

Sadhguru

Interview by Jacques Geluk | Photography: Isha Foundation

Ranked amongst the fifty most influential people in India, Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and a bestselling author. Sadhguru has initiated powerful yoga programs for human transformation and wellbeing and path-breaking outreach projects to uplift rural communities. Probing and passionate, insightful, logical and unfailingly witty, Sadhguru's talks have made him a speaker and opinion-maker of renown. With his astute and incisive grasp of current issues and world affairs and his unerringly scientific approach to the question of human well-being, he has been a primary speaker at the UN World Headquarters, UNESCO Headquarters, a regular at the World Economic Forum, and a special invitee at the Australian Leadership Retreat, Indian Economic Summit, TED and Google, to name a few. In the past few years, Sadhguru has launched mega ecological initiatives in India to address challenges such as water scarcity, agrarian distress and land degradation. These initiatives have become game-changers by establishing a global blueprint for economic development that is ecologically sustainable.

1 | Namaskaram Sadhguru, please tell me what you consider to be your most important and fundamental message to us all?

Sadhguru: In pursuit of human wellbeing, people have looked up and divided humanity in ways that you almost cannot fix it. Out of this, much hallucination has happened, many wars have happened, unspeakable things have been done by people to each other and this continues to happen. In the last hundred years, we looked out in pursuit of our wellbeing and with this we have destroyed half the planet. All the ecological disasters are just a consequence of the pursuit of human wellbeing. By fixing the outside situations, you can create comfort and convenience, but you cannot create wellbeing. If wellbeing has to happen, one has to turn inward because human experience is generated from within.

As there is a science and technology for external wellbeing, there is a whole science and technology for inner wellbeing. This is the fundamental shift that we want to bring about – instead of looking up for your wellbeing, you turn inward. This is what Yoga means – not up, not out, but in. The only way out is in.

2 | Is it important whether we are Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or even atheist? Does religion play an important role, or can we all benefit from your teachings?

Sadhguru: Let's first understand the distinction between seeking and believing, between a spiritual process and religion. If you adhere to a certain religion, you are referred to as a believer. But when you say, "I'm on a spiritual path," you are referred to as a seeker. You can

be a genuine seeker only when you see, "I do not know." If you think that you know, then you cannot seek.

'I do not know' is a tremendous possibility. Only if you see 'I do not know', the possibility of knowing arises in your life. Everything that you do not know, if you fill it with a belief system, you will never know. It will offer some solace but it is not a solution.

Yoga is the science of turning inward. One of the basic aspects of my work has been to present Yoga as an absolute science and technology. I am insisting it is a technology because it does not matter who you are – if you learn to use it, it works for you.

3 | When did you realize you wanted to inspire people and why?

Sadhguru: This happened to me when I was 25 years of age. I had finished university, I got into business and I was in a state where everything that I was doing had become quite successful. So when everything that you do is successful, the world does not go around the sun, you think it actually goes around you! I was in that kind of a condition, where I was dead sure of everything. So one afternoon, between two business meetings I just had a little break. I come from a place called Mysore, where there is a small hill just outside the city. This is known as Chamundi Hill. This is a hill that I have known very well right from my childhood – I have trekked here, camped here, and spent days and nights on this hill. I had a little break, so I just went and sat there.

Till that moment in my life, this was me and that was somebody else. I just sat there, my eyes were still open and suddenly I did not know what was me and what was not me. What I considered as myself

'THE ONLY WAY
OUT IS IN'

was simply everywhere – the rock on which I was sitting, the air that I was breathing, the atmosphere around me – everything was me. I thought this lasted for five to ten minutes but when I came back to my normal senses, four and a half hours had passed by. I was sitting there and tears were flowing to a point that my shirt was wet. I have always been peaceful and happy – that has never been an issue for me. But here I was bursting with a completely different level of ecstasy. When I tried to find an explanation, my mind said, “Maybe you’re going off your rocker.” When I shared my experience with my friends, the only questions that came to me were, “What did you drink? What did you pop?” I did not grow up on any kind of spiritual tradition. I grew up on European philosophy – Dostoevsky, Camus, Kafka – so I could not figure what was happening with me. All I knew was that I had hit a gold mine and I did not want to lose it. That day when this experience happened to me, I thought if these tears of bliss could happen to the whole world, what a magnificent place we would be living in! So, this whole process of what we are referring to as Inner Engineering is just an effort to somehow rub off this experience on people.

