

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

'Truth Can Only Be Experienced'

By Kavita Chhibber

In the course of my career as a journalist, I have lost count of the number of times, devotees and their divine gurus and divine mothers themselves have accosted me to give them or the organizations they represent a plug. While I have met many of them, I have to say, none of them impressed me enough to want to meet them again. Some are involved in great philanthropic work and for me that was enough to cut them some slack, but it wasn't enough for me

to want to engage them in any kind of dialogue. I also saw that many of them were offering old wine in new bottles in the name of newly created knowledge, and while there is no such thing as an original word, I wish they had given credit where it was due. Some were passing off ancient traditional wisdom from India as their own discovery.

What caught my eye when I first picked up a book called Mystic's Musings, was the fact that the man whose words were captured within its interiors rode a motor bike. As I began reading the book, I was struck by the bluntness and the thought provoking observations that he made. I ended up by gifting that book to several friends and relatives - the reason? That book made me think. This was quite a kickass guru, and a breath of fresh air I thought. I heard mostly positive things about him, and as is normal, a few negative things. Those few who came disoriented were either scared out of their wits by some intense experiences they had during the exercises they had to go through as part of the courses, others because they were told not to talk about their experiences, thought everyone was being esoteric, some found him aloof and others didn't like some of his devotees. All of them however said that this was one of the most honorable foundations where not a penny was wasted or misused.

I finally met Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, the founder of Isha Yoga foundation a couple of weeks ago. The foundation is described as a non profit, non-political and non religious organization. It "does not promote any particular ideology, religion, race, but transmits inner sciences of universal appeal". I saw a man with razor sharp intelligence, an irreverent sense of humor, a sharp wit, whose command over the English language was impeccable and his take on life made a lot of sense. There was no question that was out of bounds, and things that were negative and seemed to bother his devotees, were laughed off by him.

"People either love me or hate me. Why should anyone get upset if someone says something negative about me?", he tells me. "I guess it must be because they love you." I had said shrugging my shoulders as we sat down for this interview.

His response was, "Love should not make you blind. It should make you think more clearly."

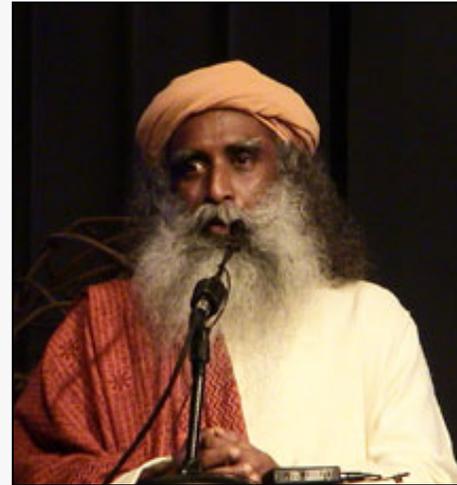
And so began the first of many conversations I hope to have with this intriguing man. This is perhaps just the tip of the iceberg as far as the wide range of topics that he can speak on, but I felt it would be easier to start by touching on various things and then

perhaps do a series and take one particular subject at a time.

Sadhguru just as I was coming to see you I saw this little piece in one of the newspapers which said that one doesn't know about India being a super power but when it comes to mysticism, the world looks to Indian gurus as the help button on the menu.

You've been all over the world and spoken at many international events, what is your take on all the divine gurus traversing the globe these days?

India as a culture has invested more time, energy and human resource toward the spiritual development of human beings for a very long time. This can only happen when there is a stable society for long periods without much strife. While all other societies were raked by various types of wars, and revolutions, India remained peaceful for long periods of time. So they invested that time in spiritual development, and it became the day to day ethos of every Indian.



The world looking towards India for spiritual help is nothing new. It has always been so in terms of exploring the inner spaces of a human being-how a human being is made, what is his potential, where could he be taken in terms of his experiences. I don't think any culture has looked into this with as much depth and variety as India has. Mark Twain visited India and after spending three months and visiting all the right places with his guide he paid India the ultimate compliment when he said that anything that can ever be done by man or God has been done in this land.

So definitely as humanity, today we have reached many peaks in terms of science, economics or technology but if we do not heal the inner damage then all the power that technology has given us will only be used destructively. We are already on the verge of threatening the extinction of the planet. If human beings are not tempered from inside there will always be conflict.

