

Introductory Study Notes On
THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

By Gaile V. Campbell

SECOND EDITION

The Department of Education
The Theosophical Society in America

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Foreword

The Voice of the Silence by H. P. Blavatsky is a classic of Theosophical literature. It has many depths of meaning and is a never-ending source for study, meditation and spiritual inspiration. There can be no single interpretation to *The Voice*, and not all students will agree upon any one approach. Students who wish to understand something of its profound spiritual teaching must undertake their own search and discovery.

We are grateful to Gaile V. Campbell for providing these *Study Notes*, which we hope will help open the door to this precious gem of wisdom for new students. However, students are advised to purchase their own copy of *The Voice of the Silence*, as this study guide does not replicate the valuable introductory material or the glossary, both of which contain information important to understanding the text. Also, the reader is assumed to already have a basic knowledge of Theosophical philosophy and terms. Again, this study guide is not meant to be the definitive approach to *The Voice*, but simply the fruit of one student's labor of love. After students have gone through this entire study guide, they are encouraged to expand upon the ideas presented here and come to their own realizations as to the deeper meaning of *The Voice*. Many of the books listed in the bibliography are worth reading as they will provide the reader with further insights and depth of understanding.

Ms. Campbell passed away in 1990 at the age of 86 in her home at Calgary, Canada, but this online edition will assure that her contribution lives on. Not much is known about her except for that she was an ardent student of Theosophy, and also an artist whose paintings often appeared in the galleries of Vancouver and Toronto. The first edition of *Study Notes* was published by the Theosophical Society in America's Department of Education in 1969, but it was not widely distributed. I felt that it would be useful to publish an updated second edition. Errors in citations found in the first edition have been corrected and a more complete bibliography added. Some of the original commentary has been amplified slightly to provide greater context. In other cases, a few obsolete references have been deleted. Where the word *man* appears in the text, it should be interpreted in the non-gender specific sense as indicating the human being or human race. I have chosen to take the actual verses of *The Voice* from the 1992 edition published by The Theosophical Publishing House in Wheaton, Illinois.

David P. Bruce
Director of Education
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Preface

The Voice of the Silence was one of the last works written by Madame H. P. Blavatsky, affectionately known as "HPB." She tells us that the contents of the little book were derived from *The Book of the Golden Precepts*, a work which is read by all mystic students in the esoteric schools beyond the Himalayas. The original precepts are engraved on thin oblongs. Copies are very often on discs or on plates, and are generally preserved on the altars of temples. They are written sometimes in the Tibetan language, but mostly in ideographs. To read the preface in its entirety would greatly inform those seeking to understand better her work.

The Voice of the Silence is an invaluable source of spiritual guidance, for it tells the aspirant how to begin preparing himself for traveling the Great Unknown. Whether or not the aspirant is ready to take specific steps on this road matters little, for the important thing is to become acquainted with the signposts which will guide the disciple along the pathless path at some future time in this life or in the next. To understand the rules will add much to the student's knowledge of spiritual science.

—Gaile V. Campbell
1969

Introduction

Each Fragment has been divided into sections. It might be advisable (but not essential) to have the same edition of *The Voice of the Silence* (Theosophical Publishing House, 1992) that was used in preparing this study guide. If the edition used herein cannot be obtained, the additional research to be done by the student will, in any case, prove rewarding.

The three Fragments contained in this book could be summed up as follows:

- Fragment One, called “The Voice of the Silence,” points out the way, the method, by which an aspirant may begin to prepare himself for meditation and discipleship.
- Fragment Two, called “The Two Paths,” shows the importance of study, purification of the lower vehicles, and devotion in obtaining wisdom, and the choice between two Paths.
- Fragment Three, called “The Seven Portals,” reveals seven keys which open into a life of responsibility and service which, it is said, will eventually lead the disciple into union with his higher or inner Self.

Study Notes on *The Voice of the Silence* — Fragment One

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

Lesson 1

VOICE:

1. These instructions are for those ignorant of the dangers of the lower IDDHI.

See HPB's footnote in the glossary of *The Voice of the Silence* for an explanation of the word *iddhi*. The lower psychic faculties reveal the previously undetected presence of a vast and complicated network of nonphysical life, including kingdoms of devas and nature spirits, some of them adverse to humanity, as HPB tells us further on.

As HPB goes on to say, there are two kinds of *siddhis* (abnormal powers)—the spiritual and the psychic. The spiritual powers may be uncommon and abnormal, but they are powers with which we shall become better acquainted in the future when we have learned to use them, not only for ourselves, but also for the benefit of humanity.

The third Object of The Theosophical Society clearly advocates that those who wish to learn should “investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.” The term “latent powers” relates not only to varieties of extrasensory perception but to the authentic and deeper powers of the human spirit.

