

The mind bender

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Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, yogi and mystic as he is called by his followers the world over, could easily be called a new age guru. After all, he talks of finding practical solutions to inner well being, and uses cool new age phrases like 'blissed out' and 'freaked out' to explain the state of nirvana.

He also confesses to having succumbed to the technological advantages of a high-end mobile phone, as he gives you his email id and asks you to 'stay connected'. Ask him if this is the cultivated image of a new age spiritual guru, and he shoots back with, "Why? Even our sages and gods and goddesses were not against technology. Bows and arrows, axe... whatever was the advanced technology of that time, they used it," he laughs. And he vehemently objects to the new age guru title. "Why do you want to call me new age anything?" he wants to know, "Don't I look ancient enough?"

Definitely not, we'd like to tell him, as we hear him reel off data and survey figures to tell us why every individual in the world today needs to have an inner balance system in place. "Which is why the quest for spirituality is at its peak now," he lets you know. And he would know, for, he's just back from doing prana prathista of the largest meditation hall the West, in Tennessee. So, would he explain the West's fascination for spirituality?

"In the West, religion is very set. It isn't as if they all believe in spirituality. Initially, there's a lot of scepticism and disbelief," says Sadhguru. But since spirituality is a living process and has evolved along with the evolution of mankind, it has practical solutions for all of life's problems, says Sadhguru. "Once they catch on to this, they're on. Tennessee, for instance, is a hardcore Bible belt where people are extremely virulent about their religion. But we are doing very well there. That is because we do not sell spirituality as a new religion. The fact is, it is not. It is a well-being technique. So, it doesn't matter if you are Hindu, or a Christian or Muslim. It is the question of the quality of your life," explains the guru.

And for that quality of life, everyone is looking India-wards. "See, in many parts of the world, many things have happened towards human well being. But nowhere in the world has any culture looked at the inner mechanics of the being as a science, as an evolved essence of technologies, except for us. No other civilisation on this planet, except for India, has looked at the inner mechanics of a human being with as much depth and dimension as it has been done in our culture – and we've been doing it for thousands of years. If only we had presented this as a proper science earlier, by now the whole world have been on to it. But we have not bothered to present it well. And if, in spite of that, people naturally recognise the depth and dimension of what is being offered, it talks of the wisdom of our ancestors," says Sadhguru, explaining why people, when they seek a change in their spiritual composition, come to India and why Indian belief systems, and practices like yoga, are a rage abroad.

And it is this presentation of our spiritual tenets as a science that, Sadhguru believes, is enticing a world of followers. "The thing is, in other parts of the world, people mostly try to handle their well-being with a belief system. They believe in something, and from that evolves teaching, or philosophy.

Fundamentally, if you work hard enough on a human being right from his or her childhood, you can make him or her believe anything. So, what you believe is not of much significance – you can believe just about anything, it is accidental, based on where you are born and how you are brought up. But our sages were wiser than that. What they taught us was based, hundred per cent, on science. I present spirituality as a technology for inner well-being. So, yoga and Indian way of life finds an acceptance everywhere in the world – including Arabia, which has some strong belief systems in place. Generally anybody is open to basic sense, isn't it? Who's not interested in their own well-being?"

But it is not as if Sadhguru agrees with everything that happens in the West or in India under the tag 'Indian spirituality'. "To begin with, spirituality is not Indian or American. Just as we are not different 'species' of human beings just because we are Indians or Americans, spirituality too is not Indian or American. We've been fortunate enough that the spiritual process started here. Because even today people want to come to the source. But unfortunately, we have not kept the source very clean and organised. Spiritual process is contaminated by all kind of teachings and beliefs – this damages the purity of knowledge. Because for the uninitiated, it is very hard to discriminate," he feels, adding, "Our spiritual ethos is no longer a conscious process... it is a heritage now. Carrying it as a heritage, a relic of the past is not good. It has to be a live process. But even this relic has the power to make an impact on the world."

Neither does the Sadhguru agree with teaching spirituality as a stress-management tool in colleges in the West. "There has to be a committed, focused environment for such." You cannot bung it in between explaining Maslow's hierarchy and boardroom body language classes, feels Sadhguru. "Some people are attempting to do this, but I don't agree with it."