



What does the word spirituality mean to you ?

It is a total confusion because I do not know what you mean by that word. It is all too vague and doesn't mean anything for me as such.

Did religion play any role at any time for you?

No. I had a basic introduction to Jewish education for a year or two but I felt it was rather absurd and I became a fairly hardcore non believer early on.

That said, religion has different connotations. If you speak of religion and reading religious texts for an overall background - yes it interests me. But when it comes to espousing a kind of supernatural belief, it has the potential for a lot of evil.

Why did you feel it was absurd when you were young?

It didn't make any sense to me. All those people with all those beliefs, saying that God is talking to them, and all the ideas of miracles - it felt too absurd.

The idea of an energy beyond us that some people call God, but you could call it 'interconnected energy' - does it mean anything to you?

Well, interconnected energy is quite a different thing from the idea of a personal deity that talks to you, sees you, knows you, protects you, takes care of you. I think the latter is like a childlike need of having someone take care of us.

Synchronicities, so called coincidences and such phenomena, how do you look at it, is it all a question of probabilities or is there a larger orchestration ?

It is all probabilities only.

What about the idea of rebirth ?

It is a lovely thought but there is no evidence of it happening and I see it more as a source of comfort than anything else. The idea of an extension for our lives is a hope and a wish. It is a source of comfort for people, since facing the idea of complete extinction is too difficult for them.

What is your way of dealing with the existential fear of death ?

I wrote a lot about it. It is hard to answer it all in a few words. We have a lot of self defenses against it, and I am trying to see how we can find some peace about it.

One of the arguments is that we fear death a great deal because of our fear of the unknown and what will happen to us. But we were in the same state, or 'non state', before we were born. So what about thinking about that? The state of non existence is the same before and after life. And that is where religion is responsible partly in instilling so much fear - regarding what will happen to us "after". Religious leaders tell us we should behave in a certain way or donate certain things in order to ensure a fine 'thereafter'.

Another argument is the idea of ripples, of leaving something behind, passing something of value that gets carried on, creating waves or ripples - whether through a book, or one's work as a teacher, a doctor and so on. That can give you some kind of satisfaction.

For you, it was either entering the family business or becoming a doctor?

Yes, there wasn't much of a choice, but I didn't have any intention of entering business. So gradually I came to psychiatry and then to writing. The idea of expressing myself creatively, of sharing my ideas and thoughts felt very important to me.

Meaningful?

Yes, meaningful.

Therefore the ripple effect for you?

Indeed.

How do your novels' plots come to you ?

It is a very organic process. When I start a story, I have no idea where it's going to go. I just sit down at the computer with a writing pad, and I see where it takes me. Every writer talks about that and how writing comes from a certain place in the unconscious. I am just trying not to get in the way of my unconscious when I write.

And be the conduit ?

That's right.

Many creative people talk about this feeling of being a conduit, not knowing what comes through them.

Exactly. I start a story never knowing how it is going to end and where it will take me. Or I know the end but not what will happen in between.

Do you have a daily ritual of writing?

That's right. I try to write seven days a week. Sometimes gaps happen and I really don't like it.

When you work with patients do you also have this feeling of being a conduit ?

Maybe not a conduit, but I am definitely there to help the patient understand what he already knows about himself. The whole thing is to help him know himself.

Today for instance, this patient came and was wondering if he should marry this woman or not. My job is not to tell him what to do, but to help him access all his unconscious feelings about this relationship.

Is working with dreams crucial for you ?

If the patient remembers his dreams of course. Sometimes transformative dreams can help us so much in understanding what is happening in the person. I am not there to solve the dream, but through associations the person comes up with aspects of their lives they would have not known of, or noticed.

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

The most basic question of all: why is there something rather than nothing?

Philosophy has been enough of a companion to find answers to it?

Yes I am interested in people who like to think. So I've read a lot of philosophy. I have just spent the last three years writing on philosophers, after Schopenhauer, about Spinoza, who will be the topic of my next novel. He led the most quiet of lives, but I am trying to recreate an inner life for him. And in parallel I am dealing with the Nazi period, and Alfred Rosenberg, who was the most important Nazi anti-Semitic philosopher.

What is your idea of happiness ?

To live a life so that at the end of it you would have no regrets. That would be my definition of happiness.

And are you in that space?

Oh yes. I think so. I am lucky enough to have a lot of unlived life inside of me. Happiness would be a sense of having a huge amount of unlived life inside, and you live a life as full as you can.