

## Chapter Four

# Rebirth

### The Psychic's Choice at the Time of Death

The psychic being at the time of death chooses what it will work out in the next birth and determines the character and conditions of the new personality. Life is for the evolutionary growth by experience in the conditions of the Ignorance till one is ready for the higher light.

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The dying wish of the man is only something on the surface — it may be determined by the psychic and so help to shape the future but it does not determine the psychic's choice. That is something behind the veil. It is not the outer consciousness's action that determines the inner process, but the other way round. Sometimes, however, there are signs or fragments of the inner action that come up on the surface, e.g. some people have a vision or remembrance of the circumstances of their past in a panoramic flash at the time of death, that is the psychic's review of the life before departing.

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The psychic being's choice at the time of death doesn't work out the next formation of personality, it fixes it. When it enters the psychic world, it begins to assimilate the essence of its experience and by that assimilation is formed the future psychic personality in accordance with the fixation already made. When this assimilation is over, it is ready for a new birth — but the less developed beings do not work out the whole thing for themselves, there are beings and forces of the higher world who have that work. Also when it comes to birth, it is not sure that the forces of the physical world will not come across the working out of what it wanted — its own new instrumentation may not be strong enough for

that purpose; for there is the interaction of its own energies and the cosmic forces here. There may be frustration, diversion, a partial working out — many things may happen. All that is not a rigid machinery, it is a working out of complex forces. It may be added however that a developed psychic being is much more conscious in this transition and works much of it out itself. The time depends also on the development and on a certain rhythm of the being — for some there is practically immediate rebirth, for others it takes longer, for some it may take centuries; but here again, once the psychic being is sufficiently developed, it is free to choose its own rhythm and its own intervals. The ordinary theories are too mechanical — and that is the case also with the idea of *punya* and *pāpa* and their results in the next life. There are certainly results of the energies put forth in a past life, but not on that rather infantile principle. A good man's sufferings in this life would be a proof according to the orthodox theory that he had been a very great villain in his past life, a bad man's prospering would be a proof that he had been quite angelic in his last visit to earth and sown a large crop of virtues and meritorious actions to reap this bumper crop of good fortune. Too symmetrical to be true. The object of birth being growth by experience, whatever reactions come to past deeds must be for the being to learn and grow, not as lollipops for the good boys of the class (in the past) and canings for the bad ones. The real sanction for good and ill is not good fortune for the one and bad fortune for the other, but this that good leads us towards a higher nature which is eventually lifted above suffering and ill pulls us towards the lower nature which remains always in the circle of suffering and evil.

### Assimilation in the Psychic World

The soul after it leaves the body travels through several states or planes until the psychic being has shed its temporary sheaths, then it reaches the psychic world where it rests in a kind of sleep till it is ready for reincarnation. What it keeps with it of the human experience in the end is only the essence of all

that it has gone through, what it can use for its development. This is the general rule, but it does not apply to exceptional cases or to very developed beings who have achieved a greater consciousness than the ordinary human level.

It is not the soul (the psychic being) that takes a lesser form [*in its next birth*], it is some part of the manifested being, usually some part of the vital that does it, owing to some desire, affinity, need of particular experience. This happens fairly often to the ordinary man.

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After leaving the body, the soul, after certain experiences in other worlds, throws off its mental and vital personality and goes into rest to assimilate the essence of its past and prepare for a new life. It is this preparation that determines the circumstances of the new birth and guides it in its reconstitution of a new personality and the choice of its materials.

The departed soul retains the memory of its past experiences only in their essence, not in their form or detail. It is only if the soul brings back some past personality or personalities as part of its present manifestation that it is likely to remember the details of the past life. Otherwise, it is only by Yogadrishhti that the memory comes.

There may be what seem to be retrograde movements [*in the evolution of the soul*], but these are only like zigzag movements, not a real falling back, but a return on something not worked out so as to go on better afterwards.

The soul does not go back to the animal condition; but part of the vital personality may disjoin itself and join an animal birth to work out its animal propensities there.

There is no truth in the popular belief about the avaricious man becoming a serpent. These are popular romantic superstitions.

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The soul takes birth each time, and each time a mind, life and body are formed out of the materials of universal Nature,

according to the soul's past evolution and its need for the future.

