

Ram Kumar

Painter

The Delhi-based artist believes art is the highest form of spirituality

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Ram Kumar, Painter.

What does spirituality mean to you?

Certain values that come from my upbringing and that became an integral part of who I am. Though I have succeeded in reaching that mode, art is also a form of spirituality, as ideally it would take me to another mode of existence, in the same way spirituality shall.

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

I do not think there is an external force guiding life. Of course certain things can happen by chance, but rather than wait for some external intervention, I believe that we are responsible for what happens. We are the guides. And in fact, it is not important for me to know if God exists. I take life as it comes and do my work as I feel I ought to.

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

Of course for me, life's purpose has been to paint. But it is not something I knew without hesitation since I was a child. As my uncle was a banker, I thought I was destined to become one and went on studying business. But one day in university, I saw an exhibition: it was the first time in my life I saw a painting. I was so overwhelmed that I immediately inquired about art classes and began learning. I was lucky to have an inspiring teacher and a supportive father. I was fortunate thereafter to find ways of making a living from my art. So gradually, I became more and more passionate about it and knew I could not do anything else.

What is spirituality for you in your day-to-day life?

To try and be good and true to myself and to others.

What is the role of spirituality in your art?

In a way, I could describe art as the highest form of spirituality—as far as I am concerned. But it is an ideal, not something I have attained until now. I wish I would paint at least one good painting in my life, one that I would look at and feel: "this is really unique". That painting has not come yet. In fact, to attain that ideal, I guess I would have to lead a different kind of life and become like a sadhu. It is rather impossible to reach that state in a city, with its multitude of distractions. So I try to minimize my interactions with all those potential disturbances. On the other hand, I feel that in any case art is not a finished product. One cannot see a painting independently from the other. It is a continuous expression of my evolving existence.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

I grew up in a middle-class Hindu family. So even though I do not believe in rituals, mantras, miracles and so on, certain concepts and beliefs that were part of my childhood became a part of who I am. Also, in the winters of Shimla where I grew up, I had many moments of solitude, collecting my thoughts, reflecting on the things of life. That connection to nature has been a constant inspiration.

If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be?

I do not believe in reincarnation, I do not think there is something beyond. I believe in the present.

If there was one question you could ask God, what would it be?

Why question?

What is your idea of happiness?

To control my desires. I would say I am a happy man...

The writer is a French traveller who has worked in international relations, classical music, journalism and psychology. But it is her particular interest in spiritual matters that has led her to devise this version of The Proust Questionnaire: "It helps us to see people who they really are inside."