MEMORY OF PAST LIVES

If one were to say things truly, one would have to say everything, in full detail. For among the innumerable experiences that I have had in the course of eighty years, many were of such a variety and apparently so contradictory that one might say: after all, everything is possible. So then, if I tell you something about past lives without presenting the thread running through everything, that would be opening the door to dogmatism. You will say one day, “Mother has said this, Mother has said that.” And that is how dogmas, alas, are made.

Given then the multitude of experiences and the impossibility that I should pass my life in talking and writing, you must tell yourself that everything is possible and not be dogmatic. I may, however, give a few general indications.

Only when one is consciously identified with one’s divine origin, can one in truth speak of a memory of past lives. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the progressive manifestation of the Spirit in the forms in which it dwells. When one reaches the summit of this manifestation, one has a vision that plunges down upon the way traversed and one remembers.

But this memory is not a thing of the mental kind. Those who claim to have been such a baron of the Middle Ages or such a person who lived at such a place and such a time, are fanciful, they are simply victims of their own mental imagination. In fact, what remains of past lives are not beautiful pictures in which you appear as a mighty lord in a castle or a victorious general at the head of an army — that is only romance. What remains is the memory of those instants when the psychic being emerged from the depths of your being and revealed itself to you — that is to say, the memory of those instants when you
were wholly conscious. That growth of consciousness is progressively effectuated in the course of evolution, and the memory of past lives is generally limited to the critical moments of evolution, to the decisive turns that marked the progress of your consciousness.

At the time when you live such moments of your life, you do not care at all about remembering that you were Mr. X, such a person, living at such a place and in such an epoch; it is not the memory of your civic status that remains. On the contrary, you lose all consciousness of these petty external things, accessories and perishables, so that you may be wholly in the flare of the soul revelation or of the divine contact. When you remember such instants of your past lives, the memory is so intense that it seems to be still very close, still living, and much more living than most of the ordinary memories of our present life. At times, in dreams, when you come into contact with certain planes of consciousness, you may have memories of such intensity, such vibrant colour, so to say, even more intense than the colours and things of the physical world. For these are the moments of true consciousness, and everything then puts on an extraordinary brilliance, everything is vibrant, everything is imbued with a quality that escapes the ordinary eye.

These minutes of contact with the soul are often those that mark a decisive turn of our life, a forward step, a progress in consciousness, and that frequently corresponds with a crisis, an extremely intense situation when there comes a call in the whole being, a call so strong that the inner consciousness pierces the layers of unconsciousness covering it and is revealed all luminous on the surface. This call of the being, when very strong, can also bring about the descent of a divine emanation, an individuality, a divine aspect which joins with your individuality at a given moment in order to do a given work, win a battle, express one thing or another. The work done, the emanation very often withdraws. Then one may retain the memory of the circumstances that were around those minutes of revelation or inspiration: one
sees again the scenery, the colour of the dress that one had put on, the colour of one’s own skin, the things about you at that time — all that is fixed indelibly with an extraordinary intensity, because the things of the ordinary life revealed themselves then in their true intensity and their true colour. The consciousness that reveals itself in you, reveals at the same time the consciousness that is in things. At times, with the help of these details you may reconstitute the age in which you lived or the action that you did, find out the country where you were; but it is very easy also to make a romance and take imagination for reality.

Yet you must not believe that all memories of past lives are those of moments of great crisis, of important mission or of revelation. Some times they are moments very simple, transparent, when an integral, a perfect harmony of the being was expressed. And that may correspond to altogether insignificant external situations.

Apart from the things that were in your immediate surrounding at that moment, apart from that moment of contact with your psychic being, nothing remains. Once the privileged moment passes, the psychic being plunges into an inner somnolence and the whole outer life melts into a grey monotony which does not leave any trace. Besides, it is almost the same phenomenon as what happens in the course of the life that you lead at present: apart from those exceptional moments when you are at the summit of your being, mental or vital or even physical, the rest of your life seems to melt into a kind of neutral colour which has no great interest, when it matters little whether you were at such a place instead of being at another, whether you did this thing or that. If you try to look at your life all at once, in order to gather, as it were, its essence, the twenty or thirty or forty years behind you, you will see rise up spontaneously two or three images which were the true moments of your life; the rest is effaced. A kind of spontaneous choice works in your consciousness and there is a tremendous elimination. This will give you a little idea of what happens in regard to past lives: the
choice of a few select moments and an immense elimination.

It is very true that the earliest lives are very rudimentary; very few things subsist out of that, scattered memories few and far between. But the more one progresses in consciousness, the more the psychic being is consciously associated with the outer activities; the memories grow in number and become more coherent and precise. But still, here also, the memory that remains is that of the contact with the soul and at times that of things which were associated with the psychic revelation— not the civic status or the changing scenes around. And this will explain to you why the so-called memories of past animal lives are the most fantastic: the divine spark in them is buried much too deep down to be able to come up consciously to the surface and be associated with the outer life. One must become a wholly conscious being, conscious in all its parts, totally united with one’s divine origin before one can truly say that one remembers his past lives.