When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane and remains there for a time, but after a time the vital sheath disappears. The last to dissolve is the mental sheath. Finally the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest there till a new birth is due.

This is the general course for ordinarily developed human beings. There are variations according to the nature of the individual and his development. For example, if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic.

The soul gathers the essential element of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for farther experience.

It is really for the vital part of the being that *śrāddha* and rites are done — to help the being to get rid of the vital vibrations which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to its rest in the psychic peace.

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The movement of the psychic being dropping its outer, its vital and mental sheaths on its way to the psychic plane, is its normal movement after death. But there can be any number of variations; one can return directly from the vital plane without passing on to farther and higher states, and there are cases of an almost immediate rebirth, sometimes even attended with a detailed memory of the events of the past life.

Hell and heaven are often imaginary states of the soul, or rather of the vital being, which it constructs about it after its passing. What is meant by hell is a painful passage through some vital world or a dolorous lingering there, as for instance in many cases of suicide where one remains surrounded by the forces of suffering and turmoil created by this unnatural and violent exit. There are also, of course, real worlds of mind and vital

worlds which are penetrated with joyful or dark experiences, and one may pass through these as the result of things formed in the nature which create the necessary affinities. But the idea of reward or retribution is a crude and vulgar conception and we can disregard it as a mere popular error.

There is no rule of complete forgetfulness in the return of the soul to rebirth. There are, especially in childhood, many impressions of the past life which can be strong and vivid enough, but a materialising education and the overpowering influences of the environment must often, but not quite always, prevent their true nature from being recognised. There are even a number of people who have definite recollections of a past life. But these things are discouraged by education and the atmosphere and cannot remain or develop; in most cases they are stifled out of existence. At the same time it must be noted that what the psychic being mainly carries away with it and brings back is ordinarily the essence and effect of the experiences it had in former lives, and not the details, so that you cannot expect the same coherent memory as one has of past happenings in the present existence.

A soul can go straight to the psychic world but that depends on the state of consciousness at the time of departure. If the psychic is in front at the time, this immediate transition is possible. It does not depend on the acquisition of a mental and vital as well as a psychic immortality — those who have acquired that would rather have the power to move about in the different planes and even act on the physical world without being bound to it. On the whole it may be said that there is no one rigid rule for these things; manifold variations are possible depending upon the consciousness, its energies, tendencies and formations, although there is a general framework and design into which all fit and take their place.

### **The Psychic Being and the Progression from Life to Life**

It is necessary to understand clearly the difference between the evolving soul (psychic being) and the pure Atman, self or spirit. The pure self is unborn, does not pass through death or birth,

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is independent of birth or body, mind or life or this manifested Nature. It is not bound by these things, not limited, not affected, even though it assumes and supports them. The soul, on the contrary, is something that comes down into birth and passes through death — although it does not itself die, for it is immortal — from one state to another, from the earth-plane to other planes and back again to the earth-existence. It goes on with this progression from life to life through an evolution which leads it up to the human state and evolves through it all a being of itself which we call the psychic being. This being supports the evolution and develops a physical, a vital, a mental human consciousness as its instruments of world-experience and of a disguised, imperfect, but growing self-expression. All this it does from behind a veil, showing something of its divine self only in so far as the imperfection of the instrumental being will allow it. But a time comes when it is able to prepare to come out from behind the veil, to take command and turn all the instrumental nature towards a divine fulfilment. This is the beginning of the true spiritual life. The soul is able now to make itself ready for a higher evolution of manifested consciousness than the mental human — it can pass from the mental to the spiritual and through degrees of the spiritual to the supramental state. Till then, till it has reached the spiritual realisation, there is no reason why it should cease from birth, it cannot in fact so cease. If having reached the spiritual state, it wills to pass out of the terrestrial manifestation, it may indeed make such an exit, — but there is also possible a higher manifestation, in the Knowledge and not in the Ignorance.

Your question therefore does not arise. It is not the naked spirit, but the psychic being that goes to the psychic plane to rest till it is called again to another life. There is therefore no need of a Force to compel it to take birth anew. It is in its nature something that is put forth from the Divine to support the evolution and it must do so till the Divine's purpose in its evolution is accomplished. Karma is only a machinery, it is not the fundamental cause of terrestrial existence — it cannot be, for when the soul first entered this existence, it had no Karma.

