

Sonal Mansingh

Odissi Dancer

'There are no questions left to ask God'

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Sonal Mansingh, Odissi Dancer.

What does spirituality mean to you?

A good single malt! Or joy: if you cannot have a belly laughter, or look at yourself with a twinkle, then all other words about spirituality are gibberish. Besides, I see two kinds of spirituality: the one on your own, within your own vibrations, and the one in a crowd. If you are able to maintain the same inner feelings in the latter as in the former, then the true meaning of spirituality can emerge.

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

With my strong willed character, I have found myself times and times again hanging over a cliff, one leg already swinging over the abyss, and at the last moment I would be pulled back from catastrophe. Who does it and why, I stopped asking, but protection and guidance definitely have been there. Over time also, one develops antennas to catch the signs indicating the path of life, so that there is no confusion, no wearing off.

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

Since I was a child I knew I had to dance, and I ran away from my parents' home to join my guru. It has meant working hard and sweating much, being called names at times. But yes, with a mission – beyond dancing per se, it is about spreading joy and goodness, carrying to the audience the essence –or the elixir– of things. It is like a process of conversion of the enormous, the unthinkable, the immanent, into something poetic and beautiful. Oceans of philosophy, metaphysics, the richness and the meaning of life are transcribed by the dancer through metaphors, poetic images, stories and hopefully the audience can take back home at least a drop of the elixir.

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

Dance of course, but also so many moments of life, smoking my cigar, enjoying a good glass of wine...

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

All of dance is a spiritual experience. People have said they saw Krishna dancing with me, or I was seated in the lap of the Mother. It is not that I became either of them, rather I would invite them, invoke their presence, try and be a conduit for expressing the essence of Creation, what is called Rasa Anubhava. It has been compared to the experience of the divine – at times there is a realization, like enlightenment, taking you somewhere in Creation through the layers of firmament. Why doesn't it happen every time, or to every dancer, that is the whole mystic and mystery of dance...

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

I had a terrible car accident in 1974, while I was teaching a master class in Germany. My ribs, collar bones and most importantly my spine were broken. I was told I could never dance again, and only possibly walk two years later. I wanted to die. Until I met Pierre Gravel, a famous chiropractor who saved me and enabled me to dance again. The accident made me so much more human. Before, I was a star. After, I suddenly was nothing, like a worm. Then I was given a new life, but why? For my mission. This, and the essence of my mission, I understood most clearly thanks to the accident.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

First of all, all that I have accumulated in my last births, then being born in a certain family and place, and studying with a certain guru. Beyond everything though, dance has been my guru.

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

As a dancer of course, for seven more lives at least!

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

It may sound strange, but I do not think I have any question at the moment. I feel that whatever is, "it is so". It does not mean sitting back idle and waiting for God to do everything, but if after doing what you have to do, things still do not happen the way you wish, then simply it is so. There is no question. It is an inner understanding.

What is your idea of happiness?

Right now, when I am talking to you for instance, there is such an aura, can you feel it? If that is not it, then what? There are so many wonderful moments – it is all about flowing, letting go, as if you were on some velvet, in the deepest ocean, simply enjoying the experience.