

Pre-Conference Monthly Workshop – “Time Wise”

Introduction: *Please take time to review on your own before meeting, and summarize for your group.*

Sai Ram. This is the first of four workshops related to the Young Adult (“YA”), Ceiling on Desires (“COD”) initiative. As we know, Swami has placed a lot of emphasis on the COD program as part of the 9-point Code of Conduct. For our journey to God, He recommends “*Less Luggage, More Comfort.*”

As Sai Devotees, we have focused on our internal transformation, as well as societal uplift through service. The COD initiative will build on this foundation and expand to address the interplay between our actions and current social and environmental issues.

Purpose of the Workshops: The COD initiative strives to bring a new perspective by introducing thought provoking materials and discussion questions to help YAs across the nation to progress along their individual spiritual journey by minimizing desires. All group activities are intended to support the individual COD spiritual discipline taken on by each YA, and will also include components of meditation, Gayatri chanting, and service.

Monthly workshops will be implemented by YA groups and will examine one of the four components of Swami’s COD program – time, money, energy, and food – each month. The first is *Time*, given the start of the New Year, the fact that the nation is undergoing numerous economic and social changes, and, most importantly, the fact that Swami has blessed us with the opportunity to participate in the first ever National Youth Conference.

Structure of the Workshops:

- ☆ **Mindfulness and Meditation:** We will open each discussion session with an exercise in mindfulness, or becoming more aware of oneself in a particular moment, followed by Jyothi meditation. Today, we will consider how being more mindful of time can help us use it more “Sai-fully.” *Suggested time: 15 minutes.*
- ☆ **Discussion:** Focusing on one resource per month, we will use a combination of Swami’s teachings, secular articles, and/or videos as the basis for discussion. Group discussion should support our individual COD discipline. Today, we will consider how the time saved by reducing our selected desire can best be applied for spiritual practice. *Suggested time: 45 minutes.*
- ☆ **Group Activity:** Following the discussion, the group will choose from a list of suggested activities related to the theme, in order to further explore or put into practice one idea that arose from the discussion. The activity selected should be agreed upon by all group members and completed within the month. *Suggested time: 15 minutes.*
- ☆ **Gayatri Mantra:** Conclude the workshop by chanting Gayatri Mantra.

Reflection and Sharing: Individuals and groups are encouraged to reflect upon their experiences practicing COD, whether through individual discipline or group activities. A variety of optional tools, such as worksheets, journal, or online forum will be made available for use as desired. Groups are welcome to think of creative ways to share their activities and lessons learned with one another and/or other groups and regions.

Philosophy and Goals of this Discussion:

Swami says that “Time Waste is Life Waste,” and stresses time as an important component of any COD program.

The COD team invites each YA wishing to participate in this initiative to select ONE desire to “ceiling” between now and the National Youth Conference. We believe that even if we reduce just one desire, no matter what it may be, this will ripple into other facets of our lives, allowing us to save time as well as money, food, and energy.

For this month, please consider how you can save time as a result of ceiling the desire you have chosen. The connections may not be immediately obvious, but we’re sure they are there. The important next step is to use the time we gain to grow closer to Swami. If it is misspent on another frivolous desire, we have not made any progress.

This workshop is designed to broaden our perspective on what Swami means when He says not to waste time, and to help us find ways to save time through Ceiling on Desires.

Mindfulness and Meditation:

Suggested time: 15 minutes

To begin, as a group, we will spend a few minutes doing a mindfulness exercise. This is a technique designed to anchor your mind to your breath, help you slow down, and be more mindful of what is happening internally and externally. If you find this helpful, you may consider using it as a daily exercise for purposeful time-management.

Activity: Select one person to be the facilitator, who will read the script below. You will need a clock with a second hand which can be heard by all members. (You can also use a metronome, real or online, at a speed of 60). Following this exercise, please play the Light meditation audio (short version), available at http://saiyausa.net/components/com_podcast/media/lightmeditation.mp3

Facilitator: “Close your eyes and become aware of your breathing. As we begin to shut out some of the senses that bombard us every day, allow your mind to settle on your breath, as an anchor for you to focus on. (1-2 mins pause)

You may notice your mind wandering. This is okay, let it wander; watch it wander as a silent observer. Then bring your mind gently back to your anchor. (Pause)

Our minds are a microcosm of the world today. As the world moves faster, our minds are forced to move faster; as we slow down and create stillness in our mind, our world becomes a more peaceful place. (Pause)

Now, think of the current state of the world (pause). Notice your body and your mind at this moment. How do you feel? How fast is your breath? What is happening inside your body? (Pause. Start the clock or metronome, if needed.)

