

July 2010

WHY DON'T WE REMEMBER PAST LIVES?

Although my mother taught me the concept of reincarnation when I was a child, I never spent much time wondering about my past lives. A Sufi dancer once told me that I had been a female dancer in India, and at another time a priest in Africa. Due to my affinity for all things Japanese, my wife is convinced that my last incarnation was in Japan and she may be right. While I recognize that some people may derive therapeutic value in undergoing past-life regressions, I've never felt the urge to know whether I'd been cast as "a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn and a king" in any of my past lives. This present role is fascinating and challenging enough.

But for many inquirers, the question remains: "If reincarnation is a fact, why *don't* we remember our past lives? Would it not be useful to recall the details—or at least a summary—of our previous appearances upon this terrestrial stage?" A reasonable explanation to these queries is found in *Man, Son of Man*, Sri Madhava Ashish's insightful commentary on volume 2 of *The Secret Doctrine*.

If there were no barrier between them [past life memories] and our present conscious integrations, we would be compelled, like trams, to follow the same old tracks of thought and behavior worn by the sum of our previous lives, each time wearing the grooves a little deeper. Our past inadequacies would crush us, our past glories would inflate us. It is enough to know that all that has ever happened has made us what we are, and that all that we ever were is present in us now. We do not need to know the details of past lives, for each life is, up to a point, a recapitulation of all our previous lives, just as the development of the human embryo is a recapitulation of the evolution of the species.

When a professional actor takes on a new role, the character and the plot and the script from the previous performance are forgotten. What is not discarded are the acting skills honed through numerous theatrical performances. So it is with each of us as we repeatedly return to the earthly stage, life after life, in a new setting and new personality. The important thing to know is that throughout these cycles of birth and death, we endure as the immortal Actor, and not the fleeting roles in which we are temporarily cast.

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