

David Abraham

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'Religion means very little to me'

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David Abraham believes spirituality is the quieter, more contemplative side of human nature. It is about finding harmony in life, establishing some kind of meaning and knowing what makes one tick.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It's the quieter, more contemplative side of human nature. It is about finding harmony in my life, establishing some kind of meaning and knowing what makes me tick, reconciling all aspects of life as I deal with them on a daily basis. It is akin to an intellectual search.

How do you go about that search?

One has to be reflective, to stop and think. I try to do so, every so often. And one needs to listen, not just to oneself but also to the world around, to other people. It is also very important to try and live without prejudice, which is extremely difficult. We are so preconditioned that approaching things in an unbiased way is almost impossible.

Life can be such a race, how do you make sure you have time to be reflective?

It is tough. But we can find those small spaces in daily life, listening to music or sitting quietly in a corner. For me, it actually happens a lot at the gym - the treadmill is so repetitive that it allows me to think a lot. For instance, most of my work ideas come while doing cardio exercises. Besides, I really try to be engaged in a clean way, meaning in a focused, present way. This is something I have always felt very strongly about, this attempt to be connected, to establish links. I believe there is a wholeness that connects everything and everyone. Science talks about it, for instance

if you look at chaos theory, and how a butterfly moving its wings can set off a tornado. It happens in every aspect of our lives.

You mentioned finding meaning in your life – what kind of meaning have you actually found?

I feel there is a basic connectedness - this is who and where I am, I have some control over what I do though not complete, my actions have a particular effect, so I must try and exercise them with responsibility.

As I feel that interconnectedness, I see everyone part of a gigantic ecosystem, and it forms a kind of morality for me.

Religion on the other hand means very little to me. I see it more as a very structured set of rituals. And when it is so ritualized, the meaning gets lost. Also I find religious people very dogmatic.

I grew up in a Syrian Christian environment, and I was always struck how intolerant those people were of other practices, of other lifestyles, even of other diet systems. And it thus became very unattractive to me.

My upbringing was fairly unreligious but I went to a Christian school and at least it taught me about one structured religion, so I am not fully unaware.

I feel religion is a solace to many people. It fills the emptiness they would otherwise feel, and which they could not stand. It presupposes some divine plan to everything we do, it entails a pattern to our lives and the fact that somebody else would take responsibility for it as well – and I simply do not believe in all that.

The idea of karma, destiny, preordained events - does it talk to you?

Some elements are preordained, for instance that I was born in a particular place to particular parents, and what I am today has obviously been shaped by it. I can accept that. But I cannot accept the idea that I am destined to lead a life which is completely beyond my control. We have to make choices every minute. And each of those choices shapes our journey. They lead to larger directions, greater paths, greater roles. Should I make clothes now? Should I teach about making clothes? Should I work with an NGO making clothes with a community? Those are choices presented to me every day, and I am in control of the answers.

How did you choose design?

I always enjoyed sketching and painting. From my youngest age, I can only remember myself with a pencil and paper, drawing. Also, everyone around me was quite encouraging about it. So it seemed quite logical to shift at some point into design.

An uncle of mine was on the governing council of NID (National Institute of Design) in Ahmedabad; he was able to convince my father that it was a good school. And joining NID was actually the most important shift in my life and in my thinking. There, I started growing into who I became. For the first time, there were people teaching things that really interested me. Also, it had a very open and free system of education, which suited me very much.

Touching people through esthetics and beauty, is that part of your life's meaning?

I look at it that way now, though not fully, since so much of design is commerce, and I am very aware of that. I fully participate in the endless circle of consumption and production, which at some level I find meaningless, deeply unnecessary and wasteful.

Evaluating who we are through material possessions such as one's wardrobe feels so empty – of course it can give some kind of satisfaction but it can't be the meaning of one's life. Yet, I earn my living out of it. So at times it troubles me, at others it doesn't. Because without a doubt, I do love what I do. So I go back and forth between those feelings.

Also, I can make particular choices about the kind of things I get involved with. For instance, it would be easy not to work with craftspeople as it is hardly profitable, but it brings meaning to what I do. It is what enables me to go to sleep at night when I worry too much about over-consumption, which can be so depressing.

At times of particular difficulty or challenge, where is your anchor, how do you find your energy?

I have always had to find resources within myself. I've been through periods when it was extremely difficult. But there are no shortcuts. One has to come to terms with circumstances no matter how difficult they are, and accept them as the way life is. I can't say I have found a philosopher or a spiritual thought or a tangible thing like prayer. Prayer is exceedingly meaningless to me. Just being with myself, being still, trying to listen to what's going on inside, listening to music, reading, going for a walk, all those things help.

I don't have a set of beliefs to focus on. I have tried, I have read, I have talked to people who are part of such belief systems, and I can see what it has achieved for them in their lives, but it just doesn't work for me.

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

Actually this is what it is, and I therefore have no question to ask. I take life as it is.

If there were such a thing as rebirth, what would you choose for the next round?

I absolutely do not believe in rebirth. I do believe there is a molecular structure in every being, which does not disappear and continues to spin once we die. It gets transformed and becomes something else. It simply is a metamorphosis but it does not involve rebirth.

What is your idea of happiness?

Feeling a sense of balance and harmony. Feeling in touch with my immediate environment. Feeling connected to things around me. Being responsive to what is happening around me in a harmonious way. Being in synch. It is not something that happens a lot, but at times.

It requires a passive state - sitting there and feeling this is where I am, this is who I am, this is what I have, and feeling balanced about it, with a sense of acceptance.