What again do you mean by “the all-veiling Maya” or by “losing all consciousness”? The soul cannot lose all consciousness, for its very nature is consciousness though not of the mental kind to which we give the name. The consciousness is merely covered, not lost or abolished by the so-called Inconscience of material Nature and then by the half-conscious ignorance of mind, life and body. It manifests, as the individual mind and life and body grow, as much as may be of the consciousness which it holds in potentiality, manifests it in the outward instrumental nature as far as and in the way that is possible through these instruments and through the outer personality that has been prepared for it and by it — for both are true — for the present life.

I know nothing about any terrible suffering endured by the soul in the process of rebirth; popular beliefs even when they have some foundation are seldom enlightened and accurate.

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1. The psychic being stands behind mind, life and body, supporting them; so also the psychic world is not one world in the scale like the mental, vital or physical worlds, but stands behind all these and it is there that the souls evolving here retire for the time between life and life. If the psychic were only one principle in the rising order of body, life and mind on a par with the others and placed somewhere in the scale on the same footing as the others, it could not be the soul of all the rest, the divine element making the evolution of the others possible and using them as instruments for a growth through cosmic experience towards the Divine. So also the psychic world cannot be one among the other worlds to which the evolutionary being goes for supraphysical experience, it is a plane where it retires into itself for rest, for a spiritual assimilation of what it has experienced and for a replunging into its own fundamental consciousness and psychic nature.

2. For the few who go out of the Ignorance and enter into Nirvana, there is no question of their going straight up into higher worlds of manifestation. Nirvana or Moksha is a liberated condition of the being, not a world — it is a withdrawal

from the worlds and the manifestation. The analogy of Pitriyana and Devayana can hardly be mentioned in this connection.

3. The condition of the souls that retire into the psychic world is entirely static; each withdraws into himself and is not interacting with the others. When they come out of their trance, they are ready to go down into a new life, but meanwhile they do not act upon the earth life. There are other beings, guardians of the psychic world, but they are concerned only with the psychic world itself and the return of the souls to reincarnation, not with the earth.

4. A being of the psychic world cannot get fused into the soul of a human being on earth. What happens sometimes is that a very advanced psychic being sometimes sends down an emanation which resides in a human being and prepares it until it is ready for the psychic being itself to enter into the life. This happens when some special work has to be done and the human vehicle prepared. Such a descent produces a remarkable change of a sudden character in the personality and the nature.

5. Usually, a soul follows continuously the same line of sex. If there are shiftings of sex, it is as a rule a matter of parts of the personality which are not central.

6. As regards the stage at which the soul returning for rebirth enters the new body no rule can be laid down, for the circumstances vary with the individual. Some psychic beings get into relation with the birth-environment and the parents from the time of inception and determine the preparation of the personality and future in the embryo, others join only at the time of delivery, others even later on in the life and in these cases it is some emanation of the psychic being which upholds the life. It should be noted that the conditions of the future birth are determined fundamentally not during the stay in the psychic world but at the time of death — the psychic being then chooses what it should work out in the next terrestrial appearance and the conditions arrange themselves accordingly.

Note that the idea of rebirth and the circumstances of the new life as a reward or punishment for *puṇya* or *pāpa* is a crude human idea of “justice” which is quite unphilosophical

and unspiritual and distorts the true intention of life. Life here is an evolution and the soul grows by experience, working out by it this or that in the nature, and if there is suffering, it is for the purpose of that working out, not as a judgment inflicted by God or Cosmic Law on the errors or stumblings which are inevitable in the Ignorance.

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It is difficult to give a positive answer to these questions, because no general rule can be laid down applicable to all. The mind makes rigid rules or one rigid rule, but the Manifestation is in reality very plastic and various and many-sided. My answers therefore must not be taken as exhaustive of the subject or complete.

1. He [*a Jivanmukta*] can go wherever his aim was fixed, into a state of Nirvana or one of the divine worlds and stay there or remain, wherever he may go, in contact with the earth-movement and return to it if his will is to help that movement.

