

Shivinder Singh

CEO and MD

'It is up to me to be content'

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Shivinder Singh, CEO and MD, Fortis.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is the process of finding God within me. It first implies that for me there is a God, and also that God is in every one of us, It is not something outside of me. Religion is more like a rule book, a formatted way to follow. It can help, but ultimately spirituality is about my own way of finding God.

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

Well, first of all I believe in God, and also, according to the way of life I belong to, we believe in a living master as a manifestation of a form of God. So certainly there is protection and guidance coming with it.

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

First of all, in our view, the purpose of life is God's realization. Humans are the only form of living with the power to differentiate between right and wrong. And this is what can get us out of the cycle of life and death. Of course each one of us finds his own way of achieving this purpose. Then there is what I do in the world, in my case in healthcare and hospitals. This is actually something that came by accident. It was always understood by my peer group that I would enter the family business, which meant pharma. And pharma was the one thing I did not want to do as it was a step removed from the customer. Also, I wanted to be in business, but not in what was already there for me. I heard the idea of hospitals being discussed at home and it appealed to me. It had three qualities: it would be different, it would be in business (I did not want to be into charity only) and I could make a significant impact on people's lives. Often people ask me why I am not into hotels, as in some ways both businesses are connected. But the fundamentals of hotels are eating and drinking, which are things I do not believe in. So with healthcare and hospitals I really feel like a fish in water, it has been a perfect fit for me.

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

We as a family have a particular way of life and belief that we follow. According to it, we should do minimal harm in terms of not killing animals and so on, so we are completely vegetarian, including no eggs; we should not lose control of our consciousness so we do not drink alcohol; and above all, we believe God is in every soul from a tree to an animal to a human being and the way to find it is within. This entails spending time on our own as often as possible. 85% of our interaction with the world comes through the eyes and ears, 96% if you add the mouth, so first of all you need to shut all three in order to see and hear within. In the end, a large part of finding God is about finding myself first. As if I was a drop in the ocean, but if I do not even recognize one drop, how can I recognize the ocean? And also, the ocean is supposed to be pure so I cannot get in it impure, I have to first go through a process of cleansing.

What is the role of spirituality in your professional life?

Spirituality and my way of envisioning life are completely integrated to every moment and aspect of my day, including the professional one.

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

I would not mention one single experience but rather several moments when, to use a metaphor, the gear shifts changed, when the level of engagement was transformed. As a kid, you hear and follow those beliefs because you are told so. Then comes a stage of interacting with the philosophy, of asking questions in order to make sure one understands – why no eggs, why no chicken, why no alcohol, and so on. That is gear one, when one starts to push the envelope to see and understand. Gear two is when one stops questioning and starts fully believing, in an integrated way, from within. That faith gets tested a couple of times – "if there is a God and He is looking after me, then why is this happening" and so on – and then the questioning transforms into believing. The most significant gear change took place when my maternal grand-father passed away, seventeen years ago. It was a very big event in my life. He was the embodiment of the philosophy my family adheres to, the ambassador of that way of life. So it was a test, and in the end it took me to a different level.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

My maternal grand-father, above everything and everyone else. He was a towering influence on my life in every fathomable way. When I would not agree with my parents, I would go to him and whatever he would say, I would do, no questions asked. Now that he is gone, my Uncle has filled that void like a God Father.

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

I would be ready to start all over again. I could not have gotten a better life, better opportunities, or a more special connection to spirituality.

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

No questions asked. No mystery.

What is your idea of happiness?

It is about trying to be content with what I have and where I am today. Of course I have to drive myself to achieve targets, but no matter where I get, there will always be challenges, difficulties, reasons for stress and I can always find reasons for unhappiness. For instance, had I sat down five years ago and imagined what Fortis would have become, I would have painted a much smaller picture than what it is now. We have achieved a hell of a lot more than we could have ever dreamt. So sitting in five years ago's shoes I should be very happy. But of course I can find faults and things missing and craving for much more. Another problem is that as humans, we always compare ourselves to those succeeding more than we do, we look at what others have and bump up our reference framework, we never look down. And that either can't ever be satisfying. So in the end, it is very much up to me to manage and be content here and now.