

THE PROUST QUESTIONNAIRE

General Joginder Jaswant Singh was the first Sikh Chief of Army staff, a position he held from January 2005 till September last year. He is now Governor of Arunachal Pradesh.

'Why remain a rat in a rat race? Become a tiger'

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is a direct, personal and a very intimate connection with God, with my beliefs and my faith. It is something I derive my strength from, feeling the full spiritual strength flowing into me or what I do.

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

Most definitely, and I have constantly felt so. My philosophy has been to be a warrior and a winner. And God has been kind to me, I have been a winner. But none of that comes easily. I believe God only helps those who help themselves. There is no shortcut to success. So I worked hard at it, and kept trying to be innovative, never going by the book or following the sheep path.

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

Well, I would definitely see a clear line and an underlying theme throughout my life—thriving to choose the righteous path and a just cause, striving to be a warrior and a winner. Was that obvious since my childhood? When growing up in the fifties in India, there was very little industry or private sector. One had to choose between being a bureaucrat, a professional or in the army. Coming from an army family, it was natural to take the military path. My grandfather had fought in World War I. He was wounded and spent the rest of his life disabled, barely managing to sustain his large family. My

father was a self-made man who also struggled to make ends meet. But we were brought up with very strong values such as the determination to succeed and work hard, as well as with stories about our religion, our warriors, the sacrifices made by our gurus to defend the weak and the oppressed, to defend the faith. All this shaped my life and its purpose.

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

It's not about going regularly to a temple, praying every morning, or performing a ritual. It's about trying to be good and constantly feel the connection with my faith in my heart. That way, I could not be subjugated by doubt, despite the challenges and difficult patches I went through.

What is the role of spirituality in your work?

I would say it is about a number of values and an attitude I have always displayed. As Chief of Army staff, I tried to emphasise the human dimension, bringing a greater focus on the respect for human rights. If you drop a bomb on a village to kill two terrorists who have moved away in any case, and instead kill 20 innocents, you create 20 families of sworn enemies. And what is the responsibility of those



women and children? It also manifests in a certain style of leadership. I would encourage my officers to think and shy away from yes-men attitudes. I would often scold them and ask if they are keeping their brain for their next life! I would also push them to draw what is their line of happiness. Too often I have seen generals unhappy whereas colonels would thrive. What is the point of reaching such a stage and moan? Why remain a rat in the rat race instead of becoming a tiger?

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

There were many such events. I always say, for instance, "when I go up, I will salute the weather God". Indeed, so many times our plans would have been completely ruined by a bad rain but we would be unexpectedly blessed with sunshine. Also, as a brigadier in Kashmir in the early '90s, I was seriously injured. But the spinning bullet went 12 inches through my body without touching a single vital organ or bone or the main artery. Had that happened, by the time I reached the hospital, I would not have been alive. The experience showed me again that there is a hidden hand seeing me through.

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

It is up to God to decide. But I would want to be in a position in which I can be of service to mankind.

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

How could I dare question someone so superior, who is running the universe? We cannot always comprehend his deeds, but we cannot assume the role of questioning. He is the Creator, so he is the decider.

What is your idea of happiness?

Mahatma Gandhi used to say that the world has enough resources for people's needs, but not for people's greed. I think it summarises my idea of happiness: knowing where to draw the line of what will give me inner contentment and not constantly crave for more. ♦