Now direct your attention to the ticking of the second hand of the clock. Focus on this for a few seconds. (Pause) Notice how this ticking is a reminder of the silent passage of time. Synchronize your breathing with the seconds of the clock. Inhale for 2 seconds, exhale for 2 seconds. (Pause) Slowly increase the length of each breath – 3 seconds (pause), 4 seconds (pause), and so on until your breaths are slow and measured. (PAUSE)

Notice your body and mind at this moment. How do you feel? What is happening inside your body as your breath slows down? (pause) How can you reflect this feeling back into the world around you? (Pause. Turn off metronome.)

Each breath is also an opportunity to connect with the Light of God. With each inhale, receive and fully absorb this Divine Light into your being. With each exhale, release and send the Light’s love, peace, and wisdom to all beings in the world. (Pause)

We will now spend a few minutes in Jyothi Meditation, which will unlock the inner sanctum of peace and allow the Light and Love of God to bathe and purify one’s body, senses, thoughts, and emotions, while also extending its brilliance throughout the entire Creation.” (*Conduct or play the Light meditation short version audio.*) Whenever you are ready, you may slowly open your eyes. Thank you all for participating.

Closing: Swami has said that the average person breathes over 15,000 times a day. Each breath, each second is an opportunity to realize your oneness with God. In order to do this, we must be mindful of that breath, mindful of that moment, present in that moment, anchored to our breath.

Our breath can also be used as a tool to calm our bodies and still our minds, reflecting peace into our worlds. This one breath, which Swami has given us, has the potential to simultaneously connect us to the Divine Light within and radiate peace into the world! Yet we do it thousands of times a day without realizing its value.

Regardless of where we fall on the spectrum, whether constantly stressed, always multi-tasking, and over-utilizing each minute, or generally passive about time, taking it for granted, and not using time to its fullest potential, it is likely that every one of us will benefit from being more mindful of time. Throughout this discussion and the activities you choose to do this month, consider ways to be more mindful, more present in the moment, and more connected with Swami. (*You may take 1-2 minutes to get quick reactions of members, if they want to share.*)

Discussion:

Suggested time: 45 minutes

Check-in: To begin, each member of the YA group will briefly answer this question:

What is the one desire you will “ceiling” before the NYC, and how will that practice help you save time?

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES AND DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS AS A GROUP. SELECT A HISTORIAN, TO TAKE NOTES OR RECORD THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSION (I.E. VIDEO, AUDIO).

Desires are a Prison

Man is deluded by his unlimited desires. He is living in a dream world. He is forgetting the Supreme Consciousness. That is why it is important to keep our desires under control, to place a ceiling on them. Desires are a prison. Man can be freed only by limiting his wants. You should have a desire only for life's bare necessities ... Ceiling on Desires is a must for leading a peaceful and meaningful life. You must curb the desire to seek more and more wealth and turn your effort to realize the Reality within. In pursuing this effort, you must avoid waste of food, money, time, energy and knowledge as well, as these are forms of God.

- Sanathana Sarathi, August 1994, pg 210

Time is Sacred

Night follows day and day follows night,
Summer follows winter and winter follows summer.
Thus time marches on, engulfing us and making our lives shorter.
In spite of this, we cling to our desires.

Time is moving away fast like the wind. The duration of our life is melting away like a block of ice. We will drop the body sometime or the other and leave this world without knowing the purpose of life. When life departs, the body will either be buried or cremated. What is distinctive of human life? Man must recognize the sacred task for which he has taken birth. If he spends his time only in fulfilling his sensuous desires, he will be wasting his life. The duration of a life is an important factor. Therefore, time should be used properly.

