



PROTECT THE PLANET

Study circle



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This guide has been designed to help Centres/Groups of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) facilitate a study circle on the topic of Food. It has been developed to be delivered in three parts. This part has a duration of 1 hour.

Part 1 will cover: *What food is, where it comes from, how it is grown and cultivated, and the reasons and ways we can change the way we source and purchase our food to help the environment and ourselves.*

PART 1

OPENING AND INTRODUCTION			
ACTIVITY	NOTE TO FACILITATOR	RESOURCES	DURATION
3 OMs (or a minute's silent sitting) followed by an opening prayer	<p>Whether Omkar or silent sitting is used depends on the audience this study circle is being delivered to. Either way, the objective of this activity is to help settle the group and establish group dynamics. This is the same for whether a prayer or short reading is used.</p> <p>Example of a prayer that could be used to start the session: "Dear Swami, we, your children have gathered here today so that we can be your instruments in protecting and serving Mother Nature. You have blessed us with Mother Nature. Please guide us on your mission to serve Her. Please let our words, thoughts and actions be of your accord. Please bless us to be open minded and to learn from one another, so that we can truly embrace the inherent divinity within us, in all beings and Mother Nature."</p>		1 MIN

<p>Introduce today's topic</p>	<p>This study circle is part of the Serve the Planet (STP) initiative of the SSIO.</p> <p>The purpose of this study circle is to understand the role of nature in providing us with the food we eat, be aware of where our food comes from and the importance of knowing this and offers practical tips on how to source healthier and more environmentally friendly food</p> <p>It is important to remain respectful and open at all times. Keep in mind that the Study Circle is about sharing and exploring the topic and inspiring each other rather than 'finding right answers'.</p>		<p>3-5 MINS</p>
TODAY'S DELIVERY			
ACTIVITY	NOTE TO FACILITATOR	RESOURCES	DURATION
<p>Question 1: 'What is Food?'</p>	<p>After reading Attachment A, pose the following questions to the group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In daily life how can we be aware of the fact that 'Food is God'? 2. How can we be mindful that locked within all natural food that we consume, is God's hidden power (Brahman)? 3. During the cooking and eating process, how can we be thankful to God for providing us with the food that allows us to live and flourish as human beings? <p>(Note to facilitators: The discussion may broaden out to the 'food' we consume through our eyes, ears, sense of touch and smell, which is fine to acknowledge. But for the purposes of this study circle we are mainly looking at the food we eat.)</p>	<p>Attachment A</p>	<p>5-10 MINS</p>
<p>Question 2: 'What is the importance of food in our life?'</p>	<p>Pose the following question to the group, using the material below and the quotation in Attachment B to support your discussions.</p> <p>"How can we be appreciative of the importance of food in our lives and the role of nature in giving that food to us?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An average human being can survive between 2-3 weeks without food, with some managing a little longer.² 	<p>Attachment B</p>	<p>10-15 MINS</p>

<p><i>Discussion:</i> The importance of knowing where our food comes from</p>	<p>Pose the following questions and read the quotation that follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does the source of our food matter? • How does it affect us? <p><i>“You should see to it that the vegetables used for preparing food are procured in a righteous manner. For example, husband brings vegetables from the market. He might have misused his position of authority and brought them without making payment, or the vendors themselves might have procured the vegetables by unfair means. When such vegetables are consumed, your mind gets polluted. You do not realise that the food you eat is responsible for the actions you perform. Unsacred food makes you do unsacred deeds” – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 35.22: November 23, 2002)</i></p> <p>This means that knowing where our food comes from, how it is grown, cultivated, stored, transported and sold to us is important.</p> <p>Pose the following question and use the facts that follow to have a discussion about the environmental impact of where our food comes from.</p> <p>“What do we know about the environmental impact of where our food comes from and how it arrives on our plate?”</p> <p>You could encourage the group to reflect on what they know about the following principles and to what extent they affect the food we purchase and consume.</p> <hr/> <p><u>Local versus Imported Foods</u></p> <p>The transportation of food from where it is grown and cultivated to where it is sold, contributes a great deal of carbon emissions – which is a major driver of climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst only 1% of food is transported by air, it accounts for 11% of carbon emissions.³ • Since 1992, the amount of food flown by plane has risen by 140%.³ <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foods that are locally grown are usually in season. Whereas foods that are non-seasonal are usually picked when under ripe, require chemicals to preserve them for long periods of time, are transported long distances and are less fresh & healthy. 	<p>VIDEO – The global food crisis (5 mins)</p> <p>VIDEO – Plant growth and farming activity (3 mins)</p> <p>VIDEO – Organic sustainable farming is the future of agriculture (6 mins)</p> <p>VIDEO – What is organic (5 mins)</p> <p>(*Note if no video facilities are available on-site, participants can be sent ALL video links beforehand to watch at home prior to the study circle taking place)</p>	<p>15-20 MINS</p>
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Organic versus Intensive Farming

