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**Celebrating the Brotherhood of Man
& the Fatherhood of God**



All religions are facets of the same Truth
-Sai Baba

**A HANDBOOK OF CENTRE
ACTIVITIES AND CUSTOMS**

WELCOME TO THE SAI BABA CENTRE OF EDMONTON

We are happy you have come to the Sai Baba Centre of Edmonton. Whatever your spiritual tradition or practices, you are most welcome to join us in singing the praises of The Divine in all names and forms: *Yahweh, Jesus (Esu), Buddha, Krishna, Rama, Allah, Nanak, Zoroastra, Divine Mother*, etc., and in offering service to humanity wherever and whenever you can. As you can see from the displays in the entrance and foyer, we honour and respect all religions and traditions following Sai Baba's teaching: *All religions are facets of the same Truth.*

PURPOSE

The principal objectives of all Sathya Sai Baba Centres are:

1. To help individuals to become aware of the divinity that is latent in them and to conduct themselves accordingly, so that they may achieve the ultimate goal of spiritual enlightenment.
2. To practice divine love towards all beings in daily life, thereby bringing peace and harmony in one's life, community, and the world.
3. To ensure that all human relations are governed by the spiritual principles of truth, righteous conduct, love, peace, and nonviolence.

Accordingly, the Sai Baba Centre of Edmonton aims to provide an opportunity to individuals of all faiths to learn and practice spirituality according to Sai Baba's teachings:

Any individual may become a member of the Centre after becoming familiar with its purpose and guidelines (**available**

"Centres must try to spread interest in prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices which lead man Godward. They must demonstrate the joy that can be derived from singing and remembering the Lord's Name, the peace that one can draw from good company. They must render services to the helpless, the sick, the distressed, the illiterate and the needy. The service must seek no reward."

THURSDAY AND SUNDAY MEETINGS

Every Thursday evening from 7:00 pm and Sunday afternoon at 4:00 pm we gather to sing devotional songs or "bhajans". (**See notes**)

Our meetings generally follow this format:

Centre and Bookstore open 15 minutes early

Devotional meeting begins with 3 Oms.

Brief announcements followed by a short reading of Sai Baba's teachings.

Devotional singing (bhajans) begins. Usually ten songs.

Meditation, Aarathi (invocation and offering of light)

Closing Prayers and Passing of sacred ash (vibhuti)

Quiet dispersal

STUDY CIRCLE

Study circles are held once a month. Please see the monthly calendar for the scheduled time. A study circle focuses on a selected spiritual topic (*awareness, free will, reincarnation, etc*). in order to enhance growth in understanding and insight. A Study circle involves taking a point and each person in the circle discussing his understanding of the point and its meaning. At this time, participants often share their inspiring personal experiences with Sai Baba or *Swami* as He is often called. For more information on Study Circles contact the Spiritual Coordinator.

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) is provided for children of Sai devotees from preschool to age 18. Sai Baba refers to this spiritual aspect of education as *Educare*, which means to draw out that which is within. The practice of the human values of **Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-violence** is nurtured and encouraged together with respect for the universality of all of the world's major religions and the oneness of humanity. The SSE classes seek to develop confident future leaders who have a balanced view of life and effective communication skills. SSE classes are held every Sunday afternoon from 2:00 to 3:45 pm. Please contact the Education Coordinator for more information or registration.

DYNAMIC VALUE PARENTING CLASSES

Parents are the child's first teacher and therefore play an important role in the child's character development. Children learn from their parents, not only from what they say and do, but also from their feelings and emotions. Recognizing the major influence that parents have on the child's development, our Centre offers highly interactive parenting classes based on the five Human Values - Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence - by qualified parenting facilitators. These classes are held on Sunday afternoons. If you wish to register, or want more information, please contact the facilitators of these classes.

YOUTH GROUP

An important wing of our Centre is our Sai Young Adult Group for ages 16-35. The Teen Youth Group is for those aged 16 to 21 and the Young Adult Group for those aged 22 to 35. Typically, the Youth Group is made up of the graduates of the Sathya Sai Education (SSE) classes that are held as part of our program. Members of the youth group are trained in selfless service and public speaking and are seen as future leaders and active members of society and of the Centre. The Youth under the leadership of a Youth Coordinator engage in a variety of activities such as Study Circles, service, assisting teachers in SSE classes, organizing camps and special centre programs.

LADIES WING

The members of the Ladies Wing with the guidance of the ladies' Wing Coordinator are the backbone of several important functions such as serving food to the needy, cleaning the Centre; assisting in clothing drives, facilitating Value Parenting classes, assisting with the SSE classes, and coordinating the food preparations for all of the Centre's special occasions. Please see the Centre's calendar for scheduled meetings.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Sai Baba says: *“Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray,”* and *‘Service to man is service to God.’* Our Centre provides many service or volunteer opportunities. We regularly feed the homeless, collect food and clothing for delivery to the poor, donate blood and plant trees to help the environment. We serve meals at Operation Friendship and at the Native Friendship Centre on dates and times shown on the calendar. If you want more information on service or wish to get involved, you may contact our Service Co-coordinator.