I don't know about the other gurus traversing the globe, but my endeavor is and theirs should be also, to aim at the political, economic and other areas of leadership. If some element of spirituality enters the life of these leaders, it could change the complexion of the world in a very short time. It is a priority and is beginning to happen but not significantly.

There are so many gurus that even the people get confused. So are the world leaders also confused when there are so many of them around. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Sri Sri Ravishankar went to Lebanon and Srilanka respectively but it seemed to be a waste of time.

It was not a waste of time. It was a good PR exercise. No the world leaders are not confused. They simply don't listen because they don't think most of the divine gurus are worth listening to. Some of them have started listening to me, but the numbers are still very few. Unfortunately a lot of these gurus go as a religious group and that is looked down upon.



So what is the role of the guru, what should people be looking for? I see most of them churning out old wine in new bottles.

I know all the people you have in mind. I know you are a journalist and you will put it everywhere but I have to say this. I will be ashamed to be grouped with them. Guru means one who is the dispeller of darkness. By reading and translating two chapters of the Bhagwad Gita does not make you a guru. There was a time when interpreting a book was important because only one man in the village could read. Now every body can read as we continue to try and create a literate world around us. So why do you want to interpret that book for the people? Let every one read the book themselves and understand it the way they want to. A guru is not here to interpret scriptures and

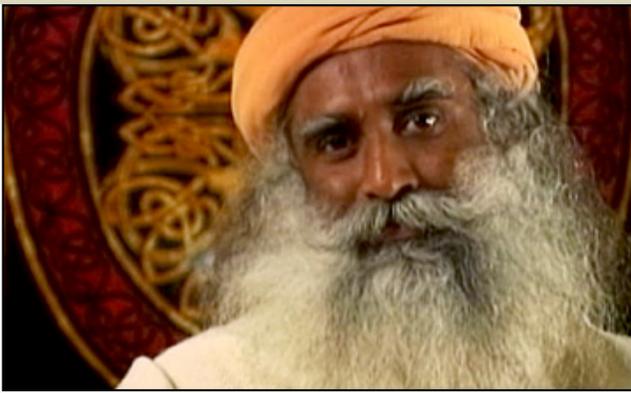
books. He is here to bring out the possibilities within you that by yourself, you may not be able to explore because it may be in a totally different direction from the way you may be looking.

I'm an uneducated guru. I don't know the scriptures, I have not read the Vedas and I didn't bother to read the Bhagvad Gita. I'm about life-I'm not about heaven. Its not a popular thing to say, but I believe that the whole effort of the guru should be to help the seeker deepen his seeking, not to give him answers.

If I give you the answers then the only option you have is to either believe me or disbelieve me. If it is me you believe then you are not getting any closer to finding answers to your seeking. If you don't believe me, you aren't getting closer either. All you'll have will be an interesting story that I told you, to tell others, who in turn will tell others and it will all continue to be distorted and add to all those distorted stories that have been going around for years and have messed up people's lives so badly.

If a human being says I don't know something, then the possibility of knowing is open in his life. When a man believes he knows something that he does not know he is a mess because he believes something he does not know.

I come from only my experience and the only thing that I know for sure is this piece of life. I don't know anything else. I don't know what Rama said or Krishna said. Whatever bits and pieces I heard from my grandmother didn't make any sense to me. For me Rama was the son of a king who became a king. Beyond that I don't see anything. The guru should not be talking about Rama or Krishna but about the means by which to deepen the human experience. A human being today lives on the surface of life and the guru's effort should be to take him to his innermost core.



So what is your take on religion? Islam has come in for a lot of bashing in the aftermath of the World Trade Center tragedy.

The conflict in the world has always been between one man's belief versus another man's belief. The moment you believe something you have already started a conflict. Islam believes that God cannot have a human form, no language and God never said anything. He just gave some experiences that human beings interpreted. So the very fundamentals of the first original writing is a human interpretation. If that is so then it should be open to further interpretation. This is something the Hindus did very well. They divided their teachings as Krutis and shrutis. One is subject to interpretation because it has to evolve with the

society and has to be reinterpreted for every age. This factor is very much there in Islam also but somewhere along the way a few forces have taken control of the whole thing and said that you cannot reinterpret Islam in any other way than the way it is written, and that is where the problem lies. Religion has become a very divisive force in the world, because people are willing to die for what they believe in.

We can't go on defining religion because everyone has their own idea. Fundamentally it's a belief system. Firstly I'd like to ask all people who have some capacity to think-the very fact that you "believe" something means to admit you do not know. So why not consciously admit it and say-someone has said all these things-well I really do not know if its true, but let's see.

