER MEMBERS BE MADE AWARE OF THIS INITIATIVE AS ATTENDANCE IS AN ISSUE FOR STUDY CIRCLES? ALSO, SSE CLASSES ARE HELD IN PARALLEL TO STUDY CIRCLE TIMES. HOW CAN SSE TEACHERS BE INCLUDED IN STUDY CIRCLES?**

Here are a few suggestions to share this initiative with all members of the Center:

- 1) A new workshop is developed that can be scheduled by regions for those who are busy during Study Circle time.
- 2) Split devotional singing time with Study Circles as there are more attendees for Devotional singing including SSE teachers.
- 3) Provide a 5-minute summary of key points from Study Circles at the conclusion of Devotional singing. A slight variation of this suggestion is to use the Study Circle quote for sharing “Thought of the Day” reading and having a 5-10 minute discussion on it.
- 4) Some Center officers are planning to conduct the Study Circles among the Center officers before sharing with Center members. SSE teachers can be included in these Study Circle times and summary of the discussion can be presented by each group.

**WHO CAN I CONTACT TO SCHEDULE THE NEW WORKSHOP?**

The workshop can be requested by contacting your Regional President or Regional Devotion Coordinator.

**IT IS SAID THAT AN INDIVIDUAL COMES INTO SAI FOLD WHEN CALLED BY SATHYA SAI BABA AND HIS/HER KARMA. WHY DO CENTER MEMBERS NEED TO CHANGE ANYTHING?**

While all that happens is per God's will and each person's own karma, Center members must focus on their own actions and adapt to the time, place and circumstance of the communities where they live. If a community resident, out of curiosity or in response to feeling spiritually depleted, visits a Center we should be prepared to help by having programs and activities which local residents can relate to. Any change that may happen at the Sai Center will be voluntary and comes from Source not force, and will be in accordance with the guidelines and expectations of the Sai Organization.