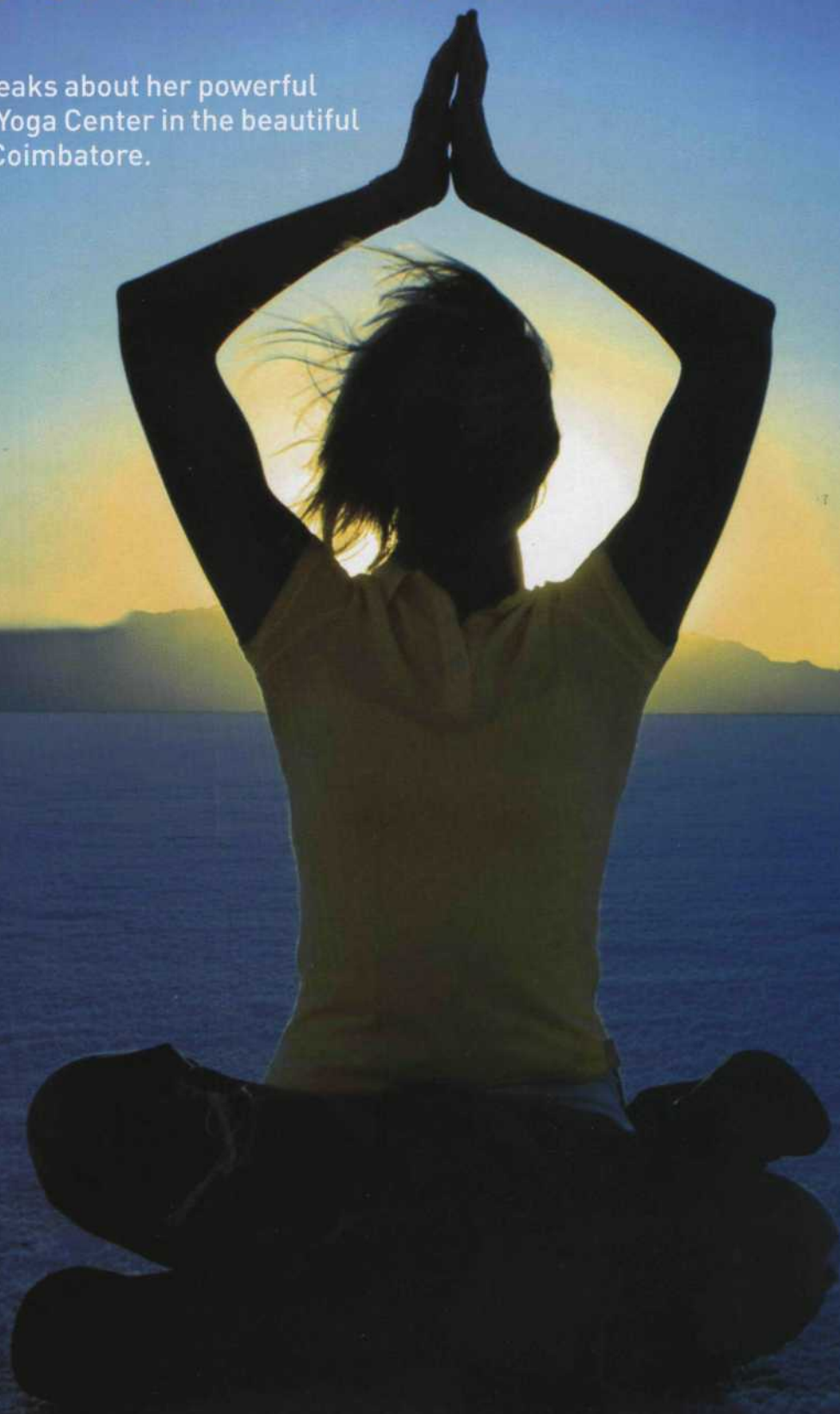


SPIRITUAL SHOPPER

A spiritual shopper speaks about her powerful experience at the Isha Yoga Center in the beautiful Velliangiri foothills of Coimbatore.

Words // Meetu Soni



While sitting in the Spandha Hall grounds for dinner one evening, looking at the exquisite arrangement of native flowers on our table, Mini Thapar Shastri remarked, "Sadhguru throws the best parties!"