DEVOTIONAL SINGING (BHAJANS)

Bhajan is an Indian word meaning devotional song. (“Buh (as in budge) – jun”) The songs express devotion to many different names and forms of God (Sai Baba, Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Divine Mother, Christ, Jesus or Esu, Buddha, Allah, Jehovah, etc.) We sing songs primarily in English and Sanskrit or Hindi. They are sung in a call and response pattern. Song leaders generally sit in the front rows. Follow along by using the words on the overhead projector or a bhajan book. All songs are sung and led by assigned leaders. If you wish to become a song leader or instrument player please speak to the Bhajan or Spiritual Coordinator. **Here are answers to some questions you may have about the format:**

Why do we sing the first bhajan to Ganesha?

Hindu tradition reveres Ganesha as the personification of OM (AUM), the Creative Word. Within human beings, Ganesha represents the intellect, the higher aspect of mind associated with conscience and wisdom. It is believed that with Ganesha’s Grace, no undertaking can fail due to subjective or objective obstacles. No Vedic ritual or auspicious act is ever undertaken without invoking Ganesha first. For this reason, our devotional singing begins with a song to Ganesha requesting that He removes the obstacles to self-realization.

What kind of bhajan does Baba suggest we sing?

Baba says “Sing simple, familiar songs so that all can share Ananda (bliss)”.

Why are some songs sung in Hindi and Sanskrit?

Although Sai Baba’s message is universal, the culture in which these songs first originated is East Indian. Centres around the world sing many of these songs in the language of their respective country. English songs form part of our devotional services on Thursdays and Sundays.

When do we clap and how loudly?

You are encouraged to clap throughout each song. Your clapping should blend in with everyone else. Strive to be unified. If you need guidance on the tempo, follow the tempo of the assigned leaders. The clapping of hands should not be louder than the tune.

How loudly should I sing?

Blend in with everyone else. No one should stand out or be heard above the group. Sing as melodiously as can be managed. Singing with understanding of the words and feeling of devotion will help the voice perform better.

Is there a particular way to sit during devotional services?

As a sign of respect, please do not sit with your feet pointed towards the altar. Otherwise, make yourself comfortable. Baba says that during singing and meditation it is important to sit with a straight spine. Rocking or swaying during the singing is strongly discouraged. Baba says it distracts others and diminishes the benefits we receive.

What is the purpose of the closing prayer (Aarhi)?

Aarhi is an invocation to bring the divine into us.

What is the meaning of “Samastha loka sukinho bhavantu?”

May all worlds and all beings be happy.

What is the meaning of “Shanti Shanti Shantihi”?

Shanti is a Sanskrit word meaning “peace”. Chanting it three times signifies your affirmation for peace on these three levels:

- (1) Peace unhampered by other beings.
- (2) Peace undisturbed by one’s own body/mind.
- (3) Peace undisturbed by forces beyond human control.

If you have more questions, you may speak with our President or Spiritual Coordinator or individual members.

CENTRE BOOKSTORE

The Centre bookstore and library are open every Thursday and Sunday before devotional services. A wide variety of books on Sai Baba’s life and teachings are available at a nominal cost. There are also CDs of devotional songs, recorded discourses and pictures of Sai Baba and vibhuti packets.

CLASSES AND EVENTS

FREE YOGA AND MEDITATION CLASSES

Yoga classes for ladies and gents and children over 12 are available. Please the Centre calendar for dates and times. Please wear loose comfortable modest clothing. Bring a yoga mat, blanket, strap, pillow, and a water bottle. For more information or registration, please contact the Instructors.

FREE VEGETARIAN COOKING CLASSES

“Food has considerable impact on character.”

Healthy vegetarian cooking classes are offered as scheduled on the calendar. Classes include raw vegan (no animal products) cuisine, and cooked vegan meals. The classes include demonstrations as well as viewing of inspirational and informative DVDs related to health, diet and vegetarianism. Please contact the Instructor for more information or registration.

SATURDAY MORNING SERVICES

Special services dedicated to Sai Baba (Suprabhatham and Sai Paduka Puja) and Lord Ganesha are held on Saturdays. These prayers begin at 6.00 am and generally conclude at 8.30 am. All devotees are welcome to participate in these devotional services. For more details, please contact the Spiritual Co-ordinator.

NEWCOMERS' NIGHT

Please join us from time to time to welcome newcomers at a potluck supper and viewing of inspirational DVDs. Please see the calendar for scheduled dates.

OPEN HOUSES

Open houses are held for a tour of our building, an explanation of our activities, an introduction to our book and audio-visual library and other resources. Please join us for some tea or coffee and light refreshments on scheduled dates. (See calendar).

