



**Institute of Sathya Sai Education Australia**

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## **A Paradigm shift: Individualism to Collective Altruism**

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### **PREAMBLE:**

Currently we are on a path of wasteful consumption, pollution, exploitation of natural resources and ecological mismanagement. If we continue on this materialistic pathway, the future of our planet is going to look very grim. This materialistic pathway has given rise to a very shallow global culture. This culture exhibits a disunited family, social unrest, inequality between the rich and the poor, lack of personal accountability of the politicians and corporate leaders and society bending the rules of morality. In this culture, **Economics is the driver**.

However, all is not lost. It is possible to envisage a more positive future **if we make spirituality as the driver. Spirituality will cause a paradigm shift** by allowing us to progress from individualism to collective altruism. You ask how this is possible.

Well, let us explore this by asking you the first question –

### **Q1. What do you understand by Individualism?**

#### **Definitions of Individualism:**

1. behaviour that furthers one's own interests (**SELFISHNESS**), regardless of others;
2. the principle of asserting one's independence and individuality in his behaviour, opinions, or actions (free dictionary); **EGOISM**;
3. A doctrine holding that the interests of the individual should take precedence over the interests of the other person, social group, or state;

In the last three decades a number of changes have taken place on the planet that has resulted in major adverse global issues which have now become a reality for each one of us.

### **Q2. What are these adverse changes?**

- Catastrophes of wars
- Excessive consumerism;
- Environmental degradation leading to global warming and natural disasters; Famine, drought etc

- Pollution
- Exploitation of natural resources
- Collapse of financial institutions due to lack of ethics and personal/organisational accountability;
- Emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases;
- Media reporting a lot of negative news
- Lack of social justice and expression of social conscience.
- Social unrest
- Religious fanaticism

Capitalists believe that **Greed is part of human nature** and is part of individualism. People will always want to compete and accumulate power and riches at any cost and this **becomes a barrier to express concern for others**. The concern for others diminishes and in that environment **Individualism (selfishness/greed) thrives and this has become one of the root causes of these adverse changes.**

### **So What effect Selfishness/greed has on the society?**

**Selfishness/greed** has led to the formation of an abstract society that largely practices:

- Religion without love;
- Medicine without compassion;
- Law without justice;
- Education without character;
- Business without morality;
- Politics without principles; and
- Work place without transparency/authenticity.

**For this workshop/interactive seminar we are defining Individualism as SELFISHNESS/GREED.**

Let us now focus on Altruism -

### **Q3. What do you understand by Altruism?**

#### **Definitions of Altruism:**

1. the principle or practice of unselfish concern for others or devotion to the welfare of others; **SELFLESSNESS**;
2. the philosophical doctrine that right action is that which produces the greatest benefit to others;

### **Q4. Think of an altruistic act that you have carried out and describe why you did it?**

- Altruistic act is a Dharmic (right conduct) act,
- You do it out of love and
- You feel peaceful.

3. Thus, Altruism can also be a manifestation of human values.

**Altruism is inherent in us. Individualism and Altruism co-exist with us (similar to the existence of inner enemies and 5 HV).** Story

of the good wolf and bad wolf within us, there is constant war – the one we feed wins (**Cherokee Indian story**).

*In nature itself, there are countless examples of absolute selflessness in service for the well-being of others. Trees carry fruits to give happiness to others. Rivers flow for the sake of others. Cows give milk so that others can be nourished. That is how a person should stand in line to be the first to serve others. Without the readiness to serve, mankind will perish. The future well-being of humanity is closely connected with the need for the spirit of altruism. Selflessness is the recognisable sign of being a true human being. BABA*

**What do you understand with this quote?**

### **Pathways to Altruism**

We have defined these as follows:

- 1. Individualistic Altruism: Individuals who are self-assertive** tend to achieve their individual goals. Once their Maslow's needs are fulfilled, their innate altruistic nature begins to manifest. People are individualistic in the beginning but once there are overflowing with wealth they **become altruistic**; **OR** there are some who **will truncate themselves and are unable to do good**, they just revel in their wealth eg Murdoch.

Examples of individualistic altruism include:

- Bill Gates (initially made money for selfish reasons, for power, fame etc), but now has created the children's vaccine initiative program, has a grand vision of eradicating polio and malaria. *The Gates Foundation has contributed 200 million so far and plans to add another 102 million to the effort. Gates Foundation will invest 10 billion dollars over 10 years in the research, development and distribution of vaccines with special focus on malaria.*
- Oprah Winfrey – came from a very poor family. She made her riches through the Oprah Winfrey show. She showed genuine concern for others while she was accumulating her riches in the US.
  - Oprah Winfrey built a Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa to provide educational and leadership opportunities for academically gifted girls from impoverished backgrounds in South Africa who exhibited leadership qualities for making a difference in the world.
- Madonna, who has adopted two children from Malawi, gave \$11 million of her own money to improve education in Malawi.
- Fred Hollows – Eye is an eye whether it is from the king or the pauper.

