

CHAPTER 1

ON THE EDGE OF A WORLD

“In truth there are three rare attributes which are only obtained by God’s grace: a human birth, the desire for liberation and the benevolent guidance of a perfect Sage”

Śrī Shankaracharya

Mother, could we go back in time a little to follow the thread of your adventure on Earth? The story of a life begins at birth. You came into the world in Normandy on 10th December 1952, and you were born blind. In the West we know little about the coming of souls to Earth. Nearly all of us forget why we came, whereas you have always remembered. Indeed, you never forgot. You have never been separated from the divine world. Today, could you tell us about your incarnation?

In my meditations, memories have come to me of a time before birth. I find myself in a space-time dimension where there is nothing but blueness. I am floating in an azure space without landscape, without music, without anything. All is simply soft, gentle and joyful. Many souls from different worlds are gathered here. A divine Being

appears who tells us he is now going down to incarnate on planet Earth, where we will all join him. He is very reassuring and speaks to us with such love and warmth that we feel great joy. We watch him go, confident that we will soon meet again.

Did he tell you anything in particular?

Yes, he said: “You will be born in a distant land. Do not worry about anything. I will always be there. We will meet again when the time comes”. I have other memories from that time: I am on the edge of a world and behind me are four other children. We look like angels, with very pale faces but no wings. We move about very lightly. All around us everything is shining in hues of luminous yellow. Everything is so beautiful, preternaturally beautiful, with an eternal sun over shimmering mountains.

From where I am, sun and sky merge into one. A being of light, a Solar Man, with a radiant aura addresses us with kindness: “One of you must go to planet Earth.” and turning to me he adds “You are the one to go.” He then causes the Earth, until then just a star in the distance, to rise and come closer. It becomes a giant sphere and I can see what is happening on this planet: people are full of hatred, they are fighting and blood is flowing. The Solar Man asks me if I feel ready for this mission. Telepathically, he conveys to me: “Your task is to rekindle divine love in people’s hearts and lead them to the realisation of their inner being”.

These words immediately resonate in my young heart. All at once feelings of immense joy and love overwhelm me. It is inconceivable to me that human beings do not know real love, yet the images I have just been shown from Earth speak for themselves. They really don't know love. So I reply: "Yes, I'll go. I'm sure that everyone can experience the same love I feel quivering in my being." But suddenly those terrible images come back to me and I ask if there are any instructions to help me succeed in this mission. At that moment, the Celestial Being places a ball of light in my hands and says: "Have faith! Later on, when the time comes, you will meet a great Sage, a Prophet, who lives far away. Everything will be arranged for you to find him at the right time." Now, when I think about it, I am so grateful to the Divine for protecting me against all the lures that could have diverted me from my mission in this materialistic world...

You are no ordinary soul; how did your incarnation unfold after the meeting with the Solar Man? How did the choice of your family happen?

After that meeting, my mind is a complete blank. I do not remember having dwelled in my mother's body before birth. I believe the divine Plan ordained the choice of my family.

What were your first thoughts as a child?

I was not aware that I was on Earth. I was born blind - and being blind one does not see the Earth (*Maitreyi*

Amma laughs). Being blind up to the age of six and a half allowed me to live in both worlds simultaneously, while being protected from the external environment. I was able to stay in contact with the celestial dimension and never forgot where I came from or what the message was. I was always close to the Divine. I would see Jesus, Mary and a young Yogi. When my father died, the Yogi was very much present.

What was the difference between the world you came from and this Earth?

For me there was no difference, as being unable to see allowed me to remain in my own world. I could perceive those other children – the ones not embodied, and play with them. It was simply as if there were another world. I could hear and feel the people living around me: loving parents and grandparents who were very present. I had the good fortune to live in a warm family that welcomed me with very much love. Little by little, I became aware that this world was not quite the same as my inner world and that I had two families, one celestial and one earthly.

My great-grandmother would often look after me. She would take me for a walk every afternoon and would frequently talk to me about Jesus. One day, I realised that He was the same being I had been seeing regularly. After that, she and I would have grand discussions; I would describe to her that other realm from which I came and we would also talk about her granddaughter who had

died five years earlier. Until the age of six and a half, I was in a world of divine love.

And just at that age, a crucial event occurred, didn't it?

Yes indeed, I regained my sight! It was summer and my sister and I were having a nap when my mother entered the room. For the first time, I could distinguish a vague grey shape. As she came nearer, I connected that form with the voice coming from it. Then, by touch, I realised that it was indeed my mother. Over the next few days, the forms became denser, more precise and contrasted in black and white and after about fifteen days, I could permanently see in colour. This process occurred naturally, without anyone's intervention. It was a miracle!

