

**CATEGORIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN *THE VOICE
OF THE SILENCE* BY HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree
Masters by Research in Religious Experience.

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ABSTRACT

The Voice of the Silence (1889), compiled by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, is widely regarded as one of her most influential works, yet it has been relatively overlooked in academia. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap by identifying, classifying, and establishing the categories of mystical experience found in this book. Additionally, it aims to compare and contrast these categories with the four marks of religious experience established by James to determine if any new categories emerge.

To achieve these objectives, the applied thematic analysis (ATA) methodology was employed, utilising qualitative and quantitative approaches to identify themes in the data. The qualitative approach used word frequency counters and NVIVO analysis software to identify five primary themes: Way, Soul, Self, Light, and Heart. These themes were then thoroughly examined through a detailed analysis of the raw data, revealing instances where they were utilised. An analytical-interpretive approach was used to explore these emerging themes further and uncover potential connections and meanings between them.

This study identified six categories of mystical experience: noetic quality, ineffability, passivity, transiency, indifference to sensory stimuli, and belief. These categories were compared and contrasted with James' four marks of religious experience. This analysis led to the discovery of two new categories, indifference to sensory stimuli and belief, which contribute to our understanding of religious experience within esoteric currents like the Theosophical Society and the writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

Key-words

The Voice of the Silence; Helena Petrovna Blavatsky; William James; Categories of Mystical Experience; *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	004
Acknowledgement.	005
List of Images.	010
List of Tables.	010
List of Acronyms.	010
Chapter I – Setting the Stage.	
1.1. Introduction.	012
1.2. Lead-In.	013
1.3. Framework.	015
1.4. Methodology.	019
Chapter II – William James & <i>The Varieties of Religious Experiences</i>.	
2.1. Introduction.	025
2.2. William James.	026
2.3. <i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i> .	028
2.4. Fundamentals of <i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i> .	032
2.5. Categories of Mystical Experience.	038
2.6. Conclusion.	044
Chapter III – Helena Petrovna Blavatsky & <i>The Voice of the Silence</i>.	
3.1. Introduction.	046
3.2. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.	047
3.3. Blavatsky on Mystical Experience.	054
3.4. Buddhism in <i>The Voice of the Silence</i> .	059
3.5. <i>The Voice of the Silence</i> .	066
3.6. Overview of <i>The Voice of the Silence</i>	070

Chapter IV – Categories & Propensities of Religious Experience in *The Voice of the Silence*.

4.1. Introduction.	078
4.2. The Divided Self.	080
4.2.1. The Path.	080
4.2.2. Heart.	081
4.2.3. Soul.	082
4.2.4. Self.	083
4.3. Sense Impressions.	086
4.4. Knowledge & Belief.	088
4.4.1. Belief.	090
4.4.2. Light.	091
4.5. Conclusion.	093

Chapter V – Discussion of the Categories of Mystical Experience of Blavatsky & James.

5.1. Introduction.	096
5.2. Categories of Mystical Experience.	096
5.2.1. Noetic Quality.	096
5.2.2. Ineffability.	098
5.2.3. Passivity.	100
5.2.4. Transiency.	101
5.2.5. Indifference to Sensory Stimuli.	102
5.2.6. Belief.	104
5.3. Propensities of Mystical Experience.	
5.3.1. Asceticism.	108
5.3.2. The Divided Self.	110
5.4. Moral Fruits.	112
5.5. Conclusion.	113

Chapter VI Conclusion.	116
Appendix.	121
Bibliography.	135

List of Images

1. Title Page of *The Voice of the Silence*. 072

List of Tables.

1. Table A Five Most Frequent Words. 022
2. Table B Five Most Frequent Foreign to the English Language Words. 023
3. Table C Meanings with Annotations for "Path." 120
4. Table D Meanings with Annotations for "Soul." 124
5. Table E Meanings with Annotations for "Self" & Related Words. 127
6. Table F Meanings with Annotations for "Light." 130
7. Table G Meanings with Annotations for "Heart." 133

ACRONYMS

ATA.....	Applied Thematic Analysis.
BGP.....	<i>Book of the Golden Precepts</i> .
El.....	Hellenic.
ME.....	Mystical Experience.
Gk.....	Greek.
RE.....	Religious Experience.
Skt.....	Sanskrit.
SPR.....	Society for Psychical Research.
<i>The Voice</i>	<i>The Voice of the Silence</i> .
TS.....	Theosophical Society.
Unk.....	Unknown.
VRE.....	<i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i> .

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE STAGE

1.1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into four subsections and serves as the foundation for this dissertation. It provides justification for the dissertation, the aims, objectives, methodology, and findings that inform this study. The first subsection, "Lead-in," explains the rationale for focusing on Blavatsky's discourse on mystical experience (henceforth ME). It also discusses my background and position on the emic/etic debate. The second subsection, "Framework," introduces the overall aim and objectives of the study. It defines ME and positions the present study within a moderate constructivism approach. Finally, the third subsection presents the methodology, namely applied thematic analysis (henceforth ATA). It explains the data collection method and provides the data sample selection, which forms the basis for this study.

1.2. Lead-In

I have been an active member of the Theosophical Society (henceforth TS) (1875) since the early 1990s, and as such, I thought that my dissertation should focus on its co-founder, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). While searching for a suitable topic, I noticed few studies focusing on Blavatsky's discourse on ME. Therefore, I thought that exploring how she constructed her discourse on ME in the 19th century would be an important contribution to religious studies. However, the literature produced by Blavatsky is extensive and includes books, articles, letters and even notes in her scrapbooks. Furthermore, in reading *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (henceforth *VRE*), I noticed that William James refers to *The Voice of the Silence* (henceforth *The Voice*) by Blavatsky as a mystical scripture (James 2002:326). This inspired me to explore categories of ME in *The Voice*, and also to compare, contrast and discuss the results within the broader framework of Jamesian categories of religious experience (henceforth RE).

