



# PROTECT THE PLANET

Study circle



## TOPIC: LET'S REDUCE OUR PLASTIC!

**This guide has been designed to help Centres/Groups of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) facilitate a study circle on the topic of Plastic. It has been designed to be delivered in two parts (each of 1 hour duration):**

**Part 1 will cover:** *Plastics - what they are, how we use them, the environmental challenges posed by plastic and how our plastic usage impacts on our relationship with nature and God*

**Part 2 will cover:** *Placing a Ceiling on Desires in relation to Nature and what each of us can do to reduce the amount of plastic we use*

### PART 1

OPENING AND INTRODUCTION			
ACTIVITY	NOTE TO FACILITATOR	RESOURCES	DURATION
3 OMs (or a minute's silent sitting) followed by an opening prayer or reading	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, focus it and establish group dynamics. This is the same for whether a prayer or short reading is used.		<b>1 MIN</b>
Introduce today's topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of today's topic?</li> <li>• What can the participant expect to learn from this topic?</li> </ul>	This study circle is part of the Serve the Planet (STP) initiative of the SSIO. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of this study circle is to help us to better understand plastics in relation to nature and spirituality and how we can live a more environmentally conscious life</li> <li>• By the end of this study circle we hope to be able to better understand plastics usage, how it is affecting the environment and why we need to reduce the amount of plastic we use</li> </ul> <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>		<b>2 MINS</b>

TODAY'S DELIVERY			
ACTIVITY	NOTE TO FACILITATOR	RESOURCES	DURATION
<p>Question 1: <b><i>'What is plastic?'</i></b></p>	<p>You can play the video and/or gauge responses from the group and use the following definition in discussion. (*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><i>Plastic is a man-made material that can change its shape. Most plastics are made from petroleum (oil) or natural gas and do not occur naturally in nature. There are many types of plastic that have different properties. Some can be shaped only when they are freshly made, while others can be changed by heating them up or even by melting them.</i></p>	<p>VIDEO on how plastic is made</p> <p>Video - <a href="#">How Plastic Is Made</a> (3 mins)</p>	<b>5 MINS</b>
<p>Question 2: <b><i>'What kind of plastic do we interact with on a daily basis? Why do we use it?'</i></b></p>	<p>Brainstorm the different types of plastics we interact with or buy regularly. These might include: home appliances, packaging for foods, laptops and phones, plastic bags, water bottles, sellotape etc.</p> <p>Lay <b>emphasis</b> on how many of the items listed by the group are 'single-use' plastics, i.e., plastics that are only used once before being disposed of or destroyed – such as straws and plastic cups</p>		<b>5 MINS</b>

<p>Question 3: <b>'What are the issues or challenges around plastic?'</b></p>	<p>Some possible answers to share/draw from are below:</p> <p><b>In creating plastic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fossil fuels, which are limited resources that pollute the environment, are used to create plastic.</li> <li>• Globally, we use 1 million new plastic bags per minute, which uses 2.2 billion gallons of oil each year.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>In using plastics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We use many plastics just once and throw them out (otherwise known as single-use plastics), creating large amounts of trash.</li> <li>• Plastic consumption is on the rise and, according to the United Nations Environmental Programme, global plastic consumption has gone from 5.5 million tons in the 1950s to 110 million tons in 2009.<sup>2</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>In disposing of plastic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plastic does not degrade,<sup>3</sup> which means every bit of plastic that has ever been made is still in our environment today<sup>4</sup> or has become another form of plastic through recycling.</li> <li>• In a 2006 report 'Plastic Debris in the World's Oceans,' Greenpeace stated that at least 267 different animal species are known to have suffered from entanglement and ingestion of plastic debris. According to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, plastic debris kills an estimated 100,000 marine mammals annually, as well as millions of birds and fishes.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a floating mass of plastic twice the size of Texas. It is the largest garbage site in the world, located just off the coast of California, with plastic pieces outnumbering sea life six to one.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Plastic rubbish is often sent over large distances for recycling or processing. In the UK, 200,000 tonnes of plastic rubbish are being sent 8,000 miles to China each year for recycling,<sup>6</sup> resulting in vast amounts of carbon emissions released into the atmosphere simply from the air transport.</li> </ul>		<p><b>5 MINS</b></p>
---	---	--	----------------------