4 | On your website I found this question, would you please answer it for me: A fearless child, a revolutionary teen, an irreverent youth, how did it all add up to make the man who has transformed millions of lives?

Sadhguru: When I was around four years of age, I realized that I did not know anything. If they gave me a glass of water, I did not know what water was – I would just stare at it for three to four hours at a stretch. I knew that if I drank this water, it would quench my thirst and I knew different ways of using it. But even today, do we really know what water is? We know how to use everything, but we do not know what it is. So, when I realized I did not know anything, if I found a leaf, I would just look at this leaf for hours on end.

In this condition they sent me to school. I went to school and I just looked at the teachers. I paid them the kind of attention that nobody would have paid them – unwavering attention. Initially I heard the words that they were speaking and I understood the meaning. After some time, I realized they are just making sounds and I am making up the meaning in my head. Once I realized this, I stopped making up the meanings and simply listened to the sound. Then it became very funny and amusing. I was so amused, a big smile spread on my face – but they were not amused.

When I was about twelve years of age, it was one more regular day at school and I was just staring at the teacher. The teacher was doing everything possible to get a response from me. For 35-40 minutes he tried everything but I said nothing because I did not even hear what

he was saying. Then he got so infuriated, he came and held me by the shoulders, shook me violently and said, “You must either be the divine or the devil! But I think you’re the latter...” Now, I did not feel insulted or abused by this. Until that moment, I did not know anything else in the existence, but there was one constant, which was me. Suddenly this man confused me – “Am I the devil, am I the divine?” So this set up a whole lot of questions in my mind, “What the hell am I?”

When this exploded within me, suddenly my whole attention was drawn inward. All these years I was staring outside, then suddenly I started closing my eyes and sitting. This was a dimensional shift in my life. Everything about me changed, simply because instead of staring at something else, I was staring at myself. Suddenly, incredible things started happening within me, which I could never describe. Even socially, things started changing around me. People who thought that I needed psychiatric evaluation started saying, “Oh, he’s a Yogi.” That is how my journey started.

5 | Is society ready for the spiritual process that leads to inner wellbeing for every human being, and help them realise their potential within?

Sadhguru: As a generation, our survival is better organized than ever before. You are not struggling to survive; you do not have to climb a tree and get your food. You can go to a store and buy whatever you want. If you have the money, you can go and buy everything that you need for the next one year and not step out of your house.

This was never before possible for humanity. But now that survival is organized, it is very important that you turn inward. Because one thing that is happening in the world today is that human intellect is more active than ever before. More people on the planet are thinking for themselves. But the problem with thought is that it has to be logically correct. Once you become logically correct in some sense, then all heavens will collapse.

In most parts of the world, heavens are collapsing because it was only in people’s minds – it had no geography of its own. As heavens collapse, if people do not turn inward and find something absolutely tremendous within themselves, the entire population will slowly move towards alcohol and drugs. You can see this happening across the planet because the only hope they have is to do something here and now – there is no “up there” in their minds.

If you do not teach them how to be peaceful by their own nature, ninety percent of humanity will move towards chemicals. In Western countries, this has already happened. Once I was in New York City in

a large gathering of people and I just asked them, “What percentage of people in New York City can sit in the evening peacefully without even a glass of wine?” They said, “Five percent!” And after a few days, I was in London with a prominent group of people. I asked them the same question and they said, “Less than one percent!” When I say they are moving towards chemicals, it is not a moral issue for me – it is an existential issue.

Today in the United States of America, the most affluent country on the planet, a significant percent of the population is on prescription medication of some kind. That means to be healthy, joyful, peaceful or blissful, you need chemicals. If all of us are on chemicals for everything, the next generation that we produce will be less than who we are. When we produce the next generation, in some way, they must be at least one step better than us. If we do not do that, it is a crime against humanity.

In the next 15-20 years, everyone must strive to raise human consciousness. You cannot tell them unreasonable stories anymore – it is not going to work. You have to give them methods, something that is logically correct and scientifically verifiable. In that sense, society is overripe for the spiritual process. If you do not provide it now, things will burst. You have to provide a spiritual process for them, large-scale, which is non-religious and does not ascribe to any particular philosophy or ideology – just a simple process, which will turn them inward.