I must confess that as an active member of the TS, writing this dissertation came with its fair share of challenges. The major challenge was to employ a methodology that would allow me to suspend personal judgements and preconceived ideas as much as possible, allowing the data to speak for itself, and ensuring an objective and unbiased approach.

There is an ongoing debate in religious studies about the most authoritative position to adopt, namely, the emic/insider or etic/outsider. Proponents of the emic position, such as Pike and Winfred Cantwell Smith, argue that the emic provides a more in-depth knowledge of the religious system and, for this reason, has greater authority (Russell 2005: 18, 29). Proponents of the etic position, such as Robert Segal, claim that only an outsider can apply empirical and reductionist methods, thus asserting the superiority of their standpoint (Segal, 1983: 116). Godlove (2005) also subscribes to the etic position, suggesting that the emic should be suspended to ensure a more objective analysis (Russell 2005: 131).

Pye, however, offers an alternative perspective that goes beyond the emic/etic dichotomy. He suggests adopting a stance of “participation, observation and reflection” (Pye 2000: 66). According to Pye, it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between emic and etic positions because our writing is inevitably influenced by our socio-cultural background, disciplinary focus and training (ibid.). Therefore, we will always approach a topic from an emic perspective. By engaging in participant observation and reflection, scholars can take the position of both an emic and an etic participant observer, thereby engaging in a more balanced and reflective assessment (Pye 2000: 67-68). My view in this debate is that emic and etic positions are equally important. Pye's concept of the participant observer allows scholars to delve deeper into the subject matter. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding by combining the intimate knowledge of insiders with the analytical tools and objectivity of outsiders.

Considering it all, I recognise the importance of using a methodology that considers both emic and etic positions. While the emic position offers invaluable insights from within the system, the etic position complements this with an external, analytical lens. By adopting Pye's proposed stance of participation, observation and reflection, scholars can navigate the complexities of religious studies with greater depth and inclusivity. However, his approach seems more suited to field studies. The present study focuses on literary data. For this reason, I adopted the Husserlian bracketing, which allowed me to approach the data, to the extent possible, without the potential bias of preconceived assumptions and opinions, and in this way, to adopt a reflective position more cognisant of the conditionings derived from my association with TS. To reinforce the bracketing stance, I examined the data using applied thematic analysis (ATA), which combines a reductionist quantitative and an interpretative qualitative approach.

1.3. Framework

Categories of Mystical Experience in The Voice of the Silence by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky is a study in the sub-discipline of RE within religious studies. Blavatsky is an important figure in religious studies as her writings have largely influenced "esoteric literati, scientists, and entire movements, including the New Age" (Santucci 2006:184). Her work continues to shape the worldview of numerous individuals; therefore, the importance of exploring her discourse on ME is beyond question. Surprisingly, her approach to ME has hardly been researched, hence the importance of the present study, which aims to identify, classify and develop ME categories in *The Voice of the Silence* (1889) by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). The guiding question is what are the categories of ME in *The Voice*, while the objectives are twofold: to determine whether the ME in *The Voice* can be inserted into the RE categories of William James presented in *VRE*, and to explore whether a novel category can be developed that is different from the ones proposed by James.

James' work *VRE* holds utmost significance in religious studies, as it is widely regarded as seminal in exploring RE. He approached RE from an interdisciplinary perspective, including psychological, pragmatic, physiological and radical empiricism, providing a comprehensive analysis that has paved the way for subsequent scholarly studies. By approaching RE as an important and meaningful phenomena for study, James challenged the notion that they were mere delusions. Instead, he argued that these experiences provided valuable insights into psychology and different layers of the human mind.

Furthermore, this study draws on the perspective of moderate constructivism to inform its analysis. Constructivism supports the idea that MEs are shaped and reshaped by the "conceptual categories of the mystic" (Stoeber 1992: 107). Katz, in particular, argues that MEs "are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a preexistent

pattern that has been learned, then intended, and then actualized in the experiential reality of the mystic” (Katz 1992: 5). Thus, constructivism suggests that MEs are mediated by the situated socio-cultural conceptualisations. Moderate constructivism takes a more balanced approach by recognising the influence of socio-cultural linguistic processes and conditioning on the construction of the ME. However, it also acknowledges that there are other factors at play in shaping this phenomenon. These additional factors could encompass biological predispositions, innate cognitive processes, and individual differences (Jones 2020: 9).

Even though the present study is informed by a moderate constructivist approach, it does not deny the existence of nonconceptual mental states such as the ones of an infant or non-human animals, for example, as discussed in Bermúdez’s paper *Nonconceptual Mental Content* (2020). Instead, it points out that the meaning attributed to conceptual and non-conceptual mental states is contingent on the definition of “concept.” Bermúdez suggests that a more restrictive view on concepts requires that they need to be justified and defended, i.e., “the thinker [needs] to be able to justify and defend the judgment that something is an F” (Bermúdez 2020). If concepts are interpreted as perceptual mental formations that need to be defended and justified, then there may be non-conceptual mental states. For instance, experiences such as the ones of infants and non-human animals are non-justifiable and, therefore, not dependent on linguistic variables and propositional attitudes but on nonconceptual mental formations (Ibid). Considering all that, the present study also acknowledges that there are non-conceptual mental states that cannot be judged and justified. Therefore, some ME may involve nonconceptual mental states, even though the definition posited here is that they are conceptual based on socio-cultural variables and propositional attitudes. Therefore, from a moderate constructivist perspective, this study defines ME as states of consciousness differing from everyday wake states, attributed to a transcendental source. It also suggests that there are two major types of ME: contextualised ME, based on conceptual mental formations and

propositional attitudes attributed to altered states of consciousness; b. ME based on nonconceptual states of consciousness, i.e. non-justifiable.