- Collaborative Scientific research: Different scientists pool resources to develop vaccines or drugs to device new treatments.
- 2. Conscience altruistic movements** that form the catalyst leading to revolution and development of new social thinking for betterment of society; eg
- The conscience movements in the fifties gave rise to Culture Creatives. The Culture Creatives (> 50 million worldwide) care deeply about ecology & saving the planet, about relationships, peace & social justice, about authenticity, self-actualisation, spirituality & self-expression, walk their talk through service (~4 hours per week).
  - Greenpeace movement
  - Gandhi's independence movement
- 3. Collective Altruism:** Exploration of collective action fuelled with LOVE.

**Examples: Despite the current belief that individualism brings freedom and forms the basis of Capitalism (entrepreneurial culture), it also has created and promoted avenues for reform through technology development and social media to achieve collective altruism.**

- (i) **Creative Commons: Creative Commons (CC)** is a non-profit organisation head-quartered in Mountain View California, USA, devoted to expanding the range of creative works available for others to build upon legally and to share. The organization has released several copy-right licenses known as **Creative Commons Licenses free of charge to the public**. These licenses allow creators to communicate which rights they reserve, and which rights they waive for the benefit of recipients or other creators (**sharing of intellectual property**). This simplicity distinguishes Creative Commons from an all-rights reserved copyright. **Wikipedia is one of the notable web-based projects using one of its licenses.** CC permits the public to realise the full potential of the internet —driving a new era of development, growth, and productivity.
- (ii) **Wikipedia:** The development of Wikipedia demonstrates the feasibility and success of an innovative form of content creation, namely openly shared, collaborative writing. **The research finds that while participants have both individualistic and collaborative motives, altruistic motives dominate.** The success of the Wikipedia model appears to be related to wiki technology and the "wiki way" of collaboration.

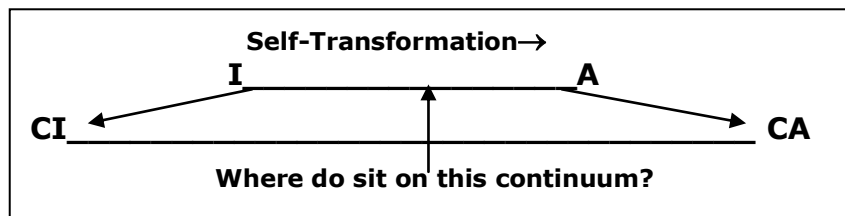
**Q5. How can you use Wiki technology to deliver resource material on human values?**

- **Vidya Vahini project** organised by the Sri Sathya Trust. Current Sai Schools in India and the internet (Wiki Technology) was used to help write and collect human-values-based lesson material for all topics in the educational curriculum and made available for use in all rural schools. Swami used this technology to deliver lessons to the door steps of the villagers.

**Other examples of CA are:**

- (iii) **Queensland Floods** – (collective altruism).
- (iv) **Activities of Sai Centres and ISSEA:**
  - SSE classes
  - Greening Australia/Clean up Australia; these organisations provide a channel to express our altruism.
  - Cooking food for the homeless
  - Akhand Bhajan
  - Training SSE teachers
  - Train the trainer
  - Conducting Diploma courses/parenting workshops etc

**Now that we have defined Individualism and Altruism, we can now represent these as two terms on a straight line. I and A** are two ends of the straight line and the individual slides to the right or left as the situation presents. As individuals we can behave individualistic at times and altruistic at other times. This can happen on the same day.



**CI** = Collective Individualism: Eg Petrol companies decide to increase petrol price. US, UK, Australia sent troops into Iraq because of the presence of weapons of mass destruction. Shoe companies using child labour, Supermarkets, Departmental stores, Banks out to make a huge profits etc.

**CA** = Collective Altruism: Sai centre activities, SAI SCHOOL (National Project), Organ and Tissue Donation, Blood Donation; Worldwide Helpers (WWH) Network etc.

1. **Narayanan Krishnan – CNN Hero:** he has brought more than 1.2 million hot meals to India's homeless and destitute through his non-profit Trust
2. **LA, California (CNN) – Anuradha Koirala,** founder and executive director of Maiti Nepal, is fighting to prevent the trafficking of

women and girls in Nepal. Since 1993, she and her group, Maiti Nepal, have helped rescue and rehabilitate more than 12,000 victims. She is a former English teacher and Minister for Women and Children in the Nepalese government. She has been named the 2010 CNN Hero of the Year. Koirala said "Human trafficking is a heinous crime, a shame to humanity, I ask everyone to join me to create a society free of trafficking. We need to do this for all our daughters."

3. **Abdul Sattar Edhi**, a social activist dedicated to help the poor in Pakistan (born in Gujarat). He is the head of the Edhi Foundation, the world largest ambulatory service and operates free old people's homes, orphanages, clinics, women shelters, rehab centers for drug addicts and mentally ill individuals. It has run relief operations in Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus region, eastern Europe and even the US, when it helped provide aid following the New Orleans hurricane of 2005. Together with his wife, Bilquis Edhi, he received 1986 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service.

