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Human Rights Activist & Entrepreneur

'Life is 99.9 per cent action'

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What does spirituality mean to you?

It is a sense of joy, a sense of awe. It is not dogma, it is not organized religion. It is the nature of love. And in action, it should not be more complicated than what Mahatma Gandhi said: caring for the weak and the frail. I cannot see spirituality disconnected from action. Otherwise, it would be indulgence, which is fine but it is not my path.

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

I am not sure there is a bigger power though I would like that to be. God for me is creation. It is not a god of control, it is not male, it is a god of the land, of the planets, definitely more female. I have always been pushed by a certain force, for instance a moral cause against control, slavery, greed. Or the demands of the poor, the voiceless.

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

I think there is some pathway you can't get off. This obsession to want to be alive no matter what makes you feel alive, that's the pathway for me. And it always is about a personal education. So in my

forties, I decided if something was not going to teach me knowledge and provide support for the spirit, I got it out.

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

My life is 99.9 per cent action, spirituality in action. It comes with generosity and kindness, which does not mean good manners or being less intense, but talking to people no one talks to, being nice to those no one else is nice to. Action for me is always tempered by a dose of outrage.

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

Some people think that business is only about the bottom line. Others believe it is about a community of human beings. So for me, it involves a whole range of corporate social responsibility initiatives and very concrete things in the workplace.

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

When I was ten years old, the same week, my father died and I opened a book on the Holocaust, seeing what human beings can do to others. Those two things kickstarted me into activism which has always been my way of being spiritual.

Tell us about one powerful spiritual experience

One of my biggest spiritual lessons was when I spent time in Pineridge, USA, one of the worst-off Native American reservations. I came up with some economic ideas for them using local plants. They said they loved it but had to seek permission from Mother Nature. So we did some ceremonies and the answer was no. It gave me a huge lesson in reverence.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

It all started with Joan of Arc. She was a non-conformist. She wore men's clothes. I was trying to have my hair like her. I wanted to be her. Then teachers like Sister Immaculate Conception: every Friday in our convent school, we prepared a meal for the Knights of the Road, without ever calling them homeless people. Writers also had a major impact on my identity – Steinbeck, Faulkner and others. Thirdly, photographers. When I was in my twenties, there was an exhibition called the Family of Men curated by Eisenstadt, a celebration of all stages of human life and human spirit. It was so inspirational.

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

I do not believe in reincarnation, but if we were to play with the idea, I would want to be taller! As an animal, it would be a deer with long legs. I would not like to be a man. And I am so curious about the future. So put me into the future, in two hundred years from now.

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

Why don't you show yourself more?

What is your idea of happiness?

To be surrounded by curious, laughing flesh, both human and food! It is about community, rituals and humour. We have many rituals at home. For instance, saying "I love you" every day, with my mother who is 92.