

THE YOGI WHO JUMPED INTO THE WELL

An Interview with Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev *By* ANIL DHARKER

Jaggi Vasudev is an imposing figure, tall, full bearded and resplendent in ochre robe and turban. He speaks softly, often punctuating his words with laughter, and persuasively makes his case for how inner re-engineering will transform the world

Photographs by FAZWAN HUSSEIN

Anil Dharker: I understand that you are here in Mumbai to conduct programmes, one of which is an introductory one for CEOs. Why CEOs?

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev: We have seminars for all kinds of people, right from tribal women to top scientists. My work is with human beings, whoever they are. As for CEOs, they are of importance because they have risen to a certain position of power and responsibility. Today, almost 90% of the total wealth is held by one percent of the world's population. So if some changes happen in that one percent, the world can be changed in a big way. When I say change, I am not talking about bringing charity into their heart; I am just looking at how to make their minds more joyful. A joyful person is always a more flexible person, a more generous person and a more pleasant person. If more pleasant human beings rule the world, the world would be very different.

AD:The conventional belief is that to get to the top of a large corporation, one has to have a lot of drive and ambition and a certain ruthlessness. I remember meeting the head of Nissan, a Frenchman, who is being lionized all over the world. And why? The first thing he did on taking over was to make thousands of people redundant. He was praised for that, for cutting jobs...But what about the human side of it, that those people who lost their jobs were now unemployable because they were the older employees? Their lives are shattered whereas the CEO becomes a hero and gets a big bonus. In other words, in the corporate world the lauded qualities are ruthlessness and a lack of human feeling. How would you change that? And would that not change the nature of the job itself?

SJV: Redefining leadership is definitely the goal. One has always thought that a leader must be tough. But it's not necessarily so: a leader can be a very loving and joyful person, even a playful person! If you have to work for somebody, would you like to work for a poker faced, tough man or would you like to work for someone who is peaceful and joyful and who is more human?

AD: No question!

SJV: That is so with everybody, isn't it? So why do we believe that only if you are of a certain type, you can be a CEO? That's not true at all. Success doesn't come just because you desire it, success comes because you function well. You don't win a game because you want to win a game, you win a game because you played well. Playing the game well means you are able to use your body and your mind efficiently. When do you get to use your body and mind efficiently? When you are joyful and peaceful. So if people are more joyful and peaceful within themselves, they are not going to become inefficient! In fact, you would look for other kinds of solutions if you are a little more joyful, and more connected with people around you. It is not always that you will have soft solutions for everything but you would look for them - that makes a difference.

AD: Let's talk of an extreme example. Adolf Hitler was as evil as you can get. But apparently in person, he was very playful and joyful. He loved dogs and children. He even had a loving relationship with people close to him. So you get this kind of dichotomy. You also get less extreme forms with the ordinary leader: at home and with his circle of friends, he is very nice and human but when it comes to sitting behind a desk, he changes, a kind of a Jekyll and Hyde almost. How would you 'reconstruct' such people?

SJV: We cannot change the external situation but what we can try and do is to create an inner situation within them, so that even sitting behind their horrible desk, they can still be playful and joyful, because being joyful brings greater efficiency. We have always had the opposite idea, that if you want to be efficient you have to be dead serious. So, giving them a way, a method, so that no matter what they do, whether they are pursuing their career, or whether they are getting drunk, or they are going to the temple or whatever, people are looking for happiness. If your life shifts from pursuit, to an expression of your joyfulness, your life would become different. And as a result, everybody's life around you would be different too. A joyful person is always easy to work with and a joyful person is willing to change, willing to relent, willing to step back, he is more human. I will give you an example: almost 20% of my time and energies are spent in prisons, both in India and outside. I have spent time with people who have committed horrible crimes. If you look at their history sheets, they have done such really terrible things in their life. If you let them out, as they are right now, maybe 50% of them may once again do the same thing, but when they are with me, they are just wonderful guys because they are joyful.

AD: You were saying that 50% might commit the same crime again. Do you feel, if you have more time with them, you could transform them?

SJV: Yes. Many of them are definitely transformed.

AD: What would be the process of transformation?

SJV: As societies, we have always focused on producing good people. Right from the day a child is born, we are always saying be a good boy, be a good girl, that kind of thing. The very fundamental of this approach suggests that we believe the creator has done a bad job.

