ONE day, when I proposed planting flowering trees at the yoga centre, a very practical ashram resident asked me, “What’s the use? Why not plant okra or bitter gourd instead?” He was right, of course. Flowers have no real utilitarian value for us. If you look at it biologically, flowers are just tools for the plant to reproduce. But I would like to live among flowers and be a little hungry, rather than live among bitter gourd with a full stomach!

A flower can be many things for people. For a lover, it may be the face of the beloved. For a scientist, it may be just an attempt at reproduction. But for a mystic, a flower is the Divine blossoming in the highest possible way.

What is the significance of a flower? Why are flowers so often used in worship? Simply because the flower represents the pinnacle, the most subtle and beautiful dimension in the life journey of a plant. This is why the traditional offering to the Divine is a flower, not a root, stem or branch. You will find human beings are variously inclined. If someone is always thinking of multiplying his assets, his interest would be in seeds. If somebody is always thinking of shelter and security, his interest will be in the trunk and branches of the tree. If somebody is thinking of pleasure, his interest will be only in fruit. There are people who plant a mango sapling today and immediately start waiting for the fruit. They don’t care what is happening with the plant. The unfurling of each leaf brings them no joy. For them, only the fruit matters.

Compared to the trunk, seed and fruit, the flower is the most fragile and transient dimension of a plant. The entire effort of any spiritual process on the planet is always to become like a flower. A flower may have no real use for us, but it is a glorious expression of life. Its fragrance pervades the world. No one can miss it.

Life in its many manifestations is essentially a variety of transactions. The transactions can be of many kinds—between nations, people, cultures and individuals. Transactions can be cellular, atomic and cosmic. Our every breath is a transaction with the universe, even if we’re not aware of it. Most people approach life transactions looking only for a takeaway. Just drop this one calculation: “What is the takeaway?” Don’t try to get anything even out of your spiritual practices. Just learn to waste some time! If you look for a takeaway, you will only get petty things. When you are not trying to be anything or get anywhere, you learn to simply be.

It is because people do not have the necessary awareness to simply be, that an alternative was suggested in all spiritual traditions: to give. Giving as an act is a deception, because everything that we have, including this body, is a loan from this planet. But if giving is a way of being, if your heart is constantly open, you become a doorway to the Divine. And then Grace has no choice but to enter.

Although a utilitarian mind may not perceive this, the flower is in constant transaction with everything around. The transaction is subtle, but the end result is the seed and the fruit.

If you can just sit and do absolutely nothing, you will see the highest level of transaction is happening right here, right now. This transaction of cosmic proportions is what we call the blossoming of human consciousness. When consciousness blossoms, you become an abode of Divine Grace.

This is why the spiritual process is always described as a ‘flowering’, not a ‘fruiting’ of consciousness. Those who seek fruit are those who want to extract some personal benefit out of every process. There is deep pleasure-seeking involved. But someone who understands life profoundly knows how to receive the beauty of flowers. He knows that the flower represents the most exuberant expression of life. Nothing more is needed.

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