CUSTOMS AND PROTOCOL

Some of the customs you see at the Centre have their origins in India, and may seem unusual to you at first. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have. The following describes customs not necessarily familiar to Westerners:

Removal of shoes at the entrance

This is a common custom in many countries of the world. It signifies leaving the concerns of the world behind and entering a holy place with purity. It also promotes good hygiene.

Seating of men and women separately

This is a spiritual practice that makes it easier for us to focus all our attention on the Divine, without gender distractions.

Seating: Please sit on the floor cross-legged or on a chair. If you sit on the floor, please avoid extending your feet towards the altar as it is considered disrespectful.

Wearing modest dress

Sai Baba teaches us to be modest in our appearance which will promote inner beauty and help us to stay focused on Divinity.

Men: White shirt and white pants are preferred, but not mandatory. Dress pants and shirts are recommended. Please avoid casual attire.

Ladies: Saris or salwar kameez are not mandatory. Dresses, dress pants, long skirts with shirts/blouses are recommended. Please avoid casual attire.

Practicing silence

Sai Baba says, *"Silence is the speech of the spiritual seeker."*

Please speak softly while in the Sai Centre and maintain silence while in the devotional hall. Practice silence *"for the voice of God can be heard in the region of the heart only when the tongue is still."*(Sai Baba).

Distribution of sacred ash

Sacred ash – traditionally called *vibhuti*, is distributed after the devotional singing ends. Vibhuti or ash is a symbol of the ultimate reality that remains when our ego is burned away (*ash to ashes, dust to dust*). It is considered to be a sort of “spiritual medicine”. Giving it to devotees is a trademark of Satya Sai Baba (and of Shirdi Sai Baba before Him). You will be offered a small amount to be taken in the right hand. People commonly eat ash, or place some on the centre of their foreheads or on an area of the body in need of care. If this makes you uncomfortable, you may refuse ash.

Monetary donations are not solicited

Sai Baba says: *“Fund collection is as much opposed to this movement as fire is to water”*. Membership is free and there is no solicitation of funds. Support for the programs of the Centre and its upkeep is strictly on a voluntary basis.

MEMBERSHIP

“The qualifications for a membership are to be an eager aspirant for spiritual progress, to have full faith in the name that the organization bears ... and to have won recognition as a good person. That is all the qualification needed; nothing else counts. –Baba

Any individual may become a member of the Centre after becoming familiar with its purpose and guidelines (**please refer to this Handbook as well as the Guidelines of the Sri Sathya Organization of Canada available on our web site**). By becoming a member, the individual agrees to honour the rules and regulations and makes a commitment to work in harmony with other members of the Centre. Membership shall cease if the member resigns, ceases to participate in Centre activities, or engages in conduct deemed to discredit the Centre or the Organization.

In addition, according to the Charter, a member ceases to be a member unless he or she attends Devotional Services at least once per month. An ACTIVE MEMBER is one who is engaged in Centre work for at least 4 (four) hours per week.

NINE POINT CODE OF CONDUCT

Centre members are expected to do their best to practice the Nine-Point Code of Conduct and the Ten Guiding Principles in order to be examples of Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings:

1. Daily meditation and prayer.
2. Devotional group singing or prayer with members of family once a week (if possible)
3. Participation in educational programs (SSE/SSEHV) organized by the Centre.
4. Participation in community work and other selfless service (*seva*) programs of the Organization.
5. Attendance at least once a month at group devotional singing organized by the Centre.
6. Regular study of Sai literature.
7. Speaking softly and lovingly to everyone.
8. Not indulging in talking ill of others, especially in their absence.
9. Putting into practice “Ceiling on Desires” and utilizing savings generated for service to mankind.

TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Love and serve your country. Do not be critical of others' countries.
2. Honour and respect all religions as pathways to God.
3. Love all humanity as part of your family.
4. Keep home and surroundings clean.
5. Help the needy with food, clothing, and shelter. Help them become self-reliant when possible.
6. Be examples of honesty. Do not participate in any corruption such as bribery.
7. Curb jealousy, hatred, and envy.
8. Develop self-reliance.
9. Observe your country's laws and be exemplary citizens.
10. Love God and avoid sin.

CALENDAR

A calendar of events is emailed monthly to members and also posted on our website:
www.saibabacentre-edmonton.ca

DIRECTORY

The Centre maintains a confidential directory of members as well as an e-mail list of members and non-members who wish to be informed of the activities of the Centre. Please see the Secretary if you wish to be added to the mailing list.

CONTACT NUMBERS

Address:

Sai Baba Centre of Edmonton
9619-82nd Avenue, Edmonton T5J 0Z7

Phone: 780-437-7243

Email: saicenteredmonton@yahoo.ca

Website: www.saibabacentre-edmonton.ca

For other contact numbers see INSERT