

**Ceiling on Desires Pre-NYC Initiative:**  
**Workshop #2: Agents of Change**

**Philosophy of this Workshop**

As Sai Youth, we are blessed to have been taught that worldly uncertainty is part of Swami's greater plan for spiritual stability for all. In the midst of financial turmoil, how can we apply this perspective to soothe and support those amongst us who are hardest hit by its far-reaching impacts? While material wealth by itself is neither positive nor negative, our attitude toward and desire for it can engender deep emotions, and shape how we use it. In this way, money can either be an instrument of good fortune or a trap for excessive desires.

Through this workshop, we hope to examine our own attitudes and attachments to material wealth as well as opportunities that Swami provides to deepen our spiritual riches. How can we, as Sai YAs, take practical steps to balance the challenges of living as consumers in a material world, while maintaining focus on the spiritual wealth we have within? Through our growing empathy, can we grasp the far reach of compassion and love? Through our energy and discipline, can we inspire a nobler world? Through the spirit of Youth, can we employ the force of Unity and the vast richness of Divine wealth to overcome any challenge and be instruments of Swami's mission?

**Mindfulness and Meditation:** 20 minutes

*Facilitator should hand out paper and pen to YAs. Let everyone get comfortably positioned before beginning the exercise. Read slowly and pause between each question, to allow enough time for visualization. You may start with Light Meditation before beginning the Mindfulness exercise.*

Sit up straight, close your eyes. Allow your mind to settle on your breath, as an anchor for you to focus on. Watch your breath as you slowly and rhythmically inhale and exhale. (1-2 mins pause). Without forcing your breath, begin to steady each inhalation and exhalation, so that each is even and full. Inhale for 2 counts and exhale for 2 counts. (Pause) Slowly increase the length of each breath to 3 counts (Pause), 4 counts (Pause), and so on until your breaths are slow and measured. (PAUSE)

Today we will take a trip, in our mind's eye, to Consumer Heaven. Imagine yourself walking into any store of your choosing. (Pause) Where are you? (Pause) What surrounds you? (Pause) Observe how you feel as your senses take in the sights, sounds, and even smells that greet you? (PAUSE)

Observe how your body is reacting to these sensations. What is happening to your breath? What other reactions are triggered?

Walk a little further into the store. What do you see around you? (Pause) What items jump out at you? Pause in front of one item that you want. How do you feel as you look at it? What would be the benefits of buying this item? (Pause) Notice your breath. What is happening to your slow and even breathing? Notice any other physical sensations you feel. (Pause)

Imagine that you are taking the item that you want to the cash register to buy it. How do you feel? What thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations do you notice? (Pause) How do you feel when you think of going home with this item and using it or showing it to your friends and family? (Pause)

When you get to the register, for some reason, you are not able to purchase the item. You have to leave it at the counter. How do you feel? What thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations do you notice? (Pause) How do you feel when you think of going home without this item, and not being able to show it to your friends and family? (Pause)

Imagine that you are now walking out of the store. As you are leaving, you see a homeless person standing outside on the corner. How does this make you feel? How does this sight influence your perspective on the experience you just had inside the store? Observe your body's reactions to these thoughts.

Bring your focus back to your breath. Is it still controlled and even? Without forcing it, steady your inhalations and exhalations until your breath is slow and measured.

Each breath is a reminder of our universal connection with the world and our universal responsibility to one another through the appropriate use of resources. Remember that being mindful of our desires and the ways they affect us can help us reduce the money we waste on unnecessary wants, therefore lightening our baggage and bringing us closer to Swami.

When you are ready, you may slowly open your eyes. (wait until the group is ready). We will continue this activity with a short written exercise.

Think about these words from Swami, "In cultivating human values, emphasis should also be placed on avoiding wastage of money, food, and time."

