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PROLOGUE to *THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE*, No. 9

Spiritual books from the East often employ a literary device in which the teachings are put forth ostensibly as a dialogue between a wise Guru and an aspiring devotee. We find this to some extent in *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, but much more profusely in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Arjuna and Krishna engage in an ongoing dialogue. Not unexpectedly, *The Voice of the Silence* also makes limited use of this convention by framing its teachings as a discussion between a humble but worthy disciple (lanoo) and an enlightened preceptor. An intriguing aspect of this stylistic practice is the use of monikers (or nicknames) to designate the pupil. Arjuna, for example, is referred to as Pāndava, Bhārata, son of Kuntī, slayer of demons, conqueror of sleep, and many other appellations. Although the use of sobriquets may at first create confusion in the mind of the reader, their ultimate purpose is to add clarity and depth by revealing something of significance about the disciple or the transformative process.

Fragment One of *The Voice* is essentially a monologue in which the Guru is speaking to the lanoo, whose presence is implied, not stated. I found this to be an interesting parallel to the practice of the ancient Pythagorean School in which the student was required to listen in silence during the probationary period of training. But the tacit presence of the pupil in the first Fragment does not prevent his Guru from addressing him by various monikers, some of which are quite colorful, a habit that he continues throughout the 2nd and 3rd Fragments.

All told, my audit of *The Voice* identified at least three dozen monikers used to address the disciple. Some paint him as a rank novice (*beginner, ignorant disciple*), while those used in the third Fragment foretell higher levels of spiritual attainment (*Arhan, Bodhisattva, Master of Samadhi*). Some point to requisite qualities that the disciple must develop (*fearless warrior, Thou of patient heart*), while others intimate the nature of trials that lie ahead (*pursuer of truth, slayer of thy thoughts, perceiver of external shadows*). The first-time reader of *The Voice* may glide over these subtleties without notice, but they are there, all the same. Some may be tempted to dismiss them as nothing more than ornamentation, as in the use of melodic trills in Baroque music. But I would prefer a different metaphor, likening them to the paprika on macaroni and cheese casserole, the bay leaves in soup, or the oregano in spaghetti sauce—all of which augment the main course by adding subtle but deeply satisfying flavors. As ideas are said to be food for the mind, the analogy is hopefully not too far-fetched.

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