### **Attitude to service – Swami's quote**

*The fulfilment of human life consists in the service that man renders, without any thought of return, in an **attitude of Selflessness**. Service rendered in this spirit sheds light in the dark interior of man, it widens the heart, it purifies the impulses and confers lasting ANANDHA. Baba*

This quote states that **when you are totally selfless then the activity is wholly altruistic**. Eg tree planting – one SSE teacher is excited and encourages all the children to attend. Another SSE teacher says Oh Gosh this Sunday is tree planting, I am busy but I have to attend.

**Q6. We all admire Swami's service to society and he is the perfect role model for altruism; however, who else would you consider being a role model for Altruism and Why? It does not have to be anyone famous – can be an ordinary citizen or your next door neighbour.**

**Eg** – Gandhi, Mother Theresa, local Canberra citizen- soup kitchen

**Swami's model of education, medical service and water projects are benchmarks for altruism. Do you agree?**

**Some of these projects are being duplicated elsewhere; eg,**

Let us make a brief list

- Next to air, water is the element most essential to sustain human life. Water projects in:
  - Indonesia , Malaysia

- Africa (Value-based water education); Sai Education Trust (SET) of Zambia followed Sathya Sai Baba's example in the provision of drinking water to the poor.
- Sai Schools in:
  - Africa - Ndola, Zambia
  - Thailand - SEAMEO (The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization) and UN-HABITAT have declared Sathya Sai School in Thailand as a Centre of Excellence'. The school trains educators from different parts of the world in "Human Values-Based Education". They have trained over 20,000 school teachers in EHV.
  - Australia – Sai School in Murwillumbah
  - South America, South America has more Sathya Sai Schools than any other continent.
  - UK EHV in schools in Britain – Caroline Alderman (Director of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education). **One principal said if this EHV could reach 10% of the schools then that will change the whole country (H2H 8 June 2011 issue –interview with Caroline Alderman).**

**This statement indicates that EHV can be one of the practical steps to secure the future prosperity of this planet.**

- In Fiji, two non-Sai devotees have started free clinics based on Swami's teachings. The free clinics are running with the help of volunteers. The free clinics are in Suva and Lautoka.
- Sai Medical Unit of Australia – work in Fiji, Sri Lanka

**The purpose of the workshop was to recognise that individualism and collective altruism can coexist in our society. I am sure you will agree that we have established that collective altruism can deliver benefits and extensive outcomes for the society.**

## **REFORM AGENDA**

As mentioned in the abstract, the ISSEA Educational Package is one of the items for the Reform Agenda. This package is under development and will be used for training for the Introductory/Intermediate and Diploma Courses for SSE teachers/Sai School Teachers and finally taking the package to the wider community and that is a challenge. Leaving this aside, **I would like you all to:**

**Q7. Think of a project that you can initiate in your centre (GROUP 1) or workplace (GROUP 2) that will allow you and your group to progress from Individualism to Collective Altruism? [Depends on time Availability]**

- My workplace - we have started a small fundraising group. A group of 7 people has now grown to at least 25 and is growing. I can feel the shift in consciousness.

## Conclusion

Swami's efforts were all aimed towards one goal:

To raise human consciousness to a new level, lifting mankind above the mire of ignorant selfishness, setting up a vision and understanding that will revolutionize the human life-style.

Moving from I to A will lead to self-transformation in an individual and this will cause a shift in consciousness (i.e. raising the level of consciousness) in that individual. But this is not enough. You need a quantitative mass of individuals to create this change through a shift from individualism to collective altruism thereby causing a quantitative shift in consciousness. It is this paradigm shift in consciousness that will contribute to the future prosperity of the world.

## Abstract

Concern for others as expressed by altruism, is inherent in human beings. In spite of this innate quality, individualism defines all interactions and outcomes of human activities and permeates the social fabric of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These individualistic activities in the last three decades have resulted in major global issues such as financial crisis, ecological degradation, little or no social conscience, and excessive consumerism.

Scattered round the world are individuals who have become less individualistic and more altruistic by devoting enormous energies and resources in addressing global issues that would benefit mankind. In the current setting the challenge is how to progress on the spectrum from entrenched individualism to collective altruism.

The perfect role model for altruism is Sathya Sai Baba whose various altruistic activities are a benchmark for addressing global issues.

**Adhering to this bench mark, the ISSEA has the responsibility of developing a Sathya Sai Education package in human values. The challenge is to mainstream the use and uptake of the package by the wider community.** It is important to design a roll out strategy for this package that is fully supported by an implementation plan for the next three years. The use of electronic media and social networking resources will become a significant tool to reach the community and disseminate the information efficiently and cost effectively.

The purpose of this workshop is to recognise that individualism and collective altruism can coexist in our society. The challenge is to create a reform agenda that will use the momentum, drive and energy of collective altruism of the members of the organisation and the broader community.