

Kiran Bedi

IPS officer

'I meditate before I sleep and take a meditative walk'

Sun Nov 19 2006



Kiran Bedi, well known IPS officer.

What does spirituality mean to you?

Literally, I am recognizing the spirit around, the spirit that connects everyone of us. It is spirit in action, spirit in deed, spirit in thought, the same kind of need that binds each one of us, it is seeing each one of us in each other. Needs of the spirit it is food, shelter, clothing, love, care, compassion, self-esteem, security. These are not only material needs, they are needs of the heart, of the mind, of the body, of the environment. Some of us get drawn to the spirit and deny the spirit around us. I look at both. I do pray within me because I recognize a spark within me, that is why I am alive, but there may be a revival of a spark, which I believe in, having read books like Autobiography of a Yogi, Living of Himalayan Masters, J. Krishnamurti, the Gita and so on, when you listen to discourses, to spiritual music, I do believe there is a spirit within, there is a spirit beyond and a spirit around. It is both individual and around. There is total interconnectedness.

And when you recognize interconnectedness, automatically there is a spirit of non-violence, love for peace, need for harmony, need for mutual respect. Within the limitations of my understanding, spirituality is not one form, it is a pervading feeling and understanding.

Spirituality is the essence of religion. Religion is a format and spirit is the soul.

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

It is being aware every moment, am I into that spirit, am I connected to that spirit or not, am I in harmony, am I consuming more than giving, am I being dutiful or a cheat, am I denying or sharing.... All those concepts come in a day to day behavior. I am not in the total stage of surrender where I only give and do not take, but I am conscious that I do not take disproportionately. The moment you share though, it comes back.

Individually, spirituality is at every moment. I do not let negative thoughts enter me. And for positive things, every day I try to nourish myself. I read every day, for instance the Speaking Tree in Times of India, as well as Economic Times' Spiritual Quotient. So it is every day a new thought, a new development that nourishes me and empowers me. It is about not staying put.

I meditate before I sleep and take a meditative walk every morning. And I read as a meditation.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

It is the environment that was at home, it is the way my parents groomed us. We were visiting temples, we were into rituals, prayers but the basic concept was the common pervading spirit of sharing, caring, being dutiful, and consciousness. The other big influence was my school. It was a convent school. The church bell would ring there, the church would ring at home, we could choose between the two. We learnt to have a discerning mind. I could pick up a balance for myself – am I a deficit or a credit. There were many other influences thereafter, which I would take in if in accordance with my thinking, people, books, visuals. Vipasana course made me experience concretely spirituality of what was imagination before. It gave me a scientific analysis of my beliefs, like instant reward and instant punishment, how we actually react to body sensations, if your mind is not in the tea, it may be hot or cold, it does not matter, if you have a cold, your mind is there but you cannot sense the taste of the food. It made me understand how addicted to sensations I am, and how much of a bubble it is, how limited it is, what I am liking in the bubble and it does not stay forever, that is why our ideas change every day. Nothing lasts forever, everything changes all the time. It made me understand more that what I am hanging on will change. So what matters is the righteousness of the deed. It made me understand for instance when I lost my mother, every time a sensation of grief would come to my mind, I would observe that grief, and it would go away, it was a thought resting in my mind which made me sad; because observation of the thought gives you control over the thought, and so the grief would go away. So vipasana made me understand life better, that is why I became more fearless in life, carefree in my doing, within the tenants of morality, and with consciousness. Because I feel it does not matter, tomorrow is another day, what matters is the moment, what I care about today, what will happen tomorrow we do not know. It breaks a boundary, it makes me more free.

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

There were professional, personal, and individual spiritual turning points. I came into myself when I ran the prisons assignment. I evolved, I emerged. Because I saw huge suffering. I saw destiny having placed me there. It was a remarkable destiny that placed with 10,000 prisoners, and 10,000 families outside. And I was caught between the two, and I realized why I am here, there must be a reason. And how nature supported me every day to make things happen and the more they happened, the more there was an urge to make things happen, because I realized I was there for a reason. And after

that it did not matter to me what comes next, because it is considered the worst posting of your career, it became the most evolving posting for me. I was actually thrown out, because it was working so well, that the authorities imagined it was moving towards the Nobel Prize. The world would have seen a self running prison. I was coming into the third year of my assignment, and prisoners were actually about to be paying for their imprisonment. All would have worked, all would have been educated, all would provide for their families, and all of that in captivity. This would have been a model for world prisons.

But this actually set me free – teaching me no attachment. And it made me independent of my own department. It gave me a space and platform of my own. And books and awards came. Which even made me financially secure.

Personally, it was my mother going away. It also set me free. Because I loved her so much, I was emotionally so attached to her. She did everything for me. While she handled one side of my life, I could work outside. After she left, she set me free because I did not care to go myself, but I could not see her go away. So once she went away, I was left free to feel I can go away. And now my daughter is in the same situation. She would not want me go and I am ready to go. After her going away, I set myself free from dependent relationships, and I never believed she would go. Once she went, I realized that everything goes. So what are you hanging on?

