

Working to create peace and foster human values...

By Taylor Luck

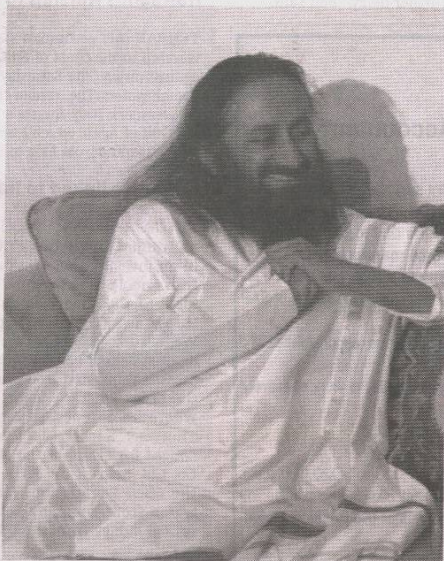
AMMAN — Currently on his second visit to Jordan, spiritual leader and humanitarian activist Sri Sri Ravi Shankar said his peaceful approaches can help not only beleaguered populations across the world, but also here in the Kingdom.

Using a breathing technique known as Sudarshan Kriya and self-development and peace concepts, Sri Sri established the Art of Living Foundation in 1982 in his native India.

He eventually expanded the humanitarian organisation to aid conflict-resolution efforts, peace negotiations, reconciliation and tending to those who suffer from natural or man-made disasters from China and the Balkans, to Sri Lanka, Lebanon and Iraq.

Sri Sri, who delivered a public talk in the capital on Saturday, said self-development and stress release is especially important for Jordan, which as a safe haven in the region, is host to many peoples fleeing conflict, persecution and other hardships.

"It is very important that [displaced persons] integrate into the society they are living in while maintain-



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

ing their cultural and ethnic identity, which can only be after freeing themselves of stress and trauma," Sri Sri told *The Jordan Times* yesterday, underlining the importance of reaching out to the younger generation.

"I would like the youth of Jordan to undergo youth

empowerment sessions to overcome restraints and realise their full potential," he said, adding that he aims to establish a centre to take care of the mental and personal health of those residing in the Kingdom.

Supporting self-empowerment techniques to over-

come trauma and violence through the Art of Living Foundation, has filled a need for a mediator in the world's conflicts, according to the spiritual leader.

"To resolve a conflict, a neutral moderator is needed to facilitate dialogue, not to impose himself or herself, but to mobilise people to come together for the common good," said Sri Sri, who has also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Sri Sri, who went to Iraq in 2007 as a peace ambassador upon the invitation of Prime Minister Nouri Maliki, said many leaders of various ethno-sectarian groups expressed willingness to open a dialogue.

The foundation has been working with thousands of Iraqis in Baghdad, Basra, Suleimaniya and Karbala, and Sri Sri was one of few figures who ventured outside the Green Zone and into Najaf, where he met with political and spiritual leaders.

"They came to me and said: 'We have only learned the art of dying, we want to learn the art of living'," he said, noting that in any conflict situation there are those who wish to prolong hostilities.

"It is only natural to have such anger, but there is no

point to keep going on and wanting revenge. People need to be healed mentally and spiritually; it will free them to move on," he said.

"Some people just don't want to resolve a conflict, and start enjoying problems in a form of masochism. That is the greatest challenge, making people realise that they want peace and to move on," he said, noting that the foundation has a centre in Iraq with volunteers promoting breathing techniques and encouraging national cohesion, conflict resolution and youth and women's empowerment.

In addition to being applied across the world, Sri Sri's message and techniques have already made an impact on many Jordanians, according to followers.

Iman Mutlaq, an investments broker, said although she was sceptical at first, she became so entrenched in the positive-thinking ideals of the Art of Living Foundation, that she is now undergoing training to become a teacher of Sri Sri's principles in Amman.

"I thought to myself, I am a businesswoman, I don't believe in any of this'," she said. But she found the breathing technique was therapeutic and rapidly

made a difference in her life.

"I changed a lot, I improved in work, at home, with my family and on my self," Mutlaq said, adding that the technique is useful for Jordanians of all ages.

"You spend too much time worrying about the past and the future, you have no time for the present and your quality of life suffers," she noted.

According to Mubadda Dallal, vice president of the foundation's Jordan branch, the country is in need of the sense of community service and volunteerism Sri Sri's teachings focus on.

"Jordan faces many challenges, both economic and social. Once you become peaceful with yourself you are more willing to give back to your community, your society and create a sense of national kinship," he said, noting that the foundation currently has over 300 active members in the Kingdom.

Sri Sri reiterated that all it takes is a simple change in attitude and mindset to make a powerful difference in anyone, of any age and any background.

"If you are miserable you spread nothing but misery, but if you are happy, you spread happiness," he said.