<p>Question 4: <b>How about recycling plastic, isn't that the answer?</b></p>	<p>Can play / discuss video and draw from content below:</p> <p><b>Recycling helps, but...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many types of plastics cannot be recycled, (because there are various types of plastic with different chemical compositions, and recycled plastics can be contaminated by the mixing of types).<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• New resources are used in the recycling of plastic</li> <li>• Recycling cannot cope with the amount of plastic waste that is produced.</li> <li>• Recycling uses up a lot of electricity – consuming even more of the world's natural resources.</li> <li>• Many people don't recycle; for example, less than 3% of all plastic bags are recycled.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<p>VIDEO on what happens to plastic we throw away</p> <p><a href="#">What Really Happens to the Plastic you Throw Away - Emma Bryce</a> (4 mins)</p>	<p><b>10 MINS</b></p>
<p>Question 5: <b>What has Sathya Sai Baba said about plastic?</b></p>	<p>Read Sathya Sai Baba's words on the challenges around plastic (Attachment A)</p> <p>You can discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why has our use of materials changed over time (e.g. clay to stainless steel to plastic)?</li> <li>• What are the challenges with using more sustainable products?</li> <li>• What is needed to make shift as individuals to using more sustainable products rather than plastics?</li> <li>• What has been your experience of this?</li> </ul>	<p>Attachment A</p>	<p><b>10-15 MINS</b></p>

<p>Question 6: <b><i>'In your opinion what has led to the current situation with overuse of plastics and plastic pollution?'</i></b></p>	<p>Read Sathya Sai Baba's words on the separation of Man, God and Nature (Attachment B)</p> <p><b>Questions for introspection and discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the relationship between Man, Nature and God?</li> <li>• How is this relationship affecting how we treat Nature?</li> <li>• How does love for animals and Creation relate to our use of plastic?</li> <li>• How can we practice love for Nature and see the divine in Nature?</li> <li>• What has been your personal experience with respect to your relationship with Nature?</li> </ul>	<p>Attachment B</p>	<p><b>15-20 MINS</b></p>
--	--	---------------------	--------------------------

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

<p>Closing summary of today's session and what to expect at the next session and homework</p>	<p>So far, we have learnt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What plastics are</li> <li>• How they are made</li> <li>• The extent to which we use them around the home</li> <li>• The challenges with plastics use, their impact on the environment and other living species around the world</li> <li>• Why recycling is not the complete answer</li> <li>• How the human species has forgotten its relationship with God and Nature leading us to the current situation</li> </ul> <p>In PART 2 of this study circle, we will cover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to practice ceiling on desires in relation to nature</li> <li>• The easy and practical steps we can take to reduce our plastic use and help protect the planet</li> </ul> <p><b><u>HOMEWORK and preparation for next session:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make a note of all your plastic consumption over the coming week and bring this to the next session</li> <li>2. Start to think of ways you could start reducing your plastic usage and try to put some of these into practice</li> <li>3. Write down a list of tips to reduce plastic use</li> </ol>		<p><b>5 MINS</b></p>
---	--	--	----------------------

	and bring these with you to the next session to share with the rest of the group		
<b>CLOSE</b>	Closing prayer or reading Prayer for universal peace - OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti		<b>1 MIN</b>

**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:**

#### **Sathya Sai Baba's words on the challenges around plastic:**

*"Not only in the field of education, but changes have now crept in the area of health. Earlier, people used pitchers, plates, and pots made of clay by local artisans. After some time, stainless steel utensils replaced the clay utensils. But now plastic pitchers, plates, and pots have come into vogue. These plastic articles have exposed man to great dangers. The plastic bags and other articles have created enormous waste material which is not biodegradable. Even if you bury it underground, it does not decompose and remains as it is even after many years. Much land is being spoiled by this plastic waste. Vegetables grown in such land are harmful to man. In this way, many harmful changes have crept in the life of man today." – Sathya Sai Baba (Divine Discourse, Sai Kulwant Hall, 22 Aug 2007)*

