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A Reflection on *The Voice of the Silence*, No. 4

“Shun ignorance. . .” —*The Voice of the Silence*

The subject of ignorance is one about which people tend to be very modest regarding their level of expertise. If my neighbor refers to me as being ignorant, it is safe to assume that he is not paying me a compliment and that he believes me to be a rather obtuse and dull-witted fellow. While that may be true prior to my having had my morning cup of coffee, any thesaurus will tell you that ignorance is not necessarily a synonym for stupidity; it may also refer to a lack of knowledge or being uninformed about something. In that sense, I willingly and unabashedly confess my total ignorance of calculus, nuclear physics, the techniques of international bond trading, the fifty words that the Inuit have for snow, or one hundred other areas of knowledge that have little or no relevance to my life. But, if my neighbor uses that epithet *after* I’ve had my cup of coffee . . .

The dialogue that takes place throughout *The Voice of the Silence* is between an enlightened guru and an inquiring *lanoo*, the Tibetan term for disciple. In addressing the *lanoo*, the guru uses a variety of epithets, including beginner, neophyte, and *ignorant disciple*. Hopefully, the *lanoo* has not yet had his morning cup of coffee and therefore takes no offense.

In the first two Fragments of *The Voice*, the disciple is told that he must avoid ignorance, a point that is made repeatedly, and therefore of some importance. Today’s aspirant may ask, “What *kind* of ignorance am I to avoid?” A search on Google reveals various categories of ignorance, the number of which depends on your point of view: Catholic theology lists three; the Kabbalah lists four; Sri Aurobindo, in his book *The Life Divine*, lists seven. Since *The Voice of the Silence* is a book of inspiration and not a treatise, it does not provide us with a neat and orderly system of classification, but it does contain a number of memorable passages encouraging the use of discernment when it comes to understanding the nature of the material world, what it means to be human, and the nature of the Self.

So, the word *ignorance* as used in *The Voice* is not a pejorative moniker, but refers simply to the state of being unaware or of lacking a certain type of knowledge. As for my neighbor, the next time he refers to me as ignorant, I may have to loan him my thesaurus.

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