AD: Are you saying that intrinsically we don't want to be good.

SJV: I am not saying that. The idea of good and bad are purely concepts that are raised to make sure that people do not go berserk. Humans invented all this morality to control people. But if you stir the human heart, so that a human being feels like a human being, you don't have to control him. It is just that he gets identified, becomes a Hindu or a Muslim, Indian or Pakistani, then you have to control him. But if he is functioning as a human being, then there is no control needed.

INTERVIEW ARRE

So the whole effort is to move a person beyond his limited identification, so that he functions as a human being and reverberates as a piece of life. If he does that you don't have to tell him what is right and wrong, you don't have to transform him, he will be just fine.

AD: But how do you change a person's mindset? In fact is it something that is changeable?

SV: Oh yes. We have always been saying it is possible and today modern scientists confirm that. They say that within 24 hours, you can completely rewire a human brain, totally, no surgery. It does not matter what your past is, your genes, your parents, your influences, all those things you can drop in 24 hours time and become a completely new person, that's what neuron sciences are saying today. We have known this for years. That the spiritual process transforms a human being absolutely. Certain doctors in New Delhi have been scanning for over three months the brains of people who have been doing a simple meditation practice called shambhavi mahamudra. The data is with IIT, Delhi. They are just amazed at what they have found, a phenomenal coherence between the left and right brains. This means, the way you think, feel, understand life can be dramatically changed, so they now have physical proof. I don't need physical proof, I know. I have seen a million people changing in front of me, so I know it is possible.

AD: What acts as a trigger for change?

SV: Your inclination is the trigger,

AD: Is that enough?

SV: It's natural for any human being to work towards being happy, so joyfulness or happiness is not an idea, it is not a philosophy, it is a basic aspiration of life. And it's not an ultimate goal in your life: happiness should be the fundamental fabric in your life. People look at it as an achievement, but it isn't. As a child you were happy, so being happy as an adult is going back to square one. It is not the ultimate goal of your life. If your body becomes pleasant, you call it health and pleasure. If your mind becomes pleasant, you call it peace and joy. If your emotions become pleasant, you call it love and compassion. If your energies become pleasant, you call it blissfulness and ecstasy. Whether we are going to the bar or the temple, this is what we are seeking. Now if I consciously understand that this is all that I am seeking, I can easily make it a reality because it is all inward. If I want to change an outward situation, I need a hundred people's cooperation. But when it comes to inner reality, there is only one, just one. If you are willing, if you are inclined, who can stop you?

AD: But the problem is we live in a material world and our happiness is tied up with so many things. Like it is tied up with doing better in your career, getting money, a bigger car, a bigger house. This is the reality for 95% of people. Our happiness comes through this striving. That's point number one. The second point is that if everyone stopped striving, the

world will stagnate.

SV: You are putting me in the category of so called spiritual people! What I want to ask you is this: in the last 24 hours, how many moments of joy have you known? Not just you as an individual, let's take the whole Bombay population. On an average, you could count them on your fingers. But suppose all these people were just five years of age, how many moments of joy would they have known? Many more, yes. Older people say childhood is great, but when you are a child, you desperately try to become an adult. That's because your life was not yours: somebody was asking you to sit down, somebody was asking you to lie down, somebody was asking you to get up, isn't it so? Which means when your life was not yours, you had so much of joy and now when your life is all yours, the city of Mumbai should have been ecstatic! But that's not happened. That means it has not worked. If you are doing something which doesn't work for a long time, isn't it time that you stopped and looked again? That's all that I am saying. Why don't you stop and look? You are doing something that doesn't work, you are not becoming joyful, you are actually losing the amount of joy that you had in your own life earlier.

AD: Most of us feel we have achieved this much, but that isn't enough. We should have achieved much, much more. We have physical limitations of stamina and limitations of time, so ultimately, with every human being there is the feeling of so many unrealised goals.