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

Only yesterday I was asking myself this question, is god with me, is god talking to me – yes, I am talking to myself, that is the power of the spirit.

To me there is a destiny & there is karma. Destiny is my parents, my upbringing, my genes not my choice. Your environment is your destiny, you have not created it. But the moment you get consciousness, who am I, where am I, what have I got with me and what am I doing with what I got – that is karma. And I was conscious I had plenty; I had the best parents and school and opportunities that one could ask for. So I had no choice but to be the best. Since I was ten or eleven, my whole strive and thinking was to be the best. But not with the ego, to prove it to the world, but with self-esteem, confidence, to honor what I got.

Karma is being conscious to who you should be and what you should do. Karma is action. It is what you make of your own destiny. You begin with destiny, what you have, you make your karma, and from your karma you remake your destiny. And you do not know what is coming next.

And why are we born differently? Why do we get certain things and not others? Of course I believe in reincarnation. All those stories of people for instance born in the US

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

My policing work is simplest if it is spiritually based. It is so complex, stressful, agonizing, punishing, heart attack giving, evil if it is not. If it is spiritual, it is joyful, it is caring, it is justice giving, security giving, it is the finest service you can give to the community. Spiritual means follow the tenants of law, serve people equally and with respect. The laws are not here to differentiate but to give justice. It is there to repair and give justice for the victim, but also for the accused so he does not commit injustice again. Introducing vipasana for instance was introducing repair, like a hospital, with patients who had not external but internal injuries. Those personal wounds would create violence in society. How do you repair something that is hidden within? You need some therapy that enters the mind and heart. It was a

thought to a thought cure, with a peaceful environment. Vipasana could remove negative thoughts, it was a silence invisible process with peaceful thoughts replacing violent thoughts. It played the role of a healer.

First the environment of that institution was non violent, with a calming atmosphere, and letting the inmates believe that the guards are there to heal them. Apart from vipasana, yoga was very critical also, and education. Having them understand themselves. There was nothing theoretical or about teaching them, vipasana was about them experiencing it themselves.

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

I would like to be reborn with the same father and mother, the same family. My biggest strength has been my parents. They shifted to Delhi when I began working and they were taking care of my child so I could do what I was meant to do. My daughter was ill for thirteen years until adolescence and my mother took care of her. Otherwise I would have had to put my work on hold. Being reborn without them would be a punishment. And I would be a better daughter, because I would know from childhood that mummy will go one day, so I would be good with her every day, instead of fighting as I used to. We actually have a Durga temple in her memory on some land she had purchased, 40 km away from Delhi, next to a rural development center for women that we developed.

Gods close to: all the gods and goddesses are close to me, I worship them all in my house, I can't afford to annoy anyone.

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

It would be interesting to know "do you really punish for karma – then why people that I think are evil are at the top?, why do you take so much time to punish so that good prevails faster? Why should people doubt that good will be rewarded? Punish immediately! And not after those people damaged societies and countries. Because innocents are punished more along the way.

What is your idea of happiness?

The way I am right now.

I have a choice to change it, to quit anything I have, and the fact I haven't means I am happy with it. That is why I am constantly changing things. I am not doing it only for myself but for a larger good. The key to all my functioning is "why am I here for"? Not me as a person, but as a part of that duty. I always go back to the constitution and the original aim of an institution and I change it to put it back to its original goal and mission statement. So it starts changing and evolving within months. That is what happened for the prisons for instance, with the community's support. Or now I am supposed to do research but I have no money. So I partner with universities and they can help on the research. Not for myself, but for my duty. It is the Gandiji concept. You are here as a trustee and are supposed as such to make sure that the institution leaves for the reason it was created. You do not take more than what you need. You are the agent of transformation towards the essence of the institution. Instead, when people do not see themselves as trustees but are just consumers of the institution, they use it while it has resources and leave it once there are no more and it is bankrupt, they look at it with "what is there in it for me?". I am a Director General of Police and I tell my juniors: I am building it not to return to it as a DG but for you juniors to come back as DGs and immediately they feel as stakeholders. You are the beneficiary of my fight with the home minister. And they start joining me. Otherwise they wouldn't. for

the first time everyone meets at 10 o'clock now, and share all that is happening and to be done, they used to sit in their own box and not sharing anything, suddenly in the last two months we delivered much more. Everybody knows what others are doing instead of saying 'it is not my work'; now they are questioning, they are asking, they are informed, conscious of why they are here, I made them read the charter, and so they wrote to the superiors to get the resources to be able to implement the charter. No one is permanent, everyone will come and go, so what we do today is for others tomorrow.

Since August 1, Director General of Bureau of Police Research and Development.

And then depending on who they chose on January for Police Commissioner, I will see what I do. They have to follow the Supreme Court judgment. If they circumvent it, I will have to make a decision. And I could question it or set myself free to do my own things. I will not hang around for the sake of a driver and a car or a house. I have two NGOs to run, a lot of writing and traveling to do. They try to put me down and I always find a way out. Because the charter hangs on my head. You put me down but what about the charter? The key is the charter of responsibilities, going back to the essence.