

nature isn't an outcome of mere intellectual understanding but must occur in the heart of one's own being. It is absolutely possible to awaken to the eternal Truth within ourselves because we are that already. We are just not conscious of it. It is not a millimetre away. It's just here at the very place where we intuitively feel our sense of existence. What a paradox that of 7 billion human beings alive on earth today, almost all of us miss the obvious Truth. Instead, mankind is living inside the dream where everyone thinks of themselves as nothing more than a person - a psychological, autonomous flesh and blood entity. Real satsang, which is stimulated by grace, is to question this apparent reality, in order to discover again the mystical nature of our true being.

From the hearts of those awakened ones, countless blessings pour out to this world, as they are the living example of that Truth to which they unceasingly point. Their lives inspire and encourage people to free themselves from the limiting and oppressive belief in personhood.

From your experience, what is the common cause of suffering?

Ignorance of our true nature as pure consciousness is responsible for all human misery. We have no idea that there is a dimension to ourselves that is not locked inside the bubble of personal experiencing. As a person, our attention is mostly engaged with the play of transience that makes up the content of our waking state. Little attention, therefore, goes to consciousness, our essential being, which is a kind of space within which the movement of what we call 'life' is played out and observed.

Every sentient being is naturally conscious of its existence. Everyone knows and refers to themselves as 'I am'. When we say 'I am' it points to consciousness, to sentience. 'I am' is the untaught way of self-knowledge. However, consciousness, due to the conditioning it has received, started identifying with the instrument through which it can taste its existence. Hence, the idea 'I am only the body and personality' was born. It is a severe limitation upon one's being and the chief cause of suffering in this world. But each one has the potential inside themselves to discover their inherent freedom and escape this delusion.

On a deeper level, this is really what motivates our existence. Unaware of the tremendous harmony that exists in the universe, the human race is restless.

This restlessness is actually a search for lasting satisfaction. As persons we are compelled for a while to search for fulfilment in the fleeting objects of this world, which are time-bound. But that existential itch is only alleviated once and for all when our personal identity is merged with our timeless being.

What would you say to people who feel disconnected from themselves but find the concept of self-inquiry too frightening? How can they start the journey back to themselves?

Take courage. When a human being becomes aware of their disconnectedness, already a universal process is moving underneath the conscious mind. A shift on the inside is already starting to take place; you might call it grace, yearning, disillusionment or dissatisfaction, but it acts as motivation for change. Not everyone is ready for the full deal. Each route is unique. One individual, who may appear very delicate, could be made to face intense experiences as if being thrown into the middle of a roaring ocean. That is what is meant to happen for them. Generally speaking though, people step onto their path in small steps, but each step must challenge something within ourselves which we consider to be vital. When things are too comfortable, we fall and remain asleep to the Real.

Does the Divine try to bring us all to a place of Truth?

Yes, that is the way the universe works. It is totally benevolent and supportive, though if you're not conscious of it, this statement will not mean anything to you or you might even disagree completely.

When your mind begins to work in new ways, whereby it's coming out of its conditioned groove and isn't so full of resistance, pessimism and doubt anymore, you will start to move inside a new field of presence that is true, spontaneous and spacious. We have a lot of misconceptions to overcome about ourselves and the world. If you feel a pull within yourself for authentic Self-discovery, know that there are many positive forces in the universe that assist your awakening. Also some negative forces are operating within your own self that will try to distract you. However, if the urge for Truth and freedom is genuine, you will move forward in a positive way, breaking through all seeming obstacles. As I often say, if you want to be free, happy and true,

nothing can stop you. You could be from a family of atheists, or even be one yourself, and still, life may just twist your consciousness into a reorientation from being a person into conscious presence, which is the purpose of intelligent existence and true spirituality. Life is beautifully unpredictable like that. Ultimately, it's all part of the great river's flow as it moves again towards the ocean of being from where it was first born. *I would like to say to everybody, you cannot be separate from the source of existence. Just strive to find that gem of pure understanding within your own heart so that you awaken to the living Truth.*

You talk about 'Forty Days and Forty Nights' - the time when life is at its most challenging. How can someone stay connected to the Truth even when things are breaking down in front of them?

Actually, it's when things begin to break down that one's urge for the Truth grows even stronger. When our lives are too comfortable, we rarely look inside our own hearts; we get easily locked into interests which are shallow, selfish and mundane.

Hardships can force us into discovering muscles we didn't know we had.

God's benevolent force, rather than just spoon-feeding you, presents you with options and clues so that you must strive a little, but in the end discover your true strength. It has to encourage or even prod you towards opening up more in terms of trust. Your ability to trust and take the opportunities given to you is part of the dynamic game of life. A lot of people have this idea that once you're free, you sit around and just stare at the stars, but it's not like that at all. In fact, you grow more deeply into your true humanity and feel empathy with beings on a much more global scale - it's no longer about personal satisfaction. It's a question of maturity. We have this notion that spirituality is beneficial and will make us grow and become more intuitive. This is true. However, unexpectedly, we often find ourselves first torn open and pushed into unexplored spaces until we eventually come to recognise the irrefutable Truth right here where we have always been. This is a much more authentic and alive experience than merely obtaining things to satisfy our own projections, even more so in the case of our spiritual pursuits.

So life gives us opportunities to develop?

Tough experiences often come when we need to push through things. Even in a state of awakening, some amount of subtle tension remains in order to keep aspiration alive inside of us, so that we don't become complacent. But the depth of suffering or misery is alleviated as we grow more fully back into our original nature. It's when we hold on to our identity as a person, with its attachments, desires, fantasies and fears, that resistance is at its strongest. The universe allows us to experience the sweet or bitter fruits of our own projections, so that the necessary aspirations can move us beyond those limitations. Of course, life is not just about hardships and challenges.

Isn't it possible to expand our spiritual growth and consciousness through engaging with daily life and relationships?

Firstly, nothing in the universe stops you from being what you are. However, the more deeply attached we are to self-image, the blinder we become to the deeper reality of our true Self. The greater our dependency on material things or relationships, the more distracted we feel we become from that core sense of being. That's not to say that relationships are bad - everything can still happen within our own spiritual awakening - it's just that we need less than we thought we did. We come into a field of deep satisfaction in the essence of being. Of course, that doesn't mean we won't have relationships or a job; that's all part of life. But we must be clear that the need for things to build one's ego does distract from our own completeness. The sincere seeker will find a lot of space in that, for what is most important is to discover our true nature and to be effortlessly happy inside our heart. You can have all the trappings of life and still lack a sense of fulfilment. In a way that's good because it shows these things in themselves are not enough. They can still be there, but they shouldn't be on the front page of consciousness.

