

# Highlights from Study Circles

**Focus:** The Go Green Conference study circles sought to increase personal awareness and create a spiritual foundation for incorporating a more eco-friendly lifestyle. This change is more effective and durable when it is driven by understanding and inner conviction. It connects the head, heart and hands, thereby promoting spiritual growth and right action.

The themes that guided the reflections were:

- The unity of nature and God.
- Why we have lost connection with God in nature.
- What Sathya Sai Baba says about why we have lost balance and how we can live in harmony with nature.
- Our current individual as well as collective condition and deliberating ways to evolve.

## Objectives

**The aim of the study circle was:**

- To help participants increase their awareness of the underlying unity in all creation.
- To encourage self-assessment of the participant's relationship with the environment and evaluate the impact of their habits, desires and values.
- To strengthen their commitment to live an eco-friendly life as a spiritual practice.

## Reflections

Experiences were shared and quotations given by Sathya Sai Baba were reflected on. The quotations included topics such as 'Nature as the true Guru', the imbalance wrought in the environment through man's mental pollution, unlimited desires and unrighteous actions, and the responsibility of human beings as the crowning achievement of the evolutionary process.

*"The purpose of life is to experience the sacredness of Nature as a projection of the Divine."*

–Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol.22/Ch.35, 28 October 1989

## **“What makes us realise that we are part of an ecosystem that is divine in nature and which sustains us?”**

Personal experiences were shared by the delegates, which included practices such as meditation, spending time in nature and focusing on the interdependence and interconnectedness of all living beings.

All life is interdependent and based on the 5 elements. When we examine where our food comes from, we can easily recognise how nature sustains life. Nature is divine and God is the source, hence we are connected through the undercurrent of divine love and expressions of that love. The Vedas, spiritual practices, scientific discoveries and our own experiences all point to this reality.

*“Nature is your school, your laboratory, the gateway to liberation and the panorama of God's majesty. Seek to know the lessons it is ready to teach.”*

– Sathya Sai Baba, Divine Discourse, 4 October 1970

## **“How can we enhance our connection with God and nature?”**

The most immediate action pointed out was to spend time in nature. The importance of children and people living in cities to learn, observe, feel, appreciate and interact with Nature was highlighted. Another suggestion made was to adopt organic, vegetarian or vegan food, and to not waste food as food is God. Practicing silent walks, meditation and contemplation on nature, leading a simple life, weeding the garden while contemplating on ‘removing the weeds of our mind and heart, and getting involved in environmental protection activities were some of the inputs received from the participants.

It was also shared that expressing gratitude, learning to see God in nature and in every creature, treating all with love helps one connect to God.

## **“Is my method of seeking happiness beneficial to the planet? How can I make life more fulfilling?”**

Seeking happiness is often associated with accumulating excess material possessions, which in turn results in us working harder to be able to acquire better goods, position or status. Our material way of life, with its boundless desires, tendency to create waste and exploitation of nature is clearly not beneficial to our Mother Earth. It is negatively impacting millions of people, animals and plants in the process. Consuming in excess cannot bring true and lasting happiness. Therefore, replacing bad habits with good habits and making incremental changes is the need of the hour to ensure that the results are sustainable.

Using time, food, resources and energy more consciously and reducing wastage by practicing the ‘5 R’s’ (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose and Recycle) creates a sense of duty and responsibility towards nature and therefore makes us feel more positive. Efforts di-

rected at differentiating between needs and wants, reducing greed and trusting God to provide for our needs leads to contentment and happiness in the long run.

Reducing the carbon footprint, planting trees, defending animal rights and exploring other ways to give back to the environment as opposed to only receiving will result in our happiness.

*“You must learn to discriminate between delusion and relative truth and his will help you to perceive God in everything. In this way you will develop a feeling of closeness to Nature and to God and awareness of Oneness.”*

– Sathya Sai Baba, from Amrita Varshina cited in God, Nature and Man by Ross Woodward, p. 40-41)

### **“How can I achieve balance in life and effectively contribute to conserving the Earth’s resources?”**

In this day and age, the fast pace of life makes us ignore the impact of our actions. Lack of time makes us resort to quick ‘solutions’, which influences all spheres of life, from food to travel and technology. These take a heavy toll on the environment.

Sathya Sai Baba has given numerous spiritual incentives that help create inner balance which then translates into our daily lives. The Nine Point Code of Conduct, Ceiling on Desires, practise of human values, overcoming the inner enemies (greed, envy, lust, attachment, anger, desire), unity in thought word and deed, and selfless service are pathways to inner as well as outer cleanliness and will instil a sense of responsibility. Simple actions gradually change habits and will help reduce our carbon footprint.

### **“How can my spiritual practice help me to be more mindful about fulfilling my needs and yet using resources more responsibly?”**

When one’s mind is centred on God, one will see the divine in all. Developing mindfulness and considering how ‘inner pollution’ reflects on the world is a necessary step to move forward. Keeping a spiritual diary or daily checklist to monitor progress will help keep one on track with the set goals. Cleansing the atmosphere through prayer, bhajans and mantras was another solution that was provided. If you respect Mother Earth, Mother Earth will respect you. One needs to be grateful and thankful for all of God’s gifts. We must endeavour to not be the generation that steals from the future.

### **“How can protecting the planet help me grow spiritually and vice versa?”**

Service opportunities are abound everywhere. Serving the planet will certainly render our life more meaningful and help us experience the underlying unity. Practising Ceiling on Desires promotes self-discipline. One must be aware and say ‘No’ when offered a less environmentally friendly option. Learning from nature, which never stops giving, will help us connect to the divine.



## **“How can I sustain the motivation I got from today’s study circle in the year ahead?”**

The first step is to be aware of the divine in all of creation and to offer our thoughts, words and deeds to God. The next step is to practise: Setting personal goals, initiating changes at home, at work and becoming a good example. Group actions help us stay motivated and achieve more, such as Sai service projects, eco-friendly events, outreach projects, and participating in environmental sustainability actions within the community. Involving children actively would help inculcate the habit at an early age. In other words, changing priorities should be of utmost importance in order to live up to our responsibilities as stewards of God’s Creation. The health of Mother Earth and our spiritual growth are our rewards.

*“God is the Creator. He created everything in the Cosmos. But He did not retain within His hands the responsibilities relating to the Creation. He gave to human beings all capacities. But He laid down a condition relating to the use of these capacities. Men are free to live as they like. They can utilise all the material objects in creation. There can be no objection to this from anyone, not even from God. But, the Divine has declared that there is no escape from the consequences of one’s action. This has to be properly understood.”*

–Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol.25/Ch.14, 22 May 1992

