LISTENING IN WITH ...

AWAKENING TO OUR TRUE SELVES

PANACHE DESAI was born in London to Indian parents and was raised in a deeply spiritual family. He came to the United States as a young man in 2001 to spend six months at an ashram in meditation and prayer. A few years later, he experienced a spiritual awakening and began a detailed process of integration. He’s now a renowned spiritual teacher who facilitates others’ ability to open to their own divinity. Here, he talks with Unity Magazine editor KATY KOONTZ about how these chaotic times are actually a catalyst, requiring us to open our hearts wider than ever before and to discover and align with our essential selves. In the process, we’re redefining what it means to be human.
KATY KOONTZ: You refer to yourself as a vibrational catalyst. Can you explain what that means?

PANACHE DESAI: I go to a very peaceful, very present place inside of myself where there’s pure potential. It’s a place free of content, identity, and expectation. From that space, I remember who I am and emanate that to others, while I also remind them of who they are. All the wisdom traditions teach that the most profound form of healing is returning to connection with one’s self, remembering and awakening to who we are at the deepest level. With vibrational transformation, I’m reminding people of who they really are. Everything else then spontaneously begins to fall away— their sadness, their depression, their stories, their limitations, their identity—until eventually all that’s left is their divine essence that they were born to be and express in this world.

KK: Can you describe how you developed this capacity?

PD: My journey began before I was born. When my mother was three months pregnant with me, she traveled from my parents’ home in London to India to be blessed for my birth by Baba Muktananda. He’s a Siddha from a 5,000-year-old Hindu lineage known for awakening people’s experience of their own divinity and their divine potential simply through being in their presence. He told my mother I was here to do God’s work and blessed me in the womb.

KK: Can you describe any others?

PD: Another is developing radical personal empowerment, where we’re able to trust our guidance and intuition, follow our hearts, and allow the heart to have its rightful place as the most dominant organ in the body. That’s coming back to God. I’m not talking about God as an external phenomenon. I’m talking about connecting with the God within.

KK: You teach that crisis is a catalyst that’s meant to elevate us. Is that why we seem to be having so many crises in the world right now—starting with COVID-19?

PD: This is just the beginning of so much that’s going to happen. We’re going to see one form of crisis after another for 10 years, and the purpose of this time is to restore harmony and balance. We’re being forced to feel the powerlessness and hopelessness that constitute victimhood. Every single person is having their false sense of control removed from them. We’re being shown the fragility of life, the interconnectedness of all life, and that we exist beyond the boundaries of nations, race, religion, ideology, sexual identity, and socioeconomic backgrounds because the virus affects everybody. This experience is awakening us to the reality of oneness. We’re also growing in our empathy and in our capacity for connection.

Everything we took for granted, any sense of entitlement we had, and whatever we considered normal before the pandemic has gone out the window. It’s just gone. We’re now in the midst of redefining what it means to be human. We can no longer identify with what’s outside of us as the truth of who we are.

KK: Many people are doing a complete reevaluation of their lives.

PD: No one can go through a crisis and not undergo some form of self-
evaluation. Even people who don’t want to be aware are being made aware of how in denial they are, how much they’re numbing themselves or running away from being with themselves. We now get the chance to think, What am I living for? How am I spending my time? After all, time is the only real commodity. How we spend it determines how well we’ve lived or if we’re just chasing things outside of ourselves, living for trinkets of separation. If we’re living solely for all of these external milestones that we’re conditioned to believe are important, then we’re wasting our time.

**KK**: Many relationships are being tested—and ultimately strengthened—because of this.

**PD**: Absolutely. In the age of the coronavirus, is it worth holding on to any resentment or any anger toward anyone who’s upset you in any way? Is it worth holding on to your story or the thing you wanted that didn’t happen? We’re being given this incredible opportunity to unburden ourselves of all of these things that we were holding on to that allowed us to continue to feel victimized. But there’s nothing really to fight against. Life is just doing what life is doing, and we have the blessing, in this moment, to align with it. That’s the miracle of this time.

**KK**: My favorite line from your latest book, You Are Enough, is: “Why are you still holding people’s inability to meet you in an expanded state of awareness against them?” That’s quite a reframing.

**PD**: We’re looking for love on a planet of people who don’t love themselves. We’re looking for acceptance and approval in people who don’t accept and approve of themselves. We’re looking to others for things that they don’t have the capacity to give us. What we’ve forgotten is that we’re only ever interacting with ourselves and that all of this world is nothing more than the manifestation of our own state of consciousness.

If you’re having a reaction to something you see playing out in the world, that’s because it’s inside of you. We’re being given a crash course in unwinding everything inside of us that’s undermining us. So if you’re watching the news and it makes you angry, great! That’s your entry point into being with any sense of powerlessness or hopelessness that you feel inside. It’s the same with feeling fear or sadness. It’s as if we’re watching the news and it makes us feel inside. It’s the same with feeling fear or sadness. It’s as if we’re watching the news and it makes us feel inside. It’s the same with feeling fear or sadness. It’s as if we’re watching the news and it makes us feel inside.

**KK**: Sounds a bit overwhelming.

**PD**: But when we understand that we’re all acting out some energy that we’re either owning or unwilling to own, and when we become 100 percent accountable for everything we are seeing, feeling, and experiencing, then we’re free. The only reason we’re suffering is that we don’t understand how this reality works. Everything in our reality is responding to how we feel about ourselves, and if we don’t feel we’re enough, then our life is going to reinforce that feeling through every opportunity and every medium there is.