- Summer Showers in Brindavan 1973

Time is God

In the world, we are continually experiencing the same round of days and nights. You perform the same ablutions and indulge in the same process of filling the stomach. Thus you go on from year to year. But what efforts are you making to lead a purposeful and ennobling life? You are going through the same mill of experiences again and again, doing the same things again and again. If you go on in this way, what is the worth of your life? What is the goal of life? What is its primary purpose? Few care to enquire into this basic question.

Excerpt taken from New Year Discourse in Prashanthi Nilayam on Jan 1, 1991

Questions for discussion:

1. In what ways are we enslaved to the processes of time? How can we transcend the limitations of time by reducing our desires?

I know what Illinois' Governor feels like now by Charles W. Colson, Special to CNN. December 12, 2008

Editor's note: Charles W. Colson, a former aide to President Nixon, is the founder of Prison Fellowship, the world's largest Christian outreach to prisoners, and recipient of the Presidential Citizens Medal for his work with prisoners. Colson was imprisoned for obstruction of justice during the Watergate Scandal. He says pride undermines the spirit and is the source of political corruption. This article was written in the wake of the arrest of Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois, on charges of corruption.

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- If anyone knows how Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich feels right now, I do. . . .

Some 35 years ago that ugly glare of publicity was focused on me as I was charged with a Watergate-related crime, subsequently convicted and sent to prison.

In the wake of Blagojevich's arrest, many Americans are left wondering once again how intelligent people can do such stupid things -- especially when they've achieved the pinnacle of power.

The answer comes down to pride. . . .

I went on to serve seven months in prison. As lonely and demeaning as that experience was, I have never regretted it. I can honestly agree with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who wrote, "Bless you, prison, bless you for being in my life, for there, lying on the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity, as we are made to believe, but the maturing of the human soul."

Which brings me to a second reason for Blagojevich's fall: the culture of self.

Like me, Blagojevich grew up in a culture that taught the great goal of life was material success, power and influence. I grew up during the Great Depression; I thought if a smart guy like me earned a law degree and accumulated academic honors, they would enable me to find power, fulfillment and meaning in life. . . .

I made a lot of money in my law practice and accepted a White House job. But by then, I had become very self-righteous; I was absolutely certain that no one could corrupt me. And yet I ended up going to prison. . . .

Sometimes -- absorbed in accumulating political power -- we're not interested in stopping to think. But as I learned firsthand, self-obsession destroys character. It has to.

Tragically, America is continuing to rear its young to become not only self-obsessed, but obsessed with personal power. Quaint-sounding virtues such as courage, honesty and prudence -- historically considered the elements of character -- are no match for a society in which the exaltation and gratification of self becomes the overriding goal of life.

If Blagojevich is guilty, the best thing that could happen to him is to be tried and convicted. He's going to have to reach rock bottom -- just as I did -- before he will be able to escape his own prison of pride, self-delusion and self-righteousness. But that's a transformation we can never accomplish on our own. I can vouch for the fact that human pride is simply too strong.

Lewis was right: Pride is a spiritual cancer. And the only cure, for any of us, is to stop looking down and to look up. The cure can only be brought about in someone who has come to realize that the will and power to do good and not evil comes from God alone.

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/12/10/colson.corruption/index.html>

2. Swami says that desires are a prison. Colson calls his time in jail a blessing. What is the true prison in this situation? Do you agree with Colson that we can never escape this prison on our own? What do we need in order to escape?

3. Similar to Colson's experience, many other great leaders (Gandhi, Mandela, etc) had transformative times in prison. How did this time define their character and shape their lives?

Overworked Americans are urged to find a balance by Eli Sanders, Globe Correspondent. October 24, 2003

SEATTLE -- Overworked, unsatisfied, and stressed out, physician Jeanne-Marie Maher decided she'd had enough. No more being haunted by her pager, her voice mail, and her cell phone. No more coming home, sitting down to dinner, and then getting right back on the computer to manage medical charts.

"I needed to find balance," Maher said. Maher, 50, quit her job as a doctor, retrained as a life coach, started spending more time with her family, and joined a Seattle-based movement urging Americans, who work longer hours than citizens of any other industrialized country, to reclaim their personal time and examine the social and personal costs of increasingly long work hours.

