

SECTION 11: SIGNIFICANCE OF PROCEDURES, DISCIPLINE AND RESPONSIBILITIES AT WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL GROUP SINGING SESSIONS

1.0 GENERAL

1.1 Sai Baba Centres throughout Malaysia hold devotional group singing sessions (Bhajans) at least once a week and it gives an opportunity for all devotees to assemble at one place to sing the Glory of GOD. Bhajans are the foundation of the Sai movement. The congregation of devotees for bhajans enhances their desire to move to higher levels of spirituality and sadhana. Attending bhajans is a cleansing/reinforcing process, and a properly run Centre can become a focal point for strengthening one's Sadhana. Bhagavan Baba aptly explains:-

"This Organisation is intended to broaden your love, to channelise your activities through devoted service. It has not been devised to parade devotion or collect devotees to canvass support for some new fangled creed. It is dedicated to the great task of progressively aiding people to realise their Reality and merge in it". (SSS SPEAKS VOLUME 3, PAGE 44)

1.2 Since we have chosen the spiritual path we have to walk that path smoothly and positively. Therefore, it is essential that we understand the inner significance of the procedures, disciplines and responsibilities during the Bhajan sessions.

2.0 MAIN GUIDELINES FOR BHAJAN ACTIVITY

Part I

2.1 Location

The atmosphere of the place, where devotional group singing is held should be ideal for the purpose. It should preferably be in a suitable public place.

2.2 Altar and Seating Arrangement

- a. The altar should be neatly arranged and decorated. A picture of Swami should be prominently displayed. Pictures/statues of God forms/sages/gurus of the major religions should be equally and prominently placed to reflect the interfaith nature of the organisation.
- b. The altar may be decorated with flowers and garlands. The garlands shall preferably be made by the devotees.
- c. The seating arrangements for the congregation should be orderly and such that the devotees must be seated one behind another in rows and facing the altar. Men and women shall sit separately leaving a pathway in the middle. Those who come late must sit in the rear so that they do not disturb the devotees already seated. (Being late means within ten minutes before the start of the Bhajan). Silence shall be maintained prior to the commencement of the Bhajan.



- d. Those who cannot sit on the floor for reasons of physical ailments may be seated on chairs at the back of the prayer hall.
- e. Devotees with small children should sit at the back of the Hall. If they need to leave the hall, this could be done without disturbing the other devotees.
- f. Children are encouraged to be brought to the Centre. However, parents are responsible for their discipline.
- g. To assist in achieving concentration, the hall lights may be dimmed.
- h. All electronic devices such as mobile phones and pagers should be switched off.

2.3 Sound System

If a microphone has been arranged, it should be carefully tested 15-30 minutes before the Bhajan to avoid any distraction. If the mike system develops some problem after the Bhajan has started, it would be better to switch it off.

2.4 Chair for Swami

The chair for Swami, if any, shall be placed on the men's side.

2.5 Duration

The duration of the Bhajan shall not exceed one hour, excluding Aarathi. On special occasions, it may be extended or reduced as necessary, but shall preferably not exceed 1½ hours.

2.6 Punctuality

Bhajans should start at the scheduled time, on the days the bhajans are fixed.

2.7 Distraction at the Altar

A suitable oil lamp that will last throughout the Bhajans should be provided. Joss sticks may be lit before the Bhajans. There should be minimum distraction at the Altar during the Bhajans.

2.8 Hundial/Donation Box

The Donation Box of the Centre can be placed at the back of the Hall or in a separate room. It should not be placed at the altar or at the entrance of the hall. The Treasurer and one other office-bearer are to jointly open the box periodically and record the contents.

2.9 Bhajans

- a. Bhajans must be a blissful experience, bringing love, joy and enthusiasm to the devotees. It is necessary to sing familiar Bhajans so that all can share the Bliss. Bhajans from all faiths should be sung and in languages compatible to the congregation. There is no language barrier in singing the praise of the Lord.



- b. The lead singer should pay attention to the Sruthi (key/pitch), bhava (feeling), raga (tune) and tala (rhythm)
- c. The singing rules are as follows: -
 - Have two speeds – one medium and the other fast.
 - Bhajans with more than five lines should not be repeated on the first speed and sung only once in the second speed.
 - Bhajans with less than five lines can be repeated on both speeds.
 - The last line on the second speed is to be repeated to indicate that the bhajan is ending.
 - At the end of the Bhajan, the first line should be repeated with the same force with which it was started.
 - Aalap' or introductions should not be sung as per Swami's instructions.
- d. All lead singers regardless of any position in the organisation should observe the above rules.
- e. The Bhajan Coordinator has the task of presenting a good Bhajan to the congregation and he should make the appropriate selection of singers and songs for the bhajan.
- f. Namavali, Mantras, and Stothras may be chanted at the discretion of the Centre Committee. Interfaith Prayer (besides the Sarva Dharma - Om Tat Sat song) shall be chanted at the end of the Bhajan. Please refer to Appendix 11A for the details of the Interfaith Prayer.
- g. Lead singers should have an understanding of the meaning of the Bhajans that they are singing. The Bhajan Coordinator and the Centre Committee are encouraged to display the meaning of the songs using LCD projection or other means.
- h. The Bhajan singers and devotees should avoid excessive body movements so as not to distract other devotees.