This is doubtful [*whether a Jivanmukta can go direct from the world of the soul's present highest achievement to a still higher world*]. If originally he is not a being of the evolution but of some higher world, he could go back to that world. If he wants to go higher, it is logical that he should return to the field of evolution so long as he has not evolved the consciousness proper to that higher plane. The orthodox idea that even the gods have to come to earth if they want salvation may be applied to this ascension also. If he is originally an evolutionary being (Ramakrishna's distinction of the Jivakoti and Ishwarakoti may be extended to this also), he must proceed by the evolutionary path to either the negative withdrawal through Nirvana or some positive divine fulfilment in the increasing manifestation of Sachchidananda.

As to the impossibility of return [*to the earth*], that is a knotty question. A divine being can always return — as Ramakrishna said, the Ishwarakoti can at will ascend or descend the stair between Birth and Immortality. For the others, it is probable that they may rest for a relative infinity of time, *śāśvatīḥ samāḥ*,

if that is the will in them, but a return cannot be barred out unless they have reached their highest possible status.

No [*a Jivanmukta does not take rest in the psychic world before taking birth again on earth*]. That is part of the evolutionary line only, not obligatory for divine returns.

2. An advanced psychic being may mean here [*in the preceding letter*] one who has arrived at the soul's freedom and is immersed in the Divine — immersed does not mean abolished. Such a being does not sleep in the psychic world, but may remain in his state of blissful immersion or come back for some purpose.

The word “descend” has various meanings according to the context—I used it here in the sense of the psychic being “coming down” into the human consciousness and body ready for it; that descent might be at the time of birth or before or it may come down later and occupy the personality it has prepared for itself. I do not quite understand what are these personalities from above<sup>1</sup> — it is the psychic being itself that takes up a body.

3. No, the psychic being cannot take up more than one body. There is only one psychic being for each human being, but the Beings of the higher planes, e.g. the Gods of the Overmind can manifest in more than one human body at a time by sending different emanations into different bodies. These would be called Vibhutis of these Devatas.

4. These [*guardians of the psychic world*] are not human souls nor is this an office to which they are appointed nor are they functionaries — these are beings of the psychic plane pursuing their own natural activity in that plane. My word “guardians” [*in the preceding letter*] was simply a phrase meant to indicate by an image or metaphor the nature of their action.

### The New Birth

When there is a new birth one brings all that is necessary from

<sup>1</sup> *The correspondent asked whether the “personalities” of an advanced being “move about in the higher planes”. — Ed.*

past lives but also one gathers what is necessary from the earth consciousness and so too brings in new elements as one develops.

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It is a little difficult to explain. When one gets a new body, the nature which inhabits it, nature of mind, nature of vital, nature of physical, is made up of many personalities, not one simple personality as is supposed — although there is one central being. This complex personality is formed partly by bringing together personalities of past lives, but also by gathering experiences, tendencies, influences from the earth atmosphere — which are taken up by one of the constituent personalities as suitable to his own nature. Such an influence left behind by Vivekananda or one of his disciples may have been taken up by you without your being an incarnation of either.

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The being as it passes through the series of its lives takes on personalities of various kinds and passes through various types of experiences, but it does not carry these on to the next life, as a rule. It takes on a new mind, vital and body. The mental capacities, occupations, interests, idiosyncrasies of the past mind and vital are not taken over by the new mind and vital, except to the extent that is useful for the new life. One may have the power of poetic expression in one life, but in the next have no such power nor any interest in poetry. On the other hand tendencies suppressed or missed or imperfectly developed in one life may come out in the next. There would be therefore nothing surprising in the contrast which you noted. The essence of past experiences is kept by the psychic being but the forms of experience or of personality are not, except such as are needed for the new stage in the soul's progress.

The being in its long course of experience may permit for a time the search after sensual pleasure and afterwards discard it and turn to higher things. This can happen even in the course of a lifetime, *a fortiori* in a second life where the old personalities would not be carried over.

