

SONIYAA KIRAN PUNJABI

AFTER BEING INTRODUCED TO SPIRITUALITY AT THE AGE OF 22, SONIYAA KNEW SHE HAD FOUND HER LIFE'S CALLING. THERE WAS NO LOOKING BACK; SHE STUDIED EXTENSIVELY UNDER VARIOUS RENOWNED HEALERS AND TEACHERS AND AFTER THE ENORMOUS SUCCESS OF THE WORKSHOPS SHE STARTED CONDUCTING FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY, HER DREAM OF A HOLISTIC WELL-BEING CENTER WAS REALISED IN 2011

Illuminations is a pioneer in holistic wellness in the region and is a veritable oasis of spirituality in the often materialistic and glitzy trappings of Dubai. Soniyaa, the beautiful entrepreneur at its helm, is a living embodiment of her vocation; serene, strong and magnetic. She brings famous healers from all over the world to the region, (including *The New York Times* bestselling author Dr. Eric Pearl), has started international spiritual retreats and provides stress management training to several big corporates. It is hard to believe that she is only 32 years old. We capture the visionary spiritualist in the kind of glamorous avatar she rarely embraces, but one that so completely epitomises her powerful persona.

Where is home for you?

Technically, Dubai. However, I grew up in South Korea, lived in London and spend a lot of time in India.

Tell us about why you started Illuminations. I have always been interested in the concept of miracles, coincidences, destiny and a higher unseen power within and around us, which I term as the universe.

One of my closest friends passed away in a car accident when we were 19 years old. It brought a lot of questions to my mind about life, death, the after-life, past lives... It made me realise how short life really is despite the illusion of permanency. His death propelled me to look for answers beyond the physical world.

When I applied all the tools I picked up during my quest, I was able to let go of negative patterns; it changed my life forever. I found my true potential and I felt that everyone needed to know about this!

What services does the center offer?

At Illuminations we offer tools and services with one simple aim: to help individuals live light! It is amazing how much we are capable of achieving when we let of the fear and blocks that hold us back. When

we realise that it's our own attitudes and mindset that have created limitations in our lives, we have the power to change them.

I started to organise workshops for friends and family so that they too could gain the awareness that most of the problems we experience are self-created. We can let go of them by becoming aware of how responsible we are.

It has always been my dream to open a wellness center. After seven years I finally opened the space I always dreamt about. It started out as a room in my apartment, then grew with the process of time. We opened our center in Dubai's JLT in 2011.

What would you say is the most challenging part of your job?

The toughest part of my job was finding the right people to delegate my work to. To trust that others would work with the same passion. Luckily, I have now created an excellent team who treat Illuminations like their own. I realised I had managed to overcome this challenge when I spent most of the summer traveling, and my team handled the business better than I would have!

What sets you apart from others in the field?

We are a pioneer in the field of holistic healing here in Dubai and so as leaders we are always raising the bar by continuously evolving as a business. We focus on innovation.

I started off as a freelance promoter for holistic healing workshops, then set up the centre and now operate spiritual trips and advise corporates. This ever-evolving business model has been the key to our success.

How would you describe your style?

On a day-to-day basis I would definitely describe it as simple and fuss-free. Work demands that I'm comfortable in what I wear and I'm happy with that.

What is the essence of being truly stylish?

Being able to wear any outfit and carrying it off with the same grace, elegance, style and confidence. Fashion is like any other art form. It requires creativity ▶

White jumpsuit, Dhs1,855/ US\$505, The Kayys; Pearl strand necklace, Dhs860/ US\$234, Madame Reve at Boom & Mellow; Ivory vest, Dhs1,850/ US\$503, Ayesha Depala; Five-strand tassel bracelet, Dhs2,640/ US\$718, Miriam Haskell at Sophie's Closet

'My icons are known for their contribution rather than the way they dress'

and the ability to put things together to make it look extraordinary.

Describe a typical ensemble.

