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A Reflection on *the Voice of the Silence*, No. 21

“This earth . . . is but the dismal entrance leading to the twilight that precedes the valley of true light.” —*The Voice of the Silence*

Blavatsky’s metaphoric use of light in *The Voice of the Silence* is delightfully unconventional. In verse 140, the aspirant is told to “step out from sunlight into shade,” but in verse 18 (cited above) the implication is that he should be moving out of darkness and into light. It is the same metaphor used to very different effect, a literary distinction that serves to enrich the esthetic enjoyment of the reader. Also surprising is the metaphorical pairing of the words *light* with *valley*. Symbolically valleys are often used to represent pain and suffering (the valley of the shadow of death), whereas mountains suggest triumph, illumination, or a wider perspective. Again in verse 37 Blavatsky refers to the “Vale of Bliss” rather than associating a transcendent state of consciousness with a mountain peak. But this is not without precedent. Consider this passage from the Tao Te Ching: “The valley spirit never dies. . . . It is there within us all the while.” Authors have on occasion used valleys to symbolize safety, growth, warmth, fertility, and abundance.

Shifting from style to substance, let us note that some readers may recoil at the depiction of earthly life as being dismal. Yet one cannot deny the existence of suffering. Human existence involves an oscillation of peaks and valleys, pleasure and pain, weal and woe. While the suffering often cuts deeply, the moments of felicity and mirth are all too ephemeral. Having observed this sad state of affairs, Fyodor Dostoevsky allegedly confessed, “There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings.”

We do not always listen to our better angels. We see through a glass darkly. Aspiring to higher things, we quickly tire and succumb to the gravitational pull of personal desires. Yet if we struggle, it is because we are human. To paraphrase Somerset Maugham, only a mediocre person is always at his best. We will fall, but we get up again. To err is human, but to get up in the face of adversity is heroic. The journey from darkness through twilight to the true light is the one true journey, a journey of many lifetimes. Patience and devotion are our companions. If fears and doubts arise, we have the testimony of countless shamans and saints and sages affirming that it can be done. Faith and fortitude, too, are our companions. Follow the true light, dimly perceived at first, like the partial sunlight seen from the bottom of a well; but as we continue to put one step in front of the other its growing intensity and brilliance will erase these pervasive shadows that we now take for light.

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