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### Reincarnation and Soul Evolution

You must avoid a common popular blunder about reincarnation. The popular idea is that Titus Balbus is reborn again as John Smith, a man with the same personality, character, attainments as he had in his former life with the sole difference that he wears coat and trousers instead of a toga and speaks in cockney English instead of popular Latin. That is not the case. What would be the earthly use of repeating the same personality or character a million times from the beginning of time till its end! The soul comes into birth for experience, for growth, for evolution till it can bring the Divine into matter. It is the central being that incarnates, not the outer personality — the personality is simply a mould that it creates for its figures of experience in that one life. In another birth it will create for itself a different personality, different capacities, a different life and career. Supposing Virgil is born again, he may take up poetry in one or two other lives, but he will certainly not write an epic but rather perhaps slight but elegant and beautiful lyrics such as he wanted to write, but did not succeed, in Rome. In another birth he is likely to be no poet at all, but a philosopher and a Yogin seeking to attain and to express the highest truth — for that too was an unrealised trend of his consciousness in that life. Perhaps before he had been a warrior or ruler doing deeds like Aeneas or Augustus before he sang them. And so on — on this side or that the central being develops a new character, a new personality, grows, develops, passes through all kinds of terrestrial experience.

As the evolving being develops still more and becomes more rich and complex, it accumulates its personalities, as it were. Sometimes they stand behind the active elements, throwing in some colour, some trait, some capacity here and there, — or they stand in front and there is a multiple personality, a many-sided character or a many-sided, sometimes what looks like a universal capacity. But if a former personality, a former capacity is brought fully forward, it will not be to repeat what was already done, but to cast the same capacity into new forms and new shapes and fuse it into a new harmony of the being which will not be a

reproduction of what it was before. Thus you must not expect to be what the warrior and the poet were — something of the outer characteristics may reappear but very much changed and new-cast in a new combination. It is in a new direction that the energies will be guided to do what was not done before.

Another thing. It is not the personality, the character that is of the first importance in rebirth — it is the psychic being who stands behind the evolution of the nature and evolves with it. The psychic when it departs from the body, shedding even the mental and vital on its way to its resting place, carries with it the heart of its experiences, — not the physical events, not the vital movements, not the mental buildings, not the capacities or characters, but something essential that it gathered from them, what might be called the divine element for the sake of which the rest existed. That is the permanent addition, it is that that helps in the growth towards the Divine. That is why there is usually no memory of the outward events and circumstances of past lives — for this memory there must be a strong development towards unbroken continuance of the mind, the vital, even the subtle physical; for though it all remains in a kind of seed memory, it does not ordinarily emerge. What was the divine element in the magnanimity of the warrior, that which expressed itself in his loyalty, nobility, high courage, what was the divine element behind the harmonious mentality and generous vitality of the poet and expressed itself in them, that remains and in a new harmony of character may find a new expression or, if the life is turned towards the Divine, be taken up as powers for the realisation or for the work that has to be done for the Divine.

### What Survives and What Does Not

Nothing in the nature is carried over [*in the next incarnation*] except the essence of the past experiences and energies as much as is necessary for the new life. The rest is held in reserve, but things so held in reserve can be brought forward in a new form and under new conditions.

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If all is centred consciously around the psychic then they [*the mental and vital parts of the being*] survive, otherwise they separate. The vital for instance survives for a time, then breaks up and dissolves into desires and fragmentary bits of vital personality. The mental is usually more lasting — but that too dissolves. It all depends on the person, how far he has developed his mind or vital or connected them with the psychic.

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If one has had a strong spiritual development, that makes it easier to retain the developed mental or vital after death. But it is not absolutely necessary that the person should have been a Bhakta or a Jnani. One like Shelley or like Plato for instance could be said to have a developed mental being centred round the psychic — of the vital the same can hardly be said. Napoleon had a strong vital but not one organised round the psychic being.

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What you suggest [*that certain forces from a past life or lives may “stick” to a person in the present life*] is true — that is to say when it is some past personality which or part of which is strongly carried over into the present life. It is, I believe, true that you were a revolutionary in a past life or if not a revolutionary, engaged in a violent political action. I can't put a name or a precise form on it. But it was not only the sudden angers and violences, but probably also the desire to help, to reform, to purify and other intensities and vehemences that came from there. When a personality is carried over like that it is not only the undesirable sides that are carried over but things that purified and chastened can be useful.