Soul Search

I am a spiritual shopper - I have been practicing Yoga and meditation for four years - Sivananda Ashtanga, Jivamukti, Che Kong, Cranio-sacral, Reiki, Past-life Regression, crystal therapy, *et al.* With more and more magazines devoted to spiritual matters and astrology, and TV serials and cinema promoting spirituality, we see film stars, industrialists and the rich 'n' famous seeking peace and happiness. The Annamalai Hills in Coimbatore are home to several ashrams patronised by these very film stars, industrialists and the rich, one of which is Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev's Isha Yoga Center. When I was assigned to go there for a workshop, the spiritual shopper in me rose to the occasion with much enthusiasm.

I rose at 6am to catch my flight to Coimbatore in southern India, assured that I would be well looked after by a higher power. But my entry into the airport was marked by near total confusion with no tickets for me. My boarding pass had already been issued; they had another Meetu Soni travelling on the same flight! Mysteriously and miraculously things were sorted out. I was whisked away from the crowd onto the aircraft.

Meeting the Master

We arrived safely at the Isha Yoga Center ashram, south of Coimbatore in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Nestled in the lovely foothills of the Velliangiri mountain range, the Isha Foundation is a unique combination of humanitarian work and Yoga self-realization and development. The Center is the home of its founder, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, a realized Master Yogi and profound mystic. The grounds also house the Dhy. Dhyanalinga, the first multi-religious temple to be fully consecrated in over 2000 years. The temple is not only a beautiful architectural

wonder, but also emits a powerful energy for meditation. I found it a special place to recharge and renew my spirits.

The Inner Engineering training is given by Sadhguru and is a residential intensive weekend program for executives and professionals. In the words of the Sadhguru, "simple yet powerful processes from yogic science are offered to purify the system and increase health, productivity, balance and inner well-being". I participated with an exceptional group of people, and came away feeling that the training offered me life-time lessons and benefits.

I found Sadhguru to be exceptionally bright, knowledgeable in many areas, and very well intentioned in his own peace mission. Sadhguru incorporates what is most valid from the spiritual sciences, for the modern seeker. For the next three days, we were immersed in an intensive training that started at 6am and went through the day, till the evening. Yoga exercises and concentrated breathing meditation practices were punctuated with walks and instructed activity in the reserve forest that surrounds the Center: a great learning environment.

The Initiation

On Sunday, we received our initiation into a detailed combination of a yoga and meditation 'practice' that I expect to greatly enhance self-realization - the *Shambhavi Maha Mudra*. It was a moving and emotional experience and one I hope to carry with me for life. The training was followed by singing, dancing and, of course, a wonderful South Indian dinner.

The people, the setting and the content of the Isha Yoga experience worked very well together. It stimulated the release of physical,

mental and emotional blocks and activated the spontaneous expression of vital energy. The Isha volunteers who were working at the Center were always cheerful and helpful. Fellow seekers like Prahlad Kakkar, Mini Thapar Shastri, Puneet Nanda, to name a few, were all immersed in the workshop.

The Ashram

The architecturally distinctive and pillar-less Spandha Hall is the venue for residential Isha yoga programs and celebrations. The dominating feature of this space is the exquisite mural along one wall depicting the great sage, Patanjali, in half human-half snake form. Another notable symbolic feature of the Center is the coiled serpent motif. One of the symbols for *Kundalini* energy, it is seen all along the flooring of the ashram, in the latches and handlebars, on doors and windows, and in an exquisite relief on the threshold of the entrance to the Spandha Hall grounds. Also present were suspended metallic serpents, that hung from the pillars of the entrance to the Dhyanalinga temple.

