

Manpreet Singh

Minister of Finance

'I am incapable of having simple fun'

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Manpreet Singh Badal, Minister of Finance in the Punjab Government.

What does spirituality mean to you?

Many people think much about God, rather than worship God's creations. As a politician, as someone who really wants to devote his life to nation building, more important than God is to look after God's creations. There is no excuse for the fact that we have such abject poverty in the 21st century. So my priority and my idea of spirituality is to devote my entire life to bringing this country to a level where everyone has human dignity.

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

I would not know if there is such a thing as a superior force, but I do not believe things are pre-ordained and pre-planned. Chance plays an important role. And the force that sustains me all along is my dedication to my mission and my objectives.

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

For the last sixty years, my family has won the elections in our constituency. My uncle was elected eight times in a row and for me it's been the fourth time – each election with a higher margin than the previous one. What carries me through it all is my deep conviction that India can be turned around within my lifetime. I look at countries like post-War Germany, Korea, Singapore and I see that it does not take many people to change the destiny of a nation. I can feel I am destined to do just that. I can foresee that this transformation will happen. This is very clearly my mission. In the long run, everyone is forgotten, including the most powerful rulers. History will not record me. But history will record India.

And I look at the opportunity of serving my country as a privilege not many people have, so there is no looking left or right, my whole being should be into it.

I have been feeling that way since I was a child. When I was at The Doon School, I got a special permission from the housemaster to receive a local Punjab newspaper on my breakfast table every morning. I was only ten years old, a time when kids usually really do not care about such things. So it is as if had always been preparing myself for it, becoming strong, stoic, able to take on tough situations and challenges.

What is the role of spirituality in your work?

In the way I defined spirituality, my work IS spirituality. I am not into politics for personal glory, my goals are extremely clear. Also, I am very lucky not to be dependent on this profession to make a living. I was born into a rich family and I inherited a lot of wealth, so I can almost afford being like a Gandhi.

Can you share a unique experience that changed or shaped your spiritual beliefs?

I think that two experiences shaped me deeply into who I am. First, growing up in rural India, in the midst of utter poverty, made me want to give back to the society I was taking from, and make sure this suffering disappears. Second, my exposure to the West, especially when I went to England to study law, and the contrast of what I saw there with India pushed me even more into striving for the end of poverty.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

My main inspirations have always been nation builders, like Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, or Nelson Mandela, or Lee Kuan Yew. His book "From Third World to First" is my bible. It is on my bedside table and even though I have read it six times, I keep coming back to it. Other inspiring figures have been freedom fighters, like Shaheed - E - Aazam Bhagat Singh and Patrick Pearse, whether in India or abroad. And finally, poets, especially Sufi poets from Punjab have been a tremendous source of upliftment and sensitivity. Of course they wrote about the love of God, but it can also be translated into the love of one's country or one's cause.

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

History does not remember people, so I would not want to be a celebrity or something of the kind. I would only want to be born in the same country and be of service to it in some way.

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

Why does He make people suffer so much on this earth? I never understood that. A young child passing away and the misery of the parents: why?

What is your idea of happiness?

Here, I would like to quote from Tagore:

"Where the world is without fear and the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free,
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls,
Where words come out from the depths of truth,
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection,
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way in the dreary desert sand of dead habit,
Where the mind is let forward by Thee into ever widening thought and action,
In that heaven of freedom let my country awake."

That is my idea of happiness. My family would point out the fact that I am essentially incapable of having simple fun. I am so focused on what I feel my mission is. I just cannot help it.