



“Be still, and know that I am God.” —*Psalms 46:10*

Self-Realization Fellowship ♥ *Kentucky*
Lexington Meditation Circle

Guidelines for Service Readers

During devotional services, the readings are generally taken from the divinely inspired writings of Paramahansa Yogananda. Selections from published works by Daya Mata and other SRF monastics may also be used. Except during our Second Sunday Reading Services, when we draw from the sequenced “Service Readings” prepared by the Mother Center, you are free to use your intuitive discretion in choosing a reading from the vast publications of Self-Realization Fellowship. Readings generally run about three to eight minutes in length, and should not exceed ten minutes, with the exception of the somewhat longer overall time often devoted to readings during our Second Sunday Reading Services.

HONING YOUR SKILLS AS A READER

Read the entire passage selected for the service so that you understand the overall message. Then deepen your understanding of its meaning by thinking carefully about the ideas expressed. Discover the thought, feeling, and realization behind the words. Analyze the mood and flow of the language and sentence structure. Look for word groupings and phrasings and for the natural places to pause, to emphasize, and to inflect in order to convey the meaning when you read the passage aloud. Make certain you understand the meaning and correct pronunciation of every word used.

In preparation for reading the SRF service selection, go over each paragraph carefully. Search for the right emphasis and expression that will convey both the message and the spirit behind it. Even if this seems difficult at first, you will improve with practice. One or two practice readings is not enough, even for an accomplished reader. The selection must be read aloud until you are satisfied that you have drawn out every meaning and feel within yourself the vibratory essence of the message.

Because our Guru wrote and spoke from a state of deep God-consciousness, his words vibrate with liberating power. A good reader feels this sacred inspiration and thus awakens the confidence and gathers the concentration of the audience. He or she arouses such an interest in what is being read that the listener becomes totally absorbed in it.

By regular prayer, meditation, and spiritual living a service leader grows spiritually. Thus he or she is better able to convey both the uplifting spiritual vibration of the reading and its liberating wisdom.

After the service accept appreciation graciously. If you made blunders, don't apologize or offer excuses; learn from your errors and try constantly to improve your skill. Master doesn't expect us to be perfect; he just wants us to do our best with humility, grace, and enthusiasm.

Many personal benefits accrue to dedicated service leaders—the blessings of God and Guru, the satisfaction of serving fellow devotees, and the growth and understanding that come from deeply absorbing the spiritual

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vibrations and sacred wisdom that permeate Master's words.

RECORDED TALKS

As an alternative to a service reading, you may occasionally use an excerpt of a recorded talk by Paramahansa Yogananda or an SRF monastic. Such excerpts generally should not last much longer than ten minutes.

CREATING A DEVOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE AND STRUCTURING THE SERVICE

Your goal is to establish a reverential atmosphere prior to the arrival of devotees and to maintain it throughout the service. Therefore, be sure to arrive a little early so that you are set up and ready to play background devotional music 10 minutes before the hour at which the day's meditation begins.

Except for the second Sunday of each month when we begin an hour earlier, our Sunday services start at 10:00 AM with an hour of silent meditation prior to the formal service that starts promptly at 11:00 and concludes at noon. Begin the service at 10:00 with a brief prayer, perhaps a quotation from Master, and a chant. At 10:50 again play devotional background music until you begin the formal service at 11:00 by asking the group to stand as you open with a prayer.

On the second Sunday of each month, background music begins at 8:50 AM and meditation starts at 9:00 with a short prayer, perhaps a quotation, and a chant. About 10:00 lead a period of devotional chanting. At 10:50 there is background music and an optional break. The main service begins at 11:00 AM.

PRAYERS

In leading the group in prayers, you may draw upon the many God-inspired prayers that Master has given us in his various writings such as *Metaphysical Meditations*, *Whispers from Eternity*, and *Scientific Healing Affirmations*; or you may use a personal heartfelt prayer. Prayers should be reasonably brief, and most importantly, they should be saturated with genuine devotion. Remember that we are invoking the living Presence of

God and the divine SRF Gurus.

The opening and closing prayer of the main service should begin with this invocation: "Heavenly Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved God; Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Swami Sri Yukteswar, and our guru, Paramahansa Yogananda; saints of all religions; we bow to you all." Generally we conclude the closing prayer with what Guruji considered his greatest prayer: "May Thy love shine forever on the sanctuary of our devotion, and may we be able to awaken Thy love in all hearts."

MUSIC

You may lead periods of chanting using a harmonium to play selections from *Cosmic Chants*, or alternatively, you may play selections from an SRF chanting CD. For background music use instrumental or other appropriate selections from SRF-produced CDs. During the 11:00 AM service, an opening chant is usually played after the reading. A final chant is played at the close of the meditation, normally followed by one or more repetitions of the "Om Chant."

HEALING TECHNIQUE

Toward the end of every service, prior to the closing prayer, the service reader leads the congregation in performing the Healing Technique as taught by Paramahansa Yogananda. This four-part technique, performed while standing, is explained in detail on page 37 of the *SRF Manual of Services*.

WHEN NEWCOMERS ARE PRESENT

There is a beautiful saying in India: "The guest is God." Keeping this reverential spirit in mind, after the service always make an effort to cheerfully greet newcomers, helping them to feel comfortable and answering any questions they may have.

NOTE: Large portions of these guidelines were directly adapted from the SRF handout titled "Ways to Improve Your Reading Skills." Other sections are based on the SRF Manual of Services and informal guidance from the Mother Center.