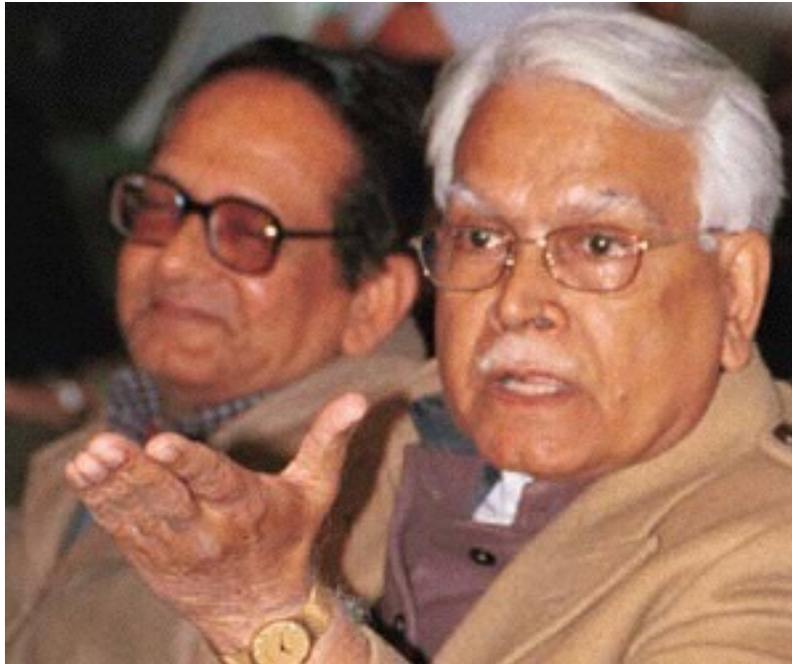


# **K. Natwar Singh**

Former External Affairs Minister

## **'I believe in prayer'**

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**K. Natwar Singh, Rajya Sabha Member and Former External Affairs Minister.**

### **What does spirituality mean to you?**

I make a fundamental difference between religion and spirituality. I am not a religious person. I do not believe in a personal or impersonal God. I believe though in some unseen power which keeps this tormented planet of ours going. There is some order in the disorder, a force that keeps the world moving. Spirituality is also about a set of fundamental values that every serious human being should not neglect.

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

Well, I guess there is such a force in my life, and I feel very grateful to it as I was given so much by it, though I feel I have not given back enough. But between absolute determinism and free will, I would say I believe a bit in both. The Almighty hands you a number of cards and it is up to you to see how to play them. Overall, I consider myself a lucky person. But obviously I have made a considerable amount of mistakes. And also, some things are absolutely inexplicable. For instance, we lost our daughter when she was only 30. Why? It is grotesque in the scheme of things that parents would cremate their children. It is a horrible reality.

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

Otherwise why would we be here? But what is mine precisely? It is a very uncomfortable question; one I wouldn't know how to answer. And besides, life is so fragile— I am acutely aware of how much life and death walk together.

### **What is spirituality for you in your day-to-day life?**

I believe in prayer, and also I chant a daily mantra from the Rigveda—the Gayatri mantra, "Let the light that gives light to the sun enter all my being". Besides, I can be superstitious, especially about the fact that if you get excessive success, you are bound to see the wheel of fortune turn.

### **What is the role of spirituality in your public life?**

I like to think that nothing I have done would give me shame. The Volcker report scandal is to me a misunderstanding; it mostly is a political thing that happened within the Congress. Still, those moments were extremely difficult, the pressure from the party, the government, the media, the public—it was all horrendous. In such moments, you must summon all the inner strength you've got. And I did stand up.

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

I had a very bad accident in 1977 and the fact that I survived was a complete miracle. It somehow gave me the feeling that something was protecting me. You are travelling in a car, the chap next to you dies and you survive —why?

### **What are your spiritual inspirations?**

My encounter with E. M. Forster was undeniably fundamental. He ruled my intellectual life for two or three decades. And his instruction "only connect" definitely also had a spiritual undertone to it. It meant connecting the inner and outer life, and also was about friendships—those make all the difference in the world.

### **If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be?**

I do not believe in reincarnation—if it did exist, the heavens would be quite overcrowded! But if I had to choose something, I would want to be a great writer.

### **If there were one question you could ask God, what would it be?**

Why don't You put an end to the cosmic mess?

### **What is your idea of happiness?**

The Japanese have an expression for a moment in the Sumo game: as the two Sumos confront each other for long periods of time, there comes a move following which the audience instantaneously goes "ha". That kind of moment would define happiness. Or rather, I would call it joy. And concretely, it can be playing with my grandchildren, or simply being in silence. I am not the ascetic type, but my nature is rooted in solitude and silence, "the greatest noise in the world" as Pasternak would say.

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."