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There is no such thing as an insuperable difficulty from past lives. There are formations that help and formations that hamper; the latter have to be dismissed and dissolved, not to be allowed to repeat themselves. The Mother told you that to explain the origin of this tendency and the necessity of getting rid of it —

there was no hint of any insuperable difficulty, quite the contrary.

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For most people [*when they die*] the vital dissolves after a time as it is not sufficiently formed to be immortal. The soul descending makes a new vital formation suitable for the new life.

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The physical always dissolves and in each new life one gets a new physical formation. To preserve the same physical would mean physical immortality.

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Not *as* they are.<sup>2</sup> What remains and to what degree depends on the development in each case. Of course the centres themselves remain — for they are in the subtle body and it is from there that they act on the corresponding physical centres.

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No, the subconscious is an instrument for the physical life and disappears [*after death*]. It is too incoherent to be an organised enduring existence.

### Lines of Force and Consciousness

What is exactly your theory? There is one thing — influences — everybody undergoes influences, absorbs them or rejects, makes them disappear in one's own developed [*poetic*] style or else keeps them as constituent strands. There is another thing — lines of Force. In the universe there are many lines of Force on which various personalities or various achievements and formations spring up — e.g. the line Pericles–Caesar–Napoleon or the line Alexander–Jenghiz–Tamerlane–Napoleon — meeting together there — so it may be too in poetry, lines of poetic force prolonging themselves from one poet to another, meeting and

<sup>2</sup> *The disciple asked, "Do the centres remain as they are after death?" — Ed.*

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diverging. Yours seems to be a third — a daemon or individual Spirit of Poetry migrating from one individual to another, several perhaps meeting together in one poet who gives them all a combined full expression. Is that it? If so, it is an interesting idea and arguable.

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But after all it is a line of consciousness and not a personality that reincarnates; the personality is only for the one life, so it does not bind though it may influence at certain points the present life.

### Beings of the Higher Planes

It is always possible for a being of the higher planes to take birth on earth — in that case they create a mind or vital for themselves or else they join a mind, vital and body which has already been prepared under their influence — there are indeed many ways and not one only in which they can manifest here.

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As there are many personalities in a man in his various ordinary planes of consciousness, so also several beings can associate themselves with his consciousness as it develops afterwards — descending into his higher mind or other higher planes of being and connecting themselves with his personality. That is for the principle. But as for the particular information [*about a certain person*], it is inaccurate. It has probably reference to the period when Mother was bringing down beings to aid in the work.

### Fragments of a Dead Person that Reincarnate

All human incarnations or births have naturally a psychic being. It is only other types like the vital beings that have not, and that is precisely the reason why they want to possess men and enjoy physical life without being themselves born here, for so they escape the psychic law of evolution and spiritual progress

and change. But these formations [*the vital fragments of a dead person*] are different, they are things that do not leave the earth and do not possess but simply attach themselves to some human rebirth (of course with a psychic in it) which has some affinity and therefore does not object to or resist their inclusion.

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The fragments [*of a dead person*] are not of the inner being (who goes on his way to the psychic world) but of his vital sheath which falls away after death. These can join for birth the vital of some other Jiva who is being born or they can be used by a vital being to enter a body in process of birth and partly possess it for the satisfaction of its propensities. The junction can also take place after birth.

### Connections from Life to Life

There is a vital connection generally — the psychic is comparatively rare. It is something in past lives usually that determines these connections in this one, but the connection in this life is seldom the same as that of the past which determined it.

### Lines of Sex in Rebirth

As far as I know, the births follow usually one line [*of sex*] or the other and do not alternate — that, I think, is the Indian tradition also, though there are purposeful exceptions like Shikhandi's. If there is a change of sex, it is only part of the being that associates itself with the change, not the central being.

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Not sex exactly [*is present in the psychic being*], but what might be called the masculine and feminine principle. It is a difficult question [*whether a man can be reborn as a woman or a woman as a man*]. There are certain lines the reincarnation follows and so far as my experience goes and general experience goes, one follows usually a single line. But the alteration of sex cannot

be declared impossible. There may be some who do alternate. The presence of feminine traits in a male does not necessarily indicate a past feminine birth — they may come in the general play of forces and their formations. There are besides qualities common to both sexes. Also a fragment of the psychological personality may have been associated with a birth not one's own. One can say of a certain person of the past, "That was not myself, but a fragment of my psychological personality was present in him." Rebirth is a complex affair and not so simple in its mechanism as in the popular idea.

