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Enlightened Mission: Action for Rural Rejuvenation Interview with Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev -
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Jayesh Patel

'The world and the populations of the world are suffering not because we lack resources, but simply because we have not cared for too long. Its time that everybody loves to care.'

Intellectually we know there is suffering in the world. We dream of making the world a better place, but rarely does our day-to-day life provide an opportunity for action. A unique program to aid the rural villages of India has been launched by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, founder of Isha Foundation, a non-profit organization in India and America. In this interview, the remarkable yogi and self-realized spiritual leader shares his vision and plan to allow a new possibility for change to emerge for the desperate and often forgotten poor in mother India.

With captivating enthusiasm of his mission, Sadhguru admits that all people cannot travel to distant lands, offer their hands or time, so he has lined up a passionate army of 200,000 volunteers to do the work. He says for the rest of us, it is time everybody cares about the impoverished of the world. Here, Sadhguru talks about his ambitious to help our fellow human beings.

Jayesh Patel: What is Action for Rural Rejuvenation?

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev: I have been closely involved with the rural population right from my youth and what I see is in the last 20-25 years, there has been such a huge degeneration in the rural persons life in India. Over 70% of the Indian population still lives in the villages in India. And over 70% of the Indian population is self-employed. There are no large corporations to employ them. Economically many things have been happening in the last two decades and things have improved to some extent, but culturally and psychologically, huge damage has happened to the basic human being. Maybe he is wearing little better clothes, maybe he is drinking little better water, maybe something else has happened, but the human being is suffering more then ever before.

All the evils of market economy has touched him already, but the benefits of market economy has not gone anywhere near him. When I say evils of market economy have touched, you need a different mindset to understand what I am going to say now - it's very hard for a city living person to understand this. Here in the Indian village 20 years ago, you could walk through anybody's field and it's not a crime. And for a person who lives on the land, land is not just the means of earning. That culture has always thought the land is your mother. Here you call mud as dirt, they call this mud as mother. There is a huge amount of emotion towards the earth on which you walk, because they see it as mother, because it feeds you and

nourishes you on a daily basis. Today just walking through the fields is no more possible because everybody has put up barbed wire fences in the last 10-12 years. And suddenly it caused a huge damage to the human physic. And like this there are many things, simple things.

JP: Are you trying to provide education and economic assistance to the villages to help them compete?

SJV: The Action for Rural Rejuvenation project is not about giving them economic or administrative help, it is just to raise the human spirit. We are doing this in many stages. The ultimate goal is to establish a center in every village. There are over 60 million people spread out in 54,000 villages in Tamil Nadu. We want to establish 13,000 centers. These 13,000 have been curled down to 3,000 because it is more practical to group other aspects together. We are establishing 3,000 centers with one yogashala, where people can practice yoga and learn healthful ways of living, one gymnasium, one volleyball court for men and one throw ball court for ladies. It makes such an enormous shift in them - just playing games and having inter-village tournaments. You must be in these villages to understand the excitement. They forget all their miseries, their half-full bellies and everything. Suddenly they are a new kind of people. So we just are establishing these centers, which will take enormous investments.

JP: Has the construction of the centers started already?

SJV: As a precursor to establishing these centers, we are sending out 250 mobile dispensaries built on 5 truck chassis. The idea is to teach healthful ways of living. These mobile clinics are going with a trained medical doctor, but he is not going to prescribe medicine for everything. The allopathic system of medicine is well beyond the reach of an Indian villager. People are still dying of gastroenteritis, any numbers of women are suffering because of urinary infections and the culture is such that emotionally they would rather die rather than being examined by a male doctor. So if there is no lady doctor they will not go and they won't tell anybody that they have a problem until it is so extreme they are on their deathbed. Hundreds of children in Tamil Nadu are losing their vision every year, just for a problem as simple as conjunctivitis. Two drops of antibiotic will save the child's sight, but he is scratching his eyes out because they are itching. It is not any kind of rare disease - just an itch that will last for 5 to 7 days. Because the two drops of antibiotic is not administered in time, hundreds of children lose their vision.

These medical dispensaries, these mobile dispensaries are going there along with a yoga teacher. The doctor is also trained in homeopathy and other home remedies, because whenever possible home remedies are given. Only when it is really necessary, free medicine is given. So this trucks goes in to administer health care, but also to introduce yoga. Our objective is in one year we want at least 30% of the population doing yoga to live better healthfully, simple yoga for physical health. This can be taught in 2-3 days time and it will make a huge difference. Villagers have welcomed us in such a phenomenal way. The first 2 trucks are on right now. We need 250 trucks.

JP: What made you take on such a large project for the rural people?

SJV: Right now a situation in an Indian village is that human spirit is crushed. There are only two things keeping the Indian villager going right now - unrealistic cinema and alcohol. To avoid boot legging most governments in south India have started producing and supplying cheap alcohol. Very hard liquor is available in a sachet for six rupees. So if over ten laborers are working anywhere, there will be an alcohol vendor. In the evening when he quits work he is tempted. On a bicycle they are selling alcohol and its available on credit, so everybody starts drinking. Over 80% of the rural men in south India over 16 years of age drink regularly. And he doesn't have the necessary food to support this hard liquor. When he drinks

this liquor and doesn't eat properly, he has no urge to get up and go to work tomorrow morning. But he has to work. When you have to do something when your body is not willing and your mind is not willing then slowly you become resentful towards everything, towards creation and creator, isn't it?

Slowly there is a huge resentment because one segment of the population is living well. India means many layers. There is wealthy India, such highly educated India, such poor India, and such uneducated, illiterate India. There are many segments of society that are totally segregated into economic classes. Rural Rejuvenation is mainly to raise the human spirit and it has been meticulously planned, every aspect of it because to be successful in the world, whether you want love, you want peace or you want wealth, if there is no good strategy it won't work. So for the last 12-13 years we have prepared a huge mass of dedicated people, many of them are full time volunteers just waiting to go.

And people may say 'What is my concern about somebody who is living in an Indian village or any village for that matter?' Any human being who is oblivious to somebody else's suffering is no human being, isn't it? Only if you are capable of being oblivious to your own suffering are you entitled to be oblivious to other people's suffering. When your own suffering matters, everybody's suffering on this planet matters, isn't it? Now I am involved in this not because I need to do it. I don't feel guilty of my well being, I am not suffering my well being, I enjoy my well-being. I am not doing this to buy a ticket to heaven. I am not doing this to find peace of mind or joy in what I am doing. All these things I know how to create within myself. I am just doing it because it needs to be done and we can do it. If we don't do what we cannot do, it's ok. But if we don't do what we can do, our lives are wasted isn't it?

For more information about Action for Rural Rejuvenation and yoga programs by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, visit www.ishafoundation.org.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev will conduct a free public talk at the Kerr Cultural Center on Jan. 9 from 7-9Pm. For information, call 623-580-9616 or visit www.ishafoundation.org.

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[Return](#)