

Devotional Gathering: Protocols and Customs

● Attire

Please wear clean and modest clothing that is comfortable and loose-fitting. Revealing clothes or shorts are not appropriate.

● Shoes

Generally, shoes are removed and left at the entrance to the Center. This is a common custom in many countries and also signifies a sign of respect for leaving the "dust of the world" behind. The removal of shoes upon entering the facility is optional in the U.S. Sathya Sai Baba Centers' functions.

● Greetings and Good-byes:

Many devotees say "Sai Ram" to say hello and good-bye. This conveys the acknowledgment of the divinity in each other.

● Silence

We ask that you maintain perfect silence while in the Center. This helps to maintain spiritual calmness and will not disturb others in prayer or meditation and restrict your movements to a minimum while sitting in the prayer hall.

"Practice silence, for the voice of God can be heard in the region of the heart only when the tongue is still. Silence is the speech of the spiritual seeker."

● Seating

Men and women sit separately. This is needed to minimize distractions arising from curiosity or subtle attractions between members of the opposite sex. This protocol is followed in all Sathya Sai Baba functions throughout the world.

"At Bhajans and at other meetings, men devotees should sit apart from women devotees. The rule should be applicable to all members - whether they are Indians or non-Indians, in India or elsewhere. It is part of the spiritual discipline that is necessary for devotees ... mixing freely and sitting together do not promote a peaceful atmosphere. In sitting separately, sensory thoughts do not arise so easily."

Often, seating is on the floor. Chairs are provided for those who may need them. When sitting on the floor, it is proper for men and women to sit with their legs crossed. Select the seating option that is comfortable to you.

● Time

Please plan to arrive on time to quietly and comfortably seat yourself before the program begins. Everybody should be seated a few minutes prior to start of the bhajan

● Singing

Men and Women alternate with leading the devotional singing. Songs may be sung in variety of languages and are sung in unison-style or Bhajan-style (sing and response).

Bhajan lead singers and instrumentalists must be seated in the front few rows

Devotees arriving late may quietly seat themselves behind without disturbing those already seated

Sing sweet, familiar and devotional bhajans in any language which can be understood and sung by other devotees.

Musical instruments used during bhajans should not drown the voices of the singers and those who follow, thus maintaining a balance between the instruments and singing.

Do not clap out of tune.

Do not monopolies the time in bhajans by singing one bhajan for six or ten minutes repeating the same lines again and again.

Bhajans should be sung in two speeds: slow and fast. In the slow speed, sing each line twice and, in the fast speed only once except the last line which should be sung twice to signal the conclusion of the bhajan.

If your voice is not sweet or pleasant, it is best to remain silent; that is the best service you can do. Keep devotional songs as simple as you can, without competitive pomp or show. When you sing devotional songs, dwell on the meaning of the songs, and the message of each name and form of God, and roll on your tongue its sweetness. Let those with a good voice and musical talent lead; the devotional singing must be pleasant and it should not jar on the ear.

● Prayers

A number of selected prayers in English and Sanskrit are generally recited in unison following the conclusion of devotional singing. The selection and sequence of these prayers may vary from Center to Center; please follow the Center protocol. The following prayers are listed in alphabetical order. Center worship services repeat prayers from this list in varying orders.

● Vibuthi

At the conclusion of the Devotional singing session, Vibuthi is distributed to all devotees. Vibuthi is gray ash materialized or blessed by Sai Baba and signifies the ultimate destruction of worldly desires.

● Children

It is the responsibility of parents to maintain control of their children at all times.