The data informing this dissertation is a literary text, *The Voice*, consisting of aphorisms offering second-hand narratives of ME, such as the one of enlightenment. Second hand because, Blavatsky (the compiler) did not claim to have experienced the mystical states she describes in *The Voice*. In addition, this study employs James' four marks of RE as criteria for identifying and classifying ME in the data and determining whether a new category can be developed. James uses the term RE for phenomena that he essentially describes as mystical. For him, ME can include a range of experiences, such as automatism, trance, and even experiences without mental conceptual formation or union with the divine. This study also considers the propensities of RE determined by James, such as asceticism and the twice-born personality type, and the evaluation criteria he establishes to determine whether an experience is genuinely religious, namely moral fruits and philosophical reasonableness.

The methodology used to achieve the outlined aims and objectives, explained infra, is ATA, which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches by integrating statistical and mathematical methods into the data. The qualitative strategy for identifying emerging themes within the data is text segmentation based on a word frequency counter. Furthermore, a quantitative interpretative approach and Husserl's phenomenological bracketing are adopted to analysis the data as it reveals itself. The findings are then contrasted and compared against James' categories of RE to determine whether a new category emerges.

Additionally, from a history standpoint, Blavatsky's writings have been classified as belonging to the Western esoteric tradition (Faivre 1994: 86; Hammer 2013: 3,4). Although this classification is helpful because it defines a category for religious studies, it can also be called into question for various reasons. First, she was born into an Eastern Orthodox family and raised in an Eastern European background. Blavatsky's spiritual journey further sets her apart from Western ideas, as she converted herself to Buddhism during her time in Sri Lanka. This

significant change in her life brings her closer to Eastern philosophies than the Western esoteric tradition. Her Theosophical system is profoundly rooted in Buddhist and Vedantic concepts. Furthermore, it is difficult to associate the concept of "Western" with Blavatsky's writings and the organisation she co-founded. Granholm points out that the TS explicitly advocated "positive orientalism" (2014:23), the view that the "exotic other" possesses superior knowledge and should be emulated (Ibid). This perspective is incompatible with Western esotericism because it assumes the West does not possess this superior knowledge. Therefore, it seems incongruous to designate Blavatsky's work within the Western esoteric tradition.

Finally, this dissertation consists of six chapters. The first features an introduction to this study and methodology; the second, introduces James, discusses and reviews *VRE*, outlines the Jamesian methodology and evaluates his categories of RE and criteria to determine genuine RE, namely immediate luminousness (philosophical reasonableness) and moral fruits. The third chapter introduces Blavatsky, *The Voice*, and reviews the scholarly discussions regarding the data. The fourth chapter provides an interpretative analysis of the data sample that makes up the findings of this study. The fifth chapter discusses the categories of ME by Blavatsky and James, while the final sixth chapter presents the conclusion, namely a summary of the findings, possible weaknesses and suggestions for future studies.

1.4. Methodology

The methodology used to achieve the outlined aims and objectives is applied thematic analysis (ATA), an interdisciplinary approach defined by Guest et al. as combining several analytical tools, such as interpretivism, phenomenology, grounded theory and positivism, into a single research method (Guest et al. 2012:14). Qualitative research is defined here in the way suggested by Nkwi as "any research that uses data that do not indicate ordinal values" (Nkwi et al. 2001:21; Guest et al. 2012:14). Grounded theory is a qualitative research strategy developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L.¹ that, according to Charmaz, "construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Charmaz 2006: 4; Guest et al. 2012:22). It is a bundle of inductive methods for synthesising qualitative data to determine text categories, concepts and their relationships. It involves qualitative approaches such as reading the text verbatim, identifying, comparing, contrasting emerging themes, and constructing analytical theories "constantly checking them against the data" (Guest et al. 2012:11).

ATA is also based on the philosophical methods of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). This includes, for example, the idea of giving the other a voice so that lived or imagined experience can speak for itself (Guest et al. 2012:12), a process essential for the social sciences (Ibid). The phenomenological approach used here draws on Husserl's *epoché* (Husserl 1970: 151, 155, 186, 235), the practice of discarding preconceived opinions and beliefs or suspending judgement to let the data speak for itself.

ATA also combines two perspectives on data analysis: positivism and interpretivism. Clifford Geertz (1973), the father of interpretivism, uses a hermeneutic approach to examine the deeper meanings contained in data. He considers positivism to be reductionist and incapable of capturing the deeper

¹ See *The Discover of Grounded Theory*, 2006 reprint.

meanings of discourse (Guest et al. 2012:12). Conversely, positivism considers Geertz's (1973) interpretative approach excessively subjective and adopts a reductionist perspective supporting the notion that "interpretations should be derived directly from data observed, and [...] data collection and analysis methods should, in some way, be systematic and transparent" (Guest et al. 2012:13). In combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, ATA is an interpretative, analytical approach using a reductionist, positivist method for data collection, that considers the "the act of identifying themes within text, among other components of the data analysis process, [...] a highly interpretive endeavor" (Ibid). ATA also acknowledges an essential difference between the type of data and the type of analytic tools used to approach the data, expanding in this way qualitative research strategies (Guest et al. 2012:5).

