

2.1. FACILITATING STUDY CIRCLES

Prepare

- Pray for a **topic** or subject, or let the group decide.
- Download the relevant **material** from Study Circles for Divinity Volume 2 at www.divineprint.com
- Have enough **copies** for people to at least share.
- Set up the room in a **circle** or a near-circle in front of an altar.
- Optional: have a board or hanging paper to **write** down important points.
- **Pray** for Sai Baba's guidance and presence.

Begin

- Welcome everyone and **explain** to newcomers the format of the program, that the participants regard the words of Sai Baba as being Absolute Truth (allowing for context and translation into English), and that the role of the group is to seek to reach a consensus on what He wishes to convey to us.
- Taking it in turns around the circle, the facilitator asks someone to **read aloud** a paragraph or more of the prepared material.
- Ask the group members to give their **understanding** of what the dictated passage means, or to ask a question about some or all of its contents.
- **Encourage** discussion by asking questions like, "What does this mean?", "How can we apply this?", "Who has encountered this?", "Why is this difficult?", etc.
- **Write** the main points on the board (optional).
- Allow **silences** to continue.
- Only ask for **volunteers** to say something; avoid one person dominating by selecting each speaker.
- Guide the discussion. **Keep to the topic.**
- Stop arguments when they start by **moving** on.
- Encourage personal **experiences** if relevant.
- **Relate** other relevant things Sai Baba has said or well-known devotees have written or experienced.
- **Act** as though you know little about the topic; offer your opinion only if the discussion lags, or briefly at the end of a particular discussion.
- **Never** criticise or judge or tell others they are wrong unless they first invite it.
- Let **others** speak – do not speak over the top of them.
- Endeavour to be **aware** of Sai Baba within each person.
- **Smile** and keep your sense of humour.

Finish

- **Summarise** the discussion.
- Ask for any final clarification needed or **short** points to be made.
- Try and let someone else have the **final** statement.
- **Close** with the Asatoma prayer in English or Sanskrit.
- Silently **thank** Sai Baba for leading the discussion.

STUDY CIRCLE MATERIAL

Convenors or facilitators of Study Circles might like to choose a topic for study and discussion by one of the following methods:

- Work through the sections in the book, one after the other in order of presentation;
- Pray and ask Lord Sai a few days prior to the Study Circle meeting to select one of the topics listed on the Contents page of this book. Be aware of the single word that will come to your mind. Alternatively, this can be done by selecting the topic from a bowl containing slips of paper on each of which a separate topic is written;
- Observe which themes are of immediate relevance to a particular member or members of the Study Circle. Different topics can be selected depending upon the activities of the group or the religious festivals at the time.

Alternatively, the group could discuss one whole discourse by Lord Sai available from the monthly magazine '*Sanathana Sarathi*' or the Sathya Sai Speaks series of books which contain discourses from 1953. Sometimes this is appropriate around particular festival days or dates in the calendar, such as Gurupurnima, Ladies Day or Christmas.

Books written by Lord Sai on particular themes are also available, such as the Vahini series; for example, *Prema Vahini* collates a series of articles dealing with Love written by Sai Baba. The Study Circle could steadily work through the book, reading aloud each paragraph and discussing the meaning and application to daily life.