

Dr. Karan Singh

Politician

'Life is an adventure in consciousness'

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Dr. Karan Singh, Politician, Author & Diplomat.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is a quest for the divine, with a dual form: attempting to transcend this mundane reality and at the same time being very much part of it. And rather than delving too much in issues of past lives or arguing about religion, it is important to just move on, from here and now. Who knows where we are on the journey in any case. So just enter the stream as the Buddhists say and then at some point, necessarily, you will join the ocean.

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

Yes, I actually believe in such a force. But I could not respond to it as an indefinable power, with no face or incarnation, as is the case in monotheistic religions for instance. I need to focus on some specific symbol of it. So for example at times I have worshipped Krishna and presently I am a worshipper of Lord Shiva.

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

First of all, I would say that my mission is to achieve spiritual realization. Also, when I speak on Vedanta around the world, I feel it has an impact and can help people, so I guess it can be described as part of a mission, in the same way I would envision my interfaith work.

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

Life to my mind is a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth, an adventure in consciousness. And as you know, in our tradition, there are four ways of trying to connect the Atman and the Brahman, the individual and the divine: Jnana Yoga or way of knowledge, Bhakti Yoga or way of devotion, Karma Yoga or way of good works, and Raja Yoga or way of contemplation. So I try to combine the four in my life and develop them in a single integrated path towards the divine. Among others, I do pujas every morning and evening, and I pray – those rituals are a good way of staying connected to that path, it is so easy to get carried away.

What is the role of spirituality in your public life?

Well, I see my spiritual quest as having several dimensions and one of them is my public life – as a form of karma yoga. I am particularly attached to the interfaith work I am undertaking. As much as the environmental movement was peripheral thirty years ago and is now so front stage, I feel that interfaith dialogue must become so. Too many millions are still torn by issues of religion all over the world. Also, I feel we need a change of paradigm: rather than having a central powerful organization such as the Church for instance, I'd rather see a number of points of light around the world, and the world gradually enveloped by them. It is a more gentle, widespread, diffuse paradigm. And in my own way, I try to connect with those lights all along.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

I started off with my mother who was very devotional, she was a village girl, not a princess. And then I began delving into philosophy, with the Upanishads at the core and Swami Vivekananda & Sri Aurobindo as two towering influences. But more than anything else, I would mention people I have actually met, especially the three gurus I have had in my life: a Vaishnava guru who was an Englishman, a Shaiva guru who was an American in Hawai'i and a Shakta guru who was a Kashmiri Pandit. Indeed, I think the guru plays an important role, as the one who dispels darkness. But the guru only points to the moon, if you hang on to the finger only, you will never get to the moon.

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

Of course, if there is such a thing as reincarnation, the idea would be not to be reincarnated at all, to be liberated!

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

If I was face to face with God, I would be unable to ask any question, I would be too transfigured, too much in bliss!

What is your idea of happiness?

An enhanced sense of well being on all dimensions of life – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – a balance between them all.