

Sanjaya Baru

Prime Minister's media advisor

'Nature is my spiritual inspiration'

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Sanjaya Baru, Prime Minister's media advisor.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is not about religion – rather, it means being in communion with nature. When I am in the hills at night for instance, watching the sky, I feel it is a spiritual experience. The stars which are there for billions of years remind me of how tiny and transient we all are. Those experiences are the most awe-inspiring.

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

Well, it would be arrogant of me to think that all that happens to me in life is because of my own efforts. Those need to be combined with chance, sometimes things happen because you are at the right place, at the right time. As an illustration, I can share this: I feel there is a nomad in us all, but most people prefer some form of security, which also means constraining oneself to what family, society etc. expect from you. I have always found more exciting to take the unbeaten path. Indeed, I have had four different careers and every time, I jumped into the unknown without a safety net. When I quit a position I never planned what would come next – yet, something very different and exciting always showed up, and while jumping without net, I never hurt myself.

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

I do not see myself driven by a specific purpose in life. Quite the contrary, I never planned my life and each one of my four careers happened a bit out of the blue – I have been a university professor, a researcher, a newspaper editor and now I am the Prime Minister's media advisor. One thing though: every time I felt bored or unfulfilled in a position, I obeyed that inner urge to move on and quit, eager for new ideas and experiences.

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

My walk is my meditation – I find walking to be the most healing and therapeutic thing, especially in nature. I love silence, whether in the hills or in some remote village area where at night there is such pin-drop silence. It makes me feel at peace. Noise to me is the worst polluter. Also, I do speech-writing for the Prime Minister and most speeches actually come to me while I walk, then I only need to sit at the computer and transcribe them.

What is the role of spirituality in your position as the Prime Minister's media advisor?

It actually plays an important role. I feel that Manmohan Singh is a very saintly person, a living Gandhian. And if it was not for that inner spirituality, if it meant working with another politician – no matter how much power this position entails, I would not have accepted it. He is a truly ascetic person, extremely centred, so personally honest and so deeply committed to his values and ideas. It is very rare to encounter such a man in public life, and to have a chance to work with an essentially good person. I took a 90% salary cut to join him and at times things are so intense that it could be tempting to call it quits. But I feel that what I do here is about strengthening a somehow "superior" being and I derive a lot of energy and inspiration from it.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

I come from an extremely religious South Indian family. Though she did not impose things on us, my mother was a very orthodox Brahmin. I became a Marxist in my student days and an atheist. Since then, my connection with nature has been the main inspiration.

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

My secret dream has always been to be the captain of an 18th century ship and venture out in the high seas. As for the next life, I would at least hope to be in a place closer to nature.

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

How long will the human species last? We know there is an end to almost all species, so it is bound to happen to us as well – when?

What is your idea of happiness?

Beauty – the ability to appreciate beauty, whether in nature or in humans.