

Ram Jethmalani

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'I give God the benefit of doubt'

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Ram Jethmalani, Lawyer, MP & Former Union Minister.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is the search for a higher level of consciousness, assuming the existence of a soul within the body, which would survive the mortal frame's dissolution. I used to believe in this quite faithfully but now that the problem is much more concrete (I know I am going to die soon...), doubts keep tormenting me! Still, I cannot find definite answers with my intellect, so my attitude is to discard religions, not bother with those questions and have a one-line religion: make as many people happy as possible, reduce the sum total of unhappiness, because how could God allow for so much pain... Still, as a criminal lawyer, I give God the benefit of the doubt...

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

Of course there is some powerful force pervading the entire universe, but is it a conscious one – for instance guiding and protecting me? My finite intellect can't ever answer this question, proof beyond reasonable doubt does not exist. So I keep flirting with this hypothesis, but I would not marry it!

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

A pure hedonistic existence is alright, but it is not satisfying without a higher purpose. In my case, I always knew I had to be a lawyer. I remember participating in a school debate when I was eleven, winning it, and imagining my first speech in Court, after which people would become my clients. I went against my father's wish and became a lawyer. Beyond that, I believe in 19th century British legal reformer Bentham's words: "the greatest happiness of the greatest number is what it is about".

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

I recite with great regularity and dedication the mantra to Shiva and Parvati asking for good health in this life, and once gone, to not come back to this sorry planet...

What is the role of spirituality in the world of Law?

The day I qualified as a lawyer, I went to a senior in Karachi who told me three things:

"please so act that if you lose a case, do not lose your client, but at times you may lose both, in that case see that you do not lose the court, then at times you may lose the court as well, but never lose your conscience". So when I talk of spirituality, I do not try to pretend I am moral by any traditional standards. But I've been trying to go by this senior's advice. We have an adversarial system, which means that a lawyer does not necessarily defend a good cause, demanding justice in the absolute and moral sense, he is asking for legal justice only. The judge cannot decide until he has heard the best that both sides can tell and this is the lawyer's duty. And if I had some success, it is because of my complete dedication and loyalty to the client, whether it is a free or a paying one, whether the cause is popular or not. I work twenty hours a day for that and this dedication is the reflection of my spirituality in the practice of my profession.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

More than any influence from home, which I left early, most of my inspirations have been later encounters, especially with books. I am inspired for instance by the earlier Vedanta times, with all the freedom I understand there was, when the whole Rig Veda could be written as hymns sung by drunk Aryans to the Elements.

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

As someone more useful to society than a lawyer – as a great doctor for instance, or if after death I would get some special spiritual insights, then coming back as a preacher to share them.

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

I would have an argument with Him: why have You created so much suffering? How can that please You, why do You want to see it, why do You keep such a planet around?

What is your idea of happiness?

First of all, physical happiness is as important as mental happiness – sitting with a beautiful girl and having a drink, even if it is a platonic relationship brings me intense pleasure! In the same way, if I can help reduce a man's pain, it gives me intense satisfaction.