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A Reflection on *The Voice of the Silence*, No. 5

“Shun ignorance, and likewise illusion.”

—*The Voice of the Silence*

The frequent number of references to illusion found in *The Voice of the Silence* indicates that disciples who ignore it do so at their peril. We are told to be wary of the “sweet-tongued voices of illusion” which have the power to cast a spell over the mind and lead the disciple astray. Everybody has experienced illusion in some form or another, but nobody wants to admit how susceptible they may be to its power. The comforting notion that somehow I am immune and that it is other guy who lives inside a “castle of illusion” is, in itself, a type of illusion. *The Secret Doctrine* states: “Māyā or illusion is an element that enters into all finite things.” A few examples may demonstrate the veracity of that statement. Imagine a busy salesman who’s been calling on customers all day; now he’s relaxing at home, exhausted, sitting quietly in his favorite easy chair. Has he stopped moving? No, he’s moving through space at 67,000 miles per hour—and so is everything else on the planet as it orbits the sun. The power of illusion is sometimes used to create a deliberate effect, such as a short man wearing a suit with vertical pin stripes so as to appear taller, or a tall thin man wearing a sweater with horizontal stripes so as to give the appearance of heft.

Some people may think of illusions as merely phantasies or fancies, whereas they are often orderly phenomena following the laws of nature. The sudden drop in pitch of a siren on a passing ambulance is an example of the Doppler Effect. Snell’s Law explains the familiar optical illusion created by beams of light as they pass through water or glass.

In Buddhist literature, it has long been a commonplace that the material world is not the solid, permanent reality that it appears to be. The *Diamond Sutra* states, “All that has form is an illusory existence.” The *Dhammapada* advises, “Look on the world as a bubble, look on it as a mirage.” Discoveries in modern physics support these ancient views, as science has proven that the physical atom consists of far more empty space than actual substance. And so *The Voice of the Silence* advises the spiritual aspirant to meditate on the impermanence of all physical forms until they appear as unreal as those forms and images appearing in dreams.

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