Americans work an average of nine more weeks per year than people in Western Europe, according to the International Labor Organization. To even things up, we all would have to take a mandatory 2 and a half month vacation.

"There's a very high cost to our obsession with productivity and growth," said John de Graaf, a Seattle documentary filmmaker. Although the United States is the most productive country according to gross domestic product per capita, de Graaf said, "GDP doesn't measure many things that are very important to human happiness."

Citing studies and statistics, de Graaf and other organizers in the movement said the "time poverty" of Americans contributes to the decline of family, community, and civic life, and also harms the country's health. Among the trends organizers noted: Heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, infertility, and mental disorders are on the rise. Studies indicate two-income couples surveyed reported having only 12 minutes a day to talk to each other.

The root of the problem, according to organizers, is that instead of investing decades of gains in efficiency and productivity into more personal time, America has invested the gains in increased production while also increasing employees' work hours. The result, organizers said, is a vicious cycle: Longer work hours and increased productivity create more goods and services to consume than ever before. The time poverty that results from long work hours creates a greater need to buy goods that enable workers' hectic schedules. The need to buy more goods then feeds back into the need to work more hours, which was why workers needed more goods in the first place.

the rest of this article can be found at

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2003/10/24/overworked_americans_are_urged_to_find_a_balance_bost_on_globe/

4. What is "time poverty"? Who suffers most as a consequence of our time-poor, but material-rich, lifestyles? How can the practice of COD disrupt the vicious cycle that makes Americans time-poor?
5. Going to jail (Colson) and quitting her job (Maher) enabled them to reclaim time and a sense of purpose. Are money and time mutually exclusive? Must we give up one for the other? What are some practical strategies to eliminate overwork without wasting time?
6. In our lives, there are many instances where we are "jailed" by circumstance, and may feel forced to waste our time (i.e. time stuck in traffic, waiting for an appointment, etc). What are ways to avoid being imprisoned while in our daily "jails"? How can we take advantage of these as opportunities for positive transformation?
7. Consider the time spent waiting for Swami's dharshan at Prashanthi Nilayam. Why does Swami make His devotees pass long hours in idleness while waiting for Him? When Swami teaches us not to waste time, does He want us to fill each moment with activity?

Ceiling on Desires: Group Action Plans

Suggested time: 15 minutes to decide upon an activity; time spent completing the activity will vary

As a group, please select ONE activity that you will all undertake together this month. Some activities are designed to be done together and will require time set aside to meet. Others can be done individually, but with the knowledge that your fellow YAs are also carrying out the same commitment on their own. You may think of creative ways to keep each other posted on your progress throughout the month and share your strategies, like a buddy system, group emails, or a blog.

The purpose of the group activity is to expand your perspective on the resource of time, why Swami teaches us not to waste it, how it is sacred, and how we can make the best use of it. Consider one important point that you discussed or a lesson learned during the workshop, and convert it into action through the group activity. You may pick from the examples below, or create your own, based on skills and interests of group members. Above all, this should be a way to have fun and meet our spiritual goals... together!

Where did the time go? Have each member of the group write down everything they did in the last day, and how long it took. Look over it and add it up. Can you account for all 24 hours? If not, where did the remaining time go? Look at the time you can account for – what was it spent on? How much was spent on Swami? How much was spent on wasteful pursuits or distractions? Pick one time waster that you can reduce, and substitute it with Swami Time this month. *This activity is best done just after the discussion, if time allows.*

Get out of Jail: As a group, brainstorm the “jails” in your daily life, or small bits of time that may be unplanned, which could be utilized to connect with Swami (i.e. time stuck in traffic, long elevator rides, waiting for an appointment, etc). Make a commitment to use these chances as opportunities to pray, chant Gayatri mantra, sing bhajans, or think of Swami.

Unanswered Prayers: How much time do you save after your favorite team gets knocked out of the playoffs? Use your newly gained time to connect with nature and God while satisfying your craving for sports/physical activity. Get outside, take a nature walk, ride your bike, or play in the snow.

Time is Art: Find 10 – 20 minutes in your schedule by reducing an unnecessary activity each day. Use it to undertake a creative project, like painting a picture, composing a song, sewing a quilt, or planting a garden. Work on your project a little bit each day, and see how far you get in a month! Bring in the project (or pictures of it) to share with your YA group.