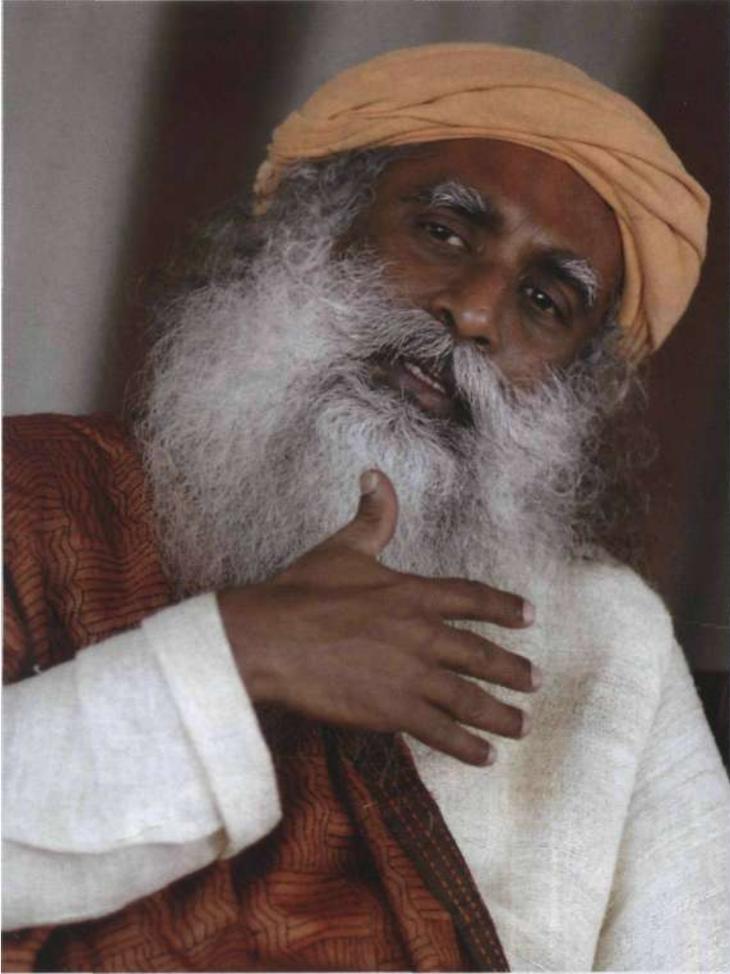
SV: Please look at the nature of your goals. The nature of your goals is that the goalposts keep moving all the time! So how can you ever realise your goals? However far you move, your goalposts always move one step further!

AD: Isn't life also about striving?

SV: First let us understand the fundamentals of unhappiness. We are unhappy not because something is not achieved, but because you don't know how to keep yourself happy. The argument goes that if all of us become happy, we won't do anything and we would still be cavemen. But please look at your own life and see: on a certain day you are very happy and on another day you are very unhappy. On which day are you willing to do more? On a happy day or an unhappy day? On an unhappy day somebody has to be push you and get you out of your bed, while on a happy day, you bound out of bed and are willing to do whatever is needed. So what makes you think that happiness will make the world go to sleep? Not true; if everybody was happy, the world would be vigorously active. Right now, half of the people are half dead anyway, there are lots of the walking dead on the streets. If they were all joyful, they would be much more creative and dynamic in their lives. This is the philosophy of the miserable who keep saying that if you were happy, you won't do anything.

AD: Let me give you an example of a friend of mine who inherited a business which he's run steadily. He opens his office, goes home for lunch

INTERVIEW ARRE



at one and packs up at five. He is intelligent, happy and is extremely content with his life...But the way I see it, he has achieved nothing because he didn't build on what he inherited.

SVJ: Contentment is very different from happiness. Contentment is containment. I am content means I am trying to contain myself within certain limits. But joyfulness and happiness doesn't contain you; if you were happy, you would dare to do things that you would not do if you were unhappy. Happy people are the most adventurous. Always

AD: The general belief is that when you are content, you are happy...

SVJ: Not true. Contentment is a philosophy, joy is not a philosophy, it is the nature of life, joy is not something that you pick up. Contentment is an idea; I am not talking about ideas, I am talking about life. If life is happening exuberantly within you, you are joyful. It is not because you have achieved something. You are joyful because life is throbbing exuberantly within you. If you are joyful, you have nothing at risk. If this assurance is there with you, you would take full strides in your life. While most people take only

half strides because their happiness is constantly under threat. They have curtailed themselves in a big way, and they call it contentment. They are really afraid that if they take larger steps, their happiness may evaporate,

AD: Yes, but you are never fully in control of how long your steps can be, are you? There are other people enforcing things on you, whether it's in your work, or in your personal life, or whatever.