VOICE:

2. He who would hear the voice of *Nada*, “the Soundless Sound,” and comprehend it, he has to learn the nature of *Dhāranā*.

In his book *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Jasper Niemand describes *dharana* as “selecting a thing, a spot, or an idea to fix the mind on.” Judith Tyberg, in *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion*, describes it as “the intense and steady mental concentration directed to some subject of thought with the mind and heart absolutely freed at the time from the disturbances of sense attractions.” Concentration, therefore, is requisite and must be given exclusively to the chosen object and not to the restless activity of the three lower vehicles—the physical, astral (emotional) and lower mental bodies.

Meditation should be practiced without causing strain to the body. When Annie Besant was first instructed by H. P. Blavatsky, Dr. Besant began to meditate with

great intensity, and her teacher interrupted her by saying, "My dear, you do not meditate with your blood vessels." For those of us who are learning how to meditate, it is suggested that we begin by learning how to protect ourselves from the forces that constantly bombard our vehicles from without. And so we learn to withdraw into the center of our being, a place wherein no other foot has trod, and acquaint ourselves with the deep silence, wherein dwells the real "I." This is most sacred ground.

VOICE:

- 3. Having become indifferent to objects of perception, the pupil must seek out the *rajah* of the senses, the Thought-Producer, he who awakes illusion.**
- 4. The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real.**
- 5. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer.**

As we are told, the mind is the *rajah*, the ruler of the senses, and must be controlled. One of the most effective systems for gaining control of the mind is the ancient spiritual science of Yoga. The fact that this requirement is listed early on in *The Voice* should be an indicator as to its importance. A prominent early Theosophist, Ernest Wood, elaborates on this further in his book *Practical Yoga*:

In yoga we are to go beyond thought, and to know things not in their juxtapositions but in their relations to primal unity. And so to learn to *still* the mind is the *first* daily exercise the disciple undertakes, for confusion of thought, which is constant movement and change taking place in the mental body, is not the ideal atmosphere in which true meditation can take place.

VOICE:

For: —

- 6. When to himself his form appears unreal, as do on waking all the forms he sees in dreams;**
- 7. When he has ceased to hear the many, he may discern the ONE—the inner sound which kills the outer.**

This "inner sound which kills the outer" may be explained this way: if we will listen to the voice of wisdom, we will become increasingly the master of ourselves and our life, and then "the inner sound" (the first step in Buddhic consciousness) will put a stop to the outer clamor which directs the feverish activities of our everyday life. Just as a blind man has no sense of color, when we awaken to a higher and

broader life, we perceive for the first time the crushing yet entirely unsuspected limitations under which we have previously been living.

It has been said that life is a school and we are in this world to learn. We begin in kindergarten to learn our ABC's of life. Then, in the course of time, we later graduate with full knowledge of the world and ourselves, with the added knowledge of what lies behind this powerful and inherent human urge *to know*:

VOICE:

**8. Then only, not till then, shall he forsake the region of *Asat*,
the false, to come unto the realm of *Sat*, the true.**

Asat is a Sanskrit term meaning that which is "not real" or "does not endure." Tyberg's *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion* says that the term is generally used to describe the "illusory or *māyāvi* realms of the manifested universe, to the shadowy or reflecting side of nature, and to the vehicles and bodies through which the Self evolves."

Until we are able to hear the inner voice of conscience and look upon life from the standpoint of the higher planes, we have no real grasp of the truth underlying this complexity of manifestation, which surrounds us on all sides on the lower planes.

VOICE:

**9. Before the soul can see, the Harmony within must be
attained, and fleshly eyes be rendered blind to all illusion.**

It is said that there is a perpetual strain between the astral (emotional) and the mental bodies, between the desires and the mind; neither of these bodies is in tune with the Ego (a Theosophical term for the higher Self) or prepared to act as its vehicle. The Ego, while enmeshed in the personality, finds it difficult to learn when the mental and astral bodies are in a state of confusion and out of harmony with the higher Self. And so, the acquiring of knowledge is made more difficult and the Ego gains but a limited view of things to be learned.

This is one of the first lessons in seeking to tread the Path: subduing the personal self or personality so that the channel between it and the Ego becomes opened and widened. The mind must be free to study, for it is the bridge linking the lower, perishable part of the human being to the immortal Ego. It is only when personal and selfish desires cease to have influence that the cacophony of voices from the outer world will no longer be in control of our destiny.

VOICE:

10. Before the Soul can hear, the image (man) has to become as deaf to roarings as to whispers, to cries of bellowing elephants as to the silvery buzzing of the golden firefly.