Identifying themes is a central task in the analysis of qualitative data evaluation. Themes are essential for creating categories to identify constructs (Ryan 2003). In this way, ATA combines qualitative and quantitative approaches by incorporating statistical and mathematical methods into the text. It uses a qualitative method to locate emerging themes, such as word frequency counter, for example. Emerging themes are assessed using interpretative analysis. A disadvantage of ATA is that some more complex data may be overlooked.

In this dissertation, the qualitative strategy for identifying emerging themes in the data is text segmentation based on a word frequency counter. The NVIVO data analysis software was used to determine word frequency. The frequency with which a word is used is important because it shows how often a theme is discussed and its importance in the subject's mind. For example, according to D' Andrade, "the simplest and most direct indication of schematic organisation in naturalistic discourse is the repetition of associative linkages" (D' Andrade cited in Ryan 2003). The schematic organisation indicates the mental processes and behavioural patterns individuals use to understand the world.

The raw data was inserted in NVIVO and examined using the word frequency counter option with stemmed words to identify emergent themes. The first five most frequently used words, Path, Soul, Self, Light and Heart, in that order, are the main emergent themes in *The Voice*. Table A shows the emergent themes with synonyms and the number of occurrences in the data. The synonyms in the table were obtained by reading the text verbatim.

TABLE A
FIVE MOST FREQUENT WORDS
(EMERGENT THEMES – SYNONYMOUS ADDED AFTER READING THE DATA
VERBATIM.)

Occurrences	Word	Stemmed Words	Synonymous
74	Path.	Paths.	Way (s); Road; Tao; ² Course; Steps.
74	Soul.	Souls.	Ego (s); Higher Self.
57	Self.	Selves.	Ego (s)
44	Light.	Lighted, Lights.	Bright; Fire (s); Illuminate; Illumine; Lit, Spark (s); Twinkles; Twinkling.
42	Heart.	Hearts.	Love; Compassion; Affection; Bosom; Tender.

The next step in the text fragmentation was reading and re-reading the raw data to locate each instance where the first five emergent leading themes had been used to abstract meaning. The general meanings for the five emergent themes were included in Tables C, D, E, F and G in the Appendix.

The first five most frequently used foreign words, *Buddha*, *nirvāṇa*, *Bodhisatva*, *arhat* and *lanoo*, in that order, are also important emergent themes in *The Voice*, as shown in Table B. Words used by Blavatsky with the same meaning associated with the five most frequent foreign words have been added to the Table and found by reading the text verbatim. For the meanings of the foreign words that appear in English, see Appendix I, Tables C, D, E, F, and G.

² Blavatsky uses Tao as synonymous to “path.”

TABLE B

FIVE MOST FREQUENT FOREIGN TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE WORDS

(EMERGENT THEMES – WORDS WITH THE SAME MEANING NOT INCLUDED IN OCCURRENCES.)

Occurrences	Word	Stemmed Words	Same Meaning³
37	Buddha	Buddhas	
22	Nirvāṇa	Nirvāṇas	Nirvani; Paranirvāṇic
17	Bodddhisatva	Bodddhisatvas	
14	Arhat	Arhats	
13	Lanoo		Śrāvaka (Skt); Śramanas (Skt); Chelas (Skt); Akoustikoi (Gk); Asketai (Gk)

The most frequent foreign words, *Buddha* (Skt), *nirvāṇa* (Skt), *Bodddhisatva* (Skt), *Arhat* (Skt), and *Lanoo* (Unknown), are analysed only within the context of interpretation in relation to the five main emerging themes.

To reveal further meanings in the data, the phenomenological approach of *epoché* was used, i.e., the process of suspending judgement to allow the text to speak for itself and reveal its meanings and phenomena. Achieving *epoché* is challenging because one cannot be completely free of preconceived ideas. Nonetheless, I have tried to defer judgement as much as possible to give voice to the data. This was followed by an analytical interpretative approach used to create the categories of MEs. The analytical interpretative approach is simply an interpretation of the data as it reveals itself. In the process, the data is compared and contrasted with some critical ideas of James concerning categories of RE, such as the variable of the moral fruits he used to determine whether an experience is genuinely religious, inclinations of RE such as the twice-born temperament type

³ The “same meaning” listing includes the foreign words that Blavatsky attributed the same or similar meaning to the five most used foreign words.

and asceticism, and also his four marks of RE, namely ineffability, noetic experience, passivity, and transiency to identify categories of RE in the data and determine if a new one emerges.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the present study combines two data approaches, exploratory and hypothesis-driven. First, the data was approached from an exploratory perspective without linking predetermined categories of ME, such as the Jamesian ones, to the data. Instead, categories were created based on themes emerging from qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, NVIVO was used to identify emergent themes based on word frequency. Then, the five most frequent words were explored by reading and re-reading the data; after that, a table of emergent themes was created. Next, the data was considered from a hypothesis-driven perspective based on two predetermined analytical categories, namely "mystical" and "experience" (Guest et al. 2012:6), as well as the four categories of RE suggested by James, namely ineffability, noetic quality, passivity and transiency. The last analytical tool was to compare and contrast James' categories of RE with those emerging from *The Voice*.

CHAPTER II

WILLIAM JAMES & *THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE*

2.1. Introduction

The first chapter sets out the main objectives of this study, which are twofold. First, to determine whether MEs in *The Voice* can be inserted within William James' categories of RE. Secondly, to determine whether a novel category can be developed distinct from the Jamesian ones. To achieve these objectives, this chapter, entitled *William James & The VRE*, is divided into four subsections. The first introduces William James, a prominent figure in the field of religious studies, and provides a comprehensive overview of his life and work. The second subsection offers a broad perspective on *VRE*, a work of particular importance to religious studies because of its pioneering approach to RE. The third sub-chapter deals with the foundations of the *VRE*, delving into the epistemological and theoretical background James used to establish his categories of RE, providing the context necessary to understand the framework James worked within. Finally, the fourth subsection evaluates James's categories of RE. It is important to note that while these categories have been extensively analysed within the discipline of religious studies, their applicability and suitability for classifying MEs in *The Voice* will be explored in this study for the first time.