Consider these figures from the Union of Concerned Scientists: “The average American is exposed to about 3000 advertising messages a day, and globally corporations spend over \$620 billion each year to make their products seem desirable and to get us to buy them.” It is said that advertising works cumulatively and unconsciously, meaning that we are affected by it over time, even though we may not know it. [<http://www.ucsusa.org/publications/guide.ch1.html>] When this is true of the world we live in, how can we constantly maintain awareness of Swami’s message not to waste money on excessive desires?

Take a few moments to silently free write on this visualization experience. What did you learn about yourself? What did you notice about your own desires? Was the item you focused on a “want” or a need? How do you rationalize this? How does awareness of desires help us “ceiling” them? (Allow 2-3 minutes.) YAs may share their thoughts with the group (1-2 minutes).

Throughout this workshop and over this month, let us attempt to heighten our awareness of our desires and the way we use money to fulfill our desires. Let’s grow more mindful of what we are using our money for, how much we think of money, or where it may be going to waste.

**Discussion:** 60 minutes

**CHECK-IN:** *What is the one desire you are ceiling before the NYC, and how will that practice help you save money?*

**The Dalai Lama has said that a moral crisis in the world is at the heart of global economic woes.**

By Dean Nelson in New Delhi, 13 Jan 2009

The exiled Tibetan spiritual leader said that the global economic meltdown is the result of a crisis of morality, which had been driven by greed and corruption. Selfishness and a lack of spirituality and culture in the world were key causes for the current crisis in the world's financial markets, he said.

Speaking to Buddhist students in the Indian holy city of Varanasi, the 73-year-old Nobel peace prizewinner said people must remember how their own fortunes and those of others were connected.

"Lack of spirituality and culture is the main cause behind the rampant corruption in the world. People have become selfish and materialistic, which has led to the economic slowdown," said the Dalai Lama at a gathering of 20,000 students at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies.

He said the solution was in recognising our interdependence, valuing education and protecting the natural environment.

He said that we must learn to be less interested in consumerism and less selfish. We must understand that if we want to survive and be happy, everyone must survive together. "We are interdependent."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/tibet/4229146/Dalai-Lama-moral-crisis-caused-economic-woes.html>

1. Do you agree with the Dalai Lama’s analysis of the economic situation? What role does morality play in economics? What does it mean that everyone must survive together if we are to survive and be happy?
2. What opportunities emerge from this crisis? What spiritual lessons can we learn from this and other current events?
3. In the climate of uncertainty surrounding the collapse of banks and businesses around the world, with people losing their jobs and their homes, do you take security in the idea that this is all part of a greater plan? How have your personal experiences contributed to your conviction in this bigger picture?

**Carrotmob Makes it Rain**

Everyone needs to buy things. But we tend not to spend our money in a way that is both collective and socially conscious. So Carrotmob, a new environmental advocacy group, had an idea: what if those seeking the same kind of product got together, pooled their dollars, and used them to collectively support local companies that were also doing the most for the environment? Watch what happened when Carrotmob pulled a big crowd together to spend a lot of money at the local store with the strongest environmental commitment. If we live our values, business can--and does--listen.

Please watch the version of "Carrotmob Makes it Rain," available at the link below. Before the workshop, right click and save the file onto your local computer. <http://www.saiyausa.net/files/nyc2009/initiatives/COD/supplement-video-cod-workshop2.mp4>

4. What do you think of this approach to conscious consumerism? How can we keep in mind Swami's ideal of "Less Luggage, More Comfort" and still be conscious consumers?
5. This video makes it look easy. In reality, what challenges might we face in attempting to support the companies that display the greatest social conscience?
6. Carrotmob uses money as a "carrot" to dangle in front of companies from which they expect change. While effective, this

approach is "results oriented." In our work as Sai YAs, how can we be effective while remembering to surrender the results?

7. What are some other models of positive economic change you have heard of or experienced? What models does Swami show us through His own work? How can we apply these practices as YAs in our own lives?