All the while, my experience of the Ashram was heightened by Sounds of Isha. The music group formed by the residents of the Ashram, is inspired by their deep yearning to express the grace of their Guru. Unable to classify the music into any specific genre, I resorted to simply enjoying it and letting it pervade through my being. It evoked an almost unanimous response from everyone present as it played in the evenings. While sitting in the Spandha Hall grounds for dinner one evening, looking at the exquisite arrangement of native flowers on our table, Mini Thapar Shastri remarked, "Sadhguru throws the best parties!" Apart from that, though, there are many reasons that I would dearly love to repeat my experience. &

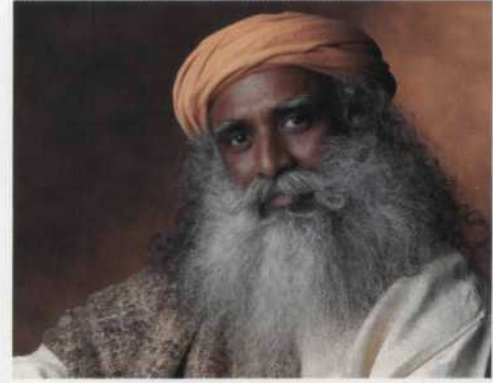
DIVINE CALLING

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, apart from being an accomplished mystic and yogi, is also the founder of the Isha Foundation. He took out time to speak to &. about his vision.

Interviewed by // Varun Rana



The kind of lifestyle the younger generation has - as you said, we are the most comfortable and most affluent generation, but we are not the most joyous one. Why is that?



Sadhguru, what do you hope to achieve?

What do you mean by that?

If I were to put it in very crass terms, are you looking at personal happiness or at public happiness?

Personal means what? My personal?

Individual happiness. The people who follow you or people who come to you for guidance; are you focusing on their individual happiness or are you focusing on a larger public happiness?

Where is 'public', where did you see them?

All, everywhere.

These are individual people. So, only individuals can be happy. Public is just a word.

The units make up the whole...

...because individuals are the humanity. There is no humanity as such, there are only human beings. You can be happy, I can be happy, somebody can be happy but humanity cannot be happy because no such thing exists. So, without individual well-being there is no such thing as universal well-being. This is the mistake we have always made. We have slogans for human well-being, but it has not

happened simply because we never focused on the individual. You want the society to be happy, how? You will fix the roads, you will fix the buildings, but people are still unhappy. They'll find different reasons. Does it mean to say we should not fix the roads?

See, what we do on the outside is to the extent that is necessary for our...well...for our comfort and convenience. So what you fix on the outside is only comfort and convenience, you can never fix well-being from outside.

To what extent do you work on outward happiness?

My fundamental work is towards human well-being. Human well-being means, essentially, • people being well within themselves; joyful and peaceful and healthy. But right now, if they don't have food to eat, you can't talk about inner well-being for them, so we talk about food. They don't have education, we talk about education. If the government and administration had taken care of all these, I would be happy not to do any of those things.

And concentrate on your vision?

Yes. Unfortunately, even the basics have not been taken care of. So we are trying to do something whatever we can do. When you have no interest or focus on any human being then you talk humanity. (Laughs) So, if you are

a part of humanity, you are not a human being. That's the horrible way of looking at it, isn't it?

Yes, it would give me no credit for being who I am.

You are a faceless entity, but everybody, within himself, is an individual human being of great importance, for himself at least. No 'life' thinks it is not important. In comparison it may think, but its life is important, isn't it, in its own way? Even an ant thinks its life is important. So, if you don't address the individual, where is transformation? You can only talk about it, it will never happen. Anything that happens in the world happens because individual people change.

Right now, individual people have to change; we are working on all levels. The most important thing is the leadership. When I say 'leadership', I am not just talking about political leadership or anything like that. Anybody who can influence a thousand people in their life is a leader in their own right. They may be entrepreneurs, a bureaucrat, or the prime minister of the country. It doesn't matter who they are. In people holding responsible and influential positions, if we bring about even a little change in the way they think and feel about life around them, they can change the world. That's what we are

"Why are you thinking about your profession, how much money will I make, how will I live? It's a horrible way to live. "



looking at.

And, therefore you also work with such people?

Yes.

On a completely different note: lifestyle. The kind of lifestyle the younger generation has - as you said, we are the most comfortable and most affluent generation, but we are not the most joyous one. Why is that?

No inner engineering, too much outside engineering. Outside we have fixed, inside we have not fixed.

Sadhguru, nowadays, people are very manipulative. To this day I do not see the reasons behind that. What do you think are the reasons behind that?

Why, they are in pursuit of their happiness.

Is it so simply selfish?

Yes. They are in pursuit of their happiness.

But is it alright to be like that?

It's not a question of if it's right or alright, it just doesn't work.

