

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE PAST

*H. Spencer Lewis, FRC
Imperator of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, 1915 - 1939*



Entrance to Karnak Temple, Luxor, Egypt. Painted by H. Spencer Lewis during his Egyptian trip of 1929.

One of the arguments most often used in an attempt to deny the possibility of reincarnation is this: If we have lived once before and our memory retains any knowledge of that existence, why is it that we do not recall any event of our previous lives?

You will note that this question, no matter how it may be worded, always includes the positive statement or the positive intimation that no one ever recalls anything of his previous incarnations. The question is really not a question but a statement and precludes any argument, since it assumes right from the very start that no one does recall anything of the past.

Such an attitude is absolutely unfair for two reasons. In the first place, no one has a right to assume because she has no distinct recollection of a previous existence that no one else has; and, second, it is not right to assume that the mind does not occasionally reveal to us real pictures of the past which we do not understand or appreciate as having any connection with the past.

To illustrate my point, I will refer to just one very recent and fortunate conversation. A businessman of conservative and orthodox religious viewpoints, wholly out of sympathy with the doctrine of reincarnation, called upon me in regard to my plans for a trip to Egypt and Palestine with a number of my coworkers. He frankly admitted that while he was not interested in the research we intended to make or any of the ceremonies that we would attend while in Egypt, he nevertheless had a deep-rooted desire to go to these foreign lands but had never wanted to go alone. Now that a few persons in his city, whom he knew fairly well, were going with us, he wished to go along with them and enjoy their companionship on such a trip. Knowing from previous remarks made by him that he was out of sympathy with many of the thoughts expressed in this book, I asked him bluntly why he wanted to go to Egypt and Palestine rather than on any other tour. His first answer was this: "Because I have always felt a strange fascination or a peculiar attraction toward some part of Egypt or the Holy Land."

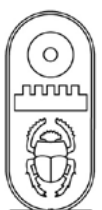
I tried to analyze his statement and find out what part of Egypt, or what things in Egypt and the Holy Land were responsible for the attraction he felt. His answers were always indefinite and vague until I finally drew from him the following: "Well, ever since I was a young man, I have felt that certain pictures I have seen of Egypt or Palestine were more interesting to me than pictures of any other part of the world. I do not mean pictures of the busy streets of Cairo, but of some of the outlying, native villages. I have always felt that I would find something there or discover something in such a locality that would be of intense interest and perhaps personal profit to me in some way."

Upon further investigation, he reluctantly admitted that some of the scenes he had seen of native villages and people with native costumes seemed "somewhat" familiar to him, and he further admitted that this fact had led him to read many different books on the history and customs of Egypt and the Holy Land. And, that in some passages describing incidents of a few centuries ago, he seemed to feel a familiarity, or a sympathetic understanding, as he put it, which only increased his attraction toward those countries.

I could not help smiling when he made these admissions with such reluctance, for I knew at once precisely what he was experiencing, and I also knew that it was useless at the present time to point out to him why certain incidents in history relating to certain localities and peoples and certain scenes and places connected therewith were "somewhat" familiar to him. I know that if I had pressed my questioning far enough, he would have admitted that some of these scenes were as familiar to him as though they had been seen by him sometime in a dream. This would have aroused his suspicion,

however, and caused him to feel that I was trapping him into admissions which he did not care to make, and so I dropped the argument.

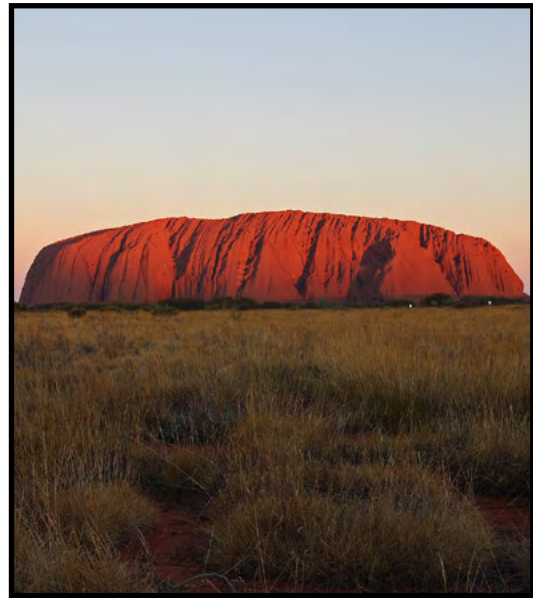
This experience on the part of this man is typical of that which can be found in the life of the average person. I believe that in my lifetime I have questioned perhaps ten thousand people in regard to so-called recollections of the past. I have not called these things by that term, but have asked them frankly this question: Do you ever find in your "moments of meditation, contemplation, or revery, certain scenes of places, people, buildings, or homes, rising in your mind like pictures or scenes that were familiar to you?"



