

THE TENNESSEAN

Local News, Wednesday, October 15, 1997

LOCAL NEWS

LIFESTYLES

Yoga guru touts peace, not religion

Indian brings classes to Nashville at behest of his former students

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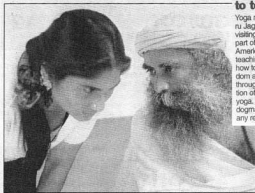
Selling Indian yoga techniques in Bible-Belt Nashville would seem as tough as opening a lawn-mower store in the desert.

But Jaggi Vasudev, a noted yoga master who is on his first trip to the United States, says he isn't selling anything.

The 40-year-old guru, who has gained wide fame in his native India, hawks no tapes, markets no books and offers no T-shirts for purchase.

During his visit this week to Nashville, he's simply offering a chance for others to achieve freedom from daily anxiety without renouncing any religious belief or any earthly responsibility.

"There's no dogma. It is a way of self-inquiring," said Vasudev, who



Volunteer Kothai Shekar listens to Jaggi Vasudev during a yoga course at Gower Elementary School Monday night.

was schooled in English literature and civil engineering before he had a life-changing, metaphysical experience about 15 years ago.

That made him understand that external rewards are not as great as the inner peace that comes with true meditation.

"Probably 100 years ago, only kings and queens could have what the average person has today," he said, "but still man is in the same

mess in terms of happiness."

The guru's first visit to the United States comes at the invitation of some former students who helped set up small classes in Centuria, Ill.; Bloomington, Ind.; Columbus, Ind.; and Dayton, Ohio.

Although more than 100,000 people in India have sought his teaching — including the Indian national

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Indian guru in America to teach inner peace

Yoga master and guru Jaggi Vasudev is visiting Nashville as part of his first trip to America. He is teaching students how to achieve freedom and inner peace through a combination of meditation and yoga. It's not about dogma or renouncing any religious beliefs, he says. On 1B.



VASUDEV

Guru emphasizes meditation

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lucky man — Vasudev has not lived the life of a celebrity on tour.

While in Nashville, he is staying in the simple apartment of one of his former students. And he has been satisfied to have 13 students who attend three-hour sessions for 13 days in a row in Nashville. The students, who are about halfway through their course, were asked to pay \$175 to defray his travel costs, but only a small number actually did.

Those practicing yoga say their discipline — which includes techniques for breathing, posturing the body and meditating — is not a religion. It is, they say, a way to mental and physical health. As such, they aren't followers of religious deities. They are meditators.

"We do not worship him as a god. He is our spiritual master. He is an

enlightened person," said Maya Prabhakar, who learned yoga from Vasudev in India and decided to invite the guru to the United States after she moved to Nashville with her husband, a computer programmer.

Those seeking the guru for the first time were impressed by his teaching.

"It's very powerful," said Margie Mercer, who teaches yoga classes in Nashville. "It has a very calming effect."

Jim Pencock, a public relations consultant who helped spread the word of the guru's coming to Nashville, was skeptical. But he found the techniques helped him clear his mind.

"I know that sounds weird, but I'm an straight down the road a Southern Methodist on there is."

He India as many as 60,000 unpaid volunteers help spread the message of Vasudev and his ab-

To learn more

Jaggi Vasudev may teach another 13-day session on yoga techniques at the beginning of November. For more information on the Nashville classes, call 256-2633.

ran — or yoga learning center — Contributor in Southern India.

It was not clear that Vasudev had his blissful experience that caused him to give up his lucrative civil engineering business and delve into spiritual pursuits.

He was sitting on a rock when he was suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling that "left me drenched in a totally different kind of bliss."

He has spent much of the rest of his life trying to show others that they may find inner peace that helps bring them closer to their god and



JAGGI VASUDEV / STAFF

Seethi Kumar, a physical therapist from Illinois, volunteers by helping G. Kumar Avel breathe properly during Jaggi Vasudev's yoga course at Gower Elementary School Monday night.

satisfies them without seeking financial or personal power. "I am in no way antagonistic to

anyone. I'm not asking for anything. I am only asking people to look inward." ■