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A FALSE BEACON OF HOPE?

One hundred and fifty years ago a great novelist wrote: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Many of you may recognize this as the opening gambit from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. Although written in 1859, historians have observed how well these words served as an epithet for the entire twentieth century, an era marked by great optimism and achievement, as well as unspeakable barbarism and depravity.

In the first chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens continues his use of balanced syntax with: "It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light; it was the season of Darkness."

Will our twenty-first century be characterized by violent clashes of a similar nature? Time will tell. As we survey the present state of the world, one indicator that portends a continuation of such polar extremes is the apparent advance of technology unhinged from moral or ethical considerations. While it is undeniable that science has brought numerous benefits and improvements to human life, there is an uneasy suspicion among thoughtful observers that technology is becoming a false beacon of hope, leading us instead into a world of dark choices and hidden dangers. Intellectual brilliance unfettered from any spiritual mooring operates in a narrow spectrum of light. What is needed to guide us through these perilous times is the illuminating light of spiritual insight.

In this regard, a story from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is instructive:

Master: How do you see when the sun goes down?

Pupil: In that case, I see by the moonlight.

Master: How do you see when the moon is no longer present?

Pupil: When the moon is no longer present, by candlelight

Master: And then when you blow out the candle and there is no sun, then no moon, and then no candle, how do you see then?

Pupil: Well, Master, somehow I see by the light within.

David P. Bruce is the Director of Education at the Theosophical Society in America.