

Return to the Stars - First and Last Memory



My friend was now exhibiting signs of advanced older age - days motionless in his armchair, painful movements and unwanted dependence, but pain had not obliterated laughter lines among the wrinkles. His smile was primed to light up heaven. Whilst it was sometimes difficult for him to remember details from yesterday, his conversation was littered with endless memories of personal experience - extensive travel - family - friendships - many joys and a similar number of tragic episodes, all peppered with an inexhaustible stream of mischievous humour. His memories were a pleasurable journey through many lands.

'Memory is strange,' he mused. 'Age changes memory. It's the time when you try to remember when your trousers used to fit and you had a belt to fasten.' He pulled at his waistband. *'I can still remember shaving without bloodshed; being able to go just where I want just when I want, and being treated like a gentleman rather than a grown-up infant but please don't ask me about yesterday's menu ..!'*

We had been reminiscing through times abroad one day when he told me about his first memory. *'Talking of journeys,'* he said, *'My earliest memory is of a journey.'* His deep brown eyes under bushy brows were full of wonder. He was serious and earnest but relaxed and confident. *'It's a memory which has haunted me all my life. My first memory - probably before all my distorted childhood mind pictures. It's a memory of stars. They were all around me in a vast darkness that held no fears. I was moving fast. Hurtling downwards through the stars. I wonder, was this a pre-birth - even pre-conception memory?'* He looked hard at me to gauge my reaction then relaxed and went on. *'That memory was so vivid it has stayed with me through the years. I think I've always lived with a conscious sense of really belonging among the stars - somewhere far distant from here - outside measured time and space - like in another dimension - heaven perhaps? Maybe it's true that we are all made of stardust. Some of us have more twinkle than others though! I've always been fascinated by the stars. A cold starlight night has often been a comfort to me. It's the time when I really feel close to God. I once read a letter which Van Gogh wrote to his brother. In it he said that when he had a terrible need of religion he went out at night to paint the stars.'*

He paused for breath, but before I could say anything he went on. *'I've thought about that dream a lot lately, maybe because if that's how I came to this world it will not be long before I make the return journey! Do you remember what Peter Pan replied when Wendy asked him the way to never-never-land. "Second star to the right and straight on till morning!" Perhaps there'll be an angel saying something like that to me! It gives me a sort of thrill to think about it. Was that where my life began - out there beyond the stars - plunging to earth from God's eternal love-universe to inhabit this chosen body? The scriptures say the stars are God's glory and he gives them all names. I remember someone saying - 'Perhaps they are not stars, but rather openings in Heaven where the love of our lost ones pours through and shines down upon us.'*

My old friend's engaging smile had a touch of heaven about it as he brought our conversation to a close. *'Best of all I like to think about Jesus saying he's the bright morning star. He's been with me down here and he'll be there when I get back. All that really matters now is for me to stay close to him and be ready for the stars!'*