As long as we feel victimized—as if it’s happening to us—we’re perpetuating our suffering. Once we make the commitment to awaken, then we can begin to unwind everything inside of us that makes us feel as if we’re not enough. We’re able to respond, instead of react.

**KK**: You teach about the importance of feeling, not just thinking. Can you say more about that?

**PD**: The incompleteness we’re dealing with isn’t at the level of the mind, it’s at the level of feeling. Until we’re able to resolve this feeling of not being enough, we can’t truly enjoy the wonderful gift of being human. It’s only in western cultures, so-called advanced civilizations, that the mind has become so prominent. Life has never had anything to do with thoughts, or the level of belief, or even transformation. It’s just amazing to me that the whole transformational space has been dominated by exercises related to the mind. To ancient civilizations and cultures, nothing has to do with the mind. We’re vibrational beings. The mind is just an apparatus. It quantifies. It analyzes. It compartmentalizes. That’s all it does. But you can’t use the same instrument that analyzes to become peaceful. It’s not going to happen that way. The most intelligent organ in the body is the heart.

**KK**: The mind certainly has its gifts—like scientific advancements. But that comes from a different place, is that what you’re saying?

**PD**: One hundred percent. Einstein was able to innovate and create because of his connection to the deeper parts of himself, to the deeper mystery that was inside of him. Even though he had all of this mental ability, his greatest discoveries didn’t come from that. His mind was just translating these deeper impulses into mathematical formulas.
We receive through the heart, and then we analyze and interpret through the mind. But what if we could just give up the need to figure things out? What if we could just live permanently connected to the heart? Nothing in nature needs to go to a self-help workshop.

**KK:** That’s certainly true!

**PD:** Everything in nature innately knows how to be itself and how to function in the world. We’ve become this mind-dominant society, and listen, it’s been great—we’ve been to the moon—but the one frontier we haven’t explored is the soul. Until we explore that frontier, we’re dealing with a lopsided, imbalanced way of being. The only thing that brings peace is knowledge of true self—who we really are, what our greater purpose is.

**KK:** You teach how important acceptance is for transformation. Can you say more about that?

**PD:** People are incorrect in the assumption that something outside of them needs to change. That would mean God doesn’t know what God’s doing. It also invalidates the perfection of their own design. Acceptance is the fastest path to oneness. When we can accept something, we align with it. Then we’re no longer in dissonance around it. Look at how much time, effort, and energy everyone’s spending on trying to have some other version of themselves (or of their spouse or of whatever) show up outside of them. They’re missing the point.

Everything in nature was created perfectly. The same infinite intelligence that is right now unfolding the universe into greater levels of infinity created you. At some point, you have to stop trying to change your thoughts and fix things. Relax into who you are, and then you’ll discover the purpose behind why you have the thoughts you do.

**KK:** But shouldn’t we want to heal?

**PD:** Vibrational transformation isn’t about healing. It’s not about changing. It’s about radical acceptance, coming into alignment with what is to restore harmony. When we restore harmony in the body, for example, the body heals itself. Unless there’s an acceptance, and then an embracing of what is, transformation hasn’t happened. You know, if we spent as much time ending our resistance to ourselves and our lives as we do trying to effect some external outcome, the world would already be golden. Everybody would already be in harmony and peace.

**KK:** Tell me, how does grace fall into this equation?

**PD:** We create this identity, and then we present it to the world. We bolster it, defend it, and protect it. Ultimately, a crisis shows us the cracks in our identity, and those cracks are the portals through which grace comes in. So it’s super important to recognize the blessings and the gifts of crisis.

I know this in my own life because of everything I went through with my daughter Celeste. She was born with a congenital heart defect and, after a series of open-heart surgeries, finally had a heart transplant at 18 months. This experience put me on my knees, and I ultimately surrendered every aspect of my life to God.

**KK:** So many people think of God as being outside of them. But that’s not at all the God you are referring to here.

**PD:** We have this external deification of God because we think so little of ourselves. We’re fundamentally led to believe that we’re unworthy. So God has to exist as an external phenomenon, and then we’re beholden to God’s mood. I’m not talking about the version of God that has anger-management issues or that smites people. I’m talking about an infinite presence of love that we’re all a part of, that we all came from, and that we will all return to. That’s what God is, and ultimately, we are all God. We’re each an individuated aspect of God. We’re the ocean experiencing itself as the drop.

**KK:** Is our awakening to that truth why you call this the era of the soul?

**PD:** Yes, because the reason the world is the way it is today is that people are living from a sense of separation. This is the source of all human suffering. The only way to return to oneness is through a mass spiritual awakening, an emergence of who we are at the level of the soul. Everything else is just addressing a symptom.

Panache Desai is an international speaker, coach, and spiritual teacher who has taught millions both in person and through his online offerings. He’s on the faculty at the Omega Institute, the Kripalu Center, and 1440 Multiversity and has addressed the United Nations’ Society for Enlightenment and Transformation. Desai’s two books are Discovering Your Soul Signature (Spiegel & Grau, 2014) and You Are Enough (HarperOne, 2020). Visit panachedesai.com.