

August 2018

A Reflection on *the Voice of the Silence*, No. 20

“Step out from sunlight into shade, to make more room for others.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

An old Jewish prayer praises the Lord for having made a distinction between light and darkness. Poets should be thankful too, for they often utilize those images in their craft. The contrast between light and darkness is rich in symbolism, one instance of which is found in this popular invocation from the Upanishads: “From darkness, lead me to Light.” William Blake employs the same symbolism in his poem “Auguries of Innocence”: “God is Light to those poor souls who dwell in night.” Moreover, the symmetry of the Latin phrase “Lux et Veritas” (Light and Truth) is so self-evident that Yale University adopted it as its motto. So in the face of all this, why is the disciple being asked to step out of the sunlight and move into the shadows? Does not light symbolize the Platonic ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty? Are we to believe that life is a zero-sum game in which goodness is a finite resource and therefore to be distributed on a time-share basis? The key to this enigma lies in understanding the style in which *The Voice of the Silence* was written.

Virtually its every page features lines of exquisite poetic imagery. The motif of light appears again and again, yet in differing contexts. Verse 80 describes the “unfading golden light of Spirit,” while verse 34 issues a warning about a certain type of light that bewitches the senses and blinds the mind. Verse 28 advises the disciple not to mistake the fires of passion “for the sunlight of life,” while verse 14 equates “bathing in the sunlight of thy life” as being a problem. Again, what are we to make of all this? It seems confusing.

The language of poetry is pliable, flexible, and elastic. We do not read poetry with the mindset of an attorney or accountant. Returning to the citation at the top of the page, could the words *sunlight* and *shade* hold a psychological meaning? Let’s say that “sunlight” represents the ego’s desire to bask in the spotlight and be the center of attention. Let’s say that “shade” represents the attitude of one who is seeking neither attention nor recognition, but simply doing good work for the sake of the work. In the eyes of the world, that person may appear to be insignificant, because people usually crave the spotlight for purposes of self-aggrandizement. But as C. W. Leadbeater noted, “The only power which the disciple should desire is that which makes him seem as nothing in the eyes of others.”

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