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00:06

I am Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:19

20 years ago, a close friend of mine received a past life reading from a psychic. From what she told me, it involves the psychic focusing energy upon my friend, and gathering visions or images from my friends previous incarnations. Of course, there's no way such a thing can be corroborated. But my friend believed that the information she was given about two of her past lifetimes, one in which she was a monk, and another in which she was a citizen of a place like Atlantis. shed light upon patterns and choices characterizing her current life. reincarnation hinges on the idea that the soul retains the knowledge or the wisdom accrued from one lifetime to another, though the body and even the personality fall away. I'm fascinated by this belief. I like the tension, it signals between the natural inclination to go after the markers of success in one's lifetime. And the notion of striving for a more esoteric type of evolution. Why am I thinking about souls and reincarnation? Because I'm curious about what will last. And I don't always believe that the monuments we are in the process of building monuments to celebrity, to hyperbolic wealth, and to power will survive? Even if somehow they do? What will they reveal to the humans of the future about who we were, and what we valued? What are we here in human form, to learn? I'm persuaded to believe the lessons of this life have to do with what we might become willing to give away our time, our love, our attention, even perhaps a bit of our comfort, if it might help another person out of their suffering. I'm talking to myself, of course, I'm trying to learn this lesson. Though it's difficult to do. It's easier to indulge the urge toward self regard toward building up a version of oneself designed to impress others. One other thing my friend was told by the psychic she visited was that she had made a promise to help three other souls, which ones we tried to guess was I

won, I wondered, was another of our friends. Of course, there's no way to know. Maybe the thing to do in such a situation is to help as many people as possible in ways both large and small, trusting that the good we give away, is never wasted. Today's poem is Ozymandias. By 19th century English poet Percy Bish Shelley. It's a poem that succinctly calls out the hubris and the futility of Empire. ahzzmandius by Percy Bish Shelley I met a traveller from an antique land who said, too vast and trunk lists legs of stone, stand in the desert, near them, on the sand, have sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown, and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command, tell that it's sculptor Well, those passions read, which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things, the hand that marked them, and the heart that fed and on the pedestal, these words appear. My name is Ozymandias, King of kings. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair. Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bear, the lone and level sands stretch far away. The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.