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Indian Yoga teacher breathes peace

Shankar says world condemns attacks in India

By Christine Morente, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

SAN MATEO — The embodiment of peace and tranquillity walked silently into a room.

Long, black, wavy hair framed his slim face, and a full beard traced his genial smile.

But his eyes held pain when he spoke of the death, devastation and evil in Mumbai, India, perpetrated Tuesday morning by terrorists.

"This should not shake people's faith in peaceful means," said Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Tuesday afternoon. "We need to reassure people that the whole world unitedly condemns criminal acts."

Diminutive in his white traditional Indian outfit and gold shawl, Shankar is 50 years old.

Twenty-five years ago, he developed Sudarshan Kriya, rhythmic breathing of varied frequencies, which is said to have helped legions of people let go of their stress, depression and even illness. In 1982, he established the Art of Living Foundation, which has brought food, clothing and education to many Third World countries.

He compared his creation of the Sudarshan Kriya to writing a poem.

"It just happened," Shankar said. "It just came from intuition and inspiration."

For seven days, he took his teachings, and his yoga and meditation series, to the San Mateo County Event Center. He visits the Bay Area at least twice a year.

Shankar — deemed His Holiness by his followers — spreads the message of compassion, commitment to society, and a universal understanding of life.

This time, he is emphatic with his message after the bombings in India.

Early Tuesday morning, some 200 people were killed and hundreds more were injured after an Islamic terrorist group planted bombs on trains leaving from the Churchgate station in Mumbai, once called Bombay.

In the past, Shankar has met with governments, religious organizations and non-governmental organizations to get them to work together to stop the violence.

"We need to nip it in the bud," he said during a media briefing at the Event Center. "We need to walk together, cutting across religious boundaries and barriers, and uplift human values and work for peace and happiness for all."

He said the scale of Tuesday's attacks surprised him, but the threat had always been there. He adds that religious fanaticism and people being numb to violence is the root cause of terrorism.

"You have to bring everyone in the right direction," Shankar said. "To them, it's like, 'Look at how much I can destroy, or how much pain I can cause.' That type of pride in being violent is the worst thing. (But) inside their heart, there is a victim."

He also has met with violent individuals, especially in prisons, and have seen them regret the pain they've caused. So, he says education and the practice of yoga and meditation are essential.

"The (Art of Living fundamentals are) ... to realize the human values in life. We're a global family," Shankar said. "(And) with simple breathing techniques and meditation, (people's) whole attitude in life is changed. Breathing calms the mind and relieves the stress. I strongly believe transformation is a possibility."

His final message on Tuesday was to the militants responsible for the India bombings.

"I want to tell them that non-violence will win," he said. "We will adhere to our principles, come what may."

Sam, from Hayward, has heard Shankar lecture in San Jose. He took the yoga and meditation series Tuesday night. He did not want to give his last name.

"I need calmness," Sam said. "I think he's a genuine man of God, and I think we're all searching for that part of us, who want to connect with the divine, and I think he can teach us. Help us."

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