A yogi, golfer and a seeker, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev holds forth on spirituality without boundaries and the idea behind a leadership programme for the business community, to Sangeetha Devi Dundoo.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, founder of Isha Foundation, is an example to show how a guru and religious texts don’t need to go hand in hand.

A stark departure from what one would expect of a guru, he steers clear of long-drawn philosophical texts and encourages his followers to seek a spiritual path beyond the constraints of a belief system, which comes as a breath of fresh air.

On a short visit to Hyderabad for the Koti Deepotsavam festival, he spoke to Friday Review on a range of topics. Excerpts.

Seekers Vs. believers

Can spirituality exist outside the realm of religion, its texts and rituals?

The guru answers emphatically, “Within the framework of belief system, there is no spiritual process. Spiritual process is about exploring what you don’t know whereas belief is assuming things about what you don’t know, which means you are not seeking. When you say you are on a spiritual process, you are a seeker and not a believer. This is fundamental. A belief system is for those who seek solace. If you seek solution and not solace, believing or disbelief doesn’t make a difference.”

Apply methods, not philosophy

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev refrains from using the term ‘philosophy’ to his teachings and states that he believes in using methods that work. He reasons, “When something works, it is called a method and I can teach people to use that method or process. I don’t believe in the intellectual circus of weaving philosophies out of nothing.”

He emphasises that anything that doesn’t work, no matter how holy it is, doesn’t mean anything to him. “Just about anybody can be a philosopher. A thief or a drunkard will have elaborate philosophies about what he does and why. In some way, one is trying to explain the absurdity of his own actions, which is a waste of time.”

Yoga and us

A few yoga practitioners have, of late, lamented that yoga is practiced more in the West than in India. To this, he says with a gentle chuckle, “Probably these practitioners are looking at the West and somewhere in their mind, West is superior.” He concedes that more is being written about yoga in the West. “They are more expressive about everything they do; they want to share it and make it a commercial success. Just about anyone in America is in the process of writing a book, that’s their culture. I am not judging them. If they practice yoga, they will walk around town with a yoga mat. Here, we practice quietly.”

Health from within

The system of yoga, he explains, helps in bringing a different level of attention to who we are and enables us to conduct the most complex machine on earth, the human body, in a sensible manner. “We aren’t paying attention to this beautiful system given to us,” he says.

Drawing from one of his fundamental tenets of Inner Engineering sessions, he says, “Your life is not stressful; your inability to manage your own mind and body causes stress. Human experiences are created from within. We have worked ourselves to a situation where we think everything can be fixed from outside.”

He is glad a section of medical practitioners have begun to think of health as something that has to happen from within and one that cannot be solely fixed by the pharmaceutical industry. “I wish the practitioners had done this long ago. Chemicals can support us when things don’t go right. It is our business to see that, as far as possible, things don’t go wrong. The way we eat, sit, stand and breathe leads to health and ill health,” he says.

Citing the example of the United States, he elaborates, “It is the most affluent nation on the planet with options for the best levels of nourishment. But the nation spends three trillion dollars on health care, causing a huge hole in their economy, which doesn’t speak well. India shouldn’t go that way.”

He underlines that when we fail to look within, we become ‘animal-istic’. “Animals also go through birth, growth, reproduction and death. We have the capability of doing that with consciousness. And we are too expensive for the planet, ecologically. We leave too many footprints. Health is fundamental and we need to handle it well.”

Tee time

His interest in adventure travel, penchant for SUVs and playing an occasional game of golf has left many bemused and he has, in his own inimitable manner, explained that being on a spiritual path doesn’t necessitate one to live a life of poverty. “I am passionate about life,” he has often stated.

“Yoga have always been adventure travellers; haven’t they?” he laughs. “People come to me for what I have to offer and not for how I live or what are my interests. I appreciate that.”

His golf kit travels with him, though put to use on rare occasions. Having played tennis and soccer actively, he took to golf about six years ago. “I had damaged my knee after playing soccer with the kids and was recouping at the Delhi centre. Someone kept a new golf kit besides me and said ‘Sadhguru, it’s time you play golf,’” he recalls.

When he plays, he reaches the golf course early in the day and plays alone. “In other sports, be it cricket, tennis or soccer, the ball comes with a certain velocity and spin and you have to react within a split second. In golf, you can take your time to hit a sitting ball. Injuries are minimal. It’s a beautiful game.”

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golfer, he says he never trained at a driving range and gulps, “Golf is for those incapable of playing other sports.”

Talking business

Over the years, having addressed the World Economic Forum and having been associated with business establishments across the world, he along with business consultant Ram Charan, began the Insight programme.

With Insight 2014 due in the end of November, Sadhguru talks about its genesis. “India has a number of family run businesses that hit a plateau after growing to the tune of Rs. 200 to 500 or 700 crore. There is a serious Dhiratsarshana syndrome — at any cost your son. India has suffered immensely because of this. As the business grows, it’s no longer about you but about people, customers and the country. One should run a business beyond personal loyalty, hegemony and take a professional approach.”

Insight was begun to help people scale up their businesses. “Companies are no longer looking for managers. They want people who have entrepreneurial qualities within the enterprise. This year we have Ratan Tata and GY Prasad, co-founder and CEO, Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories, as part of the programme. Ravi Venkatesan, former chairman of Microsoft, has also been with us. The richest resource of Insight, according to Ram Charan, is the mentoring that participants get from CEOs.”

Participating CEOs open up about their lives, how they tackled tough situations and modules are created from their life-work experiences. “No one will open up their lives in this manner at a B-school,” says Sadhguru.