2.10 New Bhajans

- a. New Bhajans may be introduced during a Bhajan session. However 80% of the Bhajans shall be those familiar to the congregation.
- b. If sometimes a Bhajan leader starts a Bhajan in a wrong tune, he should not stop singing. The best course would be that the next singer supports him with the correct tune and if it is not possible, let others follow in whatever tune the Bhajan is being sung.

2.11 Musical Accompaniments

- a. All musical accompaniments to Bhajans must be pleasing. The accompanists must be authorised by the Bhajan Coordinator.
- b. The common instruments for Bhajans are as follows:
 - i) Harmonium, keyboard etc to give guidance in terms of Sruthi
 - ii) Rhythm instruments such as tabla, naal or tambourine with skin
 - iii) Jaldras or manjiras to give good effect to the Bhajans



- c. The combination of accompaniments and lead singing should provide the correct mood for the communion with God. The playing of instruments should not drown out the voice of the lead singers.
- d. More than one accompaniment in lead or rhythm must be well coordinated. For example, if a tabla and a naal are to be played simultaneously, the skills in the techniques of accompaniment must be known. Instrumentalist should be mindful at all times during the bhajans that the instruments only play an accompanying and supporting role to the vocal singing. It should not drown out the words that the singer is singing.

Part II

2.12 Recommended Bhajan Procedure and Schedule

These are recommended procedures and schedules for the conducting of Bhajans:

- a. Devotees should be seated at least 10 minutes before the commencement of the Bhajan.
- b. The session shall commence with 3 omkaars.
- c. The first Bhajan shall be on Ganesha followed by one on the Guru.
- d. Subsequently, Bhajans on any other forms may be sung. Preferably a male and female singer shall alternate to lead the Bhajans.
- e. The Bhajan session should comprise songs devoted to as many God forms as possible. This should include at least one Sarva-Dharma Bhajan, where possible.
- f. Swami emphasises that the devotees must clap to the rhythm of the bhajans as they are following the lead singer. This ensures concentration and involvement. However if anyone is unable to follow the rhythm, it is best for them to refrain from clapping.
- g. The Bhajan shall end with an Omkaar and three Shantis.
- h. Guided Jyothi meditation shall be performed followed by mantras and interfaith prayers.
- i. This may then be followed by Swami's Message for the Day.
- j. Service and other announcements can be made either before or after Aarathi.
- k. Aarathi shall be performed while the congregation sings the Aarathi song.
- l. Vibhuthi Mantra shall then be chanted while vibhuthi is being distributed.
- m. Devotees can then offer Padanamaskar.

2.13 Performing Aarathi

- a. Centres may have the option of performing Aarathi by an individual or by any number of devotees. It is recommended that the Aarathi song be concluded with three 'Narayanans'.
- b. Aarathi can be performed using camphor (preferably smokeless) or oil flame.



- c. The 'Narayana, Narayana' is to be sung at 3 speeds, normal, fast and faster.

During the third recitation of 'Narayana, Narayana' the Aarathi is shown to the devotees and it is placed at the altar.