2.2. William James

William James (1842–1910) was an American physiologist, psychologist, phenomenologist, pragmatic philosopher, radical empiricism proponent, and transcendentalist. Goodman, says that as a philosopher, James' ideas influenced Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), the father of phenomenology, and Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) (Goodman 2002), to name a few. Milem points out that as a psychologist, he pioneered the theory of functionalism, was one of the first to propose a theory of emotions, focusing on their origin and nature, and was also the world's first positive psychologist. Interested in the supernatural, he was one of the first scholars of mysticism (Milem 2016:10), pioneering the study of RE in psychology and religious studies, paving the way for a science of religion with his seminal 1902 book, *VRE*.

James was born into a wealthy family in New York. His mother was Mary Walsh (1810–1882), his father, Henry James Senior (1811–1882), a theologian and Swedenborgian, and his brother Henry James (1843–1916), a prominent English-American author. James earned his M.D. from Harvard Medical School in 1869. He taught physiology there for two years while maintaining a strong interest in philosophy and psychology. From 1884 to 1885, he served as the president of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). The SPR was founded in London in 1882 and was the first organisation devoted to investigating paranormal and unexplained psychic phenomena. James was also a co-founder of the American Society for Psychical Research, which pursued the same goals as the English one. Mühlematter et al. mentioned that James was a member of the TS (Mühlematter et al. 2021: 69), and Haas pointed out that he was affiliated with the Boston branch (Haas 2019: 1369, 13).

In 1890, he published *The Principles of Psychology*, an interdisciplinary book that combined physiology, psychology and philosophy with ideas from pragmatism and phenomenology (Goodman 2002). In 1896, he delivered the Lowell Lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston, focusing on hypnotism,

automatism, hysteria, multiple personality, demonic possession, witchcraft, degeneration and genius. Some of these lectures served as the basis for the ideas he presented in his later Gifford Lectures (Taylor 1984:6). In 1897, he was invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh University. Due to a heart condition, he postponed them until 1899-1901. He compiled the Gifford Lectures and published them in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*,⁴ a work that had a major influence on the disciplines of psychology and religious studies.

Goodman remarks that James's interest in spirituality persisted throughout his life, as he oscillated between the idea that *VRE* presented a scientific study of human nature and the thought that RE "[...] involves an altogether supernatural domain, somehow inaccessible to science but accessible to the individual human subject" (Goodman 2002).

⁴ Scottish universities annually organise The Gifford Lectures, presented by prestigious scholars, focusing on natural theology and ethics. The Lectures were launched in 1887 by Adam Gifford (1820–1887).

2.3. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

More than a century after its publication, *VRE* continues to pique academic interest and remains a seminal work in the fields of religious studies, psychology and philosophy of religion, having massively influenced both academic and lay perspectives on religion and RE. According to Gellman, the significance of *VRE* lies in the fact that it argues that religious and MEs convey metaphysical knowledge (Gellman 2019), thus challenging Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) view that “God, the design of creation, the soul, its freedom, and the life hereafter [...] are not objects of knowledge at all” (James 2002:47). Jantzen pointed out that *VRE* also serves as an “important conductor of the subjectivist view of mysticism to modern philosophers” (Jantzen 1989:296). Taves (2005) wrote that *VRE* is a seminal work because in it, James coined the concept of religious and ME as an object of academic inquiry (Taves 2009:4) while aiming to lay the foundation for a science of religion:

[...] we have the beginnings of a ‘Science of Religions’[...] and if these lectures could ever be accounted a crumb-like contribution to such a science, I should be made very happy.

(James 2002:335)

Somehow, James has achieved his goal, for according to Poloma and Baker, the method offered in *VRE* “has been the most commonly used social scientific perspective on religious experience” (Poloma 2005:172 & Baker 2009:41).

However, *VRE* has also been extensively criticised. Spickard, for example, criticised James' approach from a sociological perspective because it ignores “social origins of religious experience” (Poloma 2005:172). *VRE* did not address the influence and social impact of religion because it emphasised that human experience supersedes institutions. Moreover, Poloma pointed out that James detaches RE from the beliefs by which they are structured (Poloma 2005:173).

Wynn, for example, wrote that James did not take into consideration the impact discourse can have on shaping and reshaping belief and experience, and prioritises emotions over doctrine (Wynn 2005: xi), claiming that most probably no philosophical theology could emerge if “no religious feelings had ever existed” (James 2002:335).

The Jamesian radical empirical approach to RE also has been criticised from a constructivist perspective. Constructivism emerged as a reaction to the so-called perennial philosophy school in religious studies. Perennialists argue that MEs are universal, cross-cultural, and independent of beliefs. A considerable number of scholars have vigorously contested the perennialist viewpoint. Steven T. Katz, for example, is one of the best-known critics:⁵

[...] mystical reports do not merely indicate the postexperiential description of an unreportable experience in the language closest at hand. Rather, the experiences themselves are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a preexistent pattern that has been learned, then intended, and then actualized in the experiential reality of the mystic.

(Katz 1992:5)

The supra criticism did not take into account the fact that James considered that the only way to know mystical consciousness or to evaluate whether someone has had a genuine RE is to assess its function. He proposed using two parameters to determine the genuinity of RE, i.e., moral fruits and philosophical reasonableness (discourse). In this way, James considers the importance of discourse; however, he supported the controversial notion that pure experience or consciousness supersedes socio-cultural linguistic processes.

