

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 1 1

Living in Sai

Spiritual Discipline Program

**Improve Communication and Interact
Respectfully with Family**

“When there is understanding and harmony in the family, peace will spread to the community, and from there to the nation and the world. Unity confers joy and peace. - Baba, Jan. 1991

Dear Sai Young Adults,

With His grace and love, we share our next spiritual practice point- “Improve communication and interact respectfully with family.” While we recognize that charity begins at home...we seldom think about ‘communication’ in the same manner. The first and the best place to improve our communication is at home.

Swami often reminds us that our parents are God and that the love of family is the medium through which the love of God is taught. Communicating and interacting respectfully and lovingly with your entire family is very important and pleases Swami very much! Let us not just improve communication at home, but carry this loving and respectful attitude with whomever we interact with-our neighbors, at school, in the workplace, and in our community.

We hope that you will read and share this newsletter and study circle guide with your family, Sai brothers and sisters; and also engage in discussions on applying this practice point in your daily lives. Swami’s simple and practical words of wisdom on effective communication serve as the ideal GPS (God Positioning System) to navigate through this adventure of life, making it enjoyable and meaningful!

Jai Sai Ram!

November 19- 26, 2011

*Latest updates on YA
pilgrimage, Registration,
National Gratitude offering,
and more!*

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Understanding the Spiritual Discipline

How is communication here different from speaking softly and lovingly (i.e. July SDP)?

Communication here is:

- **A function of the role you play.** Ex: A mother may behave/interact in specific ways with her child that is different from ways she interacts with her mom, sister, father, and spouse.
- **Beyond just speaking, i.e., non-verbal clues.** Ex: mom's love can be communicated without speech and with her loving glance.
- **A medium to express love.** Ex: parents advising, older siblings mentoring, etc.



What would interacting respectfully entail?

- Our word should reflect Swami's sweetness
- Being sensitive
- Not being hurtful
- As Swami sums up "You may not oblige but learn to speak obligingly"

Understanding Communication

(Source: Communication Workshop based on Swami's teachings by Dr. Joe Phaneuf (USA National Young Adult Advisor))

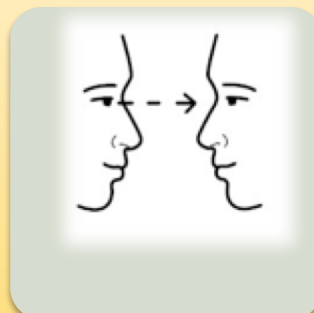
Let us break down the act of communicating into 2 sub-acts:

(1) Understanding/imbibing and (2) reacting/responding.



Swami says, "first understanding, then adjustment." So what does this entail?

- Listening patiently
- Watching for nonverbal clues
- Making the heart to heart connection
- Using repeat back technique to make sure you have understood



How do we understand/imbibe effectively?

- Eliminate distractions
- Being fully present in the moment
- Eye contact
- Become curious rather than judging everything that is said
- Follow Swami's example on how to make a person feel comfortable
- Make love the foundation



How do we react/respond effectively?

- Make empathic statements and gestures
- Remembering that sometimes a person needs to vent and does not need us to solve their problem
- When appropriate, offering to help or give advice
- Holding hand or hand on shoulder
- A change in our behavior
- Putting ourselves in their shoes
- Seeing someone you have great respect for such as your mother or grandmother
- Seeing Swami in others

Ramayana, a Guide on Human Relationships

Among the four brothers in the Ramayana epic, there was boundless love and regard for each other. When Rama went to the forest and was in Chitrakuta, Bharatha came there to entreat him to return to Ayodhya and reign as the legitimate heir to the throne. Rama refused to return, saying that Bharatha should rule over Ayodhya in accordance with the promise given by Dasaratha. The argument between the two was ultimately resolved by Sage Vasishtha who told Bharatha: "Do not cause any pain to Rama, who is Divinity itself and who has come down to protect the good and uphold Dharma."