I hope my look is effortless and feminine with a touch of glamour. I could achieve that via a statement necklace, a stand-out jacket or pair of trousers. I wear a lot of white but I am also drawn to prints and pretty colours; pinks, peaches and nudes.

Who are your favourite designers?

Emilio Pucci, Diane von Furstenberg, Roberto Cavalli and Zimmerman for swimwear. Also, a pair of well-fitted AG Jeans by Adriano Goldschmied!

What is the one thing in your wardrobe that you hold closest to your heart?

The things that are close to my heart are people and experiences rather than material things. My classic designer clutches would come a close second!

Who are your fashion icons?

Most of my icons are known for their contribution to society, rather than the way they dress. But I like the way Kate Middleton, Queen Rania of Jordan and more recently Amal Clooney are always perfectly turned out.

Your beauty essentials?

SK-II Miracle Water, sun-block and pure virgin coconut oil for hair, skin and pretty much everything! I purchase a lot of chemical-free, organic products for the face and body. Cosmetic-wise, I think a blush for that tinge of colour and a lip balm for well-moisturised lips are a must.

Most importantly I try to maintain a state of inner happiness and self-love. It may sound cliché but we all know that's the most essential ingredient to beauty.

What's on your fashion wish-list?

A personal shopper or stylist who can take me on a spree and pick out all these amazing things for me to wear every day! **Is there a piece in your wardrobe you will never regret splashing out on?**

I have been investing in a lot more resort and swimwear recently. This new wardrobe inspires me to take more relaxing, chilled holidays by the sea and incentivises me to keep fit.

If you had to shop in one place...

I would opt for London. It has a huge variety of one-off boutiques, big-name designer stores, multi-brand shops, department stores, high street staples and quirky markets. You get a mix of everything. Plus I used to live there so I know my way around the metropolis.

Your vacation plans always include...

A spiritual retreat which offers lots of opportunities to connect with yourself, nature and like-minded people.

I want a bit of everything. A big city where I can shop, eat and play, a chilled spot where I can lounge around a nice pool or on a beautiful beach or adventure activity. I like a balance of everything whilst on holiday as it's my

Floral crystal necklace, Dhs15,780/US\$4,276, Jersey bodysuit, Dhs1,520/US\$413, Striped skirt, Dhs2,090/US\$569, All Elisabetta Franchi; Satin bow pumps, Dhs4,650/US\$1,266, Roger Vivier; Perspex clutch, Dhs1,766/US\$480, L'afshar

time to recuperate from my hectic work schedule. I am not one for extremes.

The restaurant that never lets you down: Bentoya Japanese Kitchen on Sheikh Zayed Road in Dubai.

The beauty expert that makes you look your best is...

I recently had an oxygen facial at Joanna Vargas in New York City and I loved it as it did wonders for my skin. However, nothing makes me look better than just having come out of a powerful energy healing session.

What are your future plans?

To make the best of every moment, live in the present and seize every opportunity to learn, grow, evolve and enjoy without being too attached to tomorrow. It always tends to work out best that way!

Which stores do you tend to make a bee-line for?

Zara, Reiss and sometimes H&M. They bring you the latest fashion trends at affordable prices.

When it comes to high-end, I splash out on YSL, Jimmy Choo, Prada and Chanel because everything I have bought from these brands is so classic that it will never go out of style.

The one thing you always wanted to do but have yet to:

Get married and have children – but only for true love. I have pretty much tried everything else! **H**

WORDS & CREATIVE DIRECTION:
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HAIR: AVAN CONTRACTOR,
MICHELLE COELHO AND EMILIE YANG
@ BBLUNT DUBAI;
MAKE-UP: SEPHORA MIDDLE EAST

Sheer bodysuit, Dhs1,750/
US\$476, Sequined skirt,
Dhs4,125/ US\$1,123,
Tailored blazer, Dhs3,095/
US\$842, All Elisabetta
Franchi; Crystal pearl
earrings, Dhs1,490/US\$405,
Ciner at Sophie's Closet;
Century heels, Dhs3,100/
US\$843, Charlotte Olympia