⁵ See "Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning" in *Mysticism and Language*, 1992, 5. According to Forman (et al 1990: 3), in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, the perennialist school is comprised of the following scholars: “William James; Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944); William Johnston (1879–1915), James Pratt (1875–1944), Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), and W.T. Stace (1886–1967).”

Moreover, in *VRE* RE is associated with sensations and therefore feelings play an important role. For example, one cannot claim that the experience of the scent of a flower is based on a pre-existent pattern that has been learned and actualised in experience. This radical empiricism has been criticised because it makes mysticism “essentially private and individualistic” (James 2002: 333) and places it in the realm of sensations and feelings rather than reason. James, however, attempted to redeem it from privacy and individualism by acknowledging that the formulation of experience is a task associated with reason, since “we construe our feelings intellectually” (James 2002: 335. & Zaleski 1993:94). Notwithstanding, the role of belief is still neglected in the Jamesian viewpoint, even though he argued that sensations depend on discourse to be actualised. Furthermore, such a view differs radically from constructivism due to the emphasis on the primacy of direct experience in constructing mystical discourse, giving a very subjective approach to RE. In any event, Barnard suggests a point of compatibility between James’s view and constructivism, namely *VRE* recognises that RE is shaped “by each person’s language, culture, historical setting and personal predispositions” (Barnard 1997:6). This may emphasise situated knowledge. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that *VRE* remains a work informed by excessive qualia.

Furthermore, Jantzen criticises *VRE* from the perspective of a hermeneutic of suspicion, arguing that the work is historically inaccurate because James uses data outside the

[...] context from which they were drawn, let alone to the historical and social conditions out of which they arose. When these are considered more carefully, we often find that James’s interpretations are doubtful.

(Jantzen 1989:299)

James took for granted the views of Romantic thinkers such as Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) on mysticism,

such as ineffability and never challenged them to look at the data in a different way (Jantzen 1989:299). Jantzen's criticism does not change the fact that ineffability seems to be an aspect of RE that can be traced even in ancient texts like the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*,⁶ verse seven, which states that Brahman is beyond thought (*acintyam*) and beyond description (*avyapadeśyam*) (Krishnananda 1968:12). Nonetheless, the criticism is valid in the sense that it is important to look at the data from different aspects. Furthermore, the interpretation of ineffability may differ depending on the socio-cultural background.

According to James, mysticism shows the existence of a non-conceptual language similar to musical compositions (James 2002: 326), ineffable. Stace questioned ineffability, claiming that it was confused with paradoxicality and, therefore, should not be used to evaluate ME. The experience is one thing, whilst its conceptual construction is another (Stace 1960:31). Stace points out that the problem with this view is that James's belief in the objectivity of ME "confus[es] the indubitable pure experience with the highly doubtful elaborations of interpretations put upon it by the mystics" (Stace 1960:35). Matilal claims that "James only gave the name to the problem by calling it ineffability but did not offer any solution nor did he contribute anything to our understanding of the problem" (Matilal 1975:218) which is to determine which element of conceptual description should be regarded as experienced and which element as interpretation (Stace 1960:32). The fact that James does not acknowledge the paradoxicality of mystical discourse, and does not determine which element of conceptual discourse should be regarded as experiences versus interpretation are important points to take into consideration.

⁶ The date the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* was written is controversial, but it is often attributed to the 1st or 2nd century A.D.

In addition, *VRE* has also been received ambivalently in the discipline of psychology of religion, with many scholars exploring the work

[...] because [...] tensions and omissions are those from which the future basis if the subject can be built. What remains so rich about *VRE* is the way so many commentators can return to the text to discover ever-new ways of reading.

(Carrette cited in James 2002:xliv)

2.4 Fundamentals of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

According to Goodman (2002), the epistemological approach underpinning *VRE* is radical empiricism, a theory advanced by James that states that the basis of all knowledge is pure experience (James 1904:534).⁷ Goodman explains empiricism as a philosophical and epistemological approach that supports the idea that knowledge is gained through sense perception. For example, one can determine when a classical concert is being broadcast on the radio by listening to it. Regrettably, James died before he could complete his theoretical justification for radical empiricism (Goodman 2002). In his *Essays of Radical Empiricism*, he coined the concept 'pure experience' to refer to "the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories" (James 1912:93). Pure experience cannot be conceptualised because it supersedes discourse (Ibid). It is the primal stuff from which knowledge is derived by way of relation, and this relation is pure experience, which is connected both to the knower and the object of knowledge (James 1904: 477,8).

⁷ See *A World of Pure Experience*.

In order to situate RE within the epistemological spectrum of radical empiricism, James defined religion from an emotional perspective, i.e., religion is the “feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 2002:29-30). His definition of religion is based on his physiological theory, which assumes that emotions arise from physiological responses to experiences (James 1884). He considers the divine as expressed through emotions, interpreting it as a “primal reality” to which a person is compelled to respond “solemnly and gravely” (James 2002:35). *Solemnly* and *gravely* are emotional traits that vary in intensity and expression (Ibid:25), making it difficult to identify them with precision. As a result, it is difficult to provide a clear conceptual description that can be used as a criterion for the study of RE. Therefore, the rigorous scientific method of delineating ideas with sharp edges cannot be used to evaluate such experiences. To circumvent this conundrum, James used data on “the extremer expressions of religious temperaments” (Ibid:5), which he divided into two personality types: the sick soul and the healthy-minded.

