

# **LESSONS FROM LIFE**



**By: Yaduvenu das**



I first heard of Ratnavali in July 2002. My wife and I had met our good friend Kishore at a wedding in Scarborough. It was a hot day and after the reception we decided to go for a paddle and walk along the beach.

As we made our way back from the beach to the promenade Kishore asked if I remembered the accident he'd been involved in 1973, in which a devotee had been killed. I replied that I did and that I'd known the devotee (whose name was Dave) and that we were pot-washing buddies.

I was living in the bramacari ashram at Bhaktivedanta Manor at the time and I remember Bhajahari making an announcement one morning that devotees from the Edinburgh temple had been involved in a collision with a lorry and that one devotee (Bhakta Dave) had been killed.

Kishore then narrated the tale of a young 27 year old girl, currently at the Soho Street temple in central London, who believed that she was Bhakta Dave in her previous life.

This girl, whose initiated name is Ratnavali, grew up in a Hindu family in London and although she has a female body her mood is more like that of a bramacari. She feels internally male, has a bramacari mentality, is renounced and likes to play drum on harinam, which is her daily activity.

**It sounded more like a fantastic tale from the Mahabarata than something you'd expect to find happening around London.**

Kishore explained that he'd been approached by Ratnavali after he'd spoken at Tribhuvanath's funeral in October 2001. He'd mentioned the accident and Ratnavali, who was sitting nearby felt that she remembered Kishore's face.

She told me later that when he mentioned a devotee dying in the accident she'd wanted to call out 'No I'm here, everything's okay.' She felt that she could see the pain in his face and wanted to tell him not to worry and that everything was alright.

When Kishore narrated this story on Scarborough beach he repeatedly referred to Dave as Raghava. I hadn't known him by that name and when I mentioned this Kishore explained that Dave had received his initiation letter on the morning he was killed and that Prabhupada had given him the name Raghava.

In the early 70's Kishore was a bramacari with a reputation for being hardworking and enthusiastic. Everyone knew that he pushed himself hard and as temple commander of the Edinburgh temple he was busy from morning 'til night.

At the time of the accident Kishore was driving the devotees to Glasgow for book distribution. He fell asleep at the wheel and the temple van veered across the road and collided with an oncoming lorry. Some of the devotees were thrown from the vehicle on impact, while Dave who'd been asleep in the back was killed instantly. He'd been lying exactly where the lorry hit and his body was almost cut in two at the waist.

**“I remember what it was like to die and I remember living before.”**

Kishore, who was only around 24 at the time left the movement shortly afterwards. There was no counselling in those days and Kishore's life all but collapsed under the weight of guilt, depression and addiction. He worked through these issues years later, but his life was completely overshadowed by this terrible event.

Kirtana Rasa and I were amazed by Kishore's tale – that a devotee could die, come back thirty years later and tell the person responsible that everything's okay – which must be the ultimate closure. It sounded more like a fantastic tale from the Mahabarata than something you'd expect to find happening around London. Yet, we could relate to it because we'd had a similar experience years before.

Our eldest son Yaduvamsa was plagued by past life memories from the age of three. I describe them in the negative because although they are amazing to look back on now, twenty five years later, we found them quite disturbing at the time.

No parent wants to hear their child speak repeatedly of death in a forceful and anxious way. We were devotees and liked to hear of such things when they were rationally explained in a Bhagavatam class, but vivid memories of past lives are not always recalled in the same calm and philosophical manner.

Yadu was sometimes distraught by these memories. On one occasion he called out anxiously from the back of the car as we drove out of Belfast on a December night in 1982 just before his 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

He kept saying that he remembered dying. 'I remember what it was like to die,' he shouted again and again. 'And, I remember living before.'

I was tired. I'd had a long, hard day and didn't want to deal with it. I was also scared by the frantic tone of his voice and it was probably made worse by the fact that it was dark and cold. But I thought that the best way to put an end to these episodes was to let him talk about whatever it was he was experiencing.

'Okay, what was it like to die?' I asked him reluctantly.

'You feel pain in every part of your body at the same time', he replied.

'Do you remember where you lived in your past life?' I asked.

'In England.'

'Where in England?'

'On Barry Island.'

Actually, Barry Island is in Wales. But as a four year old he could not differentiate between England and Wales. I asked Yadu who he'd lived with. He replied that he'd lived with his grandparents. I then asked what he called them.

'I used to call them mum and dad,' he said. Then he became confused and said, 'But why would I do that?'

What Yadu did not know when he said this is that I had a brother who'd died the year before he was born. He was 19 and had been killed driving to work on a bike one morning. Yadu was only a child and he'd grown up in Krsna Consciousness, living in the temple. We didn't see my family very often and had no reason to tell him about my brother's death.

My brother also saw Prabhupada at the London Rathayatra in 1973 and as a child Yadu frequently dreamt of Prabhupada at Rathayatra.

## **As a child Yadu frequently dreamt of Prabhupada at Rathayatra.**

On our next visit to my parent's house in Wales I took Yadu into a room that had a photo of my brother taken just a few days before he died and asked Yadu if he knew who it was.

Immediately he replied, 'That's me.'

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. Over the following couple of years he remembered a number of things about his earlier life as my brother, such as the bikes we had for Christmas in 1963 and the shed at the top of the garden that was taken down years before Yadu was born. But everyone in our family now accepts that Yadu was my brother in his previous life, even his personality and interests are exactly the same.

A few days after speaking with Kishore at Scarborough I got a call from Ratnavali and we had a long chat about everything. I saw no reason to doubt what she was telling me even though they were not from vivid remembrances. And, I noticed a similar trait. Ratnavali had the same overwhelming need to talk and make sense of her situation as Yadu when things were coming up for him.

Shortly afterwards I posted an article on a devotee internet site asking if anyone had similar

stories. I had several replies. One told me of a three year old girl who told her parents she was a babaji living near Radha Kunda. Waking up crying one night she asked for a book they'd never heard of. The book turned out to be written by one of the Goswami's and dealt with the intimate pastimes of Radha and Krishna.

## **No parent wants to hear their child speak repeatedly of death. We liked to hear of such things only when in Bhagavatam class.**

Another mother in Dallas told me that her daughter remembered many previous lives as a child and I heard of a young woman who recalled living in New York and seeing Prabhupada there in the 60's. She was later murdered and took birth in Croatia where she became a devotee.

I now believe that past life memories can manifest in a number of ways – as direct recollections as Yadu experienced or through subtle impressions: emotions, feelings and dreams as in Ratnavali's case.

Like most devotees I'm accepting Ratnavali's story in good faith, only she knows what she is remembering and feeling and we have no way of proving or disproving it.

But it should be of no great surprise that we return to be with the same people we knew before as we become connected karmically. So in this way, through a combination of desires and reactions we are drawn back to be with those we love (and hate) again and again. It is only those we are indifferent to that we may be sure of never meeting again.

## **Yadu did not know when he said this that I had a brother who'd died the year before he was born.**

These are straight-forward spiritual truths. Everything in life / nature rotates – planets, atoms, ages, seasons and us along with it all – from life to life. Krsna says in Bhagavad Gita that we've been taking repeated birth and death since time immemorial. It's just that his lessons are not always confined to a book.

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