If this question is asked before anything is said about the subject of reincarnation, the average person one meets in the average walks of life will frankly admit that such is true in his case and that he has often wondered about it, and has really been puzzled about it. If the person to whom the question is put is one who has traveled much, especially in foreign lands, he will generally add that, "When I was traveling here or there, I was surprised suddenly to come upon a scene in front of a building (park, public square, bridge, or other picturesque setting) that I found to be precisely a duplicate of what I had seen in my mind many times, but which I had never before seen in real life."

When these persons say that they have come upon scenes which they had never seen before in real life, they always mean that they had never seen them in this life or in this incarnation, and they will frankly tell you that it was the first time that they had ever traveled or had been anywhere near the familiar scenes in their present earthly existence. If, then, you open the subject of reincarnation and ask them if it is not possible that the familiarity with such scenes maybe due to having lived near them in a previous incarnation, you find some who are broad enough in their thinking to realize the possibility of this and admit that it may be true, whereas others will instantly tell you that since they do not believe in reincarnation, they cannot look upon these things as an indication of having lived once before.

This means that we must allow such persons to offer another theoretical explanation of why and how they have scenes coming before their consciousness with a certain degree of familiarity but which they have never seen in actuality. The explanations thus offered are often amusing and, of course, associated with extreme supernatural principles or



impossible mental laws. In other words, the explanations do not explain at all. And yet these persons will seriously assure you that they do not have any recollections of a previous existence and, therefore, they certainly could not have lived at some other time.

On the other hand, nearly every person who has read of historical events in other lands at other times than at present has found herself strangely attuned with the history of certain periods or of certain places, and is attracted more to the history of these places than to other places. Sometimes this interest is in relation to places in America or even in the same state where the person now lives, or often the places are located a few hundreds, a few thousand, or many thousands of miles away.

Then there are many people who in moments of reflection, relaxation, or reverie find themselves slipping backward, so to speak, to a rapid panorama of scenes and incidents which seem to struggle to come up out of the fog and mist of past recollections, but cannot quite reveal themselves in all of the clearness and distinction that makes for perfect recognition. People who have experienced this are often puzzled, not

only by the peculiar pictures that do come close to the borderline of clear perception, but by the multiplicity of scenes that seem to flash so rapidly in the background of the consciousness. There are also many who have had certain definite impressions come to them from the depths of their consciousness, which seem to be related to their own lives in a time and period long past. These persons, too, are puzzled over these things, but seldom associate them with anything like a past existence.

Now, just what should one expect in regard to the recollection of events in a past life? Is it logical for the average person to expect that the events of a past life should be registered in a memory so close to the borderline of our present consciousness that we can easily reach across or pierce through the veil that separates the past from the present and bring these pictures into living reality? Assuming that the memory we have now is the same memory that we have had in a previous life, and assuming that in its storehouse vaults it retains all of the pictures and impressions registered upon it throughout all of our lives, is it logical to suppose that it should be an easy and simple thing to reach into those vaults and unlock the records at will and withdraw clear and distinct pictures relating to any period of time? If you believe that this is logical, then it is reasonable for me to ask why it is not possible for you to reach right into your storehouse of memory now

and withdraw all the scenes, all the pictures, relating to the events of your life in the present incarnation during your life in the present incarnation during your second, third, and fourth years of childhood. Can you do this?

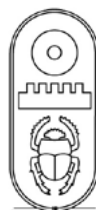
You may answer and tell me that you do

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recall certain incidents of your childhood and youth very distinctly. At best, you may tell me of ten incidents clearly registered in your mind and easily recalled, which relate to your earliest years. But, think of the millions of other impressions and pictures that are locked in that memory and which you cannot recall. The few that you speak of constitute such a small fraction, and such a small fragment, that it is hardly worth speaking about as an illustration of recollection.

Let us examine the few that you do recall, and let us see how clear and distinct they are.

Do you remember the first time you were allowed to play on the street or to play with your neighborhood companions? You may answer by picking out one incident connected with this important event in your life. But, if we analyze that incident, we find, first of all, that there is some unusual feature connected with it, which not only impressed you very profoundly at the time, but impressed your parents or your relatives, or your companions, and caused them to speak about it often. The event may have occurred in your second year, or your fourth year, but you will find





The 14th Dalai Lama, born Lhamo Dhondup, the highest spiritual leader of Tibet. The Dalai Lama is believed by Buddhists to be able to choose the body into which he is reincarnated.

that it was an event that was probably discussed and spoken about in your household for several years thereafter, and was not only registered in your mind and memory a number of times, but through repetition of description and the telling about it, it was carried along into your fifth or sixth year of life.