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All the instances I have heard of in the popular accounts of rebirth are of man becoming man and woman becoming woman in the next life — except when they become animal, but even then I think the male becomes a male animal and the female a female animal. There are only stray cases quoted like Shikhandi's in the Mahabharata for variations of sex. The Theosophist conception is full of raw imagination, one Theosophist even going so far as to say that if you are a man in this birth you are obliged to be a woman in the next and so on.

### Asuric Births

*Āsurīṣu*<sup>3</sup> can't possibly mean "animal". The Gita uses precise terms and if it had meant animal it would have said animal and not Asuric. As for the punishment, it is that they [*Asuric men*] go down in their nature to more depths of Asurism till they touch bottom as it were. But that is a natural result of their uncontrolled tendencies which they freely indulge without any effort to rise out of them while by the cultivation of the higher side of personality one naturally rises and develops towards godhead or the Divine. In the Gita the Divine is regarded as the controller of the whole cosmic action through Nature, so the "I cast" is in

<sup>3</sup> Kṣipāmyajasram aśubhān āsurīṣveva yoniṣu. "I cast down them continually into more and more Asuric births." Gita 16.19.

harmony with its ideas. The world is a mechanism of Nature, but a mechanism regulated by the presence of the Divine.

### Animals and the Process of Rebirth

The soul in the animal evolves its manifestation to a point at which it can pass from the expression in animal to the expression in human consciousness.

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It is when the vital gets broken up, some strong movements of it, desires, greeds, may precipitate themselves into animal forms, e.g., sexual desire with the part of the vital consciousness under its control into a dog or some habitual movement of excessive greed may carry part of the vital consciousness into a pig. The animals represent the vital consciousness with mind involved in the vital, so that it is naturally there that such things would gravitate for satisfaction.

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*Mūḍhayoniṣu* or *adho gacchanti* [*in the Gita*] does not necessarily refer to animal birth, but it is true that there has been a general belief of that kind [*that a man may be born as an animal in his next birth*] not only in India but wherever “transmigration” or “metempsychosis” was believed in. Shakespeare is referring to Pythagoras’ belief in transmigration when he speaks of the passage of somebody’s grandmother into an animal. But the soul, the psychic being, once having reached the human consciousness cannot go back to the inferior animal consciousness any more than it can go back into a tree or an ephemeral insect. What is true is that some part of the vital energy or the formed instrumental consciousness or nature can and very frequently does so, if it is strongly attached to anything in the earth life. This may account for some cases of immediate rebirth with full memory in human forms also. Ordinarily it is only by Yogic development or by clairvoyance that the exact memory of past lives can be brought back.

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### Remembering Past Lives

Certainly, the subconscious is formed for this life only and is not carried with it by the soul from one life to another. The memory of past lives is not something that is active anywhere in the being — if by memory is meant the memory of details. That memory of details is quiescent and untraceable except in so far as certain constituent personalities taken over from the past retain the memories of the particular life in which they were manifest. E.g. if some personality that was put forth by one in Venice or Rome remembers from time to time a detail or details of what happened then. But usually it is only the essence of past lives that is activated in the being, not any particular memories. So it is impossible to say that the memory is located in a particular part of the consciousness or in a particular plane.

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These ideas of past lives are not experiences, they are mental formations trying to give a name and form to something that is true, but you must not attach any importance to the forms the mind gives it. The truth is that there was a connection in past lives, but the forms given by the mind are likely to be mistaken.

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It is not the ego, but the inner being that remembers the past lives — and the inner being as a rule is perfectly detached about them.

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The different and contrasting phases through which you pass are obviously due to the emergence of different personalities in you created by past lives. One is full of the zest of life and its ardour, the other has the Nirvanic tendency and a certain incapacity for mastery over the physical existence. This is very self-evident and the putting of a name or a frame to the past lives in which these personalities were formed could hardly add anything of importance. If you yourself remembered the essence

of them (not the details), then it might be of some use for your own consciousness in determining the limits of each influence in you and its place — but that can also be done well enough even without that remembrance.