- The use of pesticides, fertilisers and other agrochemicals has increased hugely since the 1950s. For example, the amount of pesticide sprayed on fields has increased 26-fold over the past 50 years. As well as killing pests, fertilisers also kill beneficial insects and add chemicals to our produce.⁴

Fair Trade

- Fair Trade is a certification that acknowledges if producers have been paid fairly and received decent working conditions. You can find foods and other products with a 'fair-trade' logo or certification on them to support living wages.⁵

Other environmental considerations (these will be further explored in Study Circle Part 3)

- Land conversion & habitat loss – It is predicted that in developing countries, a further 120 million hectares of natural habitats will be converted to farmland to meet demand for food by 2050.⁶
- Wasteful water consumption – Globally, the agricultural sector consumes about 70% of the planet's accessible fresh water.⁷
- Soil erosion and degradation – The crops that cause the most soil erosion include soybean, coffee, cassava, cotton, corn, palm oil, rice, sorghum, tea, tobacco, and wheat.^{8,9}
- Climate change – Agricultural practices are responsible for around 14% of global greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰
- Genetic erosion – The widespread use of genetically uniform modern crop varieties has caused agricultural crops to lose about 75% of their genetic diversity in the last century. Today, just 30 crops account for 90% of calories consumed by people.¹¹

In light of the above, adopting a vegetarian diet and reducing dairy intake is one of the best things you can do for the environment! More on this in Study Circle Part 3.

Thankfully, the food production industry is exploring ways to develop more sustainable farming methods, that use less water and land, but still produce nutritionally wholesome and pesticide-free food with less harm

	caused to the environment from carbon emissions and soil erosion.		
<p>Question 5: 'SO, where does our food actually come from?'</p> <p>'And what is it's journey from the farm to plate?'</p>	<p>Refer back to the foods people shared in Question 3 and ask them where those foods come from? Pick one or two videos and the information below to support your discussions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does our bread come from? Where is the wheat grown? • Where is our rice grown? How does it get to us? • Where do the fruits or grains we eat come from? • How much of our food is locally grown versus imported? • What is the difference between whole and processed foods? <p><i>"The food consumed by man should be proper, pure and wholesome. But nowadays people eat whatever they get and wherever they get it, and thereby spoil their health. Food plays a major role in the preservation of health. Care should be taken to see that the food consumed does not have much fat content, for the fats consumed in large quantity are detrimental not only to one's physical health but also to one's mental health. Meat and alcoholic drinks take a heavy toll on man's health, causing many a disease in him." - Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 27.03: January 21, 1994)</i></p>	<p>VIDEO - Where does our food come from? wheat (2 mins)</p> <p>VIDEO - Remarkable rice: how does it grow? (3 mins)</p> <p>VIDEO - Where do fruits and vegetables come from? (3 mins)</p> <p>VIDEO - Processed foods vs. whole foods (3 mins)</p>	10 MINS
<p>Question 6: 'So the question is what can WE do to change things?'</p>	<p>Discuss the ways in which we can choose to consume food that is more environmentally sustainable, using the information below to support your discussions.</p> <p>Suggestions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat seasonally – tailor your recipes to support seasonal fruits and veggies. • Buy local produce – this means less energy is required to transport the food over long distances and the food is fresher and healthier. • Choose food that is grown organically rather than intensively – organic farming works in harmony with the natural ecosystem, whereas intensive farming has to rely on artificial fertilisers and pesticides to produce mass grown crops on less 		20-25 MINS

	<p>fertile soil. Look at labels for certification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy 'fair-trade' certified foods where possible. • Buy fresh fruit and vegetables from your local farmers markets rather than supermarkets to help support local businesses. • If you do buy from supermarkets, read labels to check food is locally grown. • Adopt a vegetarian diet and reduce dairy intake. <p>Another way to source healthy and nutritious food without harming the environment is to GROW YOUR OWN vegetables and fruit. You can watch the video for basic tips and tricks or discuss this with the group. Here are just some of the benefits of growing your own food:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic produce which is nutritionally healthy, as fresh as it gets, and much better in taste • Cheaper than buying from supermarkets or farmers markets • A good form of exercise • A great way to spend valuable time with nature • A great hobby and good educational activity for children too • Results in zero carbon emissions <p>Know your food miles – this is the distance the food has had to travel from the point of origin i.e. the farm to its destination i.e. our kitchen.</p> <p>You can calculate the food miles behind the food you eat using this Food Miles Calculator. Share the link with everyone in the group.</p> <p>Further points to reflect on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing what you now know, how will you change the way you think about food? • Has the information covered in this study circle changed your definition of what can be considered as 'food' according to Sathya Sai Baba's definition? • How will you change the way you source and shop for food? • How quickly would you like to implement these changes to not only reduce your impact on the environment through food, but also to eat more healthily? • What challenges do you foresee? How could these be overcome? 	<p>VIDEO – An introduction to growing your own fruit and veg (7 mins)</p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will you educate your family and friends on this topic too 		
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION			
Closing summary of today's session and what to expect at the next session and homework	<p>So far, we have learnt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food is God. • What foods we eat and the importance of food in our life. • How the way our food is grown and produced has a significant impact on the environment. • Where our food comes from and what that means for us and the environment. • How to change the way we source and shop for food to help the environment. <p>HOMEWORK</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For personal reflection: What is your attitude towards food – do you revere it and feel grateful for it? Do you think of food as God? 2. Find out what foods are grown locally in your country to share with rest of the group. 3. Nominate a few people from the group to create a calendar based on the seasons of locally grown produce. For e.g. locally grown cherries (March) or mangos (July) etc. 4. Research and write down a list of local farmers' markets in your area to share with the rest of the group. 5. Make a note of the kinds of foods you eat over the coming week and bring this to the next session. 		2 MINS
CLOSE	Closing prayer or reading. Prayer for universal peace – OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.		1 MIN

