PEOPLE often ask me about the role of surrender on the spiritual path. I tell them they cannot achieve it. Surrender is not an act. Surrender is a certain quality. If you try to surrender to someone, you will only become a slave. You will not become free.

I have never asked anyone to surrender to me. I do not want such an indignity to befall anyone! The spiritual path is not about you surrendering to the Guru or to anyone else. It is about you becoming surrender. The Guru is just a catalyst to bring about that quality in you.

The world we live in has always taught us how to conquer. The need to conquer comes from the fundamental fear of losing yourself. It is because you do not know how to handle that fear that you seek conquest. Whether it is wealth, power, people or relationships, the impulse to conquer happens because you feel inadequate.

This inadequacy has happened because you have identified yourself with little things. When your whole identification is rooted in this little bit of flesh, it is natural to feel insufficient. Looking around at the vastness of existence around you, you feel small and fearful. So, you try to become bigger by acquisition and conquest. People around you have to praise you and tell you that you are special all the time; otherwise, you feel lost.

If you want to know the ultimate, however, the only way is surrender, not conquest. But for the logical mind, surrender is disgraceful. It is also terrifying because it means dissolution.

But a less alarming definition of surrender would be this: choosing not to identify yourself with the limited. How can we do this? It is to handle this question that people created a device called God. They said, “Drop the identification with little things, and identify with something beyond. Identify with God.”

But the problem with this approach is that you have reduced God to another form or concept and have grown identified with that. On top of that, my God and your God keep quarrelling, keep waging wars against each other!

Every device that is created needs to be overhauled periodically, because it gets corrupted over a period of time. Once people realise how the mechanics work, the device will not function. New devices have to be created. That is absolutely fine, because the device itself is of no consequence. How well it works is all that matters. Getting stuck with a limited idea of God is like me pointing to a flower, but you getting stuck with the pointing finger and missing the flower completely.

Shifting your identification from one device to another can be tricky. It may take you a whole lifetime to make the shift. This is where the live Guru comes in. His function is to keep breaking your identifications, and hastening your process of evolution. You are not capable of practising faith or surrender. But you are capable of commitment. In the Isha Yoga programmes, we start with a seven-day commitment. If that works for you, you extend the commitment for a longer period. Later, you might choose to extend it for a lifetime.

So, you do not try to surrender. You just stop identifying with what you consider to be yourself. If you have to identify with something, do not identify with that which boosts you; identify with that which breaks you. When you begin to dismantle your defences, your self-created walls, you become complete receptivity. When that happens, the Guru doesn’t have to do anything. His business is just to create a situation where you drop your barriers, your limited identifications. The rest will happen by itself.

Surrender sounds very enslaving. Logically, it is pure slavery. But experientially, it is absolute liberation. It is like an absence. You cannot create an absence. You can create light, but you cannot create darkness. When you switch off the light, you realise darkness has always been there. And that is surrender—collapsing back into the vastness of existence, into the boundlessness of life itself. ❁

Sadhguru, a yogi, is a visionary, humanitarian and a prominent spiritual leader (www.ishafoundation.org)