

Parul Vadehra

Director of Vadehra Art Gallery

'The purpose of life is to find happiness'

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For Parul Vadehra, Director, Vadehra Art Gallery, God just needn't be an idol. She feels it would be arrogant of us to think that God resembles us.

What does spirituality mean to you?

The belief in something higher than yourself - not necessarily in a religious sense, but more in an entity or a force, an energy above and beyond humans, beyond the earth, beyond the solar system. There is so much chaos in the universe that if not for this force, everything would be colliding and disintegrating.

How did you come to this feeling?

If it was just us it would be a scary place to be, so there must be something else. There are so many shades of gray in humans. So hopefully there is a benevolent entity watching out for everyone. A more scientific side in me asks where is the proof of afterlife, of rebirth and all those things. And I have questioned times and again our mythology. But I am not an atheist. God just needn't be an idol - I feel it would be arrogant of us to think that God resembles us.

If God is so benevolent, why all the suffering we see everywhere?

I do not have an answer to it. I keep asking myself the same question. Saying that it's people's karma does not satisfy me. If I consider that there is only a force, a scientific energy keeping things going, then there are no personal feelings attached to it, no benevolent aspect and no contradiction with the overwhelming presence of suffering. But another side in me wants to hope there is somebody listening to me. I do pray and it's important to me.

Who do you pray to?

Our family believes in a saint, Sai Baba. So I pray to him and I consider him like a confident, someone I can constantly talk to.

Why do you believe in him?

Because I've done so all along. I know his life story. I feel he was a very good man and it's good to follow good people's example. I go to the place where he is buried every year. It may be all in the head, but I definitely feel something special when I go there, more than in any other religious place I visited.

What is the purpose of life?

To find happiness.

What does it entail?

I don't dwell on the future much. What matters is how I feel here and now. I want to enjoy my career, have a family I love and that loves me back, and enough time to spend with them.

Why this career?

I fell into it by chance. After my marriage I took some time off to think about what I would do. My husband's family who runs the gallery suggested I join and I did. It's been great ever since. It matters to me if I can make a difference – to the family by my being there and helping out, to the gallery by contributing something, and in general to Indian art. Even though I didn't know much about Indian art when I first joined, now I am very passionate about it.

We have forty or fifty artists we regularly work with. With our Foundation we give opportunities to young artists through fellowships and grants; we bring art to the public through discussions and talks; and we bring art to children, which is personally very important to me.

When you were a little girl what did you want to do when growing up?

Everybody wants at some point to be an astronaut or be famous. But really, I never thought too much about the future. And it mostly works for me to function that way.

At the most challenging times, where is your anchor?

In my family.

If there is a question you could ask God, what would it be?

Do You exist? And if I don't get an answer, I would know. Or rather, God could also actually be testing me. And so in that case, I would never know...

If there were such a thing as rebirth, what would you choose?

I don't think about the rest of this life so how could I think of the next birth ? But I guess I would choose to come back as myself. When I look around, I have to count my blessings for sure. Of course I have my ups and downs like everyone, but I am really blessed on the overall.

What is your idea of happiness?

You know it when you feel it. There are good days. There are bad days.

If there were one thing you could change about your life, what would it be?

I wish I had studied more in college and known how important it is to study well. I would give anything to go back to school and study everything that interests me whether astronomy or geology or anything. Back then I was only looking at the tedious papers to write and the exams to sit for. The kind of life you have in college is nothing like what you have the rest of the time.