Only when you say I do not know, the possibility of knowing becomes a reality. Unless you yourself have experienced it, what you believe is not the truth for you. What is not reality for you will be naturally distorted by you and others will distort it further. Truth cannot be interpreted-truth can only be experienced. Instead of creating the device for people to experience the truth, others started interpreting the truth and that is how mysticism turned into religion. The human mind is given to enormous distortion and we need to put a cap on it. In India too, the whole thing got distorted because they started competing against organized religion from outside and in trying to compete with the outsiders they became like them and that in turn diluted the spiritual and mystical dimensions of the Indian culture.

So where is mystic India headed? There seems to be more of materialism there today.

When a country is starving and steeped in poverty for a long period of time, and sees an opportunity to do well they will go all out. You can't ask a starving man to meditate when he sees a bread truck. Mysticism still exists but the Indian media grabs any opportunity it finds to bash mysticism, based on very little factually correct information. Interestingly if you are associated with a particular religion they won't dare to write anything about you but since I'm not then they will write anything and everything. Do you know someone wrote that I mesmerize people, steal their kidneys and export them to America. So that's why I'm here- to make a deal with you about more kidneys! Some other reporter who happened to read that also wanted to write further on the story and came and asked me-Is it true that you are exporting kidneys to America? I said no I'm not finding enough, so I'm just having them for breakfast.

You said that there will be many more women than men on the spiritual path, but women don't make effective spiritual masters because they are too emotional. What do you have to say about the many female gurus who have emerged and seem to be well received and the fact that many women are at the top these days.

What I was referring to was the feminine and the masculine and not necessarily the gender. The women masters will do fine as long as they are teaching just bhakti, but yoga is the whole mechanics of dismantling everything and putting it back together. How

many women would get up on a weekend and go under the hood of their cars to dismantle it. Most men would. The small number of emerging women leaders who are successful in the various fields have had to behave like men to reach that level. The world has grown in a particular direction which is driven by economics. When you talk about a big man, you are referring not to someone with a big heart, but someone with deep pockets. Because economics rules the world, the masculine is dominant. If art and culture was to rule the world, then the feminine would fare very well. If you want a gentler, more sensible world, economics should not be the dominant force.

These days temples are being built by the dozens and millions of dollars being poured into them. Isn't this a waste of money? And also people seem to be obsessed with Vastu shastra and keep spending money, breaking and redoing homes to make them vastu perfect.

The temples of the early ages were built in a scientific way as energy centers and consecrated by yogis and mystics. The idols were prepared a certain way, and the place reverberated with certain energies. The mantrams, the parikrama all were blended together to create a certain field of positive energy. Tradition does not tell you to go to the temple to make appeals to God. It only tells you that if you go there you must sit there for some time. When you go out in the world all interactions are one man's gain and another man's loss. Every transaction has a possibility of conflict within and outside the family. So if you sat at the temple after your shower you would be surrounded by positive and calming energies. Then when you step out you will look at the world in a more positive and calm way. So temples were built often around heavily populated areas just for this reason.

People who are on a spiritual path were never told to go to temples. They had their own self charging method of creating positive energy.

As for Vastu shastra, since the past ten years or so the concept has been very abused. Today you have architects telling you how to build your house. Imagine 1000 years ago, a villager would have no clue about what dimensions were needed to build his hut. He may cut a tree that is only 8 feet long but since he has 10 children, he may end up building a tunnel 120 feet long to accommodate his family. So there were some people who could guide the villagers about the right dimensions for their requirements, and set some rules of thumb. Each terrain had a different weather condition and requirement. The mountains had a different vastu, so did the plains. So depending on the different weather conditions and terrain, vastu shastra gave simple architectural guidelines on what kind of a house should be built. For example in an open country, you may need to build a house that can withstand rough winds. In a town which is crowded with buildings and there is no possibility of heavy winds, you would not need to build a house with similar requirements.

Sometime back I happened to go to this lady's house. I have been there before. She has a nice house and a garden. This time I saw a very high pole erected in the middle of the garden. I asked her why she had erected it. Initially she was hesitant and then said a friend of hers had mentioned Vastu and referred her to a vastu consultant. The man told her that her house's highest point should have been from the southwest and wasn't, and if she didn't have it fixed one of her sons would die, and that he could fix it for 50 thousand rupees. The lady got angry and said she didn't believe in it and that her husband would never agree to that expense. The man left but his words started working on the woman's mind until she called him back and after haggling the price down to about 11000, asked him to help. He built that pole and told her see now because of the pole the south west part of your house is higher than the others and you are saved.