Part III

2.14 Role of Bhajan Coordinator

- a. The Bhajan coordinator is to ensure that the administration of the Bhajan Activity is properly organised
- b. The Bhajan Coordinator will be responsible for the following areas:
 - i. Selection of disciplined singers
 - ii. Ensure that singers comply with the code of conduct for singers
 - iii. Ensure appropriate accompaniments
 - iv. Ensure that a proper roster is maintained
 - v. Encourage all singers to attend practice sessions
- c. The prerequisites to be a Bhajan Coordinator would be as follows:-
 - i. A high standard of discipline
 - ii. Knowledge of pitches, talas and meaning
 - iii. Ability to instruct and guide singers and accompaniments
 - iv. Preferably able to play a lead instrument
- d. The Bhajan Coordinator should endeavour to educate the lead singers on the meaning of the Bhajans sung. The Coordinator, as and when appropriate, will be responsible for the production of Bhajan sheets.
- e. The Bhajan Coordinator shall encourage the singing of Bhajans in all languages within the confines of the rules of Bhajan.
- f. The Bhajan Coordinator should ensure that Bhajans are arranged in proper sequence in order to maintain the tempo of the session.
- g. The Bhajan Coordinator may have an occasion to refuse the request of an aspiring singer, if found not to the required standard of singing discipline. He should let the singer know the areas needing improvement. He should encourage the aspiring lead singer to join the practice sessions to improve his singing to the required standards. Bhajan practices shall be organised regularly to provide training for the lead singers and aspiring lead singers. A Bhajan Coordinator should encourage and train chorus singers as well.
- h. The Bhajan Coordinator may arrange for house Bhajans or Temple bhajans on request by devotees or the relevant temple committee.
- i. The Bhajan Coordinator need not be a lead singer.
- j. The Bhajan Coordinator must himself be an example of discipline and integrity to inspire the lead singers and the congregation.
- k. A Bhajan Coordinator should also be involved in doing service.

2.15 Role of Lead Singers

- a. The required qualities of a lead singer are:
 - i. a pleasant voice and being able to sing at the required pitch
 - ii. able to Infuse feeling into the Bhajan, with clear diction and volume
 - iii. able to correctly pronounce the words in the songs
 - iv. familiar with the Tala and Laya of the Bhajan
 - v. self-discipline



- b. Every lead singer should understand that their primary objective is to inspire the devotees who attend bhajans weekly.
- c. Bhajans in suitable local languages may be sung to maximise the impact on devotees.
- d. Lead singers should aspire to learn bhajans from professional bhajan tapes or CDs, and ensure that they learn the proper pronunciation and sing the bhajan with right combination of devotion, tune and rhythm. Lead singers should practice adequately at home to be able to present their Bhajan well.
- e. New lead singers or singers with limited musical knowledge should sing simple bhajans. Experienced lead singers may sing medium bhajans and difficult bhajans. They should determine what types of bhajans are suitable in accordance to their style of singing and vocal abilities.
- f. Lead singers should attend the bhajan practice sessions so that there is proper coordination with instrumentalists.
- g. The most important quality of lead singer is discipline. They should behave in such a way as to uphold the image of Sai since they will be noticed by the rest of the congregation. They should show modesty and respect at all times, and conduct themselves with humility. Their personal example set, in terms of conduct, dressing, etc. will inspire the members of the congregation and junior devotees.
- h. The singer is a devotee first, a lead singer only second. His/her service to the centre should not only be in singing. The lead singer must set the best example in service activities too.



INTER-FAITH PRAYERS**HINDU PRAYER**

ASATHOMA SATH GAMAYA
 THAMASO MA JYOTHIR GAMAYA
 MRITHYOR MA AMRITHAM GAYAMA
 AUM SANTHI! SANTHI! SANTHI!

*(LEAD ME FROM UNREAL TO REAL; LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT;
 LEAD ME FROM DEATH TO IMMORTALITY; AUM PEACE! PEACE! PEACE!)*

CHRISTIAN PRAYER

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN;
 HALLOWED BE THY NAME,
 THY KINGDOM COME,
 THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN,
 GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,
 AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES
 AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US,
 AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.
 - AMEN -

BUDDHIST PRAYER

BUDDHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
 DHAMMAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
 SANGHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI (REPEAT PRAYERS 3 TIMES)

*(I TAKE REFUGE IN THE BUDDHA, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE;
 I TAKE REFUGE IN THE DHAMMA, LAW ETERNAL;
 I TAKE REFUGE IN THE SANGHAM, THE HOLY MEN)*

KUAN YIN'S PRAYER

OM MANE PADME HUM (X3) (REPEAT PRAYERS 3 TIMES)

(THE JEWEL ONE ON THE LOTUS)

JAIN PRAYER

OM NAMO ARIHANTANAM; OM NAMO SIDHANAM; OM NAMO AYARIYANAM;
 OM NAMO UVAJAYANAM; OM NAMO LOYE SAVASAHUNAM

*(HAIL TO THE GOOD MEN; HAIL TO THE SAGES; HAIL TO THE FOUNDERS;
 HAIL TO THE TEACHERS; HAIL TO ALL THE GREAT MEN IN THE WORLD)*



SIKH PRAYER

SATNAM VAHEGURU (X 5)
(HE IS TRUTH, ALMIGHTY GOD, DISPELLER OF DARKNESS)

UNIVERSAL PRAYER

LOKA SAMASTA SUKINO BHAVANTU (X3)
OM SANTHI! SANTHI! SANTHI!
*(MAY ALL PEOPLE, EVERY WHERE BE HAPPY;
OM PEACE! PEACE! PEACE!)*

