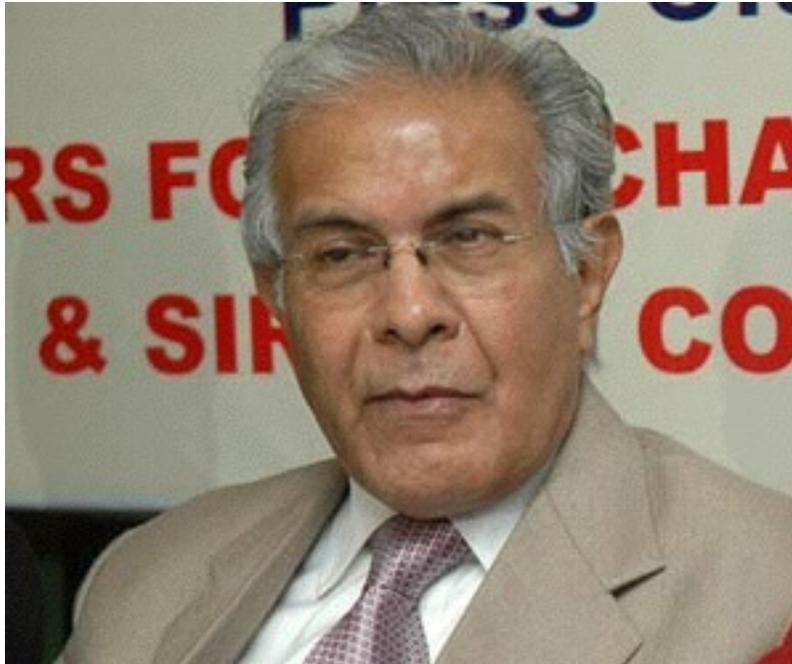


Wajahat Habibullah

Chief Information Commissioner

'I believe that there is an overarching force'

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Wajahat Habibullah, Chief Information Commissioner, Govt of India.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It means communicating with something beyond the temporal. And as a person of the Muslim faith, it more particularly means the Sufi tradition, by which its pirs would reach out to the Almighty in a direct communication, beyond the limits of dogma or established tradition.

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

I believe indeed that there is an overarching force. And I have had instances of feeling guided or protected but those are extremely personal episodes...

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

I do think that everyone comes with a purpose in life. And that the history of human evolution, beyond all its setbacks, is not about ups and downs but about a continuing improvement. So the purpose of life is to seek the positive. Overall, am I satisfied with my life? If I die tomorrow, would I feel I have lived

my life as it should have been? No...I cannot say I have done my best, but I would not say I have failed altogether.

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

I realize there is something well beyond whatever efforts I make in my life, they are only part of a much greater whole. I pray according to the formal prayers of Islam at least twice a day. I believe that prayers must have a hold in your heart.

What is the role of spirituality in your professional life?

A very concrete illustration was when I went back to Kashmir in 1990. Those were very violent times, it was dangerous to even walk out of the tiny room I was confined to. Yet, it was the most enriching period of my life, because I grew so close to the people and their sorrow, their tragedy. They were so willing to share, and I was willing to listen, although I could have been a simple bureaucrat writing papers. I was more successful in my mission because it was a constant spiritual bond.

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

In 1993, while negotiating a settlement in Kashmir I was nearly killed. A truck ran into my car and I stayed for months in the hospital. The doctors were convinced I would never recover. The only reason I did was because of the prayers of countless people, I have absolutely no doubt about it.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

My religion has provided me with a very solid grounding...But if one uses religion as the frontier beyond which you are not supposed to venture, then it is dogma...For me, Rumi, the Buddha, the very rich Sufi traditions of India and many others have been tremendous inspirations. The early 20th century Sufi saint Haji Waris Ali Shah had a close relationship with my great grandfather and his teachings have been very significant to me...he emphasized the need for love in all instances and moments.

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

I would like to be a horse...in some nice open environment, like the Pampas in Argentina.

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

None, I have to address questions myself.

What is your idea of happiness?

I can only think in terms of satisfaction, moments of joy, a beautiful sunset, a precious smile...