Time with the Timeless: Plan a group visit to people who have constraints on time in their lives, like children with terminal illnesses, inmates of prisons, or the elderly. Talk with them and try to observe and learn from their unique perspective on time. Consider how valuable the short time you give them company could be to them, given their time limitations in life.

Meditation: Meditate 11 times this month for 11 minutes each. Try to keep your mind still for at least 11 seconds. By the way, thinking only about this 11-second rule doesn't count towards absolute “stillness”! ☺

Mindfulness: As a group, brainstorm ways that you can make a practice of being mindful of time in your daily life. Implement at least one of these. Keep a journal to observe how you feel or change, and share with others.

Learning from your community: Decide as a group on 3 good questions related to time that you find interesting. (For example, “How much time do you spend each day doing something you really love?” or “If you were notified that your job would be relocating you to the Moon tomorrow indefinitely, what would you do with your last day on earth?”) Have each YA ask the questions that the group selects to 3 people they come across in their community, preferably who they don't know, at the store, on the train, etc. Bring your answers back to the group, and debrief what you learned from this experience.

Chart your Progress: As a group, select one of the worksheets on time, or create your own, to monitor your daily use of time, identify wasted time, and chart your progress over the month. Worksheets posted at <http://saiyausa.net/files/nyc2009/initiatives/COD/time-management-worksheet.xls>.

Start the Day with Service: Do a group service activity *early* in the morning. Look at how much time you have left in the day to spend wisely!

Living Service: Look for ways to make service an attitude rather than an activity. Spend 11 seconds thinking of ways to live service each day. Whether it's spreading a smile, warmly greeting the grocery clerk, caring for the environment, or sharing your divine spark with the world, take the time you saved through your personal Ceiling on Desires practice and apply it to your way of "living service." Eventually, living service will transcend time, and can be who you are, rather than what you do. Share your experiences with your fellow YAs.

Time to grow: Grow a houseplant. Observe the silent passage of time as your plant blooms. Consider how you bloom over time. Watch for the subtle changes and ways that you grow, learn, and develop through your COD practice this month.

Game time: Have each member of the group copy the first quote below onto a piece of paper while timing them. Then split into pairs, and have each member of the group copy the second quote below onto a piece of paper while carrying on a conversation with their partner. See how long it takes. Debrief this activity by discussing the benefits of multi-tasking vs. single-tasking. Which took longer? Which was more accurate? Decide on one takeaway to put into practice as a group, and monitor your own efficiency and effectiveness while multi-tasking or single-tasking this month.

Quote 1: *"The richest man on earth is the one with least desires, and the poorest man on earth is the one with most desires."*

Quote 2: *"Do not fritter away the minutes in loose talk, retailing scandal, witnessing films, or mixing with flippant companions."*

Rocks in a Jar: You can better fill a jar with rocks if you start with the larger ones and fill the gaps with smaller pebbles or sand. If you put the sand and pebbles in first, you will not have room for the larger rocks. Similarly, when thinking of time management, we should complete the higher priority tasks first, and fill in our remaining time with lower priority activities. As a group, brainstorm 3 categories of activities that we do which are high priority and 3 that are low priority. Make a commitment to prioritize the rocks, rather than the pebbles.

Gayatri Mantra

Close the workshop by chanting Gayatri Mantra three times as a group.

If there is time, you can debrief the workshop by asking members to share their reactions, insights, feelings, or feedback. Thank you all for your participation. We welcome your feedback and suggestions. Please visit the COD forum at www.saiyausa.net or email nyc@saiyausa.net.

Further Resources:

Please check the website for more interactive components related to the Pre-Conference Initiative Program.

Meditation Podcasts: Online, you will find a series of meditation-themed monthly podcasts. The podcasts will cover diverse topics like Introduction to meditation, the Saience and science of meditation, music and meditation, guest speakers etc.

http://www.saiyausa.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=32&Itemid=32

Gayatri Study Circle: We have study circle material available online to help you delve deeper into the importance and power of the Gayatri chant as explained by Swami.

http://www.saiyausa.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=31&Itemid=31