

Shahnaz Husain

Beautician

'I am at peace with myself'

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Shahnaz Husain, Beautician.

What does spirituality mean to you?

You can be spiritual by serving God in many other ways than being religious. For me, it is essentially about making a difference in other people's lives and it is what makes life worthwhile.

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

I have noticed that whatever I touch becomes gold, and I cannot make a wrong decision because I am guided in the right direction, as if by a strange spiritual power within me. There is a power moving the universe, that one may call God, and if you are good at heart, It shows you the way.

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

There is no such thing as destiny, we create our own. In my case, I have the power to change people's lives as looks matter so much. But I had no clue I would ever do such a thing and it happened quite serendipitously. I was married very young (at 15), frustrated and restlessly in search of an occupation. My husband took me to a friend who had heard of an army officer's wife giving beauty classes – "put Shahnaz into that and she will stop troubling you" he said. That is how it all started. Had we seen

another friend, or had this one not heard of this class, who knows what I would have become. Once in London for further studies, some incidents due to chemical products—a client committing suicide, another becoming blind—changed the course of my life again, as they prompted me to look into ayurveda. And without all this, I could not be helping so many people today.

What has been the role of spirituality in your work?

People focus on the brand goodwill or the financial value of a company but there is also something called spiritual goodwill and to me it matters tremendously. So many girls cannot afford treatments or classes, but undertaking them would change the course of their life. They could get married, or keep their husband, or anything positive of the kind. And how much does it cost me to have them for free? They cannot pay, but they can pray, and nothing can buy that, as it comes from the heart.

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

I came back to India at the age of 21 after seven years of training, began working and was immediately phenomenally successful. One day my father whom I worshipped took me aside and showed me a torch: the light can easily go off if there is any mechanical defect. One can disappear any day, in an instant. But though so successful in earthy matters, what was I doing spiritually and to prepare the thereafter? One should not postpone doing good things. His words triggered something in me and it ignited my interest in underprivileged people, particularly in the deaf and dumb.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

My parents were an interesting combination as my mother was very religious and conservative, and my father was resolutely modern. I remember my grand-father also, who was commander-in-chief in Hyderabad. He built himself a marble grave and every morning, he would ride to it and meditate inside the grave for a while. He wanted to remain humble despite all his power, and remind himself that this was his permanent place and that there was therefore no reason to show any lack of concern or respect for humanity.

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

There is nothing I would want to do that I am not doing, so I would just ask to come back as a good human being.

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

There is so much struggle and suffering and poverty, why wouldn't everyone have the same right to happiness?

What is your idea of happiness?

It is only a state of mind. If I cannot find happiness on my own, no one and nothing can do it for me. So I would not say I have inner peace as such, but I am at peace with myself and therefore happy.