Note: Ideally there should be 2 Facilitators in groups of ten or more participants. The first facilitator is the one who is conducting the study circle. The second facilitator observes the group's dynamics and informs the first facilitator of any lethargy and confusion from participants. This second facilitator also conducts the opening activity (eg. Omkar) and the sharing of insights at the end. This helps give variety to the participants, but also allows the first facilitator space to capture important feedback and learning points at insight sharing.

Attachment A

“From the principle of Brahman emerged Akasha (ether). From Akasha, Vayu (air) originated. From Vayu, Agni (fire) emerged. From Agni, Jala (water) emerged. From Jala came Prithvi (earth). From Prithivi, Oshadhi (vegetation) emerged. Oshadhis gave rise to Annam (food) and man is born out of food. Thus, you can see that man and Brahman are intimately related. On this basis, Lord Krishna declared: “Mamaivamso Jeevaloke Jeevabhuta Sanathana” (the eternal atma in all beings is a part of My Being) Without the principle of Brahman, nothing can exist, be it ether, air, fire, water, earth, vegetation or food. And man cannot survive without food. On this basis, the Vedas declared: “Annam Brahma” (food is God). What is food? Does it constitute merely cereals and vegetables that we consume? No. The whole world is composed of food. One body is the food for the other body. That which is consumed is food and the one who consumes food is also food. Everything that exists in this world is food. Therefore, it is said, food is God. You offer food to God chanting the Sloka, “Brahmarpanam...” before you partake of it. But where is Brahman? He is very much in you. That is why He responds to your prayer immediately from within: “Aham Vaishvanaro Bhoothva...” meaning, “I am in you in the form of Vaishvanara (digestive fire) digesting the food that you consume.” – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 33.33: December 25, 2000)

“The earth has always been worshipped by the ancients of Bharat as Mother Earth, since it is the earth that, in some form or the other, provides food and sustains life. Most gratefully the ancients said: “O Mother Earth, I am able to have food on account of your kindness.” Without the earth, we cannot have grain, and that is why earth was given so much respect and was accorded the position of a mother.” – Sathya Sai Baba (Summer Showers 2000.02: May 15, 2000)

Chapter 1: Book of Genesis on how God created the World:

Verse 11: Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so.

Verse 12: The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Verse 29: Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

Verse 30: And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”¹¹

Attachment B

“Man is the embodiment of all gods. In fact, the gross form of the food that man consumes refers to the principle of Brahma. On this basis, it is said, “Annam Brahma, Raso Vishnu” (food is Brahma and the essence is Vishnu). The subtle form of the food denotes the principle of Vishnu. The subtlest form symbolises the principle of Easwara. The gross part of the food strengthens the body. The subtle part of the food strengthens the mind; the subtlest part of the food purifies the speech. So, food plays a vital role in strengthening and purifying the body, mind and speech.” – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 33.33: December 25, 2000)

Further Resources:

In 2011, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) launched the LiveWell for Low Impact Food in Europe (LiveWell for LIFE) initiative, which aimed to show how sustainable diets can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the EU food supply chain by at least 25% by 2020 – whilst being healthy, nutritious and affordable!¹²

The livewell principles included:

- Eat more plants
- Eat a variety of foods
- Waste less food
- Buy foods that meet a credible, certified standard
- Eat fewer foods high in fat, salt and sugar

To read more about this initiative [click here](#)

References

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4. http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/impacts/pollution/
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8. http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/impacts/soil_erosion/
9. WWF (2006) *Facts about soy production and the Basel Criteria*.
10. http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/impacts/climate_change/
11. http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/impacts/genetic_erosion/
12. <http://livewellforlife.eu/>



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