Today with the technology available, we can make this happen if only we put it across properly. Doing something large-scale for human consciousness will be the most important thing that we can do as a generation of people. Because every other damn thing has been done – if you do any more, there won’t be life left on this planet. If you do too much external engineering, there won’t be any planet left. It is time that human energies are turned inward so that they can engineer themselves, which will not cause any damage to the outside.

6 | Would you please explain what Inner Engineering means?

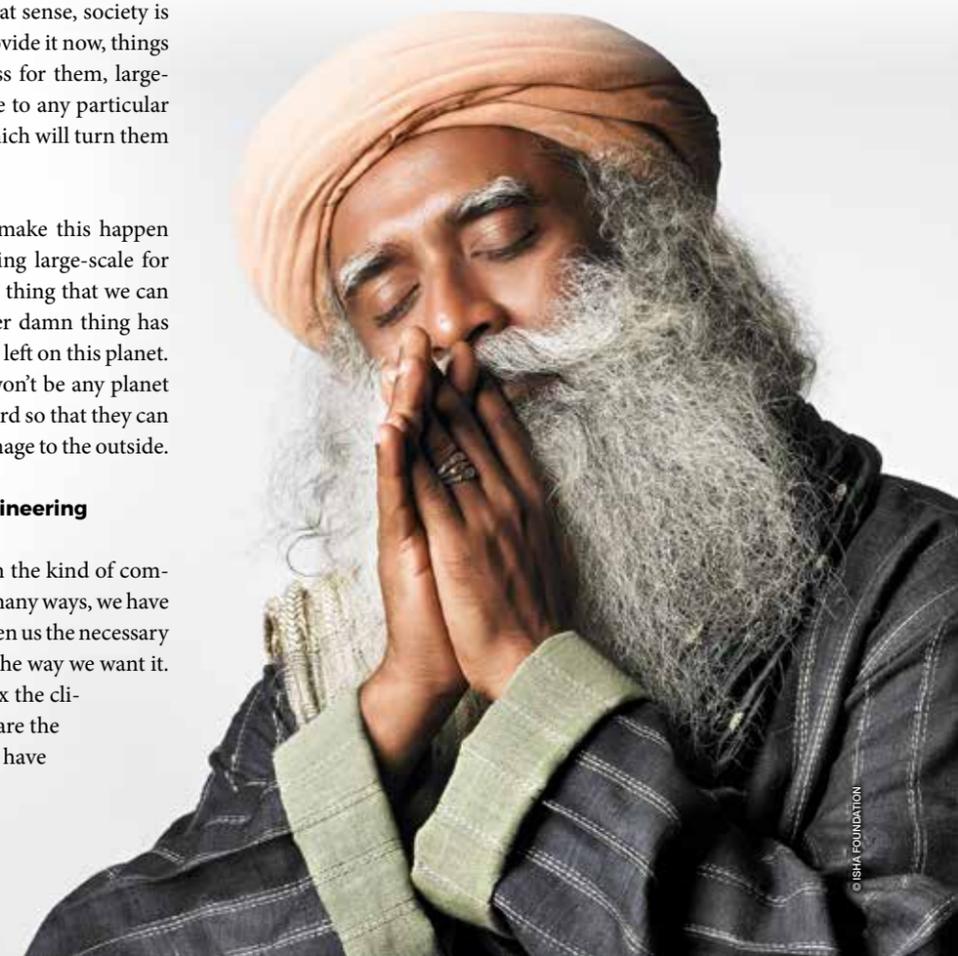
Sadhguru: No other generation has ever known the kind of comforts and conveniences that are available to us. In many ways, we have the best deal ever. Science and technology have given us the necessary power and capability to fix the outside situations the way we want it. With modern engineering, you are even able to fix the climate of your house. But we cannot claim that we are the most joyful, loving or peaceful generation. So we have

fixed the outside climate but what about the inner climate? You may have air conditioning in your house but if you are boiling inside, what is the point?

As I mentioned, there is a whole science and technology to create the inner situation the way we want it. This has been the mainstay of India as a nation. The main thing that India focused upon was inner technologies. Technology means doing something the way it works. Unless you do the right things within yourself, the right things will not happen. If you are not peaceful, joyful and ecstatic, that means you have not done the right things with this life. Inner Engineering is an exploration of how to do these things right.