SVJ: In the physical world, you take steps according to your capabilities. All our capabilities are not the same. We are always trying to run our lives with ideologies, not with sense. For example, we have been trying to produce "good" people but people have done the most horrible things on this planet with their good intentions. More horrible things than with bad intentions, isn't it so? They squeeze life out of life in every way. The more good they are, the more you can't live with them. Try to live with somebody good and see!

AD: You can be good without moralizing. If I am good, I don't want to harm anyone else, I want to get on with my life without stepping on anyone's toes.

SVJ: Why do you need to be taught this? If your humanity is active, it is natural not to step on anyone.

AD: Because most people step on others to get along.

SVJ: Yes, because people have put humanity on freeze with too much morality: it is a good Indian who will fight a good Pakistani; it is a good Hindu who will fight a good Muslim... With good intentions people have wiped out civilizations. You mentioned Adolf Hitler. He had a great intention for the world, he wanted to create a "super" world, and just see what horrible things happened! So the question is not about goodness, what we need are sensible, joyful, peaceful human beings, what we need is sense. Neuro scientists say most human beings use only 12% of their brains. Shouldn't we look at technology to enhance our ability to use at least 25 % or 35%?

AD: If we use more of our brains, we would probably be unhappier!

SVJ : Not true. If you think intelligence is going to destroy your lives, then I think we should shoot ourselves in the head. Because life is intelligence.

AD: People who are intelligent are always unhappy, because they can see that the world is unbalanced, it's full of evil and wickedness. And if you are intelligent, you are overcome by the hopelessness of it all.

SVJ: If you are an intellectual, your life will become frustrated. If you are intelligent, you will not become frustrated. If you are intelligent, you will create your life in a most beautiful manner.

AD: You are making a distinction in being intelligent and being intellectual?

INTERVIEW ARRE

SJV: Intellectual means that you are logically smart, logically sharp, while intelligence is not just logic, intelligence means you have the ability to grasp life and handle it the way it is. Not being in tune with your existence is not intelligence.

AD: Perhaps, but then too few of us are intelligent. Otherwise the world would be a much happier place, wouldn't it?

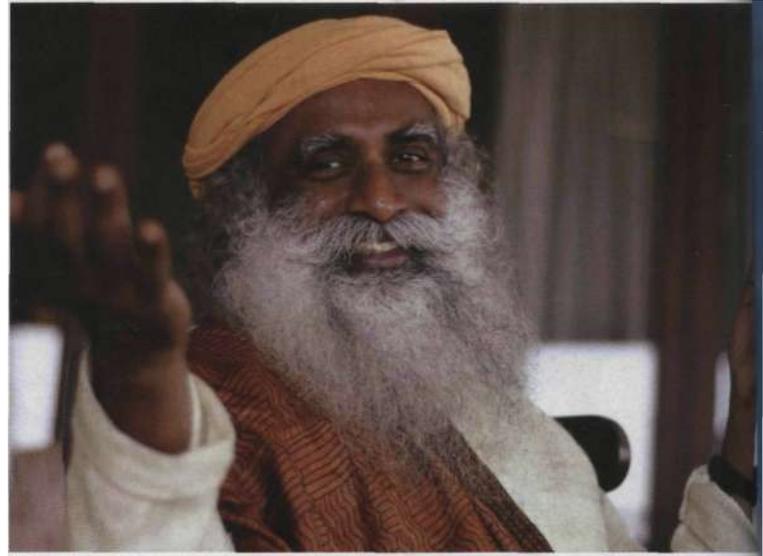
SJV: That's because people have never looked inward. They believe that by fixing the outside, everything is going to be ok. But by fixing the outside, you will only get comfort and convenience, not well-being. That will happen only by fixing the inside. But we have not made any effort towards this, because right now most human beings in the planet have limited themselves, or limited their perceptions, only to their five sense organs of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. In the very nature of things, sense organs are outward bound, and so naturally they look only outward. Neither individual human beings, or societies, or nations, or humanity as a whole has made any investment towards the essential well-being of a human being. Which is learning to go beyond the five senses and look inward.

AD: Why do you think this has happened?

SJV: Because all our priorities have got lop-sided. "Doing very well" means what? Making lots of money. If you say, "Oh, he is a big man", what does it mean? That this man has big brains or a big heart? No, it means he has got a big pocket, isn't it? Somewhere along the line, we made economics the most important aspect of our lives. Once you do this, once the economic engine drives everything, then naturally we become very grouchy because it is all about pulling and pushing and somehow being in the front, so there is no room for any subtlety, or gentleness, and art and music and everything like that will go down.

