

Abida Parveen

Sufi singer

'Music transcends suffering'

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Sufi singer Abida Parveen says that music is not a path that everyone could or would take for spirituality.

What does spirituality mean to you?

Spirituality to me is Sufism, and it represents a level of purity calling for humbleness.

It is a gift from God which holds a spark. It is a voice yearning to unite humanity. Being humble is the beginning of spirituality, and by being humble, one connects with in totality. You must come out of your religion, and out of yourself – then only you can see others. You must sacrifice yourself for others. Spirituality in a way is a negation of the self. Once you sacrifice yourself for others, the curtains which hold you away from God can open up and His clear image can appear to you.

How does this process take place?

I see it as self-actualization, meaning as a process of looking for God within. Nothing is outside, everything is inside. Once a person's spiritual power increases within, he or she can stand up for the well-being of humanity, using his energy in a very different way.

You basically go within yourself and there, you see who you are, what you are, where you have come from, who has sent you. These thoughts gradually direct you towards faith and God, towards a connection with a bigger power in the universe.

For you, does it happen mostly through music or every moment of life?

Music is a formula which is actually both very wonderful and powerful in a very unique way. With music you get an opportunity to sit alone and find yourself, while creating new lyrics, new musical phrases. There is a basic suffering in life and with music one can transcend it and go towards the supreme spirit that created us all.

What about people who do not have music as a way to connect?

Indeed, music is definitely not a path everyone would or can take towards spirituality. But it is the duty of anyone who is into music, or knows Sufism, and holds a spiritual attitude, to invite others, and help them connect with God from their heart and soul. One doesn't need any language to understand God. In any case, God cannot be understood otherwise He would not be God! So those who do not practice music can visit religious places, or listen to spiritual music, and thus have a taste of spirituality.

This connection with a supreme Being, do you feel it all the time?

I do. Time is standing still for the Almighty. We are entities created by God, temporarily dressed up in a human body, and every moment of our lives it is up to us to search for Allah.

What is God for you?

An invisible entity which has always been there, and whose presence we can see through His Creation. Everything belongs to God. God is the biggest truth and God is the message of truth, God is the message of love.

When did you first feel God's presence?

I always felt it. God was there before I became part of this world.

You never doubted God, even in very difficult times?

Absolutely never. God is the only stable element in the universe, the one element which has always been and will always be.

How do you explain that God would allow all the suffering we witness on earth?

God has blessed humans with a few powers. And it is their responsibility how they use them, how they choose to walk the path of life. If they wish to be inhuman, it is their choice.

God resides within your soul, and your soul is in your heart. So by listening to your heart, you should know what is right and what is wrong. But if a person consciously decides to jump into the pit and to act irresponsibly, he or she is responsible for his suffering.

When a person lacks spirituality and does not connect to God through his heart, then he is uncontrolled and may act with cruelty, he may perform sins.

But how would you explain the suffering of a small child, too young to make such choices and to take such responsibilities?

God would not act cruelly towards a child, nor can the parents be cruel to the child since they are like an image of God for the child. Still, if some suffering occurs, the issue lies between its perpetrators and God. They will be answerable to God in His court of justice for the child's suffering.

Among the important influences in your life, you have mentioned Muhammad Najeeb Sultan as a spiritual guide – what has he taught you?

We are sparkles of God, dressed up as human beings. When you are guided by such pure souls and beings, the light can reach deep inside you, you feel the divine light, and you actually KNOW you are touched by God and His messengers.

Is there any such thing as destiny?

Destiny is all in the hands of God, and the Almighty can change your luck in a split second.

If a person chooses a spiritual path, or if someone shows him the path of wisdom, his destiny will unfold for good and in the truest way.

What is your idea of happiness?

Happiness happens when one's heart and soul are happy, which happens thanks to spirituality. If a person is not into spirituality, he cannot be happy. When a child is given a chocolate or a candy, he smiles with innocence and joy. Similarly, when on the spiritual path, your heart and soul rejoice and you can create happiness in your life.

Do you feel so all the time?

As much as thoughts occur all the time, you can feel spirituality all the time and therefore create happiness constantly. You can do it through very simple things. Let's say you help someone get a job, or accomplish some work – you would then feel immense joy to have done something for others, and tremendously lucky that God assigned you this duty, that this thing had to be done by you.

The fact is that the soul is connected to everything around, to everything alive, and therefore you can be spiritual at every single moment - standing sitting talking laughing or creating music. Spirituality is everywhere.

At another level, spirituality's ultimate aim is for you to leave this world and merge back into God. There is something as God's suffering and spirituality helps you understand God's pain. Once you feel it, you are constantly engaged with the Almighty and that is the real, ultimate spirituality.