The sick soul revolves around a divided self (Ibid: 132), split between the mundane and the spiritual life. It encompasses the belief that existence consists of a mortal and a divine spiritual self that sees the material world as inherently evil. This quote from *The Voice* illustrates this view: “This Earth, Disciple, is the Hall of Sorrow” (Blavatsky 1889:4). In the Jamesian view, the sick soul must be twice born “in order to achieve happiness” (James 2002:132). It needs to die in the material world and be re-born in the spiritual one. It must “lose the one before we can participate in the other” (Ibid). In this vein, the Jamesian theory of RE has a pathological aspect based on a psycho-physiological perspective. For example, he held that in the “lives of Saints, intellect is weak and spiritual faculties strong and

with pathological aspects” (James 2002:265).⁸ This adds a psychological dimension to the Jamesian perspective on RE.

Furthermore, James structured *VRE* with two questions: “what are the religious propensities?” and “what philosophical importance do they have?” (James, 2002: 9). The first question focuses on the function of RE (Taves 2003: 303), seeking to determine innate religious inclinations by evaluating existential judgements or propositions. For example, to understand the inherent religious inclinations of the Bible, existential questions such as “under just what biographic conditions did the sacred writers bring forth their various contributions to the holy volume?” (James 2002:9) or “what they had in mind when they delivered their utterances?” (Ibid) need to be addressed. The second question explores its origin (Taves 2003: 303) in the effort to explain the structure, genesis, and history of religious inclinations by evaluating “propositions of value i.e., werthurtheil [sic] or spiritual judgement” (James 2002:9). This is achieved by focusing on questions such as how the experience comes about, what is the framework, the “origin and history?” (Ibid). As a result, the data informing *VRE* is drawn from first-hand experiences recorded in literature such as “works of piety and autobiographies” (Ibid: 8), such as the narratives of George Fox (1624–1691), the founder of the Quaker religion, for example.⁹ *VRE* also uses literary data based on second-hand accounts such as *The Voice*. In this manner, the data informing *VRE* is divided into first and second-hand experiences. Experiences of saints, seers and mystics are first-hand experiences (Ibid:11). Second-hand experiences are those of religious followers, often based on tradition, imitation, and acquisition of retained habits (Ibid).

Additionally, the Jamesian view supports that RE is most common in two temperament types: the healthy-minded and the sick-soul. The healthy-minded

⁸ James borrowed the notions of “once born” and “twice born” from Francis N. Newman (1805-1897) a philosopher and scholar from England. See Newman, F. N. (1905). *The Soul its Sorrows and Aspiration*, p. 203. London: P. Green.

⁹ The Quaker religion is a Protestant Christian movement whose members believe that every person has the capability to experience God within. See Fox 1903: 214-215.

temperament is characterised by optimism, a positive attitude, and an optimistic outlook on life, freedom and love (James 1917 79). In religious terms, this suggests the beliefs that make a person happy are accepted as true by the healthy mind temperament (James 2002: 66). In contrast, the sick-minded is pessimistic, depressed, and melancholic with an inclination to exaggerate evil and negativity, with an attitude of always seeing something bitter (Ibid:110). The sick-minded is drawn to ideas such as the need to transcend an illusory self and die to be reborn in a divine self. Christianity, for example, has an aspect of the sick-minded temperament, as death and rebirth play a central role in its worldview. In this vein, he links psychopathological factors to religious beliefs, removing the notion of rationalism and emphasising radical empiricism that does not allow rational choices on religious inclinations but is driven by inherent pathological factors related to feelings and sensations. Although the optimistic and pessimistic categories may be helpful in creating a psychological classification of temperament types, they can however be problematic because they are embedded in an overly subjective account that does not take into consideration social factors that may shape and reshape such inclinations. The parameters of a pessimistic and optimistic outlook on life can be both situationally and socially constructed on some level.

Furthermore, James noted that RE is based on mystical states of consciousness (James 2002:294); whilst consciousness is the source of religious feelings and acts (Ibid:15). However, he did not like to use the concept “consciousness” and writes that:

[...] for twenty years past I have mistrusted "consciousness" "as an entity; for seven or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students, and tried to give them its pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience. It seems that the hour is ripe for it to be openly and universally discarded.

(James 1904:477)

Eventually, he replaced the concept of consciousness with that of “pure experience” (James, 1904:477),¹⁰ claiming that consciousness does not exist as an entity but stands for a function, namely knowledge which is pure consciousness (Ibid:477, 8). Thus, rather than providing a specific description of mystical consciousness, he argues that it can be understood through its function (James 2002: 294). In this manner, consciousness is defined by James as a stream of thought “teeming multiplicity of objects and relations” (James 1890); it is personal and transitory, producing sensible and continuous thoughts that give the impression that one is dealing with independent objects; it is selective because it chooses what to welcome or reject (Ibid).

While James attempts to objectively use the notion of pure consciousness, he does not apply the same objectivity to the concept of ME and gives it a transcendental explanation by linking it to the concept of a subliminal self or subconscious (James 2002: xxxv). He borrowed the concept of *the subliminal self* from the English psychological researcher and one of the main founders of the SPR, Frederic W. H. Myers¹¹ (1843–1901), who coined it to explain psychic experiences and phenomena in his book “Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death” (1918). The concept alludes to the threshold (limen) of consciousness, i.e., subconscious, a level that emotions or thoughts must pass through before they can be articulate in the conscious mind (Meyer 1918:15). Myer argued that the conscious self is only a fragment of a greater self. Everyday cognitive processes reflect only a fraction of this larger self. Psychic phenomena such as clairvoyance, telepathy or automatic writing, for example, are caused by impulses from the subconscious mind and not by external factors. Moreover, what makes Myers’ theory of the subliminal self so important to James is that it formulates a pathological explanation for RE. Thus automatism, trance can be considered a change in brain function that facilitates the expression of the subconscious. Taves

¹⁰ See *Does Consciousness Exist?*

¹¹ Meyer became a member of The Theosophical Society, London, in 1883. He asked Helena Petrovna Blavatsky to show him some psychic phenomena, she produced astral bells. See Frederic W.H. Myers in Theos-Wiki.

points out that while James takes an extremely subjective approach to defining mystical consciousness, he does not deny the possibility that external forces play a role in such a phenomenon (Taves 1999:2002).