Bharatha pleaded for taking Rama's sandals and administering the kingdom in Rama's name till he returned to Ayodhya. There are a series of episodes in the Ramayana to show how deep was the love between the four brothers and how devoted were the younger brothers to Rama. Such fraternal love is an example to the world for all time. The Ramayana is a guidebook on the ideal relations between mothers and children, between husband and wife, between brothers, between the ruler and the people, between the master and the servants and many other human relationships.

Rama showed compassion to the dying eagle Jatayu, which had fought with Ravana when he was carrying Sita away to Lanka. Rama gave refuge to Vibhishana (Ravana's brother), even against the fears expressed by Lakshmana. These are examples of Rama's supreme benevolence and magnanimity towards anyone who revered him or sought his protection. Rama declared to Lakshmana: "Anyone who comes to me in a spirit of surrender, whoever he might be, is mine and I am his. I shall give him asylum. This is my vow." With a pure heart and love for everyone, Rama showed unity in all of his thoughts, words and actions.



Devotees should install Rama in their hearts and celebrate Rama Navami for achieving Atmic bliss. Going through the Ramayana epic they should reach the state of "Atma-Rama" (oneness with the Universal Spirit). In such a state there is no Ahamkara (ego-sense).

-Sathya Sai Baba, Divine Discourse on Rama Navami, April 7, 1987

Paradigm Shift from the Past

Source: *Common Challenges faced by YAs as presented in the USA National Youth Conference in 2009: Questions posed by YAs are answered by Professor Anil Kumar, Swami's translator and a faculty member of the Biosciences Dept. at SSSIHL, Prashanti Nilayam, India.*

Question 1: I find that new age thinking is one of the challenges for Sai youth because people in older generations who are not in the Sai families don't think/act like we do. We see a lot of age-old traditions and stuff like that, which are kind of divisive and narrow-minded...I feel a strong need to address that with the elders and try to see their point—to reach out to address the divisiveness, caste, name, religion and all that. There are a lot of practices that have come through the ages. How do we fight them in a constructive way, without hurting others' sentiments?

Prof. Anil Kumar: Do you need to fight them? Is there any need to fight them? It is not possible to fight; plus, you cannot fight alone. But on the other hand, if you follow the system in full understanding, in full awareness, in full knowledge of what you are doing, even if it is different from the past tradition, then if what you feel is correct and ideal and if you act in such a way, they too will be convinced. A simple example is untouchability, which was the practice at one time. Yet today it is no longer there...Days are changing, they are changing. So don't worry.

Question 2: We are always taught to respect elders, like our parents and our grandparents. But if they have some kind of aspiration or desire for us, which we feel, is not right, what should we do? (Laughter)...

Prof. Anil Kumar: I understand your point...I shall say what Baba said in this context, my friends. I shall not give my own interpretation, because being with Swami for the last twenty years, and working right under His nose in the institution, I quote Him or keep my mouth shut! Now what does Baba say about this question, where parents and grandparents feel one way and your feeling is different?

Baba said that priority should be given to the parents and grandparents. Why? Their decisions, their suggestions, their recommendations, and their advice are all based on their maturity, their long

experience, and their exposure to thousands of people. Out of richness of experience, and with a deeper conviction, they come forward with certain advice. They give you certain suggestions that are in your best interest. But you may feel differently about what they say. Why?

...So our ideas are different from our grandparents and our parents because of our age, because of our inexperience, because of our emotions, because we are not able to exercise our judgment properly, so we are not able to discriminate properly; plus, the company around us may not give us proper guidance. These are the factors that make us deviate, divert, and differ, from the opinion of our elders.

So, give top priority to parents and grandparents. Alright, but if they don't hear me, what shall I do? If they put me down, what shall I do? If I don't agree with them, what shall I do? This will be your next question.

