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'I believe in luck, not chance'

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What does spirituality mean to you?

By nature I am not religious, so that word is more about a state of being. What is it that gives me a sense of calm, where do I find my peace? At the moment, my mind is so cluttered with work that I do not really find the spirituality I am looking for, apart from islands of calm when I get away from everything. In the urban environment, one gets so caught up in the momentum of the treadmill that it is hard to see within and question where one is. Of late though, I made for myself a house in the mountains, where I can switch off from everything with a sense of calm as there is no pressure to explore and go out as when visiting a new place. So I am discovering there the virtue of a place where I can go and just be.

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

I believe in luck but I do not believe in chance. Everything I have achieved has come with hard work; I have slugged every single day of my life and never had an easy moment. That always got me to the

next level of success but each one of them comes with its issues and pressures. When there is success, people watching from the outside only see the rosy picture, they do not understand that we all go through cycles and that there are dark periods as well. On the other hand, to succeed, one also needs luck. Being at the right place, at the right time. For instance, I have had the same factors available to me in the last thirty years but they did not work as well ten years ago. The country is now going through a boom so I am peaking at the right time. Had the country been booming when I was 25, I would not have known what to do with it. Now, who gives me that luck, who blesses me? I have never really given it a thought. I just know that neither talent or hard work nor luck alone are enough. You need both.

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

I would not talk about a specific mission as objectives in life keep changing. But being born in a fairly successful family group, there was a huge peer pressure to accomplish something, no matter what form it would take, to be up to that legacy and carry it a bit forward. My father was famous at a young age, my uncle was a famous politician so there was no way we would not try and become "someone". There was no place for goofing off. Fortunately, I was always in a boarding school, which gave me a bit of distance and the space to create an identity for myself. Back then, I thought I would become a ceramist like my mother and take over her business. Architecture was not on the cards. But when circumstances threw me into it within my father's practice, I gradually learnt to like it. I had to make a conscious effort though to distance myself from my father and asked him to let me go. He was very upset about it, but without it I could have never found my own identity. Being a versatile artist, he went back to other media and withdrew from architecture. It was a huge gesture on his part.

At the beginning, my goal was to become the biggest design firm in India. Then I realized it is enough to be the best. Further on, I understood it is also not about being the best but rather about being satisfied with what I do. I figured out I could either be an idealist, in a boutique firm with two or three signature projects, or take advantage of the country's boom and become a huge design firm. I decided to do the latter and commercialize my practice. I am glad I made that choice because the times we are going through are like a big storm and what matters is size, experience, critical mass. As a large firm, exciting opportunities keep coming and I feel good being part of a larger story, talking about creating new towns, shaping the way people will live tomorrow. Now my mind works on taking this forward, both by venturing into real-estate, and thinking of the legacy, of interacting with the next generation of architects, of philanthropy.

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

I do not think I have it in my day to day life. With all that is happening in India and my work, I basically got an opportunity to ride the big storm and the high is in riding it. There is no way one can get off the pressure cooker, it is like being on a treadmill, you can only run or jump off. So in a way, one feels spirituality can come later. But maintaining a balance and not getting crazy is not easy. So I do have introspection and also, I think everyone needs people they can talk to and open up to. It is rare to find such individuals so I always seek people I value. Their opinion can shape my mind and those encounters are spiritual experiences to me.

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

Spirituality to me is about experiences and what I draw from them. Some events come and help you realize who you are and grow. One such pivotal moment was when my father fell ill and I had to come

back from college to help him in his architectural projects. I used to be a spoiled brat, a wild kid and that moment made me responsible. I suddenly was in charge, I was the man of the house, and it totally changed who I would later become.

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

I would want to be in a position to play a larger role in life. Indeed, I do not restrict my mind to architecture only. I come from a political family so I have seen the game on a larger scale. And if you were to ask what my regret is, I would say I believe I have far more energy, to do far more than what I have been doing until now. I feel I have a good mind, I can be a great contributor, I can do good for this country, I can do good on a larger scale. Will I get that chance though? I do not know.

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

There are no mysteries of the world to me, no big "why's", I take the world and life as they are.

What is your idea of happiness?

I keep saying it is an overall being. If all the things I love dearly, like my family or my work are in harmony, then there is happiness. But the dynamics of it are obviously constantly changing, there are crisis and challenges every single day. So my ability to deal with them is what determines my happiness.

The writer is a French traveller who has worked in international relations, classical music, journalism and psychology. But it is her particular interest in spiritual matters that has led her to devise this version of The Proust Questionnaire: "It helps us to see people who they really are inside."