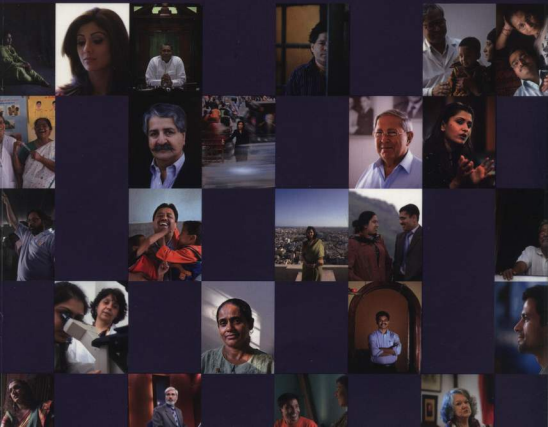
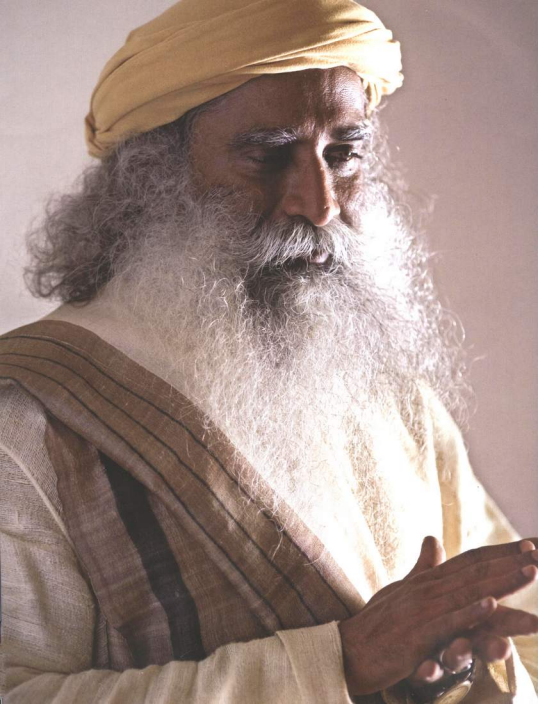


# SOUTH ASIA PORTRAITS OF COMMITMENT





# This was something that we could not ignore.

## SPIRITUAL GURU COIMBATORE, INDIA

Considered one of the most profound mystics of modern times, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, 50, has brought spirituality and yoga to the treatment of people living with HIV through the Isha Foundation, a non-religious and non-denominational organization. With 150 centres worldwide, Isha promotes the well-being of individuals and social development. Within the state of Tamil Nadu, it provides extensive health care and other services. Isha's members work in the state's highly affected districts to raise awareness about AIDS. They run an Action for Rural Rejuvenation project to provide free medical treatment and counselling through 21 mobile health clinics, covering a population of 3.6 million people in some 3,000 villages. In the media and among the public, Sadhguru rallies against stigma and discrimination, a commitment he backs with the strong implementation of programmes. He leads HIV-positive people in satsangs, or spiritual gatherings, one of which was televised throughout the country. He plans a similar broadcast in the coming year. The Isha Foundation is currently setting up a tree nursery, run by HIV-positive people, in an initiative to plant 114 million saplings over the next ten years and provide an income-earning activity with a social contribution.

Sadhguru has also developed yogic practices for HIV-positive people that he believes makes a difference in how they handle the HIV-related disease. Isha's long-term objective is to create community centres complete with medical units and hospice services, an orphanage, a home where destitute HIV-positive people can live in dignity, a yoga and meditation centre and a livelihood training centre.

"When we started working in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu, we started confronting this disease more often. Medical help was scarce or not available in the villages. The worst part was the social stigma that created inhuman situations. This was something that we could not ignore. We started joining hands with other like-minded people and national and international agencies to take up some parts of the prevention, control and treatment work.

The most difficult thing has been confronting prejudice and fear associated with HIV, which has infected more people than HIV itself. People with enough education and understanding of the situation are not immune to this. Surprisingly, even doctors are a part of the cruel discrimination.

Social and spiritual leaders must definitely take the lead in guiding the general public in creating acceptance for HIV-positive people. In the West, the care and support of AIDS patients has been considerably well established but in India a lot still needs to happen. Youth are the biggest risk group and this must be tackled on a long-term basis. Inspiring them and channelling their energies in the right direction is something the leaders should do and spiritual leaders can make a big difference here. It is natural for me to respond to any kind of suffering, to do whatever is needed and to do my best with it. There is always a way if the necessary commitment and compassion are there.

If an individual is sick, we can leave it to his or her family to take care of it. But when there is an epidemic, the government and leadership of society must act."