Baba said this: "You should try to convince them. You should be patient enough; you should be pleading. You should explain things in such a way that the reason behind your decision is clear, so that your parents and grandparents can also agree with your decision." This is what Baba said. Am I clear? That's it. Thank you. Good question, good question. (Applause)

For further enlightening conversations with Prof. Anil Kumar, please visit www.saiyausa.net for the full version.

Challenges to the Spiritual Discipline

1. **Cause:** Fast paced competitive world
Action: Spending longer hours at work/school than at home
Result: Lack of quality family time, communication gaps
2. **Cause:** Too much information from TV/social networks
Action: Excessive time spent on such past-times
Result: Communication gaps at times, false expectations
3. **Cause:** Multi-cultural/global environment
Action: Changing lifestyles and fads
Result: Appearance of "generation gaps"

Practical Tips – Bringing back the Family

Technology or Tricknology?



1. Using Sai to build bonds/strengthen communication

- Family satsangs
- Family service activities
- Participation in Sai centers

2. Simple individual tips to improve our communication skills

- Meditation improves communication
- Always it is better to think and then communicate
- Think of difficult people in your life as your PET (Personal Emotional Trainer)

3. What Swami says

- First Understanding, Then Adjustment
- You cannot always oblige, however you can always speak obligingly
- Love all, serve all
- Help ever, hurt never

4. Using Technology to improve communication within family

- Email only when you have no time
 - In situations where there are differences in opinion, avoid using email/texting to resolve the situation. Best to meet in person or talk it over the phone.
 - Ok to forward fun and inspiring emails
 - Share photos with extended family to update on various events in your life
 - Video chat to retain face time
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Improve Communication and Interact respectfully with family -Study Circle Guide

Start the study circle with 3 OM's. The facilitator now takes the participants through the following exercises.

- Close your eyes. Visualize Swami sitting in the middle of the circle. Now visualize a connection between your heart and Swami's heart in whatever form that comes naturally to you. It could be in the form of a golden thread, a beam of light, etc.
- Ask Swami to send His unconditional love through that connection to you.
- Feel the strong powerful energy enter your heart from Him.
- Now visualize the same connection between Swami and everyone present in the room. Visualize everyone connected to Swami like spokes of a wheel connected to the center.
- Now slowly turn your attention to the Sai Center that you attend. Visualize the same connection between every member in the Sai Center and Swami.
- Thank Swami for His love and guidance in doing this activity.

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Introduction Activity



Activity 1: Family Members

Make a list of your family members (including those who you consider family because they belong to your “support network/system”). What are the different roles you play? (ex: daughter, sister, brother, father, spouse).

“In the family in which you live, there should be mutual understanding and cooperation, and a sense of harmony. There should be no discord in the family that will create a bad atmosphere. A harmonious atmosphere will give you true peace of mind.” – Swami’s Discourse at Brindavan.

Activity 2: Take the time to listen

Ask a family member or a fellow young adult to practice nonverbal listening skills with you. Sit facing each other and decide which person will be the speaker and which one the listener. Talk about something you did last weekend. The listener is to use facial expressions, body postures, and appropriate eye contact to show effective listening skills. After one minute, the listener is to look away, yawn, lean back, and pay no attention to the speaker. Reverse roles. Stop and talk about both of your reactions to the changes in the listener’s behavior. Talk with each other about what you like most when you want a family member to listen.



Activity 3: Good Memories

Think about a specific time when you were satisfied and happy with your family communication. It could be a specific incident or over a period of time. Think how each person communicated with others, how persons reacted to each other, and what were specific actions, gestures, and verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why do we have a family or why is your family important to you?
- 2) How do communication gaps within family build? Why are there communication gaps?
- 3) Why is listening to each other an important aspect of communication within family? What are some challenges to being a good listener and how can we improve?
- 4) What can you learn from the good memories in activity 3? What did you learn about family communication with this activity?