The nature and basis of your experience is within you. No situation or person will ever happen one hundred percent the way you want. But at least you should happen the way you want yourself to be. Then there would be no need for you to be in pursuit of your happiness.

What we refer to as Inner Engineering means not seeing joy as something that we could achieve in our life, but seeing joy as the very basis of our lives. Joy is not the goal; it is the square one of life.



7 | How important is this, and why is a tough guru the real deal to get this message across?

Sadhguru: Someone was asking me recently, “Sadhguru, why are you so hard on us? Many other gurus say nice things. You are continuously hard on us. Whatever we do, you say it is not enough.” It is not me who is saying that. The life within you is saying that whatever you do is not enough, so I am just resonating that. You have acquired a way of speaking against your own life, so I am speaking for your life.

There is nothing wrong with arrangements of comfort and pleasure. The problem is that people identify with that and settle into it. The moment you settle into your comfort, all possibilities of life evaporate, as if you are settling into your grave. If you live here as a physiological and psychological drama, then you want to settle somewhere. Is it wrong? No, it is just that it is limited. Is it wrong to be limited? No, it is just that it is not the ultimate, that’s all.

Your relationship with a Guru is of a completely different nature. You are not choosing this for bodily pleasure or comfort. A Guru is someone who threatens all the limitations that you are on a daily basis because only if you destroy the limited, something far bigger can happen to you. If you cling to the limited, the unlimited cannot happen to you. A Guru’s business is not to teach you something, comfort you, or solace you. The Guru’s role is to demolish you but to make the demolition process so sweet that you thoroughly enjoy it. That’s a very tough job.

8 | What are the benefits of the Shambhavi Mahamudra that you teach as part of the Inner Engineering program?

Sadhguru: In the Inner Engineering program, we offer Shambhavi Mahamudra, a powerful and purifying energy technique that incorporates the breath. The practice greatly enhances your health and mental focus, it brings down your blood pressure and pulse rate, it reduces your sleep quota and there is enough medical evidence to prove that a host of other chemical changes occur in the body. But there is something else happening within you which you can only know by experience and which cannot be measured – you are blissful throughout the day.

9 | Is it also about being liberated and enhancing life’s possibilities? Could you elaborate on that concept?

Sadhguru: The whole purpose of the spiritual science is to awaken a human being to their ultimate possibility, so that they become a complete human being and live a full life on all levels – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Because the very purpose of life is to experience life in its fullest depth and dimension.

The deeper your involvement with life, the deeper your experience will be. So spirituality means ultimate involvement, not withdrawal from life. The only way to experience life is through involvement, but people hesitate to involve themselves because they are afraid of entanglement. This is simply because their involvement is very discriminatory.

If I am only involved with you and nothing else around me, invariably I will get entangled with you. But if your involvement is so indiscriminate that you are absolutely involved with everything that you are in touch with right now, this will leave you ecstatic and free from everything.

10 | What would you suggest to create a greater sense of joy and balance for yourself and people around you?

Sadhguru: Fundamentally, this is what is happening with people – they are trying to enjoy their life. You cannot enjoy your life but you can become joyful. If you are joyful, then if you do something, you enjoy it; if you don’t do anything, you are really fantastic. There are many ways to look at this. For example, suppose you lose your peace today. Initially, always the people at home will get the first dose. So if it continues, tomorrow you may pick a fight with your neighbor. If it continues, you go to some place like your office where it matters and yell there. Once you start yelling in a place where it has serious consequences for you, everyone around you knows that you need medical help.

Then they take you to a doctor. Initially, the doctor will try to talk you out of it. If that doesn’t work, the next thing is, they throw a pill into you. If you take this pill, you become a little peaceful. Not forever, but at least it works for a period of time. So, what is a pill? Just a little bit of chemicals. If you ingest these chemicals, you become tranquil. That means your tranquillity and peace are a certain kind of chemistry.

Similarly, your joy, love, and ecstasy are a certain kind of chemistry. Whether it is agony, misery, madness, stress, tension – everything has a chemical basis to it. When we say Inner Engineering, this is a technology of creating a blissful chemistry. So, if your chemistry is blissful, what this means is that you are no more in pursuit of happiness – your life is an expression of your blissfulness. If you are blissful by your own nature, where is the question of life or the surrounding situations doing something to you?

