

Julio Ribeiro

Ex-Commissioner of Police

'Humans cannot live without spirituality'

Sun Apr 22 2007



Julio Ribeiro, Ex-Commissioner of Police.

What does spirituality mean to you?

I was born a Catholic Christian, and I believe in the core principles of Christ's teachings, such as compassion, love and respect for your fellow beings. It is difficult at times not to dislike someone, but I try! And I do not think there is only one true religion: what matters is that everyone believes there are do's and don't, rights and wrongs. I also do not think human beings can live without spirituality. I have seen what that does in Communist countries when I was ambassador to Rumania and Albania. Complete atheism or materialism cannot bring contentment, happiness, or even inner balance.

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

I was almost killed twice in assassination attempts. Both times, I escaped miraculously. The first was in the late eighties in Punjab, where I was sent to fight terrorism. Forty-nine bullets were fired at my wife and me, but we escaped. The Sikh terrorists then followed me to Rumania, where I was the ambassador, and shot at me during my daily walk. A bullet got through my back, but no major artery was hit. Those two instances definitely made me feel that there was a force guiding and protecting me.

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

I never chose to be in the police force. As an IIS officer, I could have ended up in any other service. But the police set-up enabled me to do what I have always felt I was meant to do: social work. So, I guess one feels compelled to do certain things. But I do not believe in the concept of a predestined life.

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

I go to church every week and I pray every day. It keeps me focused on what I should do. First thing in the morning, I pray for a few minutes, asking that I do whatever I am to do in a spirit of service and compassion, that I should not hurt anyone and be a good person, and... that my grandson does well! Beyond this daily routine, the Christian principles of love and compassion are part of who I am. Respecting and helping others, listening to the poor, the anger towards injustice – my day-to-day life springs from those spiritual values.

What is the role of spirituality in your social endeavors?

The spiritual values I mentioned have permeated all my social undertakings, whether as police commissioner earlier, or in the many activities I am currently involved with. Indeed, I have been retired for 17 years, but I have been committed to try and develop communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims here in Mumbai. We do this especially by empowering women and letting them convince their sons, brothers, fathers (their husbands are not listening most of the time) that all this violence won't do them any good. I also try to fight corruption; I chair several charitable organizations for the blind.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

I am not a textbook Christian, but I believe in its central theme of love and compassion. This is the basis of my inspiration.

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

A social worker, in any possible way.

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

I do not want to think if there is a God or not, and therefore, wonder about what question to ask Him. It seems to me a practical hypothesis to think there is someone out there, above us, because we can't explain so many things. But whether that accommodating supposition is true or not is yet another question....

What is your idea of happiness?

Of course, I need the basics of life – good food, a roof over my head, a good family and so on. But beyond that, it is the feeling of being of service and doing what I ought to do and the balance and contentment that come from it that makes me happy.