AD: Surely there was a time when you too were a part of this rat race?

SJV: In my grandfather's place in a village, there was an eight feet diameter well, about 150 feet in depth, in summertime about 60 - 70 feet below the water. All of us boys, ten or eleven years old, would jump into this and climb up. This was a sport for us, there were no staircases or ladders, we just had to hold rock and climb, so that by the time you came up your nails would be bleeding. And if you didn't go down properly, your brains would become a smear on the wall. But, you know, when you are young, you want to do things like that. One day when I was doing this, a man well over 70 came, looked at us, and jumped into the well, I thought, "Ok, the old bugger is dead, but to my amazement he came up faster than me! I didn't like it, so I asked him how. He said come and do yoga. Even if you get into something for the wrong reasons, it still works. I got into yoga at eleven because I was amazed by his physical powers. Later, the mental powers followed. Daily practice of yoga set me apart both physically and mentally in many ways.



Thirteen years later, I was in business working like everyone else. One afternoon in Mysore, I went to a hill I knew very well because I had spent nights on this hill many times. That afternoon, I just sat there, my eyes wide open. Till that moment I had thought that "This is me". But suddenly I did not know which is me and which is not me. What I knew was that I was all over the place, the very rock that I was sitting on, the air that I was breathing, the atmosphere, everything was me! This feeling lasted for about five or ten minutes. I was fully conscious, I was fully aware but I realised later that it wasn't a few minutes but four and a half hours had passed! I was then about twenty-five years old. And for the first time in my adult life, I shed tears. Tears and me? Impossible! Tears to a point where my shirt was wet. For four and a half hours, the tears had been flowing continuously. Every cell in my body was bursting with an ecstasy that I cannot describe. Me? Who was a sceptic's sceptic? When I was five and my parents went to the temple, I had told them, "If you can't answer my questions, I will stay outside," so at five, I always stayed with the chappalwala. Later I became terribly intellectual, reading a lot of European philosophy. But something was missing. I knew that but I didn't know what. So here I was, bursting with something absolutely insane, but so beautiful I didn't want to lose it. When I sounded my closest friends and asked what was happening to me, they only said, "Did you drink something? Did you take a drug, or what?" I knew what was happening to me was so phenomenally big, it was indescribable, there was no way I could put it into words. The next time it happened, I was sitting with my family at the dinner table. I thought it was just two minutes, but seven hours had gone! Everything was normal, I was fully aware of what was happening around me, but time had just slipped away like that.

AD: You are talking about an "other-worldly" experience.

SJV: I wouldn't say another world. Let me relate it to your own experience. On a certain day you are extremely happy, so much so that 24 hours pass

INTERVIEW ARRE

off like a moment. Another day you are very unhappy and 24 hours feel like a year. If you become truly ecstatic, you will see time just fly. Even as we speak now, it's happening to many people, perhaps on a smaller scale.

AD: Do you think your scale was higher because you were blessed in some way?

SJV: I just did the right thing. For thirteen years, I did my yoga, non-stop, everyday.

AD: A lot of people do yoga regularly.

SJV: They are not doing it properly. That's what I am trying to teach. To do it properly. Yoga is a subjective science, but they are trying to do it objectively, which is a huge mistake. They are just doing the physicality of yoga. That's like having a stillborn baby. It is not going to walk.

AD: How do you do it 'subjectively'?

SJV: We believe it is a subjective science, which is why we create such a committed atmosphere before we start. Just to teach a 21 minute practice, I spend about 30 hours with people. To teach a longer practice, I spend 50 to 55 hours to prepare them. Now that kind of dedication and that kind of focus is generally missing, so all we have is the physicality of yoga. You don't have the life process behind it. My whole effort is to bring this dimension into people.

Let me ask you a question: in the physical world, if something is not working, we understand that we are not doing the right thing. Why is it not the same, if the right things are not happening inside us?

AD: When you talk to CEOs or other leaders, do you ask them to give up something in what they do? Or do you ask them to look at the world differently? What is your central message?

