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'I want to be born as a better person'

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What does spirituality mean to you?

Basically it is about being good, helpful, thinking beyond myself, caring for others, for the environment, following certain values, while leading a life of balance. And personal growth automatically takes place with such an attitude. Of course material comfort is required, money and positions are needed, but they cannot be pursued at the expense of everything else. A right dose of it, with the right methods are fine. And once you are in a comfortable position, you can do for others.

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

I believe there is such a divine force, and that there is a Creator. I have felt it at various stages of my life. I also believe in destiny and that things are pre-ordained. But that does not mean I should sit idle. To this day, I work extremely hard and in many different fields. But never would I be seeking a position or an award. There is nothing beyond my reach, everybody knows me. But had I to ask for it, it would be demeaning and take all the value out of it. If I deserve a divine thing, it will come. And because I do not seek anything, it also means I am not obliged to anyone. What I consider right, I can simply do.

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

At this point, I would say that the purpose of my life is to promote harmony between people, and in particular through interfaith dialogue. I believe that most conflicts have their root in religious fanaticism and with the proliferation of atomic weapons and other means of mass destruction, we cannot afford many more conflicts. There is no assurance that next time someone will not use the bomb. And even though human beings have yet to succeed in creating a drop of blood in a laboratory, they are now capable of destroying all of humanity.

Religion definitely has a fundamental role to play. The incidence of crime for instance would be far greater if people did not fear a superior force or some after-life punishment. Yet, out of ignorance or misunderstanding, religious people come at times to believe that their faith is superior to all others, and worse even, that others should be converted, or killed.

I once share the following idea at a conference in Pakistan, paraphrasing an Islamic scholar. Each religion has its own concept of who the Creator is, often an all-powerful and all-merciful God. But if that God was that powerful, why wouldn't He have created all human beings as saints, and followers of one faith only? When we look at a garden, we do not like it to have only one type of plants, we rejoice in the diversity of flowers and trees. We all love diversity and so does God. He therefore created different species, different people, and different ways of accessing Him – some through a church, others through a mosque, others in the Gurudwara. Ultimately all roads lead to Rome, the paths are many but the destination is the same. So if that all-powerful God has created that diversity, those who say there is only one path, those who say that the ones not following it should be changed or killed, they are the most irreligious people around. Trying to change what God has created would in fact mean having no faith in Him!

So any person or organization involved in interfaith dialogue is of interest to me, and I try to help, in any manner I can. Similarly, organizations that can give peace of mind and relief from the hardships of modern life, whether to a few hundred people or lacks, why not help them if I can? This is today my contribution to society. Before then, it took different shapes and forms. I grew up in a tiny village in Tamil Nadu. My father was a farmer and I was the first person to even attend high school. It was a huge achievement. When I went to college and everything was in English, I thought I would give up as I could not understand a word of it. Yet I stuck around and completed my Bachelor of Sciences in agriculture. But my father suddenly had a heart attack and I had to go back to the village. There I witnessed endless fights between villagers, often on property matters. I thought that if I was a lawyer, I could help solving some of those conflicts. So I went and studied law. Later on, as many friends were joining the Indian Administrative Service or the Indian Police Service I thought I would do too. This is how I ended up in the police, where I felt I could bring a maximum contribution to society.

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

I developed over time my own cocktail of practices that suit me. I basically try to bring awareness to the moment, which often involves for instance deep breathing, watching the breath go in and out. That can be done anywhere and at any point in time. As far as religion is concerned, I am a devout person and as I grew up a Hindu, it is an environment I am comfortable with. Yet I often visit places of worship of other religions. As long as I feel sanctity, I am willing to spend time in them, whether an edifice or a city. Some places have a particular energy that way. It can even be scientifically explained as we all know that there are energy centres on earth, and that some points are more magnetic than others. Actually, I believe science will be able to explain over time many things that we deem mysterious

today. But science in its modern form is only three or four hundred years old. So how surprising that it could not yet comprehend or explain phenomena that have been around for millions of years?

What is the role of spirituality in your work?

It is about trying to be on the correct path, even though shortcuts are so tempting at times. It acts like an anchor. Let me give you one example. When I was chief investigator for Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, my only goal was to uncover the truth. Yet, the amount of pressure I was under was formidable. Many would have died of a heart attack from it. Protecting the truth was incredibly difficult as so many were thinking of political benefit rather than of the interest of the country, trying to involve opponents or rivals within the same party. But we stuck to the truth, like in a spiritual pursuit and nothing unethical was authorized. Ultimately we won, but it required an enormous moral courage, and it came from spirituality. If you have a strong faith and conviction, you cannot go astray.

Spirituality also played an important role in this case from another point of view. Many senior officers in Delhi had refused the assignment. It was a blind case with no lead, and an investigation marred with minefields. The pressure was immense to find the culprits quickly. Besides, the LTTE did not have a single case prosecuted against them in Sri Lanka because they had assassinated anyone connected to an investigation against them. Death threats were basically plentiful. Yet, it never bothered me for a moment, because of a very deep conviction I hold: the time of our death is pre-ordained from the moment we are born. So whether it happens through a heart attack, a long illness or a bullet in the head, what difference does it make? I will go when it is time to go. This spiritual belief therefore saved me from that kind of fear all along.

Can you share a unique experience that changed or shaped your spiritual beliefs?

During the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination investigation, the pressure was so huge that I felt at some point the need for some inner strengthening. So despite the tornado of events I was involved in, I took ten days off to undertake a vipassana course. Ten days of silence, observing my breath, observing the sensations in my body, understanding the impermanence of it all as all sensations come and go, the good and the bad ones alike. Those ten days were a turning point and gave me the inner strength I needed to complete the investigation. No man or woman could frighten me after that. And if I was able to survive that year without significant harm, it was very much thanks to vipassana.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

I would say Gandhi has had the most significant influence on me. And I believe that because we did not follow his path, we are in trouble today. There is no social justice and therefore violence and crime are rife. Even if you look at the LTTE, you have to acknowledge that a grave injustice was done to them politically – their voice democratically expressed was ignored by Colombo. So troubles are only symptoms and indications of something going wrong in a very deep way.

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

For this life, I have always prayed for two things: as long as I live, give me enough to receive anybody to my home and share what I have without feeling it is a burden. And when it is time to go, let me have a smooth exit, without lying in bed, a burden to myself and others. For the next life, I would want to be born as a better person than I am, and of course be of as much help as possible.

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

First I would thank Him for keeping my sanity despite all the madness that has come into my life and career. And then I would ask why so many people suffer so much. The explanation that a baby is born with mental or physical defects because of some past karma never satisfied me.

What is your idea of happiness?

Having reasonable mental, physical and spiritual health, and being of use to others. That gives me a lot of satisfaction. When I feel there is fairness and a sense of justice it also gives me tremendous joy. Money and power never made anyone happy – of course there is nothing wrong in having much of both, as long as it is used for the right purpose. I do not think that Bill Gates is happy because he has accumulated wealth, but because he is able to give it back today.