

Thousands link east-west in peace

International Day of Peace focus of spiritual, cultural celebration

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[Coimbatore, India, September 19, 2004] Approximately 50,000 people from all walks of life, some having traveled around the world, gathered in the south Indian foothills near Coimbatore to celebrate peace through expressions of joy, dance and song. A dazzling array of performances and cultural exhibits summarized Isha Fest, an annual event honoring the United Nations International Day of Peace. The festival each year honors a different region of the world. This year's theme, *North America: A Kaleidoscope of Cultures*, was organized by Isha Foundation volunteers of North America who traveled to India to help create cultural understanding between east and west.



North American performers delight audiences with song and dance through the decades

Many Indians and North Americans attending Isha Fest encountered a culture different from their own for the first time. One attendee from the USA commented, "It was not so much the blending of cultures, but the blending of people, person to person, that was touching." A young man from California said, "It was beautiful because I knew that on some level every person here was here for peace. I have been to supposed 'peace rallies' in Northern California which should have really been called 'hate rallies,' considering the hateful things that were

being said about the poor people involved in the actual violence. But here, no one was screaming about how terrible things are – just thousands and thousands of people coming together for peace, in peace.”

Event organizers say that the experience and expression of cultures through art, music and face-to-face interaction is the surest way to advance peace between people and countries. Isha Fest is about illustrating the unique tapestry of humanity beyond race, color, language and politics. The majority of Indians present had never personally interacted with North Americans. One woman commented, “The festival showed a wonderful dimension of North America, a more hidden dimension. I especially enjoyed their performances, their energy and the happiness and charm in their faces.”



Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev (seated, center) guided thousands in meditation on peaceful possibilities

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, founder of Isha Foundation and guest of honor at Isha Fest, addressed the audience about the essential role each person plays in affecting world peace, noting that if peace has to happen, an inner flowering has to happen. He emphasized, “One thing we need to understand is, the world is not a globe, the world is people as we experience it now. If we do not work for individual transformation, talking about world peace may be just one more entertainment in the world.” Adding, “By changing social situations, we can only create a conducive atmosphere for individual well-being, but you cannot bring about individual well-being. Only if each individual begins to experience himself as a human being, if he allows his humanity to flower within himself, which is the only way the divine can descend into him, only then there will be peaceful individuals, peaceful human beings. If there are no peaceful human beings, there is no peaceful world.”

Sadhguru is the inspiration of hundreds of thousands of people around the world who seek their ultimate human potential through the experiential yoga he offers as a spiritual science known as Isha Yoga. Students in many diverse settings now practice his blend of yoga and meditation, from rural villagers in Tamil Nadu to government

ministers in Delhi, from life-term prisoners to householders, from students to the affluent in India, the United States and Europe. Chairperson of Times of India, Mrs. Indu Jain, is an active proponent of peace initiatives at national and international forums and a yoga student of Sadhguru. In a message delivered at Isha Fest, Mrs. Jain expressed her deep appreciation of the efforts of Sadhguru and Isha Foundation in establishing peace and harmony in the world. She shared, “This is a belief I have gathered from many masters and saints that there is the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop non-violence. None other than Sadhguru can make us the torchbearers of peace. The more you develop a sense of non-violence in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms the surroundings and by and by sweeps the world. This is how we can achieve successfully in each country a ministry of non-violent defense. We will be able to motivate the future generations to join a shanti sena instead of a war sena.”

Establishing inner peace through Isha Yoga programs is rooted in the premise that information alone is not enough. The only way to discover truth is to experience it directly. Isha Yoga practitioners (or ‘Isha Meditators’ as they call themselves) attending Isha Fest insist that Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev is a rare spiritual master who is not interested in giving information or teaching a set of beliefs. One American woman who has been studying with him since his first visit to America in 1997 said, “He would attract a famous following if he took a more sensational approach, but instead he insists that the only way to facilitate positive change is through individual transformation – for each of us to experience the essential nature of our being. This takes time and commitment, but we are fortunate. He shows us how.”

Raising human consciousness through direct experience is the essence yoga, the precursor of peace, according to Sadhguru, who insists that a synthesis of spirituality and science is necessary to solve social, economic and world peace issues. Through his programs around the world, Sadhguru initiates the process for individuals to move toward this union, explaining, “The whole science of yoga is just this, learning to harness and direct your energies in the right way so that who you are finds its ultimate expression. These processes (Isha Yoga) definitely have created peaceful human beings.”

Isha Fest is a celebration of human potential, and a message to the world that inner change is not elusive or restricted to any religion, culture, or dogma. To demonstrate this, a fusion of east-west was expressed in a Peace Concert as Manish Vyas captivated the crowd with an eclectic mix of world music of western influence, and Vani Jairam represented the revered tradition of South Indian classical music. In the spirit of bridging cultures, themes of North America were reflected not only in performances and cultural programs offered on stage, but also in games, activities and even food stalls throughout the festival.

For this special day, participants from diverse social and economic backgrounds formed a microcosm of humanity existing in peace, seeing beyond their outer forms and differences to the inter-connectedness of life. One young Indian lady in teacher training at the Isha Yoga Center participated in a Native American tribal dance. She remarked, “We didn’t know anything about this Native American culture. In the dance we became bison and hunters and made a battlefield. Through giving myself totally to the dance, so many blocks in me – physical and mental – are gone. I don’t know how to express my thanks to Sadhguru for all he has done for me, so I took this opportunity to offer myself through the dance. After this performance, a new dimension has opened in me.”

Isha Foundation is a supporting partner of The International Day of Peace, devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples. To Isha Fest participants and all of mankind around the world, Sadhguru appealed, “So on this day, which the world is to celebrate as the Day of Peace; on this day in Isha, which is a celebration, I want to plead and beg all of you that the best thing that needs to happen in the world, that everybody needs to keep focus on is that the world or the humanity or individual human beings should know at least a little bit of peace within themselves; and whichever means they get there, that’s not the point. Somehow individual human beings need to become peaceful. Only then there is a possibility for a peaceful society on this planet.”

Many thousands of the people attending Isha Fest say they have noted changes in themselves, but wonder how long it will take to affect positive changes in the world. Is such a thing possible? In response Sadhguru urges, “Do not think of the future of the world on the basis of existing realities. Existing realities on the planet could be changed in a moment, because existing realities do not take into consideration people’s will, do not take into consideration people’s commitment, do not take into consideration the love in their hearts. If we dedicate ourselves to making this happen around us, we can see in our own lifetime something tremendous and dramatic happening on the planet.”

Editor’s Note: Isha Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to inner transformation as the basis for a peaceful and prosperous global community. Isha Founder, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, is an international speaker, author and peace advocate whose work transcends religious boundaries. He is a delegate to the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations and joins peace efforts throughout the world. Sadhguru is considered an enlightened yoga master who has profound spiritual and cultural insights on health and human values. Readers who are interested in information on his yoga and humanitarian programs may visit www.ishafoundation.org. Sadhguru's books on the essential nature of yoga are available at bookstores through New Leaf Distributing or Amazon.com.

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