### **Attachment B:**

#### **Sathya Sai Baba's words on the separation of Man, God and Nature:**

*"Because of man's misconduct and immoral behaviour, there is pollution everywhere – in air, water, land, and food. All the five elements have been severely contaminated, consequent to man's unbecoming behaviour. If man behaves properly, is pollution of the elements conceivable? It is all due to the extensive prevalence of immoral feelings and improper behaviour. The sharp decline of virtues like love, compassion, and forbearance is directly responsible for the widespread pollution that one sees today. In fact, one might even say that the five elements are afraid of man! The five elements as God created them are all pure and sacred. There is nothing wrong with them whatsoever. It is man's misconduct that has caused them all to become polluted. Impurity within gets reflected as pollution without." – Sathya Sai Baba (SS 2000.2)*

*"Man is not making efforts to understand the relationship between Prakrithi (phenomenal world) and Jeevathma (man) and Paramaathma (Supreme Spirit). These are very intimately interrelated to one another. They are not disparate. The relationship between Paramaathma and Prakrithi – God and Nature is the same as that between mother and child. The relationship between man and society is the same as that between the honey-bee and the flower. Just as the child is fed by mother's milk, as the honey-bee is fed by the honey in a flower, man must enjoy the gifts of Nature. From time immemorial man has been plagued by negative ideas. There is a legendary tale in which one greedy man killed the goose that laid golden eggs thinking that he can extract all the eggs from it in one lump. Such acts of folly are committed freely by scientists today by exploiting Nature's gifts beyond all limits, creating disastrous imbalance resulting in natural calamities such as earthquakes, spelling danger to humanity. We cannot blame science for this. Those who apply the scientific discoveries without discrimination are to be blamed for this. They fail to consider with deep deliberation the effects of excessive depletion of the natural resources." – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 26.3: January 21, 1993)*

*Foster the tiny seed of Love that clings to "me" and "mine." Let it sprout into Love for the group around you and grow into Love for all mankind and spread out its branches over animals, birds, and those that creep and crawl and let the Love enfold all things and beings in all the world. Proceed from less Love to more Love, narrow Love to expanded Love." – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 13.16: July 23, 1975)*

## PART 2

OPENING AND INTRODUCTION			
ACTIVITY	NOTE TO FACILITATOR	RESOURCES	DURATION
3 OMs (or a minute's silent sitting) Followed by an opening prayer or reading	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, focus it and establish group dynamics. This is the same for whether a prayer or short reading is used.		<b>1 MIN</b>
Introduce today's topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of today's topic</li> <li>• What can the participant expect to learn from this topic?</li> </ul>	This study circle is part of the Serve the Planet (STP) initiative of the SSIO. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of this study circle is to help us to better understand plastics in relation to nature and spirituality and how we can live a more environmentally conscious life</li> <li>• By the end of this study circle we hope to learn the importance of practicing ceiling on desires in relation to nature and how to drastically reduce the use of plastics in our everyday life</li> </ul>		<b>2 MINS</b>
TODAY'S DELIVERY			
ACTIVITY	NOTE TO FACILITATOR	RESOURCES	DURATION
Question 1: <b><i>What did you learn from Session 1</i></b>	Have a group discussion on the main areas that were touched upon in Session 1:  These were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What plastics are</li> <li>• How they are made</li> <li>• The extent to which we use them around the home</li> <li>• The challenges with plastics use, their impact on the environment and other living species around the world</li> <li>• Why recycling is not the answer</li> <li>• How the human species has forgotten its relationship with God and Nature leading us to the current situation</li> </ul>		<b>5 MINS</b>

