

August 2012

A REFLECTION ON *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*, No. 8

From where does inspiration arise? I'm not talking about ordinary emotional impulses, but that rare energy that originates from otherworldly realms, bringing with it the power to elevate our consciousness and propel us to altruistic action.

Great composers have the ability to hear celestial sounds and transmute them into music that can be heard by ordinary people. In a letter written in 1823 to a younger musician, Beethoven touched upon the mystery of inspiration. "You will ask where my ideas come from. I cannot say for certain. They come uncalled, sometimes independently, sometimes in association with other things."

Some of Beethoven's greatest accomplishments, particularly his symphonies, the late string quartets, and certain piano sonatas, were inspired by archetypal ideas. Somehow Beethoven was able to bring these sublime forces into expression on the physical plane, thereby raising the consciousness of millions. Was he not a prime example of what H. P. Blavatsky called becoming "a co-worker with Nature"?

There is a basic duality pervading the manifested universe. *The Secret Doctrine* uses archetypal terms such as Subject and Object, Spirit and Matter, Life and Form when referring to this duality. The task of the inspired artist is to bridge the gap between these two worlds, the world of sublime ideas and the world of concrete expression. The creative process is said to be 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration. If a composer has not spent time and effort learning the capabilities and limitations of musical instruments; if he is not well versed in harmonic theory and methods of melodic development, then whatever inspiration comes his way will be largely wasted, because his efforts to reflect the original inspiration will be awkward and ineffectual.

Do we see the analogy to the spiritual life? Is not this proportionality of effort to inspiration also true for the spiritual life? *The Secret Doctrine* states that not one individual soul can "escape its unconscious mission, or get rid of the burden of its co-operative work with nature." If we provide the 90 percent, the 10 percent will come to us of its own accord.

David P. Bruce is the National Secretary of the Theosophical Society in America.