

Salman Khurshid

Congress MP

'God to me is what is behind that wall'

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Salman Khurshid, Congress MP.

What does spirituality mean to you?

The first image that comes to my mind is my grand-father's, Dr. Zakir Hussein. Of course he became the President of India but for me he was first and foremost a teacher – not in the conventional sense but in a simple and most precious way which I would call truly spiritual. He would teach with every gesture, with every word, with every step he took. I have tried to live my life by his example but I am quite sure I have not succeeded. To me there is such a conflict between striving to be spiritual, which also means being soft, accommodating and good and succeeding in the real world, especially the one of politics, where to strive one needs to be over-assertive and confident, competitive, tough and aggressive.

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

Philosophers have spent centuries trying to answer the most fundamental questions about life and its meaning, but I feel that if you go deep enough, there is a point after which you hit a wall and where you have no more rational answers. God to me is what is behind that wall. And life can be viewed as a dialogue with that powerful Force that influences our lives.

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

I never really chose politics. It came to me naturally as since I was young, I wished to influence positively the life of many people. Something inside was pushing me to go beyond my immediate surroundings for the larger canvass. And I am actually not sure I have been able to do it. I have not seen a consistent and effective contribution of mine to the larger canvass. I have done some things in UP, in Parliament, in my association with a hundred schools and so on but those are little islands in the larger picture. And politics are becoming increasingly fragmented, divided, narrow minded. So will I get a chance to go beyond? I do not know yet.

What has been the role of spirituality in your life as a politician?

Being in politics means being under such tremendous stress. So strength comes from "across the wall", from that Force behind it without which I would have given up a long time ago.

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

Our first born was a daughter. We called her Aisha, after the Prophet's wife, as I felt she would be vulnerable and would need a special protection. She was an amazing child, extremely bright and sharp, incredibly bubbly and dynamic, but early on we discovered she was strangely dyslexic and at the age of six she went through a repeated number of infections and then faced surgery. Over the years things deteriorated. At 11 we discovered her kidneys were damaged, and at 17, in the middle of a holiday, her kidney suddenly collapsed, she had a brain hemorrhage and fell into a coma. We struggled so much, holding on to the smallest signs of hope like when she would suddenly open her eyes. But a month and a half later, she passed away. She was like a beautiful flower that bloomed and then left. Of course, this ordeal tested my faith. But it actually never left a doubt, quite the contrary. I looked at her life and saw that apart from those last weeks in coma, she had led the richest life possible. And the time we spent in the ICU actually gave us a strength I would have never fathomed.

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

I look at my life and I feel I have had such a rich one, I have done and seen and met and heard and travelled so much. So I would just add a couple of things for next time, speaking more languages, and playing an instrument.

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

How is Aisha doing?

What is your idea of happiness?

As long as it is not an unending string of negative things, if there are few positive ones thrown in between, then it is happiness.