<p>Question 2: <b><i>'How does Ceiling on Desires relate to plastic?'</i></b></p>	<p>Read the passage on "Ceiling on desires with respect to nature" (Attachment C)</p> <p><b>Questions for introspection and discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are we exploiting nature's gifts or triggering the 'negative aspect of Nature'?</li> <li>• What is the meaning of 'Ceiling on Desires' and how do you / could you apply it in your life?</li> <li>• How does practicing Ceiling on Desires relate to our use of plastic?</li> </ul>	<p>Attachment C</p>	<p><b>15-20 MINS</b></p>
<p>Question 3: <b><i>'So what can we do'</i></b></p>	<p>Share homework from last session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The common types of plastic use that everyone identified in their day-to-day living</li> <li>• The steps they took to reduce this</li> <li>• The tips they brought to share with others</li> </ul> <p>Cover the three 'R's:</p> <p><b>Reduce</b> our plastic use. Brainstorm a list of ideas. Have a look at the suggestions included in our <a href="#">Personal Tips List</a>. This list can also be shared.</p> <p><b>Reuse</b> discarded objects or material in such a way as to create a product of higher quality or value than the original. For example, collecting empty plastic bottles to make a pen holder or plant pot. Examples are included on the Personal Tips List linked above.</p> <p><b>Recycle</b> what we DO use</p> <p><b>Pose the following questions for introspection and discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do I want to change myself or my actions?</li> <li>• What makes it challenging to change our behaviour in relation to plastic use?</li> <li>• How might we overcome these challenges?</li> </ul>	<p>Have a look at the suggestions included in our <a href="#">Personal Tips List</a>. This list can also be shared</p> <p>Also show this inspiring video: <a href="#">Zero Waste Girl - You Can Live Without Producing Trash</a></p>	<p><b>15 MINS</b></p>

<p>Personal Action Plans</p>	<p>Knowing what you now know about plastics, how will you reduce your use of plastics? Write down the immediate, medium-term and long-term actions you will take to reduce your plastic consumption</p> <p>CREATE YOUR PERSONAL ACTION PLAN</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="435 517 1031 1189"> <tr> <td data-bbox="435 517 632 813"> <p>Immediate goals - these are changes you can make almost straightaway</p> </td> <td data-bbox="632 517 818 813"> <p>Medium-term goals - these are changes that will require more thought and forward planning</p> </td> <td data-bbox="818 517 1031 813"> <p>Long-term goals - these are actions you want to take that will make a lasting impact on your plastic consumption</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="435 813 632 1189"> <p>E.g. switch to non-plastic shopping bags, say no to straws, take my own reusable cups to coffee shops</p> </td> <td data-bbox="632 813 818 1189"> <p>E.g. reduce consumption of ready-made meals, replace plastic cutlery in the home with glass or steel utensils</p> </td> <td data-bbox="818 813 1031 1189"> <p>E.g. make my own cleaning products, make-up, toothpaste</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Immediate goals - these are changes you can make almost straightaway</p>	<p>Medium-term goals - these are changes that will require more thought and forward planning</p>	<p>Long-term goals - these are actions you want to take that will make a lasting impact on your plastic consumption</p>	<p>E.g. switch to non-plastic shopping bags, say no to straws, take my own reusable cups to coffee shops</p>	<p>E.g. reduce consumption of ready-made meals, replace plastic cutlery in the home with glass or steel utensils</p>	<p>E.g. make my own cleaning products, make-up, toothpaste</p>		<p><b>10 MINS</b></p>
<p>Immediate goals - these are changes you can make almost straightaway</p>	<p>Medium-term goals - these are changes that will require more thought and forward planning</p>	<p>Long-term goals - these are actions you want to take that will make a lasting impact on your plastic consumption</p>							
<p>E.g. switch to non-plastic shopping bags, say no to straws, take my own reusable cups to coffee shops</p>	<p>E.g. reduce consumption of ready-made meals, replace plastic cutlery in the home with glass or steel utensils</p>	<p>E.g. make my own cleaning products, make-up, toothpaste</p>							
<p><b>Let's work together to reduce our plastic use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you monitor your progress with these goals? E.g return to your goals in two weeks and see how well you are doing with these. Will it help to take on this challenge with your family and friends?</li> <li>• As a group, what can you do to reduce plastic consumption in your Sai Centre Activities? (Refer to <a href="#">Centre Ideas Guide</a>)</li> <li>• What service activities can you organise to help protect the planet? (Refer to <a href="#">Service Ideas Guide</a>)</li> </ul> <p>Please note your commitment on the pledge document below. Consider forming a small team to further ideas for service or plastic reduction at the Centre level.</p>	<p><a href="#">Centre Ideas Guide</a></p> <p><a href="#">Service Ideas Guide</a></p>	<p><b>5-7 MINS</b></p>						
<p><b>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</b></p>									
	<p>Closing prayer or reading</p>								