Radio Sai Interview with Mrs. Sharon Sandweiss

Here is an excerpt from an interview with Mrs. Sharon Sandweiss and her daughter, Judy at the Radiosai studios. The communications tips suggested by our beloved Swami can be extended to all relationships in our lives. For the full transcript, please click on :

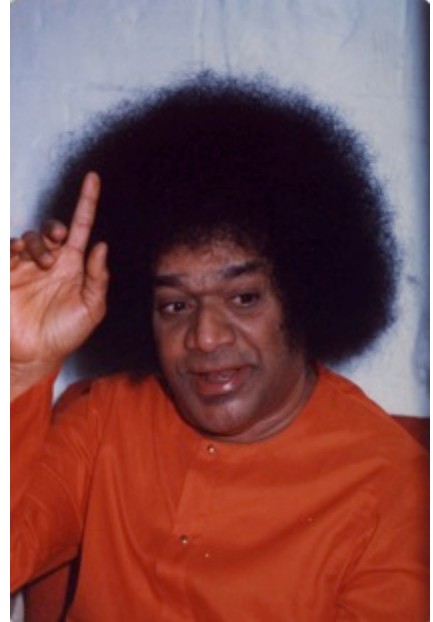
http://media.radiosai.org/Journals/Vol_08/01JUN10/05-h2h_special-03.htm

RadioSai: Sharon, did Baba give you any advice or tips on parenting during your many interactions with Him?

Sharon Sandweiss:He added, "You need to talk to your children because you don't know what they are thinking; you don't know what's on their minds. You have to listen, try to understand, and then compromise and try to reach unity." He reminded us that parents and children must have mutual respect for each other. Children respect us, but we have to respect them too, and listen to them to know what they are struggling with in life.

RS: That's an amazing parenting tip - open communication and good listening skills. And that's what people don't make time for these days.

Sharon: Right. They don't take the time or perhaps it is not in their culture. Back in the olden days, a child had to be seen and not heard, and people didn't openly discuss their feelings. But times are different now. Children are more expressive. **Baba once said that parents are teachers for their children and children are teachers for the parents - so it works both ways. That's very important.**



Self-Assessment

An Assessment of How My Family Communication Skills Affect My Life				
How often do you ...	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Think about family communication				
Communicate to family in a positive and respectful way				
Talk to myself about good qualities of each family member				
Take time to listen to family				
Use nonverbal behaviors that show respect to my family				
Use active listening skills even when disagreeing with family				
Be conscious of how we speak with family members				
Use "I" statements to share thoughts and feelings				
Avoid using "you" statements to blame or criticize				

My life is My Message



Discussion Questions

1. Swami was setting an example even from a young age. Discuss some of the messages that Swami is conveying through His example as an ideal son and grandson.
2. Can you think of similar instances in your family or extended family?

When Kondama Raju (Swami's grandfather) declared that he would run a small shop and take care of himself, Pedda Venkama Raju (Swami's father) said, "But who would cook for you, look after you, attend to your needs, etc.? We feel it would be good if you were to have someone by your side." Kondama Raju thought over the matter for sometime. Whom should he take with him? At that time, this body was about seven years of age. Kondama said, "Venka (this is the way he addressed his eldest son), don't think otherwise; I would like to have Sathyam live with me. He alone is my property." Everyone said, "But Sathyam is so young! How can He cook for you? We will hire a cook." Kondama replied most emphatically, "I do not want anybody except Sathyam. If Sathyam is by my side, no one else is required."

At that time, Sathyam had just one pair of shorts and one shirt. He had to manage with those for one whole year. The shorts and shirt would be worn while going to school; at home, Swami would wear a small *dhoti*. Life was very simple then. After advancing to the fourth grade, it became necessary to go to the school in Bukkapatnam since the school in Puttaparthi did not offer studies beyond the third. One had to go to Bukkapatnam by walk. There were other boys in the village who studied there, and Swami used to go along with them.

