

Lushin Dubey

Theatre Actor and Director

'Acting is mystical, a big high'

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Theatre actor and director Lushin Dubey always felt that theatre was an intrinsic part of her.

What does spirituality mean to you?

To answer this question I need to go back to my childhood, because obviously who I am today and what my understanding of spirituality is, start from there.

I was the middle child, and I definitely had the typical middle child syndrome – a sister with a very strong personality on one side, and a brother with an equally strong spirit on the other. So I was more of a ringside spectator than an active participator. And when you are an observer, when rather than being a spoiled brat you are the one absorbing what is happening, you also tend to be more of a giver and more selfless. That is very much part of my fabric, even though I learned to say no over the years.

Then, five years ago, I embraced the Sogo Gakkai Buddhist practice. Buddha was my father's icon, and I was always extremely close to him. As a scientist, he saw Buddha as a thinking, philosophical human being rather than a religious one, which made him an irresistible and very attractive figure. So Buddha always had a special attraction to me.

I came to the Sogo Gakkai out of sheer curiosity. Yet when I did, I felt I had arrived. Many people think of it as a very rigid practice. And at the beginning I had a resistance to the routine it entails. But today, it is precisely that discipline which I find very attractive. It is extremely easy to think of oneself as

a spiritual person yet not implement anything into concrete action, whereas the Sogo Gakkai makes it very real with its three-pronged pillars – practice, study and faith.

So today, what does the word spirituality actually mean to me? First of all, it is about living outside of myself. We tend to think of ourselves as disconnected from the whole, whereas I view myself very much a part of it. How I think, how I act definitely impacts the whole. So to feel good, I have to do good. And what is good? To create happiness in and around me.

Spirituality is about polishing this mirror within myself – what is happening outside is a reflection of what is happening inside and conversely what is happening inside is a reflection of what is happening outside. And since I am an ordinary human being, with delusions and illusions, I must consciously and actively constantly work on it. It is a very conscious effort. It is like having an eleventh finger constantly tapping. For instance, when picking a phone call or talking to my cook, I try to be fully aware and awake, what is my intonation, what will its impact be on the person I am interacting with and so on.

You cannot be spiritual if you are not fully awake, meaning fully aware of the impact of your actions. Hinduism also talks about it, but Buddhism organized it for me, and made it more practical. The practice of chanting is one of the essential ways of connecting in the Sogo Gakkai practice and I find it a really elevating and empowering experience. It makes you enter a realm of fearlessness. It detaches you from letting the mundane aspects of life affect you.

So it is about a constant awareness and consciousness. And it is a lot of work.

You mentioned living 'outside of yourself', what do you exactly mean by that?

It is about altruism, but not at the cost of neglecting yourself. It is about finding the balance between it all.

Being spiritual is actually not an easy thing. It is certainly not as simple as going to a temple, reading spiritual texts, or saying you believe in God. It is about love, in action.

Did you have a religious upbringing?

My mother was bathed in spirituality. She grew up with a lot of faith, going to Gurudwaras, reading the Grant Sahib and so on. But our parents very rarely took us to such places.

What about the idea of God?

I find that the idea of God can easily alienate you from feeling you are part of the whole creation. We all are energy, all of creation is energy, and knowing where it originates, how it came to be, if there was a "Creator" behind it all is not important to me.

What about the idea of destiny, or life being preordained?

I do believe that some people are luckier than others. I can't say why, and scientists may say it is all random, but I can't dispassionately think it is all about probabilities. I really feel there is such a thing as luck, and I have often felt I am not such a lucky person. I have to work very hard to get what I get – even though I should say that of late, things have started to come in a more flowing way.

When facing major challenges, how do you deal with them?

I face them head on. I am a really hard working person. If I set myself to do something I am determined and committed. I don't like to abandon things I have taken on. That is also part of my spirituality.

You are a fighter?

Yes I am. I don't like to give up.

How did theatre come into your life?

I always felt I have it intrinsically in me. I started from a very young age and got my first prize when in fourth grade. Then I joined Barry Jojn's Theatre Action Group but I was younger than all others so I was always a bit shy and reticent, which very much became part of my make-up. I didn't get many lead roles because of my age, but one thing about me, I know what I have and I have full confidence in it. I knew that whatever I do, one day I will go back and make it big in theatre. Because I know exactly what I want - when I start working on a production, I am crystal clear about what it should be - in music, costumes, sentiments and so on. I clearly see and know it all.

What about the feeling artists often share of being a conduit for something beyond them?

I have felt it at times when drawing, and I definitely feel it when playing, especially when doing a solo. In those moments I am lost into what I do and completely become that person. It is a very mystical moment, a very big high. It feels like meditating.

How is it to come back to this reality after such a high?

It is a high, but with humility, and I know I can do it again, I know I can create another reality tomorrow, and usually the high is pretty much there.

How do you choose the topic of your plays?

I find it interesting to look at theatre as a medium to look into subject matters that are deep and powerful. Of course we have fantastic playwrights but for some reason it is not my objective as of now. I am fascinated by historical stuff and contemporary matters. And it is a big high for me to pick subjects that are very real.

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

I wouldn't hesitate for a second, I would ask what comes after death? No matter what many philosophies say about rebirth, none of us has any palpable proof. So I would like to know what happens when I go, when I cease to exist in this form.

What is your idea of happiness?

I guess it is a combination of things. It is about meeting goals that uplift me, having a sense of pride of recognition for myself. It is also about helping people. And I should be able to get happy from little things. It should not be viewed as aphrodisiacal, out of the realms of beliefs, and only coming from things on a gigantic scale. Otherwise, the disappointment from not getting those huge scale things would be equally massive. So happiness should come with a sense of balance.