To be able to hear the “still small voice,” one must learn to become very quiet. As long as we are busy reacting to outer stimuli, we remain deaf to the “soundless sound” mentioned in verse 2. We have to become deaf to the outer sounds before we can hear the inner sounds. It has been found that shortly before going to sleep—or the first thing in the morning before we get caught in our daily routine—one is better able to settle down to a few minutes of quiet meditation. As one writer has said: “He who learns the secret of being naught but a channel, and who abides *still* within the secret place, can pass through many a crisis without undue shattering or pain.”

As *The Voice* tells us, dharana (intense concentration) will assist in producing this stillness, and then the disciple will remain unshaken by all external things.

Paul Brunton, author of many esoteric books says, “Refer inwards to the Overself, until the habit becomes first thought and second nature, weakening the strength of disharmonious and unpleasant emotions which are ever attacking us from without.”

VOICE:

11. Before the soul can comprehend and may remember, she must unto the Silent Speaker be united just as the form to which the clay is modeled, is first united with the potter’s mind.

It is written that before the soul can fully comprehend the drift of all the *tuition* which comes to it from without, and the *intuition* which comes to it from within, another harmonizing process must take place, in which the mind gradually becomes attuned to the spiritual will (Atma)—*which gives direction* to his life. We must never allow ourselves to become discouraged and feel that we are not ready or not sufficiently advanced to begin real study. A lay chela (a probationary disciple) once wrote:

I believe it to be absolutely true that the slightest attention seriously paid to the instructions will generate results within the spiritual principles of those who render it—causes capable of producing appreciable consequences in a future state of existence; that the smallest result establishes a tendency in the direction of spiritual achievement.

It has also been said that it is difficult for the soul to tread the Path for the first half of the journey while it is endeavoring to unite itself more and more with the Buddhi (spiritual soul)—but all the work is done under the direction of the Atma, the

seventh principle in the human constitution. The metaphor of “the form to which the clay is modeled” suggests a similar relationship between our physical form, the soul, and the “Silent Speaker” that is worth ruminating on.

VOICE:

12. For then the soul will hear, and will remember.

13. And then to the inner ear will speak—

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

And say: —

**14. If thy soul smiles while bathing in the Sunlight of thy
Life;**

The “Voice of the Silence” is a mystical (and paradoxical) term used to designate the higher Self—that mysterious part of us which is immortal and beyond the realm of normal, daily consciousness.

You will note that the higher Self and its vehicles are all operating in this world of illusion where humanity learns the necessary lessons that will help guide it on the return journey to the world of Spirit, our original home.

The poetic imagery of “the Sunlight of thy Life” refers to those happy times in life when fortune smiles upon us, when we feel that all is right with God and the world.

VOICE:

**... if thy soul sings within her chrysalis of flesh and
matter;**

The three vehicles that constitute the personality (physical-emotional-mental) are, in truth, a chrysalis from which a butterfly is gradually formed. Metaphorically, the soul’s residence in the physical body corresponds to the caterpillar state.

The soul should endeavor to realize that it is independent of these temporary vehicles. Once the soul *knows* where it is going and what it should do, it is released in great measure from doubt and fear.

VOICE:

**... if thy soul weeps inside her castle of illusion; if thy
soul struggles to break the silver thread that binds her to
the MASTER; know, O disciple, thy Soul is of the earth.**

To understand the conditions by which we may advance and make real progress, we should not allow ourselves to indulge in fits of depression, sadness, or self-pity for these emotions deplete our energy. We will cease to pander to the insatiable demands of the personality if we desire to set ourselves free from the innumerable ties that bind us to things that have no lasting value, which prevent us from climbing upward into more rarefied air, the natural place of spirit. The “silver thread” or cord is the emblem of purity, which links the soul to its divine counterpart. If we are to graduate into a higher state of existence, then we have to work at strengthening this link between this world and the next by the daily practice of spiritual disciplines.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the two kinds of *siddhis* (abnormal powers) and how are they different?
2. In the early stages of learning meditation, it is suggested that we protect ourselves from “adverse forces.” Give some examples of forces that would otherwise distract the novice.
3. In your own words, explain the meaning of “Before the soul can hear . . .”
4. Why is the soul characterized as being “of the earth” in verse 14?
5. Consider how the words “indifferent,” “deaf,” and “blind” relate to the attainment of dharana?

The maturing, self-evaluating person reaches a point when he feels there is more to himself than he has thus far come to know. There begins an internal groping, probing, unwinding stage, not unlike the struggles and emergence of the “new born” butterfly from the chrysalis, or the unfoldment and appearance of the freshly blossomed flower. This is not a process of short duration for a human being; it is a search that continues throughout our lives—if we have but the interest and motivation to know ourselves and others better. (Francis Knowles, *Discovery*)