The reason why in that region its important to have the south west part higher than the rest is because heavy winds batter that region for over 2 months every year from the south west.

It is unfortunate that people are taking advantage of others and making money off vastu shastra.

What is true yoga? I think people are utterly confused, with so many different styles of yoga and yoga studios.

The word yoga means union. Today the modern religions of the world say God is everywhere. A scientist has not experienced it he only mathematically deduced it. A religious person also did not experience it but he just believes it.

A yogi is someone who is neither willing to settle for deduction, nor for beliefs. He wants to experience the truth himself. So the different means to reach that stage of oneness and knowing the existence as part of yourself is yoga. You can also do other things-bend your knees, or hold your breath. All these things are there to take that one person to the state where he experiences everything as part of himself. If you consider everything a part of yourself then do I need to teach you to be good to others? There is nothing that you cannot called yoga. If I'm talking to you, its yoga. If I'm taking a walk that too is yoga. You can take your body, emotions and energy and make all of it one process that takes you towards the ultimate above-that is yoga.



There are people who have come to Isha yoga courses and been ecstatic. Others have been scared, some said they were uncomfortable. I have personally gifted Mystic's Musings to many people. Most read it and thanked me for giving them such a thought provoking book, but there are many people who in general seem to hesitate to explore anything new. There were a couple who said we don't want to read this. Also why did you not permit media to interview you?

The advanced course that we offer does scare even some people who have been with us for a long time. I whip up a certain kind of energy that may be too much for some. When something you don't understand happens with such intensity its scary for any body. If they are not strong enough seekers but casual visitors I tell them that if they are not ready to seek liberation then to just limit themselves to the basic course which is something they will benefit from without going into things deeply. There is nothing scary there. After I whip up a certain energy around me I'm not the same man. People will definitely be scared because of the intensity with which things happen in the advanced program. I tell people clearly not to go to the advanced program unless your liberation becomes more important than everything else. I do tell people not to share their experiences because it is all individualistic and let others experience things on their own rather than go by hearsay.

If people are unhappy with me personally then that would bother me, and I would like to address it but in other things we try but can't screen people all the time.

The people who are afraid to read the book or try anything new do so because of their upbringing. They have been worked upon heavily right from their childhood by their parents, by their religion and by their priests. They are therefore steeped in a certain kind of belief and if you are building your stairway to heaven basing everything on those beliefs and then are faced with these so called blasphemous questions that may shake and make that belief system collapse, it's a very scary thing.

I have always felt that there was no need to publicize what I was teaching. It was not my concern-my hands were already over full. It is only because of the focus on social work in rural India that I've become a publicity hound, because we needed support. Publicity was the last thing I ever wanted.

Many children ask me this question - why do holy men have long hair and a beard? Why does Sadhguru have a long flowing beard and long hair?

A beard is not something you grow. It grows on every man. Why does he remove it? Because everyone is doing it. People are

doing things because they do not know what they are doing. Today someone shaves a moustache or keeps a goatee or shaves the beard and keeps a moustache and it looks fine. Fifty years from now you will look at these faces and think they look ridiculous. A man with a beard looks the same through the ages because that is how he was meant to be. People do things because they feel somewhere along the way they will improve upon nature. Well that is not going to happen. Has nature given you any body part that is not necessary?

At the ashram, people reach a certain stage and are allowed to shave their heads once a month for a specific reason. But then when you reach a certain level in your sadhna we don't allow them to shave their hair. Your life span is shortened if you have less hair on your head. The energy gets dissipated. That is why I wear a turban.

Does chanting of mantras have an effect?

Today modern science is clearly saying that the whole universe is one energy reverberating. Wherever there is vibration, there is bound to be sound. You may not hear it because its in a different frequency mode. So science says that the whole world is a vibration. In yoga we say the whole existence is a complex amalgamation of sound. Everything is sound or nadabrahma. When we put the right key in a hole, and turn it, it opens a whole new world, Similarly receiving a mantra properly, and integrating it within yourself is the key to opening a whole new world. Hearing a mantra on an audio tape, or reading it from a book or hearing it from someone who doesn't know the ABCD of it is futile. In the advanced courses we only meditate but in certain programs we use certain mantras. With just one word say Shiva, I can send people into a frenzy. Eighty person people explode about 20 percent get scared. If the mantra is not delivered properly it can cause a lot of harm.

