

Gautam Thapar

Chairman of Avantha Group

'I would love to come back as an athlete!'

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Gautam Thapar, Chairman of Avantha Group.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is the mixture of a universal value system and a Hindu religious belief system. It is difficult to draw the line between the two. But the fact that all gods including Ram had their trials and tribulations has been a parable of what I feel, and an inspiration. I make mistakes but I should be able to step back and learn before moving forward, wondering why I did what I did. And sometimes the answer is not comfortable.

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

I actually believe there is such a force. When I look at my life and what I have accomplished, I wonder sometimes why I am who and what I am – why me? Of course it is also a question of what you do, of timing, of vision, of risk-taking. But still, those things are not enough to explain one's particular accomplishments rather than others.

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

I believe that circumstances shape a lot of what you turn out to be. But on a deeper level, I am a great believer in the Indian philosophy of destiny. You have a destiny, it is manifest and it is there. The path you take to accomplish it is for you to decide. But you will get there regardless. As far as I am concerned, I do not think I am only destined to be a business man. First, I believe I can correct some of the wrongs of the past in our family. And second, it is about giving back. The wealthier and more powerful you are, the more you can impact things in the way you think is morally right. That is pretty much what I have been trying to do for the last ten years.

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

I do not pray every day, or go to temples, or meditate. But despite the pressures of work, there is a lot of time for contemplation in my life. Also, I am much less harsh with people than I used to be. Basically, spirituality pervades and influences all aspects of my daily life.

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

It comes out mostly in the great desire to help those who are less fortunate. The success we have had in those areas is more important than all the money I can make. Because of historical reasons, our industries are often located in the poorest and most remote areas of the country. So we have many projects to uplift the life of those communities, through micro-credit for instance. Secular education for boys and girls in the madrasas of poverty stricken and remote Gujarat's Kutch is another example.

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

The birth of my children. I never thought of myself as a child person but my two daughters' birth was completely transforming. That feeling of pure love is something I had never experienced before. The softer edges in me and the increased contemplation of life started with them, as well as the question of responsibility. When you see what is around in the world, it is difficult to find a balance between the desire to protect them and the need to prepare them to the realities they will have to face.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

Early on, my father had decided to focus on a spiritual quest rather than inheriting the mantle of what was then one of the largest business groups in the country, created by his father. As a consequence, the range and diversity of people visiting our home, often in some spiritual pursuit or another was extremely enriching. They were coming from all over the world, from all walks of life, staying with us sometimes for months. They all have been an inspiration to me.

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

Of course I would like to be back as a human being. And I would have loved to be a professional athlete, I love sports in so many forms – so any kind of athlete would be good!

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

Why am I here?

What is your idea of happiness?

My children. The trust that you see in their eyes and the recognition... They are more important than anything else.