SJV: I don't see people as CEOs or as leaders, I only see human beings in front of me, and the fundamental human aspirations are always the same. It doesn't matter where you are or what you are. No one is coming to me to learn how to run their business, they are coming to me to learn to run themselves. But it's definitely not about giving up anything. What can you give up?

AD: You can give up your ambition, you can give up your drinking, you can give up a whole lot of things.

SJV: Suppose you give up your ambition for money and take on an ambition for God. That means earlier you desired a piece of creation, now you start desiring the Creator himself! Has your ambition come down? No, it's grown to an extraordinary greed!. The point always is this: as a human being, wherever you are, you want to be a little more than you are. If you are this much, now, you want to become a little more than that. When that

happens, then a little more, then a little more. So fundamentally what you are seeking is expansion, whatever your currency may be. For one person it may be money, for another person it might be knowledge, or love, or pleasure or whatever. Everyone is constantly seeking expansion through the currency that he knows best. So if expansion is what you are seeking, how much expansion do you think you will settle for? Generally, it will be boundless expansion. That means your goal is infinite. But you are seeking the infinite through the physical. Can the physical ever become infinite? The physical is finite, always within a finite boundary, it can never be infinite. It's like you are riding a bullock cart but your destination is the moon, and somebody is saying buy yourself a new whip. If your destination is the moon, you need an appropriate vehicle. So through the physical if you are seeking the infinite, there will only be frustration.

If there is an unfulfilled desire, you will be unhappy, and the very nature of desire is such that there will always be one desire unfulfilled. "I want to give up desire" is also a desire, so you are into a no-win situation. But there was a time when everybody thought a competitor means kill him, now they are saying let's collaborate. That means the mindset is changing. What I am saying is that the mindset is not just about the outside, but also the business of life. Life is inter-dependence, it is constant collaboration with everything around you, so if you collaborate willingly, you will go through the process of life joyfully. If you collaborate unwillingly, you think life is being taken away from you. I don't intend to change the content of anybody's life, we just want to change the context of their life.

AD: I see that, but the real world keep impinging.

SJV: Do you mean to say that I am in an unreal world?

AD : Let me talk again about the Nissan CEO. His success has depended on him cutting out hundreds of jobs, what is seen as 'flab' in the organisation. That has meant a lot of human misery, because so many people have been made redundant. Would you want him to change and say 'I can't make so many people miserable, so I will not do this'?

SJV: And let the company go down? That doesn't help because then everybody will lose. Instead of 5000 people losing their jobs, all 50,000 will lose their jobs. Is that an intelligent thing to do?

AD: So you are talking of making intelligent choices.

SJV: Life is about making sensible choices.

AD: Was life ever better and easier in the past? There's a tendency to look at the past and say that people were happier then. "The Good Old Days..."

SJV: That's a foolish saying. People talk of Rama Rajya. But even Rama was not happy, Sita was not happy, Laxman was not happy.

AD: My question to you was this: was there any time in history where human beings were happier than they are today? Have we come to a stage where there is general unhappiness, because of the stresses of modern life? Is this something that can be reversed?

SJV: Throughout the history of humanity, there was always a struggle for survival. In fact, never before in the history of this planet was agriculture as organised as it is today. Never before in the history of this planet, have human beings known the comforts that we know today. For thousands of years people had to work just to put food into their mouths, but now that is largely taken care of at least for 60% of the people. There's food for the other 40% also, if only we were more willing and caring. In short, external situations have become very comfortable now because of technology. So now we have to employ an inner technology, or inner engineering, so that we can take our inner destiny also into our hands. If you don't like the Mumbai humidity, you use the technology of the air conditioner. What about the inner climate? That is far more essential. Now there is a whole technology to create an inner climate so that you can keep yourself ecstatic every moment of your life. You have somehow climbed from poverty to affluence, but when you come to affluence, are you well? Unfortunately, no. Look at the affluent countries. Over 40% of the people in the United States are on anti-depressants.

