

Imran Khan

Cricketer & Politician

'I wonder if I do enough'

Sun Nov 11 2007



Imran Khan, Cricketer & politician.

What does spirituality mean to you?

To have a connection with the divine and find harmony between the body and the soul. I was marked one day by a New York Times' front page story by a leading psychiatrist who had spent fifty years studying the correlation between wealth and happiness. He proved that they are directly and clearly antagonistic: all over the world, the richer people are, the less happy. Solely pursuing worldly satisfaction leads to emptiness whereas the more spiritual I got, the more I led my life according to the principles of Islam, the more inner contentment I felt, no matter what the turbulences in my outer life. So faith in God has meant removing all my fears and creating a sense of inner peace, of inner freedom.

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

When you become spiritual, you see God's hand in everything, including in the worst setbacks. In Islam we believe that God keeps three things in His hands: when we die, respect & humiliation and livelihood. Once we understand it, all fears are removed. And for instance I could become more generous. When I was playing cricket, I had no clue about all this. I was only moved by the killer instinct, by the ruthlessness that sport gives you which is that there is no prize for coming second, and no place for compassion or charity. But I then gradually understood that God would provide for what I need, if I did what is meant to. So for instance I could afford being charitable. When we started the

hospital, we had Rs.10 million in the bank for a Rs.700 million project. There was a crisis every single month, but money would always somehow and serendipitously show up. I also understood that time is in God's hands. You can do your best but He decides when things happen. So basically, we are meant to struggle and strive, but timing, success and failure are in His hands.

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

I believe that the whole purpose of existence is to find our destiny. And the only impediment in fulfilling it and the God given potential we have is fear. As I grew into spirituality, my fears were removed and I understood my purpose on earth: in Islam, we believe that the more the Almighty gives us, the more responsibility we have. I feel I was blessed with much more than others. So my mission is to do for the less privileged ones. For instance, creating the cancer hospital, or this technical college I am developing in a very remote part of Pakistan. And then using the respect I enjoy for betterment through politics – I feel it is the greatest social work I can do. Indeed, a true Islamic State is a welfare State where the latter takes responsibility for the weaker sections of society, rather than the one we have now which is predatory, with a ruling elite living off the poor like parasites.

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

It is about moving in a certain direction, fulfilling my destiny and responsibilities. For instance, politics are only a part of my spiritual quest. It is not about becoming a minister per se, but if I can get into power, it is about making Pakistan a judicial and socioeconomic just country.

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

When growing up, God was an integral part of our lives. When I went studying to England though, everyone thought that God is "passé" and that religion is the opium of the masses. So doubts crept in. Genuinely growing towards spirituality therefore only started off with the death of my mother, when I was 32. Her death triggered my journey towards self-discovery. And if you come towards God through your own internal journey, through doubts and questioning, your faith is much stronger. Besides, once you start searching, God helps and shows you the way. So at that time, I met a mystic, a retired government officer who somehow became a guide. Though my faith was constantly challenged – with much tougher tests than I ever faced on a cricket field – it only became stronger over time.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

Once I engaged on this path towards self-discovery and spirituality, I began reading so much – the Koran of course, but also other books of guidance like the Vedas, the Bible and so on. Besides, the great poet Iqbal inspired me more than anyone else with his verses so steeped in the Koran, bringing out its deepest and most precious meaning.

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

According to the Koran, human minds cannot comprehend three things: the thereafter, angels and God. So there is not point in trying to fathom what will happen after I die. I only know that if I live my life decently, there is no fear to be held regarding the thereafter.

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

I used to have so many questions. I gradually understood though that human arrogance is the only thing preventing man from coming to faith. If I do not grasp something in the Book, it is because of my own ignorance, not because the Book is wrong. So there is no place for questioning.

What is your idea of happiness?

My greatest happiness has come from my two boys, and from some successes along the way like the day the hospital's doors opened. On the overall I feel quite content – almost too content at times, which makes me wonder if I do enough.