Then perhaps many times during your eighth or ninth year, you easily recalled that event and spoke about it, and heard others speak about it, and so it was once again brought up out of the musty old records of the past into the present and was again registered in your eighth or ninth year, even though it had originally occurred in the second, third, or fourth year. Now, perhaps during your twelfth year, it was recalled again by some similar event or some family discussion, and once more the picture and incident that was becoming slightly vague and preparing to fade into the indefiniteness of the past was revived and recolored and strengthened in its details and registered once more in your twelfth year.

This may have happened so many times in your life that this particular incident out of millions of others has been refreshed from time to time and brought from the past into the now, until, when you want to recall it now, you only have to reach back to the last time that you registered the incident to revive it, and bring it into close examination.

You will admit that such an incident is not typical of all the incidents of your past. To prove this, you can take any one of the incidents of your childhood, which you easily recall, and after having described it and painted it in all of its fullness of reality, ask yourself this question: What did I do the next day after this incident, or what did I do that same afternoon or evening? Certainly, if you reach into your past easily and quickly and get in contact with a certain day or hour of your past life as a child, you should be able to move the finger of recollection along the unwritten records to the next few lines and recall what happened a few hours after the incident you relate. Can you do that?

Usually, the few incidents of childhood that are easily recalled are not only those which have been revived from time to time, as stated above, but they are widely separated from each other in nature and in period of time, and the great gaps in between these events remain absolutely unrecalled. Does this not tend to prove that although a perfect record of all events in the past is retained in the mind, the matter of recollection is not so easy, and it is not given to people to have free access to all of these impressions?

If you ask why it is that it is not as easy to recall all of the events of a certain day or month twenty-five years ago as it is to recall the events of yesterday or last week, let me point out to you the psychological fact that our present consciousness of ourselves is always in the nature of a central point in

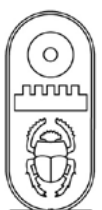
a large picture, and this picture contains the events of the last few days. As we go backward, past the few recent days, the picture extends itself into vagueness and indefiniteness. Today we are conscious not only of ourselves and our immediate surroundings, but we are conscious of the things we did this morning and of the plans we made for this afternoon, tonight, and tomorrow. We are right now in the center of a whirling mass of impressions and this gives us consciousness of ourselves and our relationship to people and places. But a person would soon lose sanity and soundness of mind and become a hopeless maniac if there were in the borderline of her present consciousness the living, vibrating impressions of all the things that had occurred in her past life or since childhood.

As each day passes, the pictures and impressions that were alive and active in the consciousness for a while are slowly taken from it and placed away in the records of the memory. It is like the librarian in a large library who makes it his business each morning when he finds new copies of new issues of magazines and periodicals on his desk to go into the reading room of the library and deposit these new issues and collect those which are becoming old and place them away in the reference files to be called for on demand. If the old ones were allowed to accumulate while the new ones were constantly added, there would soon be such a litter of publications on the reading table as to make it impossible to be aware of which were new and which were old.

So we find that while the records of the past are stored away indelibly, they can only be recalled by association of ideas or by some special process which enables us to pick one impression or one scene at a time from the past records and bring it into the now. Sometimes, through the association

of ideas or the similarity of scenes and events, a picture or impression of the past is brought into present realization. The older that impression is, or the more ancient the picture, the more vague and indefinite it is, until some of these are like fantastic sketches on a transparent surface through which we can see so clearly as to make the picture almost invisible. If this is true regarding events which have occurred within our present lives and which are not more than 30, 40, or 50 years of age, think of how indefinite must be the impressions stored away in the memory and which are 100 or 200 years old.

According to the cycles of reincarnation, the average person today would have ended the last previous incarnation on Earth about 100 to 130 years ago. That means that one would have to reach back at least 130 years in order to have impressions of the last years of that previous existence. If 30 or 40 years will soften pictures and impressions and cover them with a mystical veil of indefiniteness, 100 years would surely make them very



vague and very faint indeed. Only the most impressive, the most psychological, and important of such ancient pictures and impressions, perhaps written and printed in blood or pain, suffering, trial, and anxiety, would be so indelibly impressed as to retain brilliancy at the present time.

Is it any wonder, then, that in our reveries and meditation, we have but faint pictures and impressions coming to us like familiar scenes, and these are never frivolous things or connected with mere transitory conditions. Impressions of a city or of a building, or of a race of people, of a park, or a bridge, or something of this kind may be the registered pictures that accumulated in the memory through years of serious contact with them and are, therefore, more indelibly impressed than the mere passing events of one day or one hour.