Now, you do whatever you think is most needed, the best that you can do. But you are no more a vested interest because you are not trying to extract happiness from the world. Your life is an expression of joy.

11 | I understand you play golf and ride a motorbike, do we all need to be passionate about something we enjoy?

Sadhguru: It is not about a craze for bikes or anything else. It is just that whether it is riding a motorcycle, playing golf or conducting a program, I do it with utmost intensity, with absolute passion and involvement. I don't think one thing is more important than something else. That is why I am involved with just about anything that is with me at that moment. That is what spirituality is. It means your interest and involvement in life has gone so deep, you want to know everything about life.

12 | Could you please tell me more about the Isha Foundation, why you founded it and what its ultimate mission is?

Sadhguru: The fundamental goal of Isha Foundation has been, and will always be, to make the spiritual possibility available to people. But at the same time, one reason why spiritual groups have lost their relevance to lots of people is simply because they did not attend to the external situations around them, even when they were capable of doing something.

Attending to these social situations can be done in many different

ways. Creating a possibility for spiritual transformation is a great thing for the social situation, but still, when certain extreme conditions exist in the society around us, we cannot just close our eyes to it and simply live on with our own blissfulness. When we can do something, when we have the resources in our hands and people who are eager to do something, we thought we can translate whatever inner experience that people have into some kind of action.

If I start talking about the plans that I have, usually people get scared, so I always release my plans in small installments. People are afraid of plans and dreams because their fear is always, "If it doesn't happen, what will happen?" If it does not happen, there is no problem; but if it happens, it will be wonderful.

The question is not whether it is going to happen tomorrow or not. The question is whether we have wonderful dreams for everyone around us. Our lives have become beautiful just by having wonderful dreams for all human beings on the planet. The more massive our dreams are, the more we should realize that probably we will only get to plant the seed. Someone else will see the tree and fruit much later. If you want everything that you start to find completion in your own lifetime, you should have petty dreams. If you have big dreams, you

will not see all of it in your lifetime. You just get it rolling, that's all.

When you plant a tree, your problem is not about who is going to sit underneath it or who is going to enjoy the shade and the fruit. When you are alive, you are joyous that one more leaf has come.

13 | How important are spirituality and the ancient science of yoga? Is Inner Engineering even possible without it?

Sadhguru: People today are anxious and neurotic like never before and whatever methods they have been using to handle their internal turmoil have not really worked, so looking towards Yoga is very natural. The yogic science is the only technology for human wellbeing which has lived for over 15,000 years. Today, nearly two billion people practice some form of Yoga simply because of its efficacy. It works!

There are definitely physical and mental benefits but that is not the essential nature of what Yoga is. The fundamental objective of Yoga is to make your experience of life so large and all-inclusive that instead of being an individual, you become a universal process.

To become something more than what you are right now is a fundamental longing in every human being. What you are seeking is boundless expansion. Boundless expansion can never happen through physical means. It can happen only if a dimension beyond

the physical becomes a living reality within you. To experience this dimension is the true purpose of Yoga. So in that sense, it is only Yoga that can truly address human wellbeing.

14 | Your organisation is supported by more than a million dedicated volunteers, I was told. That is amazing. But isn't there a downside? Volunteers can say no, or don't they?

Sadhguru: We have over nine million volunteers around the world, and we are involved in a variety of activities. In any management, one of the key factors is that if you do not perform, you will be fired. A volunteer means you cannot fire them! A volunteer means they are not trained for the job. All they have is enthusiasm – no training. If anybody has to go crazy, it is me.

Once I was conducting a program for the top 40 executives of an international company. It was a two-day event and we had about eleven volunteers there who were going about doing things. So these executives looked and saw the way our people were going around and they asked, "Sadhguru where do you get these people?" I said, "You don't get them. You have to make them." They asked, "How do you make them?" I said, "You have to make them fall in love with you."





They said, "Okay, how do we make them fall in love with us?" I said, "First you have to fall in love with them." They said, "Oh, they don't pay us for that!"

