Yoga master tells how to find freedom from within

East to West: from inside out

By Michael Redmond
Lifestyle Editor

The yogi arrived in Plainsboro straight from prison.

Yes, prison — specifically, the State Correctional Institution in Dallas, Pa., where he had been introduced to the United States a program of yoga and meditation titled “Inner Freedom for the Imprisoned.”

Begun in India in 1992, the program is strictly voluntary and is offered free to inmates by the nonprofit Isha Foundation, which the yogi founded. The foundation describes “Inner Freedom for the Imprisoned” as “an alternative solution to dealing with fear, anger, stress and violence.” The program already serves thousands of inmates in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev of Coimbatore, India, is recognized by his followers worldwide as a “realized master,” a title which he has a meaning that can only be defined as religious in nature. But the sadhguru (“teacher of inner wisdom”), usually referred to as Vasudev, chooses to present the practice of yoga and meditation matter-of-factly, as a science of well-being. And his approach is receiving ample support from Western medicine. Numerous studies have indicated that the practice of yoga and meditation is good for one’s psychological and physical health.

“The word ‘meditation’ doesn’t mean anything, actually,” sad Vasudev during an interview. “By closing your eyes and sitting, you can enter any number of dimensions, including that of sleeping in the vertical position,” he taught.

“The meditation I teach, shooma meditation, is not meditation upon anything — the word shooma means emptiness. It’s not an act you perform; it’s something you become. It’s not to be identified with a particular religious tradition. There are no images presented, no mantras.”

On Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m. at Nottingham Volunteer Fire Company at 200 Mercer St. in Hamilton Square, Vasudev will be giving a discourse on “The Art of Effortless Living,” an exposition of the principles of Sahaja Yoga yoga, “a dynamic combination of breathing techniques and meditation which stimulates the release of physical, mental and emotional

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Indian yoga master, who will be leading a weeklong yoga course at the Unitarian-Universalist Congregation of Princeton. “Sadhguru means that a person is coming from his inner experience; he is teaching from his inner experience.”

blocks and activates spontaneous expression of a person’s vital energy.” Admission is free.

From Wednesday, July 10, through Tuesday, July 16, he will be leading a seven-day yoga program at the Unitarian-Universalist Congregation of Princeton, at 50 Cherry Hill Road. The Princeton program will be held for three hours nightly during weekdays and for full days on Saturday and Sunday.

Under Vasudev’s direction, the Isha Foundation of India manages more than 50 yoga centers, and an ashram (spiritual center) and orphanage, serving more than 100,000 students in India and other nations. According to an Isha researcher, the foundation’s “Sahaja Shithi” (natural self) program does not require previous yoga training or a change in lifestyle or beliefs.

Seated in lotus position on a couch in a Plainsboro condo, Vasudev sighed when asked what being a “realized master” means. “Sadhguru means that a person is coming from his inner experience, he is teaching from his inner experience. I don’t know the Vedas — but to know one’s self is enormous,” he said, by way of reply.

“There is an inner science. You can learn peace. You can find joy and ecstasy within yourself. It is possible for anyone to learn this. I don’t expect belief from people — I want them to discover what they believe, and to believe it. If people really want to know the truth, they must come to terms with what they know and what they do not know. It’s difficult for people to say, ‘I don’t know,’ but ‘I don’t know’ is the beginning of knowledge. Instead, people jump into belief so that they can pretend they know.”

The Isha Foundation devotes about 20 percent of its resources in India to its prison outreach program, said Vasudev. The foundation is also active in medical and disaster relief, health education, a peace partnership with the United Nations and social development. But the plight of inmates seems to be especially close to Vasudev’s heart. To obtain permission to enter India’s prisons, he staged an eight-month vigil.

“Some people with a different type of ego don’t fit into society. They do certain acts, even brutal homicides, with enormous consequences for society. I don’t judge rights and wrongs, but being hooked up for 20, 30, 40 years, for life, that’s tragic. With this program, when you see how these prisoners are doing, you wouldn’t believe what they’re there for,” he said.

In addition to the Pennsylvania facility, the Isha Foundation has also received permission to introduce its program later this month at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in LaGrange, Ky.

For more information about the weeklong yoga and meditation course at the Unitarian-Universalist Congregations in Princeton, call Krishnam or Kaji Venktraman at (609) 799-4533. The fee is $200 per person, including weekend meals. Additional information about Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev is available online at www.ishafoundation.org.