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## A Reflection on *the Voice of the Silence*, No. 15

“Nature’s strongest might possess no power to stay thy course.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

If the laws of nature are immutable and their operation universal and impartial, to ignore them is folly. Does this mean, then, that we have no choice but to obey Nature’s laws without exception? The above verse suggests otherwise. If that is true, our next question should be, “How is that possible?” An aphoristic remark by Francis Bacon provides a clue: *Nature cannot be ordered about, except by obeying her*. So, what exactly does that mean?

Imagine a young athlete who is training to become a tightrope walker; first he practices from only a few feet above the ground, then somewhat higher, but using a safety net. Week after week, he falls and falls, but still keeps on trying, going higher and higher. This is what Philippe Petit did until he was confident and skillful enough to walk a wire strung between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in 1974. As a novice, he had no choice but to obey the law of gravity; but as an accomplished high-wire artist, he “conquered” gravity by obeying another law—the law of equilibrium. A quote from John Stuart Mill, explains:

Though we cannot emancipate ourselves from the laws of nature as a whole, we can escape from any particular law of nature, if we are able to withdraw ourselves from the circumstances in which it acts. Though we can do nothing except through laws of nature, we can use one law to counteract another.

Let us take another verse from *The Voice of the Silence*: “Give up thy life, if thou wouldst live.” As in Matthew 16:25, we are told to give up something that is deeply ingrained in us—our sense of a personal self—so deeply embedded that we might consider it to be a law of nature. At the early stages of growth, this is absolutely necessary. A child grows by taking in all sorts of experiences and knowledge, developing various skills and abilities in the process. This process of accumulation, which is centered around the personal self, may be compared to the law of addition. Later, when the child becomes an adult and realizes its connections and responsibilities to others, a change takes place, which by analogy resembles the law of subtraction. In the spiritual life this translates to letting go of selfish attachments, rigid modes of thought, personal ambition, resentments and biases, all of which helps to clear the way for the finer and nobler impulses characteristic of our higher nature. In simplistic terms, we go from a mode of taking to giving, and the result is a voluntary reciprocity that is beneficial to all.

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