

Shobhana Bhartia

Vice-Chairperson

'Happiness is a temporary state'

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Shobhana Bhartia, Vice-Chairperson of Hindustan Times.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is the awareness that there is something beyond me and whatever I am here and now; it is also the acceptance that there is a larger energy, and that this particular life is a short episode in a larger journey. So it is about putting things in perspective.

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

I believe there definitely is such a force. It is up to us to feel or see it. It depends on how much we have shrouded ourselves with other superficial layers. Or at times we simply prefer to ignore the guidance and enjoy the moment here and now. Also, my mind is so racy, that it is a challenge for it to calm down and hear that inner voice or guidance – when I try, ten things keep popping up, I think of all the people I have to call, of all the things I have to do and so on.

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

I believe we are given certain cards and then it is up to us to make a mess out of it, or play them in a better way. In my case, I was born in circumstances that enabled me to do more, both as part of the Birla family, and as I became involved in the Hindustan Times. Being in media offers the opportunity to reach out to so many. But I do not go too deep into imagining what it entails and how big a job I need to do. It would be both too pompous and too stressful. I just try to do my best, believing that my own karma has brought me where I am, and that I do not know if I would be given such good circumstances in another birth, so I'd better try and do my best in this one.

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

I do my pujas in the morning and in the evening, because I have done so since I was a child. But more and more my inclination is to vie away from the religious and from rituals, and go more into spirituality, which is about my outlook on life.

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

Certain ups and downs of life change you: they first make you question life, God and so on. Then you realize that those challenges are part of what you are meant to learn in this incarnation. With that understanding, I have gradually come to terms with the fact that one neither controls events nor other people's destinies.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

I grew up in a very religious Hindu home, with innumerable rituals, beliefs in the traditional deities and so on. Also, when the Dalai Lama fled Tibet, Pandit Nehru asked my parents to welcome His Holiness in our house in Massourie where he stayed for two years. But the main inspiration for me has doubtless been the Gita. In the last eight or nine years, I have gradually moved away from the religiosity I grew up in. I could not find satisfying answers in the more traditional concepts of multiples deities, idols etc. And I have been studying the Gita more in depth, feeling intrigued by its spiritual content as a way of life.

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

Just the thought of living life all over again with all its ups and downs is so tiring! So I would really hope that this is my last birth.

What is your idea of happiness?

Peace matters to me, not happiness. Happiness at the pinnacle is something I am actually scared of: if you are at the top, if you have ecstasy, then no matter what, you come down and crash at some point and then you suffer. Happiness is a temporary and short term state. So all I now ask from God is peace of mind. Then even if the circumstances are not as good as I may want them to be – and things can't always be rosy – if at least I can cope with them in peace, what else should I ask for?