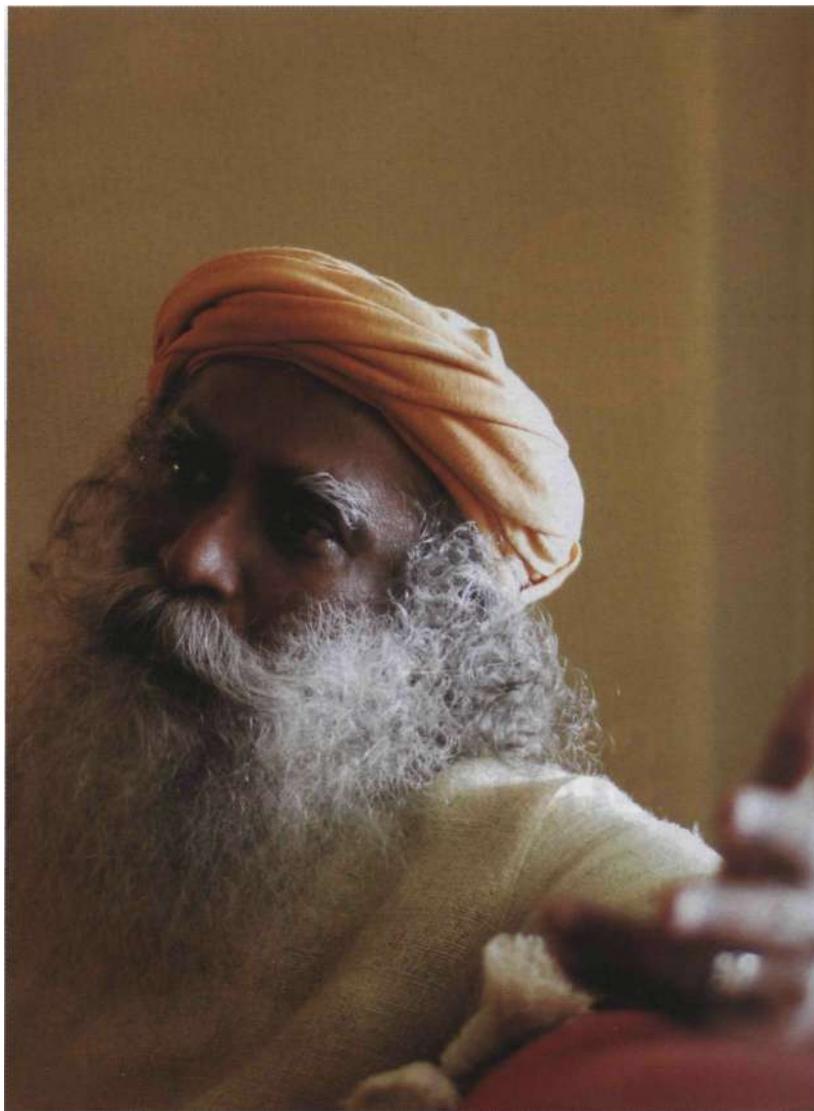
AD: Why is it that we cannot achieve this inner engineering ourselves? Why do we need a guide? Why do we need you?

SJV: You don't need me if you have a little more sense! See, the problem is that your perception is outward bound. Let me tell you a story. Someone came looking for the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore. He came to a nearby village and asked a local boy, "How far is Isha Yoga Centre?" The boy said, "24,996 miles." "What, that far?" "Yes," the boy said, "the way you are going, it is. But if you turn around, it is just four miles." So you don't really need me to find happiness, but because you are set in going one particular way, to turn around takes a little effort. Once that is done, you will do your own job.

The problem is that there is a strong resistance to the word 'guru'. But you learnt the alphabet from someone, didn't you? Even for simple ABC, you needed a teacher, so why can't you learn an inner dimension from somebody?

AD: There are very good reasons for our cynicism about gurus; after all, so many of them have been discredited.

SJV: In every profession, there are corrupt people. There are corrupt journalists, corrupt policemen, corrupt doctors, corrupt lawyers, corrupt politicians... so there are corrupt gurus too. If a policeman is corrupt, you think it is okay because you are not facing them on a daily basis. But suppose a doctor is corrupt, you think it is not okay because you have to put your life into his hands. If your guru becomes corrupt, you think it is



really, really not okay because you go in there with a certain trust, placing your life in his hands. You expect certain aspects of life to be clean at least, but that is not so in the world: in every profession, in every activity, in every sphere of life, there are corrupt people. But that doesn't mean it is all corruption.

AD: We should just be careful in selecting our doctor. And our guru. (The conversation dissolves in joyful laughter)

Anil Dharker has been editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Independent* and *Mid-day*. His columns have appeared in most leading newspapers. He is the author of several books. He is the editor of this magazine.