From then on, I enjoyed going to school; but often the unhappiness of the other children overwhelmed me with sadness. Fortunately, the young Yogi used to appear and smile to me. His presence comforted me.

Until the age of ten, I would cover my eyes with my hands several times a day. It did me good; I would find peace and float once more in my gentle universe. Fortunately, I was surrounded by beauty; I was living in the countryside to the natural rhythm of the seasons. I loved to walk in the rain and marvel at the rainbows. For a child who can see, everything soon becomes ordinary. For me, the experience of belatedly gaining my sight allowed me to discover nature with delight and full awareness. I observed everything with rapture and would

sing all the time. When I went to get milk, I would sing my heart out, for the birds, for the butterflies, for the flowers. I sang all the songs I knew from church to nature, and nature herself joined in the celebration.

I never had to believe in God: God was already there for me before I took birth. Even as a little girl, I remembered everything. When I became aware of this earthly reality, I remembered the whole 'film'. I knew I was here to rediscover my Master and my soul family in a distant country. But I also knew that many years had to elapse first.

At home, I loved dressing up. One day my mother questioned me, having often seen me draped in fabric and wearing a turban. I explained that the turban reminded me of the headdress worn by the men of my country. She thought I was just inventing imaginary worlds... and gradually I grew up.

What was the first difficulty that you encountered on Earth?

My first shock was seeing a knife and fork. The idea of eating with those 'weapons' was quite bewildering. When still blind, I used to help my sister lay the table, but I didn't have a mental image of the strange instruments that we used for eating.

The second shock was seeing that humans ate meat. It made me lose my appetite. As it was, I only ate like a bird anyway. I only used to eat rice pudding and vegetables.

My parents were understanding and my father took even more care of the vegetable garden in order to provide good quality food for me.

Could you tell us some memories and experiences of your childhood?

I remember the evenings of long snowy winters. The frost would form pretty patterns on the window panes. I loved those moments of quiet absorption that turned into meditation. It was magical! In bed, at night, as soon as I lay down on my back, snug under the big eiderdown, I would leave my body. All at once, my energy would go out through my heart chakra, through the eiderdown, and I would be floating in the room. It happened to me quite naturally. I always slept on my back. This is a secret; it is the sleep of the yogis.

One moment, I could see my sister sleeping next to me, then suddenly I would be moving around the house. *(Maitreyi Amma mimics the movements with funny noises and clearly enjoys telling this story).*

I would observe my family very tenderly, and felt I was protecting them. I realised I could even go out through the ceiling and the roof. After long days at school when I felt I needed some fresh air, I would rise through everything and find myself in the sky above our house and the village. I could feel the moon and the stars energise me. I was flying and anything was possible. All my thoughts could be realised without limit. When I came

back into the bed I shared with my sister, she would wake up almost every time. She used to say: “You are freezing. You are making me cold.” I would invite her to come out with me to show her a bigger universe, but she did not take me seriously. She thought I had been dreaming, whereas in fact I had been experiencing different worlds on the astral plane.

Another story comes to mind. Two months after recovering my sight, I was strolling with my sister and my fifteen-year-old aunt along a little path strewn with daisies and violets. I picked some flowers and went a little further on, towards an old uninhabited farm. Through the wooden lattice of the gate, I saw the Virgin Mary appear in the middle of the courtyard, resplendent in her blue gown, with the child Jesus on her left arm. Both were radiant and full of light. She gazed at me tenderly...

I called out to my sister and aunt saying: “Come quick, the Virgin Mary is just there, near the pond, smiling at us.” They both looked towards where I was pointing, then said: “But there is nothing there!”

I continued staring and they went back to picking flowers. The Virgin Mary and the child Jesus sent me rays of love which entered deep within me. Not a word was spoken; it was pure love, and it nourished me for months.

What was the most significant experience of your childhood?

I had a great initiatory experience during a retreat, preparing for my First Communion. It was in spring and I was eleven and a half years old. We were in a meadow and the priest invited us to contemplate nature. Suddenly, I felt an extraordinary energy rise in me and spread throughout my whole body. I felt an intense heat, an ecstasy. It was an explosion... like a volcano! I stood transfixed, in another dimension, without a single thought. I didn't want to move. I saw God in everything, I was aware that I was God in His absolute totality. Everything around me was God. But I realised that there was only a small flame in the heart chakra of my schoolmates; how I wished they could be fully divine.

After that, nature revealed herself to me: the butterflies with their golden auras; the birds with a shimmering sky-blue halo. They were singing and I joined in their symphony. Both worlds united and resonated together. Then the vibration of the birdsong increased and it became an angelic choir. Celestial children were there too, singing and playing music. I could see it all; it was heaven on Earth...

When the priest led the children off to church, I remained behind. Later, my friend came back to fetch me and said:

"What are you doing here? The priest is worried."

