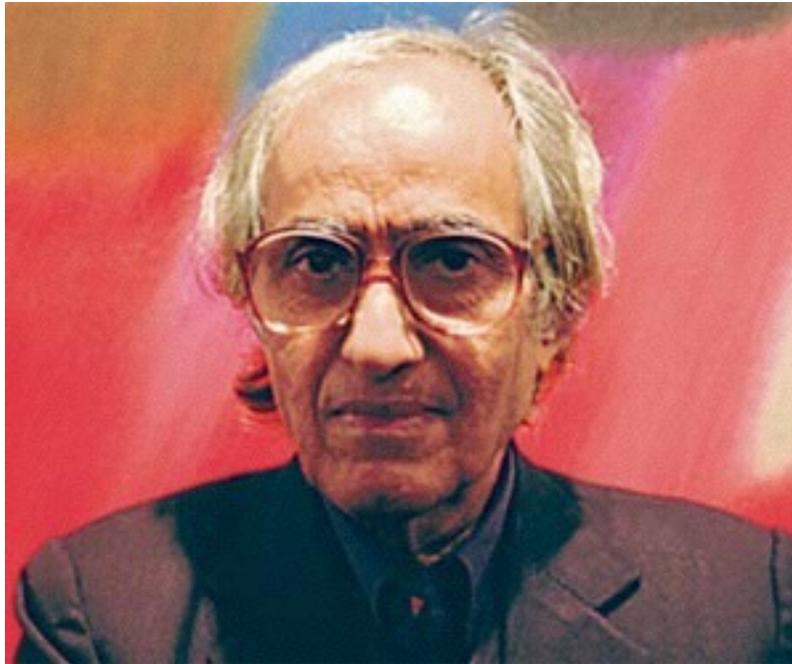


Gopi Gajwani

Artist

'I pray through my painting'

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Gopi Gajwani, Artist.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is a very sacred and very personal word – I do not compare my understanding to anybody else's, and of course I would never try to preach and convince others. My teacher is within me. If I am doing a bad thing, my teacher is saying "hey, you are doing something wrong". Only my own guru, my god inside can tell me so. If I am hurting by mistake somebody, immediately my conscience, my teacher would tell me it is wrong and I regret it. Who made me realize "go and say sorry"? This shapeless, formless force inside. And all this has nothing to do with a religion or ritual of any kind.

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

Of course, this force inside guides me about the right and wrong, and is also a form of protection. I never feel alone. And to me, it is about always keeping one's eyes open to be aware that someone is holding our hand. Then one can live fearlessly. It feels like being in a cradle.

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

I generally do not want to think of the reasons I live and so on but I can tell you this: nobody in my family had ever painted; yet, as a child, I was an utter failure in everything but painting. No one knew where it came from in me. I simply felt there was nothing else I could do but paint. And the way I have seen my "mission" is to honour those sense and abilities given by God by painting as honestly as possible, in the best way I can, without worrying about the outcome – whether a painting is sold or not and whether the critics are laudatory or not.

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

There is no need to go to a temple, perform rituals or do prayers. Just not hurting anyone, and doing what I feel I ought to do – that is my daily prayer and way of life.

What is the role of spirituality in your art?

Art is spirituality. I treat this place as my home, studio, and temple – I pray here all day long, through my paint.

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

A short story I read as a child marked me profoundly. It is the tale of an extremely poor man, who one night saw a light like one thousand suns sitting on his bed. It was an angel, holding a golden book and turning pages with millions of names on them – the names of all those who remember God every day. The old man's name was not there. So he asked if there was a book with the names of people loving other people – the angel nodded and disappeared. The next night the angel was back, holding a different book with the names of the people God loved – and his name was on top. So when I read it, it taught me so many things – the old man did not claim to worship God, just to love other people, and yet he was the most loved by God...

What are your spiritual inspirations?

This feeling that the divine is inside – my parents and grand-parents definitely played a major role in forming it. They were god-fearing (but not religious) people.

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

Of course it is an absolute mystery if reincarnation occurs or not – but were I to be born again, I would simply ask this: give me a sense so that I do not forget You.

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

I feel that I know nothing and He knows it all, but that if I was to ask something, He could say "see, you asked for it..." and I would get into trouble. So I'd rather not ask a thing.

What is your idea of happiness?

I am happiest when I walk, because He is walking with me.