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In her preface to *The Voice of the Silence*, H. P. Blavatsky states that it is dedicated to “the few real mystics in the Theosophical Society.” For a book bearing that title, it should come as no surprise that within its pages are to be found elements of mysticism. But before going further, perhaps we should discuss what is meant by the term.

In an article by Beatrice Bruteau entitled “The Validity of Mysticism” (*The Theosophist*, May 1990), the author begins with this cautionary note: “The word *mysticism* has been so misused that it is best to clear first what it does not mean.” She then provides a long list of items that mysticism *is not*, including telepathy, out-of-body experiences, miracles, and revelations from saints, angels, or discarnate entities. Evelyn Underhill, in her book *Mystics of the Church* (published in 1925), notes that the terms *mystic* and *mysticism* “are generally so vaguely and loosely used that they convey no precise meaning to our minds, and have now come to be perhaps the most ambiguous terms in the whole vocabulary of religion.” Even today the terms *mysticism* and *mystic* are still tossed about in the media by pundits and commentators who have absolutely no idea of what those words mean.

In her book *Practical Mysticism*, Underhill gives as good a definition as any as to what these terms mean: “Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.” Bruteau, in the article cited above, offers a more compact definition: “To realize oneself as ‘one with the One’ is mysticism.” Two passages from *The Voice of the Silence* carrying mystical overtones come to mind: “Seek in the impersonal for the Eternal Man” and “That which is uncreate abides in thee, disciple.”

The mystical elements found in *The Voice* are often seen at first glance as being paradoxical, two examples being “the soundless sound” or “now thy self is lost in Self.” But how long can one pontificate about “the soundless sound” before sounding vacuous and pretentious? As Bruteau rightly points out: “We are pretending to talk about something that is by definition incommunicable. . . . We are in the realm of the paradoxical for our language and logic.”

When dealing with mysticism, therefore, words are of limited utility. To really understand it is not a matter of words but of *experience*, for it deals with aspects of consciousness that are transcendent, indescribable, and incommunicable. The language of empiricism is ill-suited for expressing the subtle, inexpressible, realities of mystical consciousness. This is why it has been said that the language of mysticism consists of poetry and paradox, two modes often used to express the inexpressible; and as we have learned, these two elements are to be found in abundance throughout *The Voice of the Silence*.

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