I replied:

"I want to stay here, I feel good here. This is where God is."

"Why do you say that?"

“But don’t you see the birds? Can’t you hear their singing?”

“No I can’t see anything; no one else can either.”

“But it’s true, I can really see them.”

“Oh là là, you are completely mad! Never tell anyone about this or they’ll lock you away. Me, I like you and I want to stay friends with you. It’ll be our secret, we’ll never tell anyone.”

At that moment, a terrible sadness came over me. For a second, it was awful. I realised how alone I was on this Earth. The next instant it passed: I felt blissful again.

My First Communion was transformed into a mystical experience and the ceremony took on a whole other dimension. It was not the priest giving me the host, it was Jesus. And the church too was transformed by dancing blue and golden beams of light.

I remained in that state the whole month of June; then, during the school holidays in July and August, the energy gradually settled down. Whenever I questioned those around me about God, other worlds or reincarnation, they always answered that one should not speak about ‘those things’. I used to think that everyone believed in such things, but the visions from before birth came back to me, reminding me how unaware people on Earth were. Then, one day, the veil lifted and I realised that I really was all alone. But I had the strength of God within, which enabled me not to forget the mission. I found refuge in prayer.

I would draw mandalas during the difficult times. When they were completed, I would be filled anew with divine joy.

I found out that the children of my age considered me a bit strange, or at least 'different' from themselves. When they felt unhappy, they would come to me and find solace in hearing about the Divine. It made me hopeful for them; but once their problem was solved they would no longer think of God – it was over. So I realised that it would take a long time to establish the divine life here on Earth. Nevertheless I remained available for them.

Just before your First Communion you were struck down with polio. Can you tell us about your miraculous healing?

One morning I could no longer walk. I was admitted to hospital. Tests showed I had polio. Another life was beginning for me. The nurses were nuns. The head of the ward was a kind young sister. I enjoyed her company and we loved singing the Lord's praises together.

One evening, I'd had enough of this life and of being in hospital. I implored Jesus to come and take me back, and then fell asleep. In the night, a bright light awoke me. Jesus appeared, sat down on my bed, held my hands and I snuggled up against Him. He remained silent. His presence and His love gave me back the will to live. Then He vanished. The next morning at six o'clock, the young sister entered my room. Immediately, she rushed over to me: "What did you see? What did you see?"

I wondered how she knew. In fact, my whole room was glowing brightly with a gentle light. I replied: "Lord Jesus came to me in the night, but this time He did not speak."

Happy and excited, the sister pulled me out of bed repeating: "Oh Lord Jesus! Jesus!" She led me to her room where she had arranged a small altar and continued: "I've been praying to Jesus many times a day for ages. I would so love Him to come and visit me. Could you ask Him to?" She was so sweet that I promised to intercede on her behalf. Overjoyed, she kissed me. Then she noticed my leg and cried out in amazement: "But you can walk?"

I stayed in hospital two more days for tests to confirm the healing. Before leaving, whom should I see coming but the village priest! He then gave me a pot with three hyacinths: one white, one pink and one violet. I saw a sign from God in his words: "Take good care of them, water them well. These are souls. Do this in memory of me."

I would like to go back to your birth and your family. Did they receive any signs predicting your coming?

Up to the time of birth, they had no idea, apart from my mother. Two days before giving birth, she saw Christ's face appear in her room. At first she thought she was about to die. Apparently when I was born I was very pale, barely pink, with a mass of curly blond hair. People said my whole body was shining with a golden light. My mother then realised that the vision of Christ's face had

been announcing this special birth. The midwives and nurses spread the news, and the whole hospital came to see this baby. After a month the aura gradually diminished.

So you were already giving your first darshan? (Maitreyi Amma simply smiles). *Can you say more about your parents and the rest of your family?*

My parents were a young and loving couple. My father's family were close-knit and lived near each other as was common at that time. My parents also settled nearby. They formed a small community in the countryside. My grandfather was a wood sculptor who had studied at the *Beaux Arts* art academy. My grandmother was a very active woman who held modern views on life. She initiated projects for the women from neighbouring villages to work from home. She ran a sewing workshop and even owned a driving licence!

It was a kind, affectionate family. My grandfather always spoke in a measured and loving manner. My grandmother was very tender towards us. My uncles and aunts were young and dynamic. An artistic streak, which I inherited, runs in the family. My uncle was an artist. He taught me painting which then became a real passion for me. I was fortunate enough to know my great-grandmother who would look after me very affectionately until I was twelve years old.

I grew up in a supportive family environment. I have

many wonderful childhood memories. When I was blind, my parents were protective while at the same time allowing me a great degree of freedom. I would go on my own along a country lane to visit my grandmother and do a thousand and one little things all by myself.