No, because then when you interacting with that person you owe a responsibility to that person, right?

No. What I am saying is that I am not looking at it in a moralistic way. Now, to get something out of you, I become manipulative. Maybe I'll get something out of you, but I miss the whole point of life because in this manipulation, I am lost. I will never be peaceful or joyful within myself. So, it doesn't work. If you are doing something that doesn't work, it simply means you are stupid. You think you are smart, but you are actually stupid because for small things, you are missing out the big thing. It's not a question of morally right or wrong, it is just silly.

It is. So what you are trying to propagate is a very simplistic view which does not take any sides.

No, you don't have to use your sense if you take sides. You can just become a slogan. You don't have to use your brains to do anything. You can go by a slogan. You can build your whole life around a slogan, that's all. If you

take sides, life becomes easy. Or, you think it is easy, it is actually not. Socially, yes, maybe it is easy.

Is there a single mantra that can be applied to any number of individuals to make them at least be more logical about their own happiness?

The single mantra for everybody's happiness is - fix the inside!

And, how does one go about it fixing the inside?

That's a technology. Because it's a subjective technology, the focus and the attention are completely in a different direction. It needs a certain committed and focused atmosphere. In unfocused and uncommitted atmospheres, we never talk any spirituality or inner possibilities because it will become ridiculous.

When you speak about focused and committed atmosphere, do you mean restrained from modern comforts or...?

I am just talking about...now, if you want me to



really explore spirituality, at least this day or this hour must be absolutely committed. Not in a casual atmosphere like this, because you won't see the point; you will not be able to grasp it. Because if you could have grasped it in casual atmospheres, you would have already grasped it. It has not happened, obviously. It's not happened simply because we have never created such an atmosphere for ourselves. If we did, nobody would have to teach us, it would happen anyway.

Do you feel a sense of responsibility towards what you are doing? Or do you do this also for your happiness?

(Laughing) I don't have to do anything for my happiness. I am made like this, and if I close my eyes I can sit here till I fall dead. I have no need for action at all. The true joy of action is known only to one who has no need for action. One who is compulsively active cannot know the joy of action. When you act consciously, you really enjoy action. If I don't act; if I don't do anything, I will be a thousand times better than what I am. (Laughs) I am just hoping you young people will take up the work and I can simply sit here.

How would you like us to work towards it?

If you don't create what you care for your life is wasted even before you live it. So you must create what you care for. You must really see what it is that you care for. If you look at it, any human being, it doesn't matter who he is, what he is, the ultimate thing that he cares for is human well-being, it's only the scale. One person thinks human well-being means just 'my' well-being. Another person thinks him and his family. Another person thinks him and his community. Another person thinks him and his nation. Another person thinks about the whole humanity. Another person thinks all life forms. But every human being is interested in human well-being, isn't it? It's only the scale.

You just have to increase your scale, that's all. Not direction, just the scale. When you are young why is your scale so small, horrible. Why are you thinking about your profession, how much money will I make, how will I live? It's a horrible way to live. You must have a really large scale way of looking at things, isn't it? You must think of human well-being in a large scale. &-.

The Isha Foundation holds a number of Yoga programs aimed at self-rejuvenation and inner growth.

The Isha Yoga Center, situated amidst the beautiful Velliangiri Foothills, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, hosts numerous residential programs.

The Center also comprises of the 'Dhyanalinga' - a multi-religious meditation shrine, the Isha Home School'- a long term and much cherished vision of Sadhguru, the Isha Rejuvenation Center- offering a variety of allopathic, alternative and contemporary therapies designed by Sadhguru.

Among the more far-reaching of Sadhguru's visions is the Action for Rural Rejuvenation, which offers medical relief to over 3000 villages in Tamil Nadu alone. Qualified doctors, also trained in alternative and native therapies accompany Mobile Health Clinics through rural areas dispensing free medical aid, as well as establishing libraries, computer centres, *yogashalas* (community yoga areas), gymnasiums, playgrounds, and herbal gardens.

Also profound in its impact is the yearly initiative pioneered by Sadhguru, Project Green Hands. Last year, the record number of saplings planted was 250000. This year, the aim is to plant 25000000 to afforest deforested land.

With a dual emphasis on inner and social well-being, Sadhguru is a pioneer in more ways than one.

