

## Chapter Three

# Death

### Death and Karma

It [*death*] is a universal force — the happening or change called death is simply one result of the working of the force.

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Most people die before the vitality of the body is exhausted. It is due to many causes of which one is the destiny prepared by past lives; another the inner purpose or utility of the present life being completed — but these are subtle and secret reasons — others, accident, violence or other causes, are only an exterior machinery.

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X had reached a stage of her development marked by a predominance of the sattwic nature, but not a strong vital (which works towards a successful or fortunate life) or the opening to a higher light, — her mental upbringing and surroundings stood against that and she herself was not ready. Her early death with much suffering may have been the result of past (prenatal) influences or they may have been chosen by her own psychic being as a passage towards a higher state for which she was not yet prepared but towards which she was moving. This and the non-fulfilment of her capacities would be a final tragedy if there were this life alone. As it is she has passed towards the psychic sleep to prepare for her life to come.

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You can explain<sup>1</sup> to X that the death of his nephew had nothing

<sup>1</sup> *Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the enquirer. — Ed.*

to do with their [*his family members*'] obscurities and imperfections — it was part of his own Karma — each person has his own destiny and follows its line; to be in a certain family and with certain relations is only a temporary incident in its course. The sadhak should be free from these attachments and regard these happenings as ordeals to be passed through with equality and faith in the Divine — doing his best for those who are in his charge but not disturbed by results.

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It is a very intricate and difficult question to tackle<sup>2</sup> and it can hardly be answered in a few words. Moreover it is impossible to give a general rule as to why there are these close inner contacts followed by a physical separation through death — in each case there is a difference and one would have to know the persons and be familiar with their soul history to tell what was behind their meeting and separation. In a general way, a life is only one brief episode in a long history of spiritual evolution in which the soul follows the curve of the line set for the earth, passing through many lives to complete it. It is an evolution out of material inconscience to consciousness and on towards the divine Consciousness, from ignorance to divine Knowledge, from darkness through half-lights to Light, from death to Immortality, from suffering to the Divine Bliss. Suffering is due first to the Ignorance, secondly to the separation of the individual consciousness from the Divine Consciousness and Being, a separation created by the Ignorance — when that ceases, when one lives completely in the Divine and no more in one's separated smaller self, then only suffering can altogether cease. Each soul follows its own line and these lines meet, journey together for a space, then part to meet again perhaps hereafter — often they meet to help each other on the journey in one way or another. As for the after-death period, the soul passes into other planes of existence, staying there for a while till it reaches its place of rest where it

<sup>2</sup> A mother whose sixteen-year-old son had died wrote to ask why his death had taken place. Her letter was referred to Sri Aurobindo. — Ed.

remains until it is ready for another terrestrial existence. This is the general law, but for the connections of embodied soul with embodied soul, that is a matter of personal evolution on which nothing general can be said as it is intimate to the soul stories of the two and needs a personal knowledge. That is all I can say, but I don't know that it will be of much help to her, as these things are helpful usually only when one enters into the consciousness in which they become not mere ideas but realities. Then one grieves no longer because one has entered into the Truth and the Truth brings calm and peace.

### Death and Grieving

I can understand the shock your wife's catastrophic death must have been to you. But you are now a seeker and sadhak of the Truth and must set your mind above the normal reactions of the human being and see things in a larger greater light. Regard your lost wife as a soul that was progressing through the vicissitudes of the life of Ignorance — like all others here — in that progress things happen that seem unfortunate to the human mind and a sudden accidental or violent death cutting short prematurely this always brief spell of terrestrial experience we call life seems to it especially painful and unfortunate. But one who gets behind the outward view knows that all that happens in the progress of the soul has its meaning, its necessity, its place in the series of experiences which are leading it towards the turning point where one can pass from the Ignorance to the Light. He knows that whatever happens in the Divine Providence is for the best even though it may seem to the mind otherwise. Look on your wife as a soul that has passed the barrier between two states of existence. Help her journey towards her place of rest by calm thoughts and the call to the Divine Help to aid her upon it. Grief too long continued does not help but delays the journey of the departed soul. Do not brood on your loss, but think only of her spiritual welfare.

The telegram announces the passing away of your husband.

All has been done that could be done to keep him in life. What has happened must now be accepted calmly as the thing decreed and best for his soul's progress from life to life though not the best in human eyes which look only at the present and at outside appearance. For the spiritual seeker death is only a passage from one form of life to another, and none is dead but only departed. Look at it as that and shaking from you all reactions of vital grief — they cannot help him in his journey, — pursue steadfastly the path to the Divine.

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There is nothing to grieve about as death means only passing over to another country — to which you probably go very often when you are asleep.

That is, so long as one has attachment — one ought to look at it like that. But all attachment to past ties should be overcome.

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Of course, that is the real fact — death is only a shedding of the body, not a cessation of the personal existence. A man is not dead because he goes into another country and changes his clothes to suit that climate.

### **The After-Death Sojourn**

There is after death a period in which one passes through the vital world and lives there for a time. It is only the first part of this transit that can be dangerous or painful; in the rest one works out, under certain surroundings, a remnant of the vital desires and instincts which one had in the body. As soon as one is tired of these and able to go beyond, the vital sheath is dropped and the soul, after a little time needed to get rid of some mental survivals, passes into a state of rest in the psychic world and remains there till the next life on earth.

One can help the departed soul by one's good will or by occult means if one has the knowledge. The one thing that one

should not do is to hold them back by sorrow for them or longings or anything else that would pull them nearer to earth or delay their journey to their place of rest.

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It may happen to some not to realise for a little time that they are dead, especially if the death has been unforeseen and sudden, but it cannot be said that it happens to all or to most—some may enter into a state of semi-unconsciousness or obsession by a dark inner condition, created by their state of mind at death, in which they realise nothing of where they are etc., others are quite conscious of the passage. It is true that the departing being in the vital body lingers for some time near the body or the scene of life very often for as many as eight days and in the ancient religions mantras and other means were used for the severance. Even after the severance from the body a very earthbound nature or one full of strong physical desires may linger long in the earth-atmosphere up to a maximum period extended to three years. Afterwards it passes to the vital worlds, proceeding on its journey which must sooner or later bring it to the psychic rest till the next life. It is true also that sorrow and mourning for the dead impedes its progress by keeping it tied to the earth-atmosphere and pulling it back from its passage.

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After death the soul passes in a little while or at once from the earth atmosphere and goes into the vital worlds where it remains for a time until it is ready to leave it. Thus it passes on its way till it is ready to pass into the psychic world where it rests until it is ready for a new birth.

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After death one passes through various vital and mental planes till the psychic being drops its vital and mental sheaths and enters into rest on the psychic plane till the time comes for rebirth.

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At the time of death the being goes out of the body through the head; it goes out in the subtle body and goes to different planes of existence for a short time until it has gone through certain experiences which are the result of its earthly existence. Afterwards it reaches the psychic world where it rests in a kind of sleep until it is time for it to start a new life on earth. That is what happens usually — but there are some beings who are more developed and do not follow this course.

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That is a superstition [*that people have to live in naraka (hell) due to their bad actions*]. People after death pass through certain vital and mental worlds or through certain psychological states which are the results of their nature and action in life, afterwards they go to the psychic world and return to birth at a later time.

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When the Mother spoke of the continuance of the same trouble after death, she did not mean another life. At death you go out of this physical frame in another kind of body, not physical, and are the same person with the same consciousness. That is why to talk of dying as going to rest is an ignorance and why it is useless. The only real thing is to get rid of the old lower self and be reborn to the new higher one, which can only be done by a change within you. That is what the Mother wants of you.