<b>CLOSE</b>	Prayer for universal peace - OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti		<b>1 MIN</b>
--------------	--	--	--------------

**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 C

#### **Ceiling on Desires with respect to nature:**

*"Man is deluded by his unlimited desires. He is living in a dream world. He is forgetting the Supreme Consciousness (Para-tattwa). That is why it is important to keep our desires under control, to place a ceiling on them. We are spending too much money. Instead of inordinately spending for our own pleasure, we should be spending for the relief of the poor and needy. This is the real meaning of 'Ceiling on Desires'. However, do not make the mistake of thinking that giving money is all that is needed while allowing your own desires to continue to multiply. Curtail your desires, as materialistic desires lead to a restless and disastrous life. Desires are a prison. Man can be freed only by limiting his wants. You should have desire only for life's bare necessities."* – Sathya Sai Baba

*"Man has to consider himself as a limb of the society and help in the welfare of society, just as the organs of one's body are used for one's well-being. Again society is a limb of Prakrithi (Nature) and Prakrithi is a limb of Paramaathma (Supreme Lord). Thus there is close relationship between man and God. Nature is more progressive than man, and to protect Nature, man has to exploit it within limits. When man tampers with Nature recklessly, it reacts adversely and trouble arises. In order to protect Nature, man has to practise ceiling on desires. He should not trigger the negative aspect of Nature." – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 26.3: January 21, 1993)*

## PLEDGE LOG

Region:

Centre:

	I...	PLEDGE TO...	BY REDUCING MY PLASTIC USAGE THROUGH...	SIGNED
1	Jane Hill	HELP PROTECT OUR BEAUTIFUL PLANET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Switching to reusable cloth bags</li><li>• Avoiding foods packaged in plastic</li><li>• Taking my own containers for takeaways</li><li>• Saying no to bottled water</li></ul>	
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

## Other resources

### Alternatives or Supplements to Videos

- Plastic planet – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73sGgmZoMBQ>
- Plastic bags and the Planet – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVy8kMTUUWQ>
- Plasticised – <https://youtu.be/dfcRW7sIrPI>
- Addicted to Plastic – <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/addicted-plastic/>
- Plastic Paradise – <http://plasticparadisemovie.com/>
- Plastic Oceans – <http://www.plasticoceans.org/>
- Microbeads – <http://osof.org/hidden-plastics/>
- What businesses are doing to find an alternative – <http://www.plasticityforum.com/blog/index.php>
- “The Majestic Plastic Bag, a Mockumentary” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLgh9h2ePYw>)

## Games and Activities for SSE children or centre members

- The recycling game – <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/barnabybear/games/recycle.shtml>
- Upcycling ideas – <http://www.popsugar.com/smart-living/Cool-Upcycling-Projects-24338804>
- Make your own home made, eco-friendly cleaning products – <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/cleaning/tips/a24885/make-at-home-cleaners/>
- Turning old newspaper into bags – <http://www.guidepatterns.com/diy-newspaper-bags.php>
- Create your own upcycling workshop – [http://www.recycleforscotland.com/sites/files/recyclenow/media\\_wysiwyg/ZWS731%20PIOW%204-How%20to%20set%20up%20an%20upcycling%20event.pdf](http://www.recycleforscotland.com/sites/files/recyclenow/media_wysiwyg/ZWS731%20PIOW%204-How%20to%20set%20up%20an%20upcycling%20event.pdf)

## References

1. <https://iammotherearth.wordpress.com/green-living-tips/>
2. <http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2012/01/31/what-happens-to-all-that-plastic/>
3. <http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/earth/oceanography/great-pacific-garbage-patch1.htm>
4. <http://www.plantingpeace.org/2015/05/plastic-footprint/>
5. <http://plastic-pollution.org/>
6. <http://www-g.eng.cam.ac.uk/impee/topics/RecyclePlastics/files/Recycling%20Plastic%20v3%20PDF.pdf>
7. Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust - His Teachings. *What is the meaning of ceiling on desires?* Available at: [http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/pages/his\\_teachings/practical\\_spirituality.htm](http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/pages/his_teachings/practical_spirituality.htm)

