

THE DESIGN OF

destiny

WHEN YOU WORK IN TANDEM
WITH YOUR DESTINY YOU WILL
DISCOVER THE PURPOSE OF
YOUR LIFE

by **Sundeep Waslekar**



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My ticket for New York had been booked for September 9, 2001. I was booked at Hotel Marriott at the World Trade Centre. My first meeting was scheduled for 9 am on September 11 at the vegetarian restaurant at the Marriott. Then suddenly, a Chinese institution invited me to visit dairy farms about 200-300 km away from Beijing and Shanghai. The problem was that the Chinese hosts also wanted me to begin the official visit on September 11. The New York schedule had almost been finalised but the Chinese were not being flexible at all. The choice was between top American strategic thinkers and multinational honchos on the one hand and Chinese farmers on the other. I decided in favour of the farmers. On the early morning of September 12 in Shanghai, while it was still evening in New York, I learnt that I had just missed being part of the gruesome statistics being released by the New York fire brigade.

It was an overwhelming feeling, one I had experienced before when I was saved in the crash-landing of a Srinagar-Delhi flight on July 7, 1977. Each such episode reminds me that there is a reason why I live, a purpose that must be pursued, and a truth that must be sought.

I believe that we all have a destiny. It does not mean that the destiny will become operational without any effort of our own. The real test of life is in understanding our own destiny and taking the initiative to actualise it.

The first time ever I had a sense of destiny was when I was preparing for my final year B.Com exams. Twelve days before the exams, I received a letter from a German foundation announcing their plans to host an international seminar on restructuring global economic relations. They were calling for papers from all over the world to select 30 participants in an international competition. It was aimed at research directors of major institutes and policy makers. Somehow, something in my heart told me that I must bid for an entry. The foundation wanted the paper within ten days. In the evening a friend came to see me. She said: "If you work for your B.Com exams and secure a first class, where will it get you? At the most you will pursue an MBA and become an executive in a big company. Your destiny is to influence the shape of the world."

I spent the next ten days preparing the paper for the seminar, ignoring the final B.Com exams. A few days later, I received a standard printed reply of regret from the organisers. Something told me that

it would not be their final word. Exactly a day before the seminar, I received a sudden call from the organisers saying that they had decided to invite me on review of my candidature and that a flight had been booked. I borrowed a suit from a friend, secured the visa in the morning from the consulate, which had already received instructions, and rushed to the airport in the night.

In the following months, my paper challenging the international financial system was discussed all over the world. I was offered a scholarship at Oxford. Just as my term at Oxford got over, Indira Gandhi, who was then Prime Minister of India, wrote me a nice personal letter, advising me to return to India. Just as she was assassinated, I was asked to head the Eight Nation Peace Mission by a civil society conglomerate in Canada. Just as the time again came for a return to India, SAARC was formed and I was asked to join a panel mandated to suggest economic breakthroughs in the political conflicts of the region. One thing after another just seems to happen and lead me into a situation where I am asked to contribute to a critical regional or global issue.

The most striking coincidences take place when I am involved in backdoor negotiations to prevent wars or negotiating with terrorists. My induction in the efforts to persuade militants to give up guns was a completely unexpected eventuality. Someone, currently holding a distinguished position in Indian public life, left a book I had written and presented to him, in a jail where a very prominent militant leader was held. As the latter had nothing else to do, he read my book several times. When he was released from the jail he came looking for me. Finally, we met in the course of

a secret diplomacy exercise leading to a number of positive developments.

Now I work with Strategic Foresight Group, a think tank that attempts to influence global changes. We do not use computer modelling. Instead, we depend on insights into the minds of leaders, terrorists, analysts, scholars and others we deal with. I have no doubt from my practical experience that it is in the harnessing of the inner consciousness of every entity and every individual, that the future of the outer world is hidden.

I really believe that there is nothing special about my journey from the chawls of Mumbai's suburbs to the corridors of the United Nations and the House of Commons. Everybody has a role to play in the world. The trick lies in reading signals, understanding destiny and taking initiatives that are relevant to our world and universe. The tragedy of our society is that a large number of people ignore opportunities coming their way because they do not consciously try to understand their destiny. We do not realise our potential because of our obsession with career, property and the status that we work hard to secure. I have all of these material pleasures, but I never hanker after them. The more we chase material goods, the more they run away from us. The more we ignore them and the more we focus on understanding our purpose in life,

the more material pleasures come and offer themselves to us.

It was this understanding of the essence of life that saved me from the 9/11 tragedy. Moreover, my involvement with farmers at that time exposed me to power imbalances in the world and helped me to craft a policy package to possibly minimise the risk of terrorism. In June this year, some leaders from the western and Islamic countries met at the European Parliament for the first time since 9/11, 2001. They discussed and adopted my proposals in the form of the Brussels Consensus. Much has happened since then and will continue to happen in the months and years to come. I feel that the real part of this sojourn has just begun. Maybe this is not the time to write this article. Perhaps I should wait until I reach my destination. But then, the editor of Life Positive phoned me at the very moment I was thinking of calling her to turn down an invitation to contribute to the magazine. Let's see if this proves to be some kind of a signal. ☺

