

Deepender Singh Hooda

Lok Sabha MP

'I returned to India to join politics'

Sun Mar 23 2008



Deepender Singh Hooda is a Lok Sabha MP from Rohtak, Haryana and is the son of Bhupinder Singh Hooda, the Haryana chief minister. He was elected at the age of 27 in October 2005.

What does spirituality mean to you?

I would not describe myself as a very spiritual person, and my understanding of spirituality keeps changing over time, but I do try to be conscious of some essential questions. So I would equate spirituality with the learning taking place on the journey of life and how I would go about that journey; with the exploration of various aspects of my personality, with the process of understanding my mission and objectives in life, of figuring out how I want to go about achieving them; and more importantly, of how I could become a content person.

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

I do not believe there is an external divine force influencing and moulding our lives. I am convinced we shape our own destiny and there is no such thing as a predestined life.

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

As a kid, as I come from a political family, people kept asking me if I would enter politics one day. And my answer was always adamant – anything but that. I grew up seeing my father having so little time for the family, and so often dissatisfied because of the constraints and particulars of the political environment in the country. So the last thing I would have wanted was to go through the same. Instead, I became an academics over-achiever, joined Infosys as an engineer, then went for an MBA and joined American Airlines in the US. It was all well and fine on the surface, I was on a fast career track, but something was missing inside. After much inner torment I decided to go back to India and engage into politics. I did so because I realized there is such a thing as a higher purpose leading every individual on a particular path or direction. There is such a thing as a mission. And despite the many constraints and difficulties involved, having an opportunity to make a difference in the life of many felt and feels like the right purpose to me.

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

I am not into religious practice or meditation and so on. But it is about understanding at each point who I am and why I am here, about listening to my inner voice as much as possible. And I actually notice that it is getting stronger and stronger over time.

What is the role of spirituality in your political life?

Entering political life meant sacrificing much comfort and trading it for eighteen-hour days of work, constantly surrounded by loads of people and meeting hundreds of them every day, with no place left for a personal life. I can get agitated about it at times. But at night when I go to sleep, I feel satisfied because at least someone went back home smiling thanks to what I have done. No material comfort could give me the same inner feeling of honouring the purpose of my life. Spirituality as I said is connected to the understanding of one's higher purpose. So my political life is the manifestation of that understanding.

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

I was 26 and a half years old. I was living in Dallas, Texas, having the time of my life with wonderful friends, a comfortable job and a really pleasant lifestyle. But something was bothering me inside. I felt a strong dilemma as to where my life should go. As I belong to a political family, I had a sense I should maybe do something and join politics as well. On a Thursday night at 3am, the answer finally came. I imagined myself at the age of eighty, sitting all by myself in my living room – what should I do to make sure that this old Deepender would smile with inner contentment and no regret? Could it be that I had become the CEO of a large company and made millions? But what would I do with all that money? Or should I be the guy who had an opportunity to make a difference in thousands of lives and grabbed it? That night the dilemma got finally solved, I chose the second option. The next day I gave my letter of resignation, I sold my car and the home I had just bought. I went to work for the remaining days in a rented car, sleeping at night with my two suitcases at some friend's house.

So sometimes our lives are at a crossroads, and we have to make crucial decisions. Those are defining points. This one was perhaps the most important ever as for the first time I really listened to my inner voice. Until then, I had been on some academic and career track with not much inner listening or feeling, almost like going with the herd. From that day on, I began listening to my inner voice, trying to be more guided by my spiritual self.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

My father and my grand-father both shaped significantly my understanding of life, each of them in a quite different way. My father inspired me with the simplicity of his belief in one's work rather than one's results. He functions driven by values, doing whatever feels right and never judging by the results. I am far from being so detached from the results of my efforts, though I am trying to become more so.

My grand-father has been a towering influence with his tremendous discipline and drive. Once he has chosen a path, his dedication is complete and intense. When he decided to join the Congress to fight for independence, he gave up his possessions and transferred all the land he owned to his brother. He soon was in jail. After three years spent behind bars, he came out, bought a newspaper and read about a ban on hoisting the Congress flag. The very next day he went to the collector's office, hoisted the flag and went back to jail for two more years. He ended up spending eight years in various prisons. This formidable discipline continued after independence. He is the last surviving member of the Constituent Assembly of India. He was in Parliament for 30 years, deputy leader of the Rajya Sabha, minister and so on. Today, at the age of 94, he still wakes up at four in the morning to do two hours of yoga, he was jogging until a couple of years ago and instead now goes on swift walks.

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

As my father. He is actually someone with a huge inner peace; he listens to his inner voice constantly and bases all his decisions on it. He is the consummate karam yogi, wholly driven by his beliefs and not worrying about the results.

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

Why weren't we all created equal?

What is your idea of happiness?

Inner contentment.