

Sheila Dikshit

Chief Minister of Delhi

'There is a force guiding you without you knowing it'

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Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is a word often used these days, but above all, it is for me a very internal affair. It means different things to different people, whether action, or ritualism, or just being passive. For me, it means my own conscience, my own inner guidance. It is not necessarily attached to a particular religion. If religion means showing the path, evolving one's judgment about what is right, what is wrong — then actually it is common to all religions, it can be called ethics, morality, character and I believe in this, to me it is something internal. But I do not believe in the ritual forms of religion. I have not yet felt the urge to go to a temple, or a church, or a mosque to find solace. I have not yet developed that need, maybe one day I will.

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

I cannot say I have a figure in mind, I do not see a human form for it. But sometimes things are so uncanny, that you have to believe that there is something beyond your mind, beyond your capabilities of creating a certain situation. You have to believe that there is a force guiding you without you knowing it, that something happens not because of your own energies or your own thinking, but by

what can be called in common language a piece of good luck, or ill luck. Basically you feel it all internally, you know intuitively if it is a good time or a bad time. It is like a storm – you learn that when it happens, you should bend and not try to meet a force that you do not feel capable to stop. All of us have that intuitive feeling, if we listen to it. Why we have it – I could not explain, but we know inside which direction to take, and when. I do not believe in almanacs and things of the sort, because they are supposed to be relevant to so many millions of people, which does not seem plausible. But a good time or a bad time, a good step or a bad step – you feel it inside.

So intuition plays a very big role in guiding me. You can call it a force beyond, or circumstances or a situation, because of course it is all interconnected, we live our lives with other people, we do not live in isolation.

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

I ask myself this question sometimes. Why was I born where I was, from certain parents, with the siblings I have and so on. Why some are born with nothing while others have so much? Are those things ordained? Why are there differences? Even in one's own life, you go through cycles, very good times, very bad times, the wheel of life. Those things are not explainable unless you believe that there is something way beyond you. You cannot write and plan your destiny all the time. Of course it is up to you to grasp an opportunity when it comes. But the mere fact that it comes – it is from somewhere beyond you, it is something you are not master of.

In fact, the most important events and decisions in my life like marriage, entering politics and so on have always been something that I plunged into without planning or thinking. It just happened. I have no unfulfilled desire for instance, or the feeling I have been a flop. Quite the contrary, I always had an inner feeling that if I aspire to something for myself, it may actually not be fulfilled. So I take things as they come. In terms of what I was meant to be and do, I never thought as a child I would be doing what I am undertaking today, but I always knew I would like to be in touch with a lot of people. It gives me so much strength and motivation. As well as the commitment to a cause larger than my own self.

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

First of all, it is a state of mind, in order to find some balance. I feel there is in every one of us both optimism and pessimism. And one needs to create a balance between the two by saying when something bad happens, "this shall pass", and when some great euphoria or achievement occur, "this shall also pass". I must share with you that when something wonderful happens to me, the first thought that comes to my mind is of course happiness but also 'what's next?', 'can it be sustained?', 'can it be consistently as great', 'is it a passing phase?'. And the same takes place when I go through a very traumatic experience – that also has to pass. I have actually had a very lucky life, with a lot of experiences, highs and lows, moments of trauma and instances of euphoria when you feel like dancing because it feels so good and then you suddenly stop dancing because you feel it cannot last for too long. Some kind of a break holds you back – not being carried away in either direction. And all of that gives me a kind of inner peace, an acceptance, more equilibrium, more poise. It is a daily spiritual exercise if you will. Of course, in my kind of life, I get flowers, genuine ones, and also my effigies are being burnt, people curse me. My attitude then is that the curse has come out of the mouth of a certain person and dirtied him or her and that person should look after him or herself. But it does not bother me. Over the years, with maturity and understanding, with experience, I have learnt to not be affected by those things.

Spirituality for me is also a daily exercise of internalizing feelings. It is everyone's duty or right to spread the good with a smile, but you have to internalize your tears. When I was a child, my father said something that marked me: you can share your happiness with people, but remember that ultimately when it comes to a trauma you have to face it yourself, do not depend on somebody else, because it is not fair. It is sometimes very tough, but over the years it becomes a part of you, you do not expect it from others. And in any case, the moment you begin to expect, you create the possibility for disappointment.