### **Youth are Agents of Change**

*Excerpts from Swami's discourses*

It is supreme folly to consider that the Spiritual is divorced from the physical and that the material world has no connection with Spirituality. Spirituality runs like an undercurrent through every aspect of life - social, political, economic and moral. This basic Truth has been forgotten today. People have faith in the transient, the ephemeral and the illusory. This ever-changing world is based upon the unchanging Divine. It is only when the Divine base is understood that one can derive Bliss from the experience of what is based on it. In whatever action you do and whatever paths you pursue, be conscious of the Divine.

You are deluded because of your materialistic outlook. You have to change your vision. Do not expect God to change creation. He has given you everything in its pristine form. But, you are polluting it because of your selfish desires. People today seek power, position and pelf, but not virtues. Power and position, bereft of good qualities, are of no value. In the insane pursuit of wealth, you are losing your morality and integrity. That wealth will not be of use to you. Good conduct alone is your real wealth. Good qualities alone constitute your real treasure. What is needed today is to live a life of good quality. The fostering of sterling character and good conduct is the need of the world.

Always remember society and its welfare. You are a member of the society and therefore you have a social responsibility. You owe your very existence to society. Similarly, society is not separate from you. Individuals make a society. You and society are inseparable and mutually dependent. Only when fellow members of the society prosper will you also prosper.

Your very form is love. It is love that protects the whole world. But love is not to be seen anywhere these days. Today there is lack of love even between mother and children. What happened to that love? We are bartering it for money. When money is lost, nothing is lost. Instead of putting our faith in money, we should have more faith in love and should develop love to love relationship with others. When you have this type of relationship based on love, love will develop more and more. Only then will we be able to love everybody.

It is only the youth who are capable of protecting this world. It is the youth and youth alone who can set this world right. No nation can stand without youth. Sometimes, the elders underestimate the capabilities of the youth, thinking that they are inexperienced and young. But the youth are endowed with immense power. If they take a firm resolve, they are capable of achieving anything. If they realise their power, they can emancipate the nation. The participation of youth is necessary for the welfare of the world.

*And the Word Was God (Book 1): A Compilation of Quotes by Sathya Sai Baba*  
<http://www.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume39/sss39-11.pdf>

8. Reflect on the combined message of the Dalai Lama, Carrotmob, and Swami. Can social transformation be achieved through our use of material wealth? To what extent? What are its limits? What more is needed for true transformation to occur?

9. What are ways that our "insane pursuit of wealth" blinds us to our interdependence and connectedness to all beings? Considering the following quote from the Dalai Lama, what are some practical ways that we can use our relative positions of wealth and privilege to express our greater sense of universal responsibility?

*"I believe that to meet the challenge of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not just for his or her own self, family or nation, but for the benefit of all mankind. Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace, the equitable use of natural resources and, through concern for future generations, the proper care of the environment."*

10. Swami says that youth alone are capable of protecting the world and setting it right. This indicates immense power but also great responsibility. As USA Sai Youth, we are armed with Swami's message, blessed with creative potential, equipped with skills and resources, and charged by the currency of Divine love. What steps will we take together to "emancipate" the world from humanity's greatest challenges? What "mountains" will we move with our collective will power?

**Group Action Plans:** *15 minutes to select an activity; time spent to complete the activity will vary*

As a group, please select ONE activity from the suggestions below that you will complete together this month.

**Service Opportunities:** If the financial crisis is also a moral crisis, as the Dalai Lama suggests, then this provides us with many opportunities to serve by spreading Swami's values in the community. Below are some ideas:

- Reach out to those in your community who are hardest hit, and provide them with moral support. Sometimes, the spiritual and emotional comfort of knowing that someone cares and will listen is more important than meeting material needs.
- Educare: Working in tutoring or mentoring programs can help support children whose families are affected by the crisis. Consider including some values-based lessons or stories where appropriate, or even discussing the crisis with them. Children

pick up on messages from their environment. Talking to them about what they have heard or understand about the economic situation and how it has affected their family may help them deal with it.

