

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw

Chairman of Biocon

'Happiness is to keep doing good things'

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Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Chairman & Managing Director of Biocon.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is about moral values, ethics and principles. It is not about going to temples or swamis. It is something unique to every one of us.

What are your spiritual inspirations?

I have been very impacted by the Seven Social Sins philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi – to me, the most powerful statement ever. They have been my guiding light in life. The first principle that struck me was: if you do not pursue science with humanity, it is a sin. Wealth without work is a sin. Education without character is a sin. Pleasure without conscience is a sin. Religion without sacrifice is a sin – this one is less relevant to me because I do not feel so religious, but I do feel that life is sacrifice. I believed in building my business and I had to sacrifice a lot for it. So religion is about conviction, about believing in something important to you.

What is the role of spirituality in the world of business?

One of Gandhi's seven principles was: business without morality is a sin. As a publicly traded company with shareholders and stakeholders, it is my duty to run it in a profitable manner. But because I am pursuing a scientific business, I have to make sure my products impact humanity in a positive way. We are developing drugs for many diseases that afflict a large part of the world, such as cancer or diabetes. That is why I am so excited about what I do. Also, in a country like India with so many young intelligent minds, providing them with jobs so they can pursue their scientific research is an important part of the mission. Finally, 30% of my scientists are women – getting a lot of families to let them work instead of staying at home is so important as well.

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

Definitely. I am a god fearing person. I may not be religious but I certainly believe that god is both up above, making sure that if you are getting into difficult areas, he guides you; and he is inside, as your conscience, as your spiritual truth. I always believed that if you do things the right way, in a moral way then somehow you will be looked after.

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

Many people are not in a mission mode. But once you get a sense of purpose, and you take it on as a spiritual challenge, then you feel in a mission mode. It means having to do certain things, and doing them with a deeper conscience, probably more seriously than others. For me for instance, developing affordable drugs for unmet medical needs is what keeps me going.

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

It is about doing things the right way, looking every day at people and their needs. I am very caring and concerned about people who do not have what I have. I try to do a lot for underprivileged people. I run a corporate social responsibility initiative focusing on providing very affordable healthcare to the rural poor, through an insurance scheme at very low cost. The same with drugs for cancer: when it saves lives, I feel very good about it and it reinforces my sense of purpose. When I see the return on that investment, it shows that my purpose is right, that the mission is going in the right direction. I am not the kind of person who meditates or goes to temples. If I happen to be in a church or a temple I feel good, but I would not go out of my way to be there.

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

When my father passed away, something very significant happened. While he was not doing well, I was tempted to go to temples, and seek advice and comfort from all sorts of people telling me about the future etc. It is my father who stopped me from the temptation: "I expect better from you than clinging to those crutches. Accept what happens as what life has to offer. You are an intelligent person, don't expect those things & people to provide answers for you". Because of the sorrow I could have become addicted to them, but he prevented it.

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

I have a hard time believing that we just come and then disappear. So I would just like to come back as a nice person, with good values, someone who cares. I cannot imagine coming back as a person without principles.

What is your idea of happiness?

To keep doing good things – I simply feel very happy when I see good things happening in life and in the world.