We are always talking about good karma and bad karma. You say we should stop creating karma.

By that I don't mean sit there and do nothing, Whatever suffering a human being faces comes either from the mental or the physical. Have you known anything else? If you learn how not to create the suffering then what problem would you have with your karma? At Isha, we teach you how to separate your mind from your body, and look at things more objectively. This state scares many people who feel like they are losing balance, when in fact you become more effective and stable.

You say if you accept Shiva you have embraced humanity.

That is because Shiva is so contradictory. He is the most beautiful and he is the most ugliest. He is the perfect householder and he is a philanderer of the worst kind, He is a yogi and a drug addict and a drunkard. Everything that can be contradictory in this world he is. All the variety of qualities a human being can have in this world have been personified in one person. Now if you accept him and worship him you will have no problem because you will have total acceptance of everyone. That is how Shiva's personality has been structured.

Finally, how does one elevate oneself spiritually? One of the consistent questions asked of you seems to be that the person is trying hard to continue up the spiritual path and is not succeeding but continuing to suffer.

Human beings are ready to suffer for anything. If they are uneducated they are suffering, if they are educated they are suffering. If they are married they are suffering, if they are unmarried they suffering, if they have kids then they are suffering, if they don't have kids they are suffering. So life itself is such a suffering. Okay so let us give you death..but then that is also suffering. So they create a suffering out of anything for themselves.

People come to me and are disappointed because what they are looking for is a confirmation of what they already believe in and I won't give them that.

The fundamentals of Isha yoga are made in such a way that it doesn't take a separate amount of time. Its all about making your life into a yoga and that every single activity you do, like going to office, for example becomes a spiritual process because there is no such thing as materialistic or spiritual. Is it possible for you to separate yourself and just take your body to office? Both the materialistic and the spiritual are two vehicles seeking the same thing-to better ourselves.

Wherever you are in the world you are seeking to be a little more than what you are now. When you attain that, you want to be better than what you are again. So you are looking for boundless expansion, for your infinite nature but going there in installments. Your goal is fantastic- only the method is wrong. Its like trying to go to the moon in a car.

So can you achieve this boundlessness through the physical? The physical is always limited as being a finite boundary Once the person realizes that he becomes spiritual. The goal remains the same, the vehicle changes to a more appropriate one.

Also there is this impression that to be spiritual, you have to eat badly, dress badly and live badly and that is not true. Being spiritual has nothing to do with the way you look on the outside, but how you are within yourself.

The human mind is a very complex mechanism. We are supposedly using only 12 percent of our brain but research is going on that shows that the entire brain can be rewired and a retarded man can become a genius. They know it can be done but they don't know how. Society has always tried to produce good people. Good people are terrible people because in the world conflicts happen because good people believe some nonsense. What we need in this world are not good but sensible people who will use intelligence and not moral teaching to create the change. Yoga has always been working to produce sensible people and to enhance the human capacity. So the sensible human being becomes good by his humanity and nothing else; but it takes a certain application to do it.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev will be answering questions from readers in subsequent issues. If you have a question you'd like to ask Sadhguru, please email kavita@kavitachhibber.com.

For more information about Sadhguru, please visit www.ishafoundation.org or www.isha.sadhguru.org.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev is an international speaker, author and peace advocate with profound spiritual and cultural insights on health and human potential. He addresses over 500,000 people annually at his public forums. Sadhguru is a realized master and yogi who has practiced yoga since age 13 and authored four books on the essential nature of yoga. Sadhguru has synthesized the science of yoga into a dynamic program that allows people to restore and maintain optimum health and inner balance.

Through his books, columns, articles and interviews aired and published in a host of international media, Sadhguru is considered an authority on yogic science whose teachings help people gain an inner understanding of the issues and events that happen to themselves and the world around them.

Sadhguru is founder of the Isha Foundation, a non-profit organization advancing physical, mental and spiritual health through yoga and self-transformation. The Foundation administers over 100 yoga centers, an ashram, residential complex and medical center in India, and conducts public programs around the world. His humanitarian initiatives for world peace and his outreach programs for Tsunami relief, prisoners, children and Action for Rural Rejuvenation in India are examples of his determination to improve the human condition for all people.