

# Kiran Desai

Author

## 'Writing means liberation, therefore spirituality'

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**Kiran Desai, Author.**

### **What does spirituality mean to you?**

It does not mean religion to me. It is a journey absolutely rooted in my work, which is the centre of my attempt to understand, to try and find a place of humanity and also a place of freedom.

### **Do you believe you are guided and protected by a superior force?**

There is a great comfort in thinking that way whether it is a guardian angel or a guru or the divine. But I have a hard time getting my ethical sense around it. Because then you are stuck with the inevitable question which I always put to people who believe in such protection: what about the people who die of famine or in a war, those who have absolutely no access to dignity, does it mean they were just not anointed? Why would you be the special one?

### **Do you believe you have a special mission or purpose in this life?**

I do not know that we are here for any kind of purpose at all, it would have a religious overtone I do not adhere to. Also, I am weary of the destiny concept. Nations use it and abuse it, with missionary

implications that can justify all sorts of harmful initiatives. On a personal level, writing actually came quite late. I always read – I read to escape and it felt so much more real than the real world. It took me a long time to realize that writing could do the same for me and even better. The Indian school system is so ruthless, if you have any artistic inclination it is driven out of you. I was so unhappy in school. So when eventually I went to an arts college in the United States, where suddenly it was a legitimate pursuit, I took a writing class and that was it. It was like a revelation, like a Eureka. I wrote my first stories, and it didn't work, but it didn't matter, I was happy.

### **What is spirituality for you in your day to day life?**

Writing itself is for me an act of liberation and freedom and therefore of spirituality. It feels like a mystical act in many ways. It is built up in every aspect of my life and of my being, in the way I live, I sleep, I behave. Hours pass by when I write like in a trance, in the same way meditation or mystical experiences are often described. I find that I am incredibly and entirely happy in those moments. It can be scary though, because when you are so consumed, it is easy to depart from the world, and you start wondering about your psychological health, about the kind of life you wish to lead. I do not think I solved those questions but when writing the *Inheritance of Loss* I was really aware that if I was to continue down that road, I could just go.

### **Can you tell us about a unique experience that changed or shaped your spiritual beliefs?**

There was no particular moment but because I mostly equate spirituality to my work, I can say that this latest book, *The Inheritance of Loss*, was certainly a deeper process and an attempt to understand the basic things of what we consider right and wrong, what is honesty, how I look at things. So in that sense it was a growing up and very meaningful, shaping experience.

### **What are your spiritual inspirations?**

I did not grow up religiously, but in many ways I think of my parents as quite spiritual people and a certain degree of humanity and thought, the ability to be silent and think things through was certainly emphasized at home.

### **If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be reincarnated as?**

I do not see what supports the many stories about reincarnation, except for the hope that we do not vanish. I do not believe that souls return over and over again until they learn a lesson. And in any case, I would not wish to come back as a being in a particular form, I would much rather be water, or air, which I suppose I will be in any case, so my wish will be fulfilled!

### **If there was one question you could ask god, what would it be?**

I am not a person who thinks of god, it is not even remotely a presence in my life, the feeling of 'a' god, or 'The' god. Besides, I have so many doubts, I could talk about them for days, but I could not encapsulate them into one single question.

### **What is your idea of happiness?**

It cannot be a selfish endeavour, defined in terms of your little patch of the world. The location of one's happiness may ultimately be so small that it lies in the humblest definition of all, a definition which actually changes every day. Is it about eating a nice potato at the end of the day? Maybe...