I would like to tell you of an incident that happened when I was three years old. My mother was holding my little sister in her arms and looking for the key to the house. It was feeding time and I was playing next to a huge pile of sand. The baby started crying and my grandmother ran over to help my mother who was locked out. They asked me where the key was, but I had no idea what they were looking for. Suddenly it occurred to my grandmother to give me her keys to feel. Then I exclaimed: "Oh, I was playing with it and I buried it in that pile of sand!" The two women started to panic thinking it would take hours to find the key. But I calmly went to the exact spot where I had hidden it and, laughing joyfully, gave it back to my mother. (*Maitreyi Amma laughs wholeheartedly.*)

Around the age of five or six, my sister and I would often go to visit our grandparents. We loved snuggling up with them in their big bed. Falling asleep cradled in their arms remains for me a memory of pure tenderness. My grandmother would describe nature, which I couldn't see, and tell me all about this world. Later, when I could see, I only had to close my eyes to recall what she had told me; then everything would come flooding back.

Maman was a very kind woman who loved her husband and her children. She was devoted to her family. A dress-maker by profession, she used to make lovely dresses for us and every day she baked delicious cakes for us.

As for my father, he was always laughing and singing. He was a great soul, he was generous and had a strong sense of duty towards others. He associated God with religion and preferred to call himself an atheist. As was the custom in those days, the village priest would come and have lunch at home from time to time. *Papa* used to say: "Listen Maurice, I am inviting you in for lunch but please leave your Good Lord outside the door. And don't talk about him!" And the priest would answer: "Gilbert, you are the most Christian of all my parishioners. If only they were all like you, it would be wonderful!"

Every evening at dinner, my father made sure that the 'plate for the poor' was laid on our table.

In the sixties, day-labourers still went from farm to farm throughout France looking for a few days' work. My father spent a lot of time in the sawmill he ran, and would entrust the garden to their care. He put them up in a little house specially arranged for them and would give them new clothes. He only asked them to be clean and shaven before sitting down at table. In the evenings, over dinner, they would tell us of their adventures, which made me dream and awakened in me the longing to travel. Thence arose my love of story telling. My father used to give them instructions for the next morning saying: "My

daughter is vegetarian; I only want her to eat good vegetables. If you want to help, do some work in the garden.”

The vegetable garden was cultivated with care and yielded a wide variety of produce. My father taught us the importance of eating seasonal food. He lined the rows of vegetables with selected flowers in order to avoid using pesticides. The vegetable garden resembled a mandala which all the family would visit in the evening. To foster in us love and respect for nature, *Papa* set aside for my sister and me a little plot of earth and gave us seeds to sow. Every morning, barefoot in the dew, I would run to my little patch of garden to see if everything had grown properly since the previous day. I would pull out the weeds and water my vegetables with loving care. I marvelled at the miracle of nature.

I was really fortunate to be in such a loving family. Although they were not practising Christians, my family had an innate sense of the Divine.

And yet one day you told your parents that they really should pray...

Yes, at the age of seven I was going through a mystical phase. I became absorbed in prayer. I was permanently connected with Jesus and Mary. I was living in a state of pure *bhakti*⁷. I discovered that my parents never prayed,

⁷ Bhakti: devotion towards the Divine.

even though they had a beautiful philosophy of life.

One day I told my mother:

“I never see you praying; you’re going to have to come back again.”

My mother replied:

“But...my sweet, we only come once!”

So I said:

“Not at all: you come lots of times. As for me, I don’t come often. You’re lucky I was born among you but I won’t always be with you. Next time, you will come alone. In fact you never pray at all. One really should pray...”

Did your parents understand what you meant?

No, not at all. They thought I was dreaming up an imaginary world for myself. They did not believe me at all. So then I understood that I would have to pray even more to compensate for them.

One month before your twelfth birthday, your life was completely turned upside down. You lost your father. It was a tragedy for you. How did you, as a young girl, react to that experience?

My father died in an accident. When the police came to announce his death, *Maman* collapsed. But, despite my immense grief, I was immediately empowered with an

inexplicable strength. I suddenly felt detached from this drama as if it were not me experiencing this loss. The divine Power descended into me and It took care of everything. I was the eldest. Although barely twelve years old, I had my little brothers and sisters to take care of, and this divine force guided me to do what was necessary. I didn't cry and I was able to find the words to console others. Then came the revelation that death does not really exist; the Divine revealed to me that it is merely a transition. Very early on the morning of the funeral, my father appeared to me and smiled. He was very pale and asked me to be brave. I told him he should not have gone like that, without preparing me to take on this heavy family responsibility, and above all without saying good-bye to me.

It was the first sunny day after a month of rain. At the service, the church was too small to receive the thousand or so people who had come to pay their respects to my father. For many years to come he would appear at important moments of my life to guide me.