

August 2017

A Reflection on *The Voice of the Silence*, No. 8

“This earth, disciple, is the Hall of Sorrow, wherein are set along the path of dire probations, traps to ensnare thy Ego by the delusion called Great Heresy.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

The word *heresy* carries the negative connotations of intolerance, zealotry, and persecution; its appearance in a book on compassion is therefore somewhat startling and unexpected. Before we examine the above passage, let us consider some examples of how the term is used. In politics, an elected official who dares to voice an opinion contrary to party doctrine risks being branded as heretical. A scientist who takes a position contrary to the one embraced by the scientific establishment may find that his funding and promotional opportunities disappear. Public speakers have been known to facetiously preface an unconventional opinion with, “I hope you don’t accuse me of heresy, but. . . .” It is no laughing matter, however, to be accused of religious heresy when the consequences may be—and often have been—not only condemnation and ostracism, but imprisonment, torture, and death. Victims of the Christian Inquisition included Galileo, Joan of Arc, and Giordano Bruno. Today, the mullahs in Iran view the Baha’i faith as heretical. Most Orthodox Jews consider Reformed Judaism to be heretical. Many more examples could be cited, but the point is that charges of heresy are not the exclusive province of any one religion.

So, in what sense is the word *heresy* used in the above citation from *The Voice*? Is it used to describe a dissent from a dominant theory or doctrine? Is it used to describe a disagreement with the status quo? Is it used to describe a deviation from religious opinion or church dogma? No, it is used in none of those ways. In a gloss to the above verse, Madame Blavatsky explains that “great heresy” refers to the belief that the self, or soul, exists separately from the one universal Self. On the path of compassion it is a fundamental requirement to see that our life is interconnected with all other lives, that we do not live in a vacuum, that our thoughts and actions have consequences upon the lives of others. *The Voice* prods the reader with poignant passages, such as, “Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great heart mind and heart of all mankind?” Or this call to action: “Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer’s eye.” Or this short but powerful maxim: “Compassion is no attribute. It is the Law of laws.” To be deluded by selfishness, greed, and narcissism is to violate the universal law of compassion.

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