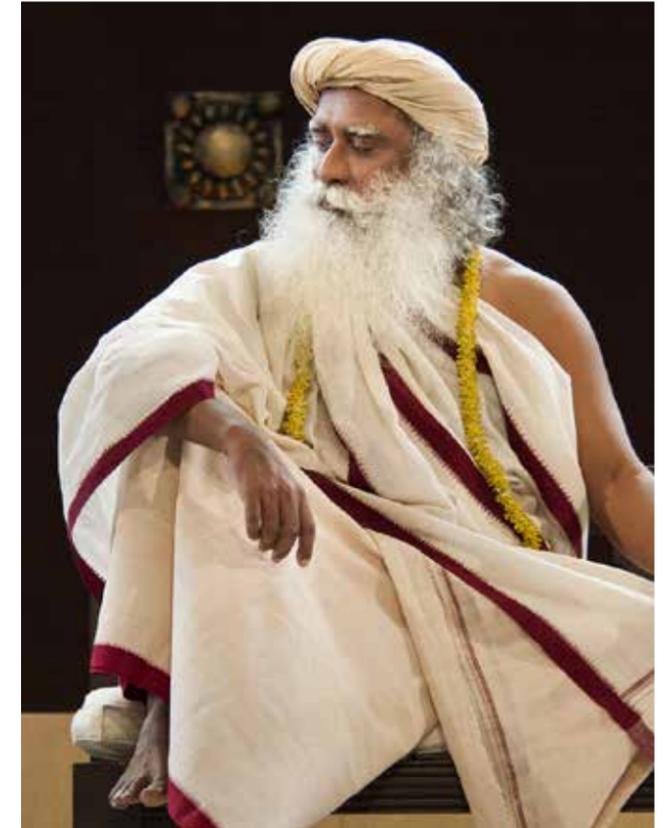
If the best has to come out from a human being, the first thing is, you must know how to keep yourself joyful, so that you can keep everyone around you joyful. If everyone who is working for you is really happy, they do not need much management. When you are an issue by yourself, you cannot deal with the outside issues with ease. When you are no more an issue, you handle the outside issues to the best of your ability, and that's all there is.

15 | Could you please say something about the importance of nutrition for mind and body? What should we eat and what not, and why is it best to eat twice a day?

Sadhguru: You may think that eating something through the day will help you be more active. But if you look at how your body feels with and without food in the stomach, you will see your body and brain work best when your stomach is empty. If food is constantly being processed in your digestive system, a certain amount of energy is naturally allocated towards that, so both your brain and body will not function at their best.

Unless you are an extremely physically active person or have some medical issue, if you are over 35 years of age, two meals a day would definitely be healthier for you. If you are eating more, you are unnecessarily burdening the system. If you can maintain this, you will live very well.

In terms of the quality of food that is entering you, vegetarian food is definitely far better for the system than non-vegetarian. We are not looking at it from a moral standpoint. We are just looking at what is suitable for the system – we try to eat that kind of food which makes you comfortable in the body. If you want to do any activity, it is extremely important that your body is at ease. So, the kind of food which keeps your body most at ease and easily nourished without struggle is what you should eat. Just experiment and see, when you eat vegetarian food in its live, uncooked form, what a difference it will make. Cooking the food destroys the life in it. Eating food after this process of destruction does not give the same amount of life energy to the system. But when you eat natural food, it brings a different level of aliveness in you. If you bring at least thirty to forty percent live food into your diet, if you eat more sprouts, fruit, and whatever vegetables that can be eaten in a live condition, it will sustain the life within you very well.



16 | What does the future hold, for you, the Isha Foundation, and in fact all of us?

Sadhguru: Across the planet, I find that doors are opening for the spiritual process like never before. Even universities, which were in many ways the last bastion of resistance, are opening up. Earlier, academics would never accept mysticism or spirituality as a part of their life but now they want weeklong sessions every year for their students.

Similarly, when the International Day of Yoga was adopted by the UN, 177 countries co-sponsored the resolution. No other resolution has received such support. It was almost like the whole world was waiting to take this step.

Having an International Day of Yoga means we are looking at wellbeing as a science – not as faith, not as something that happens to you by accident. We are not looking at the stars to fix our wellbeing. We are looking towards a scientific process of creating wellbeing consciously. Once this happens, Yoga becomes very relevant. You will see in the next 25-50 years, Yoga will become the norm on the planet, not an exception.