

January 2017

A Reflection on *The Voice of the Silence*, No. 1

“Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

What is the meaning of this puzzling statement? What does it mean to *become* the Path? Why is this required before setting one's foot upon it? As a metaphor, the image of a path is used in widely different contexts: a university student nearing graduation envisions her career path; a business owner conceives a pathway for expanding his company; a nutritionist devises a pathway to health for a client; a Hollywood agent calculates a pathway to success for a young, aspiring actress. In each example there is a series of steps leading to a desired end.

The difference is that the path spoken of in Theosophical literature such as *The Voice of the Silence* is not a means to an end—it is a way of life. It is based not on self-interest, but on altruism. It is based not on self-gain, but on service to others. The aspirant who has entered this path of service has made a solemn decision, one that will result in profound changes, both internal and external. Mme. Blavatsky described it thus: “There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the universe.” She then speaks of a secret gateway that “opens inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore.” Everything she says indicates that the decision to travel this road is not one to be taken lightly.

A college graduate may pursue a career in her chosen field, but doing so does not require a fundamental change in personality. By contrast, the neophyte entering the Path is told to “cleanse thy mind-body and make clean thy heart.” No easy task. The owner of a small business may walk away from his failing enterprise and start another. The pilgrims traveling the Path do not have that option. Though they may stumble and lose their way, they are told to “fight on and to the charge return again, and yet again.” A skillful actress can play a multitude of parts and yet be somebody entirely different in her private life. Unlike the actress or actor, the disciple must forgo artifice and facades and is instructed to “divest thyself of thy dark garments of illusion.”

So what is the meaning of the enigmatic citation quoted above? Why can we not travel that path before we have become that path? A brief clue is provided by Joy Mills in her book of commentary, *From Inner to Outer Transformation*: “We are not separate from the path, from the process.” Those ten simple words are worthy of deep and prolonged reflection.

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