However, there are those people who have at times found many definite recollections in connection with certain events that were of more than ordinary

importance in their past lives. On one of my trips through Europe a companion traveler seeking for a certain castle that he had seen in pictures and which seemed familiar, suddenly came upon it when he did not expect to do so. It was late in the evening and by artificial light he saw only the remnants of an old iron gateway in a huge wall. This had been no part of the picture he had in his mind. But, as he stood before it with me, wondering where the gateway led to, he suddenly recalled or felt a degree of familiarity with that opening in the wall. Turning to me, he said: "If there is another small doorway inside of the enclosure of this wall whereby a person can walk down a few steps and pass under the wall, then I know where I am."

With our flashlights and lantern, we went inside the old and abandoned enclosure and found, fifty feet away, another opening in the wall closed with remnants of wood and much shrubbery, and which led down twelve steps to a tunnel under the wall. And this in turn



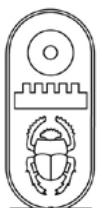
led to an underground chamber which my companion perfectly described to me before we entered it. Returning again to the highway and our hotel, we waited until daybreak and then found in the center of this walled enclosure the old building that he had described to me so often in our interviews in America, and for which he had been searching in Europe. The interior of this great building was precisely as he had described it. In fact, we had some trouble in having a doorway opened to another underground passageway and chamber, which my companion described accurately before we entered it, and which the guide and authorities of the village claimed had not been opened for one hundred years or more because of its dangerous condition and the difficulty in reaching it.

My companion claimed that he had either lived or labored in and around this place, and that his duties took him especially into these underground places, which were probably wine cellars in his time. I cite this illustration to show that one picture, one impression, one thought, may associate itself with another and serve as a key to unlock a number of related pictures and impressions. The sight of that old gate in the wall recalled to this man's mind the fact that there was another archway in the wall leading to an underground room. This he had never recalled in all of his other talks about a castle and its many rooms. Very often, the sight of one part of a building or part of a city will instantly recall from memory other related pictures and impressions which seem so familiar to us that we feel we could write about them, paint them, and reach out and touch them.

Whence come these impressions, these pictures? Not from our present lifetime experience, surely, for most of these things relate to distant and faraway places which we have not contacted in the present life.

Then, we have the cases that are quite frequent where a child or an adult suffering under some unusual mental or psychological condition is placed in a state where the storehouse of the memory suddenly unlocks itself and reveals a mass of its impressions and pictures in living brilliancy and without restraint. One case of this kind was that of a young girl in a hospital in Montreal, who could speak only French and knew nothing of any foreign languages and was not well educated. This child was in the hospital for an operation against which she protested and fought with all the strength in her little body. Finally, as the last moments approached and the doctors were ready to take her into the operating room, she made one more struggle to battle with them. In her wild fury and frenzy, she threw herself into a hysterical state in which she screamed and laughed and wept. Unable to control her, they were about to strap her to a chair, when her fury again burst forth in the wildest talk that the doctors and nurses had ever heard.

This time the girl talked perfect English and told them that she had had



this operation performed in a previous life, when she was thirty-five years of age, and had suffered so much from it that she refused to have it done again. She gave her name, her family name, the name of the town in which she had lived, and many other incidents of her life, and then suddenly relapsed again into quietness and could not remember later what she had said or that she had expressed such ideas. The use of perfect English and the strangeness of the facts she related induced the authorities to make an investigation and this was continued by several organizations and newspaper men. It was found in the town where she claimed to have lived and passed away that a woman of her age and name had lived there some eighty years previously and had passed away, and even the grave and tombstone were located, verifying the name and the date.

In India, a young girl through illness entered into a peculiar psychic state in which she claimed that she recalled her previous life and knew where her previous

relatives could be located. Eminent investigators accompanied the young child to the city she mentioned and which she had never seen in her present life. She led the investigators along a certain road previously described, to a certain building which she had also previously described, and there, beneath the flooring of one of the rooms, in a condition and position as she had predicted, they found an old box containing records which were identical with those that she had mentioned to them. These records proved the identity of the girl and verified her story.

Hundreds of such incidents as these have been recorded in the past and verified by every investigator who has looked into the matter. A complete list of these cases would make interesting reading, but would make a book of this kind too cumbersome. A denial of these facts is merely a denial of published knowledge beyond dispute.

Each one of us has in her memory, in the closed and sealed books of the past, a complete record of her previous experiences, impressions, and activities. These serve us at times as lessons learned and experiences to be used as standards to guide us in our present living. But because we cannot easily recall them, and cannot drag them out into the open as we would bring forth the things of yesterday, is no proof that they are not there, for when occasion requires, or when they will serve some purpose, they are available; and every person who has had considerable experience in the practice of certain psychological, metaphysical, and mystical laws has brought forth sufficient impressions from the past to prove at least one or two of her many past incarnations.

