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A Reflection on *The Voice of the Silence*, No. 2

“The mind is the great slayer of the Real.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

Perhaps no other verse from *The Voice of the Silence* has been so often quoted yet so little understood. Some have assumed it to be a denigration of the mind; others, that the training and development of mental faculties are unimportant. That is a misreading of the text. The mind is a marvelous instrument, and it is what distinguishes human beings from animals. There are times, however, when the mind works against us. Many years ago I was studying music at the University of Wisconsin. I loved classical music and had purchased season tickets for the Milwaukee Symphony. To my dismay, I didn't enjoy any of the concerts. Why? I had assumed that learning about harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration would enhance my listening experience, but instead of enjoying the music, my newly acquired knowledge got in the way. I tried to analyze everything and enjoyed nothing.

Again, the mind is a marvelous instrument for dealing with the realities of this world, but there are limits to what it can do. Mystics speak of another reality, one that is beyond this world of appearances, one that eludes the senses. “The eye cannot see it; the mind cannot grasp it” (Mundaka Upanishad). “It transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude” (*The Secret Doctrine*).

One of the things that the mind does exceedingly well is to classify and categorize. That is obviously a very useful function. I mean, who wants to do business with a pharmacist who is ambivalent about labels? On the other hand, Krishnamurti once noted that “naming is a very convenient way of disposing of things and of people.” To assume we understand something *merely* by assigning it a label or category is to engage in self-delusion:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

Yogis and sages have trained themselves to withdraw their consciousness from this sensory world and enter another one, a world that is more real, they say, than this one. They speak of becoming one with God, Brahman, or the Ground of all being. Such experiences are all but indescribable. In speaking about the unfathomable peace experienced by the mystic, Thomas Merton says, “As soon as you attempt to make words or thoughts about it, you are excluded.” And it is in this way, I believe, that the mind becomes the slayer of the Real.

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