Early in the morning, Swami would make a millet preparation – two balls of it, one for the grandfather and one for Himself; also, some peanut chutney to go along with it. After this, Swami would run to school. Once a week, He would prepare some *dal* [a soup-like preparation made out of pulses], laced with spinach. There were no vessels made of metal; only earthen pots. After hurried cooking, Swami would run all the way to school. At noon, there would be a break; as soon as the bell rang, Swami would run back home. The distance to be covered was three miles [about four and a half kilometres]. All the boys used to do this, and Swami did the same. On reaching home, Swami would serve food to His grandfather. He would wash the clothes, keep food for the night, and then have His meal. After this, a long run back to the school; this was how life went on for some years.

Kondama Raju was quite upset by all this. He thought, "There is no one to help Raju." One Sunday he asked, "Sathyam, am I giving You a lot of trouble?" Swami replied, "Grandfather, if I do not work hard now, when else then? Start early, drive slowly, and reach safely! This is work that I have to do with pleasure! So long as I am strong in body and mind, I am ready to do any amount of work." The grandfather was immensely pleased with this reply. This is the loving manner in which we spent time together.

—Baba, May 29, 2000



Group Activity – Role Play

Break up into groups of 2 or 3 people. Ask the group to brainstorm and enact one of the following scenarios using appropriate communication skills. Give the groups 10 - 15 minutes for brainstorming and creating the skit. **The goal is to practice communicating respectfully and openly to all members of the family.**

1) **Setting:** It's the year 2011/present day!

Roles: John, his mom

Scenario: John is in college and suddenly finds himself very busy with his classes and other activities. In the midst of this, he often forgets to call his parents or email them. His parents are concerned and worried that they can't get to speak to him just as often. John's mom often expresses her anxiety by chiding him for not calling back or informing her of his whereabouts. *Enact a phone conversation between John, who is running between activities, and his anxious mom who has not had a chance to talk to him all week.*

2) **Setting:** It's the year 2011/present day!

Roles: AJ, AJ's sister Feely

Scenario: Feely has her medical school exams coming up and needs to focus and work very hard in the weeks leading up to the exam. AJ has just come back home from college on holiday. AJ is also an amateur DJ and has got his new mixers and synthesizers. Everyone at home knows about Feely's big exam and that she needs to prepare from home. This is also the best time for AJ to try out some mixes. As you can imagine, AJ's music is too loud and distracting for Feely. AJ however believes that Feely is old enough to concentrate and focus on her work. *Enact out a scene where Feely's knocking on AJ's door to explain the situation.*

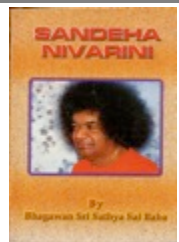
3. **Setting:** Imagine you are living in the year 2050. The Golden Age has finally arrived. There is peace and harmony in the family.

Roles: Father, Mother, Sons (or daughters)

Scenario: The children of the household have grown up finally and wish to move out and live on their own so they can feel a sense of freedom. The parents do not feel they are ready to live on their own. However, the sons feel like luminous souls who can now see the light. *Considering that you are living in a golden age, the task for the sons is to convince the parents of their points of view.*

Sandeha Nivarini

The chapters for this month's self-study are XIV and XV. Consider these questions as you read the chapters.



1. On page 117, Swami states, "Those who develop only these qualities are friends; but those who practice them, along with devotion to the Name and Form, become relatives, that is the difference." What are some of the things you do that have helped you feel more devoted to God? What are Swami's suggestions?

2. According to chapter XIV, does simply performing service entitle individuals to fully experience God? Reflect on times you felt you were serving with sincerity and your frame of mind during this activity. Did your frame of mind affect carrying out that activity? In what ways?

3. In Chapter XV, Swami describes the qualities of 'Great Men'. What are they and reflect on how you as an individual can more fully realize your Greatness.

4. In Chapter XV, pg 127 Swami states, "So give up this talk about others being bad or wrong; develop your faith and devotion..." and continues to share some recommendations. Swami is referring to the Bhaktha's experiences with Sanyasis; however, how can this advice be applied to improving interactions or communication within the Family.