### Unimportance of Past-Life Experience in Yoga

These things (events etc.) [*of past lives*] are not known usually unless they come in some concentrated state of vision of themselves. The Mother nowadays seldom has these states because the whole concentration is on bringing down the supramental principle here. When that work is done then these things may come.

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The Mother only speaks to people about their past births when she sees definitely some scene or memory of their past in concentration; but this happens rarely nowadays.

What is remembered mainly from past lives is the nature of the personality and the subtle results of the life-experience. Names, events, physical details are remembered only under exceptional circumstances and are of a very minor importance. When people try to remember these outward things, they usually build up a number of romantic imaginations which are not true.

I think you should dismiss this idea about the past lives. If the memory of past personalities comes of itself (without a name or mere outward details) that is sometimes important as giving a clue to something in the present development, but to know the nature of that personality and its share in the present constitution of the character is quite enough. The rest is of little use.

\*

It is not of course indispensable to know [*about past lives*]. It is sometimes a matter of interest for knowing the lines of one's past development and how one has come to what one is now. But to overpass this outward development is of course the main aim of the Yoga. We are not to be tied by our past lives.

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Too much importance must not be given to past lives. For the purpose of this Yoga one is what one is and, still more, what one will be. What one was has a minor importance.

### Speculating about Past Lives

It is not necessary to attach any entire belief to these ideas of past births. X's idea of Y's rebirth is evidently a mere idea — nothing else.

When there is any truth in these things, it is most often a perception that some Force once represented in a certain person has also some part in one's own nature — not that the same personality is here.

Of course, there is rebirth, but to establish that one is such a one reborn, a deeper experience is necessary, not a mere mental intuition which may easily be an error.

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Ideas of this kind about Vivekananda and Ramakrishna are ideas of the mind to which the vital strongly attaches itself — the truth of the past lives cannot be discovered in that way. These mental ideas are not true. You must wait for direct knowledge in a liberated nature before you can know who in past lives you were.

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It is better not to think of past lives just now. The mind and vital would probably become active and weave things that are not true.

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Seriously, these historical identifications are a perilous game and open a hundred doors to the play of imagination. Some may, in the nature of things must be true; but once people begin, they don't know where to stop. What is important is the lines, rather than the lives, the incarnation of Forces that explain what one now is — and, as for particular lives or rather personalities, those alone matter which are very definite in one

and have powerfully contributed to what one is developing now. But it is not always possible to put a name upon these; for not one hundred-thousandth part of what has been has still a name preserved by human Time.

### Traditional Indian Ideas about Rebirth and Other Worlds

The general Divine Will in the universe is for the progressive manifestation in the universe. But that is the general will — it admits the withdrawal of individual souls who are not ready to persevere in the world.

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The escape from birth was a universal ideal at that time [*the time of the Gita*] except with one or two sects of the Shaivas, I believe. It is not at all consistent with the Divine taking many births, for the Gita speaks of the highest condition not as a *laya*, but as a dwelling in the Divine. If so there seems to be no reason why the *mukta* and *siddha* who has reached that dwelling in the consciousness of the Divine should fear rebirth and its troubles any more than the Divine does.

\*

The Pitriyan is supposed to lead to inferior worlds attained by the Fathers who still belong to the evolution in the Ignorance. By the Devayan one gets beyond the Ignorance into the light. The difficulty about the Pitris is that in the Puranas they are taken as the Ancestors to whom the tarpan is given — it is an old Ancestor worship such as still exists in Japan, but in the Veda they seem to be the Fathers who have gone before and discovered the supraphysical worlds.

### European Resistance to the Idea of Reincarnation

But that [*the idea of reincarnation*] is just what is disputed by the Western scientific mind or was up till yesterday and is still considered as unverifiable today. It is contended that the idea of

self is an illusion — apart from the body. It is the experiences of the body that create the idea of a self and the desire to live prolongs itself illusorily in the notion that the self outlasts the body. The West is accustomed besides to the Christian idea that the self is created with the body — an idea which the Christians took over from the Jews who believed in God but not in immortality — so the Western mind is dead set against any idea of reincarnation. Even the religious used to believe that the soul was born in the body, God first making the body then breathing the soul into it (Prana?). It is difficult for Europeans to get over this past mental inheritance.