In terms of daily practice, I do try sometimes to meditate for a few minutes but I find that my mind is too active. I haven't reached the stage that my mind is calm and not thinking. It can be about a song, about the vegetables that were not very nice yesterday, or the corner of the room seeming dirty, silly things like that. Some people say they reached a place where their mind is blank and they perceive a certain light. I haven't. I am an action oriented person.

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

It is extremely important. First of all, as I equate it to inner strength, it actually is more important in politics than in any other field. Because you deal with people and you need so much strength and total commitment. Like a true convent educated girl, I feel that I must honor the responsibilities I have taken out of my own free will, with the best of my abilities. And without a commitment to a larger cause than yourself, you cannot have the strength to achieve what you are trying to do, or it will be fragile. Some of course only have a commitment connected to the ambitions of their ego. Once they go out of politics though, they crumble and collapse completely, because their identity was dependent on people paddling up to their ego. That is very sad. One needs much more. You are dealing with life, with human beings, with a city, with a country. Your policy will impact them. So you need that inner spiritual strength. Of course politics is a bit of a dirty world, politicians are viewed as people grabbing power and manipulating it for their own ends. It is very disgusting at times. I also go through this impression sometimes and I consider myself lucky if I am not too impacted by it.

Then naturally, one can connect spirituality with governance, and a sense of harmony in politics and in impacting the life of a city for instance. We have series of concrete programs I can quote to illustrate this – initiatives to sensitize children to ecology, preservation, conservation, power, water, cleanliness, or programs to empower women through basic health for instance. Of course I cannot say that we have achieved enough, but it is a beginning at least.

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

Definitely, I have had two. One was when I met my husband. Because he was the greatest influence in my life. He gave me a direction, he made me rise to who I am. The second turning point was when he died suddenly, at the age of 49, of a heart failure. It was a turning point, including spiritually of course. I suddenly felt I was standing in the desert, all by myself. Everything around me suddenly vanished and I was left to myself. And I had two choices ahead of me for the days and months to come. Do I succumb to this or do I stand up to his memory and face it? My children were young, one in school, one in college. The inspiration of my husband, the disappointment with my fate for having being left alone – of course I had a lot of support from others, but eventually I felt all by myself – that gave me a strength which came from one fact: I lost everything in life, I have nothing more to lose, so let me move forward. Nothing could frighten me after that. So those two events were defining moments in my very core, internal and spiritual being.

Tell us about one powerful spiritual experience...

I cannot say I had one single powerful spiritual experience, it is more of a constant, daily evolution. I learn from every experience and internalize it.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

I would not point out to the influence of a particular religion. I grew up in a Hindu family and went to a convent school. All around me as you can see here in my residence, I have all the gods and goddesses, but they are displayed more for aesthetics. I actually believe strongly in beauty, whether it is visual, or of a character. Aesthetics have been a strong motivation for me. It irritates me when something is not esthetical. It is my sense of harmony. I believe in a journey through aesthetics. It is not bound to a particular religion.

In fact, a multiplicity of experiences, people and books have shaped my inner beliefs over time. The works of some French authors such as Gide or Camus, Dickens, 'Alice in Wonderland' have mattered a lot, the latter because through a fantastic story, it conveys so many relevant facts and ideas about the issues and challenges of life. Also I have been very influenced by the works of the mystic and spiritual teacher Gurdjieff. It shaped my way of seeing life and made evolve my thought process. And the Gita of course, among others one of the greatest guides on psychology. And I have to mention my grandmother in law, a woman with hardly any education who managed to create a life of her own, contained, without stepping up on anyone's space. She passed away at the age of 98 and I was with her for the last six years of her life. She did not need anything apart from some food, and the rest of the day she would be using her beads, or spend five hours a day playing with her gods and goddesses. She would bathe them, dress them, feed them, put them to sleep, like a young girl playing with her dolls. During those five hours she was in a world of her own, not bothering anyone. I thought that psychologically it was a marvel. She saw it as a ritual but for all others, it meant that she was not a burden. And she was a happy person. And each one of us needs to find such solace, such inner balance and some kind of peace in our own way, without stepping up on someone else's space.

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

I would like it to be in India. I would like to be meeting my husband again. And I would like to be able to transform things, in whatever way or shape.

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

Please take me to Mahatma Gandhi so I can ask him to give me the courage that he had – the courage to face both the good and the bad in life.

What is your idea of happiness?

Making others happy, without being a burden to anyone.