

October 2017

## A Reflection on *the Voice of the Silence*, No. 10

“Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain before thyself  
hast wiped it from the sufferer’s eye.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

This has to be one of the more poignant (and challenging) passages from *The Voice of Silence*, an irresistible call to compassionate action, which speaks directly to the heart. Whether one is a Buddhist or a Christian, a Muslim or a Jew, an atheist or an agnostic, the emotional appeal of this passage is undeniable. Any sensitive person will find their heart stirred, not only by an exquisitely fashioned line of poetry *about* human suffering, but by *its actual presence*. But instead of being aware of those tears, we submerge ourselves in the predictable routine of going to work, chauffeuring the kids to soccer, preparing that client presentation, scheduling our doctor appointments, and so on and so forth. We become overwhelmed by all these demands and obligations, some of which we create ourselves, others of which are put upon us by family, friends, our boss, or society in general. The distinct danger is that we end up wrapping ourselves in a cocoon of self-interest and self-involvement, thereby growing oblivious to the pain of those around us, especially those who are not a part of our immediate circle. This is one reason why the call to compassion is so challenging. Swept away, as we often are, by the centripetal movement of our busy lives, we fail to see the ubiquitous tears of suffering, allowing them to dry—neglected, ignored, and exposed—in the fierce light of day.

Sometimes we have a tendency to overthink things that in reality are really quite simple. Being compassionate, for example, does not require you to solve all of the world’s problems; no one has the time, energy, or resources to do that. But you can respond on a case by case basis to situations as they arise throughout your day, often requiring no more than a kind word, a sympathetic ear, or a loving smile. The person who suffers usually does not ask you to solve his or her problems, but rather to listen and sympathize. You and I can do that, provided we remain alert and observant. As we proceed with our busy lives, let us remember that wiping away the tears of another is not an inconvenience or distraction—it is an affirmation of our common bond of humanity. When we recognize that salient fact of nature, we also affirm our own humanity.

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