- **Financial literacy:** Adults may benefit from some basic information on saving and investing, or creating a budget and setting spending priorities. For children, simple activities like playing store or bank, or other simulation activities can help them understand basic concepts and improve their academic skills. Teaching these ideas to others may also help us become more aware of our own spending habits and how to reduce wastage of money.

**Dressed for Success:** In a consumer-oriented society such as ours, people are often judged by their outward appearances. As a group, conduct a social experiment to understand how others may treat those in conditions of poverty. Go to a public place as a group, such as a mall, park, airport, etc. Have some group members dress very well, in professional attire, like suits or dresses. Have other group members dress casually, and still others dress in very worn or tattered clothing. Give the appearance through your clothes that some are better off than others, and see how you are treated when you ask for help from someone. Share and compare your experiences after everyone has had a chance to speak with a few people. Have we ever treated anyone differently based on socio-economic status, knowingly or unknowingly? Let this experience shape your understanding of and empathy for people who live in conditions of poverty, and who may be treated differently as a result. Keep this in mind and extend your compassion the next time you are in a situation that allows you to interact with someone in a situation of poverty, homelessness, etc.

**The Story of Stuff:** Have you ever considered where the things we use day-to-day come from and go? As a group, select one item that you all use (i.e. shoes, cell phone, car, canned tomatoes, etc). Think through the stages of the "materials economy" -- extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal. For each stage, try to answer the following questions:

1. Who was involved in this stage of production for our item? List the lives (human or not) that were touched in some way (directly or indirectly) by this product.
2. How were they impacted? List and categorize the impacts as positive or negative.
3. As Sai YAs, what control do we have? How can we affect this situation and shift one of the negative impacts to a positive? Decide on one action that you will all take together.

For more information, ideas, or a concise description of the materials economy, visit [www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com) and watch the video.

**Change for Change:** As a group, select one desire, habit or attachment that you will reduce in order to save money. Consider collecting the money that you save to spend in service to those in need.

**Excessories:** How many times have you purchased a new gadget, used it for a few days and lost it or stopped using it? It's probably sitting in your house somewhere, but you don't see much need for it anymore. These impulse buys are common, and we often get into them because the item was on sale or a friend recommended it. Pick three items that you have not used in the last 2 months. They could be anything from an I-pod, cell phone, watch, shoes, clothing, etc.

- a. Estimate approximately how much you spent on these items. Add up the total of all items for the whole group.
- b. Consider the figures below. With these stats and for other basic provisions, decide as a group how you would apportion the total amount of money from question A to make the maximum impact to our brothers and sisters at home and across the world.

- \$15 can give 50 students lunch in Burkina Faso, where kids walk 6km to school, and have no meals during the day.
- \$20 distributes 20 bednets to prevent malaria in Kenya.
- \$35 will provide job preparation training to one female gang member in Los Angeles.
- \$42 can establish a township vegetable garden, with training, resources, and follow-up in South Africa.
- \$50 buys childhood vaccinations and prenatal care for 20 people in Mali.
- \$65 provides one year of literacy training to 5 women in Afghanistan.
- \$100 provides 5 weeks of mentoring to a foster child in the USA.
- \$150 provides one month's salary to a conservation worker in the sacred groves of Rajasthan, India.
- \$250 provides 3 months of nutrition and exercise classes to a low-income woman in urban USA.
- \$500 will plant 1500 trees in Indonesia.

~[www.globalgiving.com](http://www.globalgiving.com)

As you can see, even a humble amount could provide aid for many in our own communities and across the world. In an industrialized nation, we can sometimes lose sight of the experiences of other citizens of Mother Earth, and our interconnectedness to them. What are some ways that we can forego frivolous purchases in order to support the greater needs of others?

**Gayatri Mantra:** Close the workshop by chanting Gayatri Mantra three times.

Thank you all for your participation. Please e-mail your feedback and suggestions to [nyc@saiyousa.net](mailto:nyc@saiyousa.net).