According to Taves, Myers' subliminal self was for James

[...] the first thoroughly inductive attempt in any language, to consider the phenomena of hallucination, hypnotism, automatism, double personality, and mediumship as connected parts of the whole subject as he claims that, as he wrote that no one seems to me to have grasped the problem in a way both so broad and so sober as he has done.

(James cited in Taves 1999:258)

In this manner, Pratt points out that James adopts the notion of the subliminal self to support his RE theory. He assumes that the subconscious influences the self in ways that “psychology has as yet hardly recognised” (Pratt 1913:211-2). At the same time, Weinberger justifies such an approach in that it explains “intuitions, hypnosis, some miraculous cures, religion conversion, ME, passions, dreams, hallucinations, and many other important psychic phenomena” (Weinberger 2000:443). Taves argues that using the notion of the subconscious in a work that aims to bridge religion and science is considered one of the most problematic and ambiguous aspects of *VRE* (Taves 2009:415).¹² Chalmers criticises the Jamesian approach to consciousness as Cartesian in the sense that it is primarily based on introspection and, as such, unable to provide a sound theory of consciousness (Chalmers 1966:13). Perhaps the strongest argument against the notion of pure consciousness and ME is put forward by Proudfoot (cited in Rothberg 1990) who suggests that ME involves conceptual mental formations, and as such it is shaped and reshaped by the core beliefs of a given tradition and not by pure experience,

¹² In *William James Revisited*.

These claims or beliefs may lead the subject to judge that a given experience has provided insight into "objective" reality rather than simply being a "subjective" artifact of certain practices or merely subjective states. Hence, the very description of the experience as mystical or religious (or even as meaningful) carries conceptual and explanatory corollaries rather than simply being a report of a kind of "pure experience."

(Proudfoot cited in Rothberg 1990:170).

James could have paid more attention to the role of socio-cultural factors, situated knowledge and beliefs derived from them in ME. Nonetheless, the Jamesian approach to RE opened new horizons to religious and psychological studies and continues to be an important source informing scholarly studies.

2.5 Categories of Mystical Experience

In *VRE*, James asserts the existence of profoundly distinct experiences that diverge from our typical waking states. These altered states can be attained by employing various stimuli, including practices like yoga. Ignoring these experiences would render any comprehensive depiction of the cosmos inherently incomplete and non-definitive. He asserts that no description of the cosmos in its entirety can be definitive if these altered types of experiences are completely neglected (James 2002: 301, 302). He classifies these experiences as mystical, but contrary to popular belief, he supports the notion that they are not limited to phenomena such as automatic writing, prophetic speech, and mediumistic trance. James does not consider these experiences significant, as they can occur in non-mystical minds (James 2002: 316). The primary characteristic of mystical states of consciousness¹³ is the experience of enlightenment, which can manifest as trance-like moments of "[...] insight into truth which all religious mystics report" (Ibid: 316). Such mystical

¹³ James uses "cosmic consciousness" in interchange with "mystic consciousness."

states have a profound impact on the lives of those who experience it (Ibid: 296), because they are

[...] states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect... illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule, they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.

(James 2002:295)

According to James, RE has its origin in mystical states of consciousness (Ibid). Consequently, Barnard suggests that the category of ME in *VRE* is larger and more comprehensive than the category of RE (Barnard 1997: 12).

James presents a framework for evaluating ME, consisting of three criteria. The first criterion includes four marks, namely ineffability, noetic quality, passivity, and transience, determining if an experience qualifies as mystical (James, 2002:322). The second criterion explores the classification of ME as either mystical or mystical and genuinely religious. This classification is based on examining the moral fruits and philosophical reasonableness of the experience. It involves assessing whether the moral element of the subject's religious tradition is manifested in their life and if the discourse aligns with their religious tradition (Ibid: 19). According to James, a genuine RE will improve the individual morally and involve luminousness or philosophical reasonableness. The third criterion is that the ME "[...] point[s] in definite directions (Ibid:322), showing the philosophical reasonableness [...]" (Ibid: 19) and "truth of those theological affections in which the saintly life has its root [...]" (Ibid:322). For example, the discourse shows the philosophical direction, such as monism and optimism (Ibid).

The four marks indicate the function or causal relationship between internal processes and external behaviours. Ineffability and noetic quality involve immediate luminousness (James 2002: 19) and are the two most critical aspects of ME, while the second, less perceptible features are passivity and transiency. Ineffability is a state of mind that defies discursive articulation. It can only be

comprehended by subjective experience that cannot be communicated verbally. For example, the scent of a flower can trigger feelings and sensations impossible to convey through conceptual language (James 2002: 294). In the case of the ineffable ME, the following quote exemplifies it: “A light ineffable shown in my soul” (Finney cited in James 2002: 197). In this manner, ineffability involves the idea that ME is based on sensations beyond reasoning, described as feelings (James 2002: 295). One of the shortcomings of the ineffability category is pointed out by Katz, it can encompass uncountable types of experiences that are not related whatsoever to RE. For example, an atheist can feel “a sense of dread at the absurdity of the cosmos which he labels ineffable” (Katz 1978:48). Due to the fact that ineffability is a state of feeling, it cannot be considered an objective parameter to determine whether or not an experience is mystical.

The second criterion, noetic quality, is defined as a type of knowledge gained through experience that gives direct “[...] insight into depths of truth unplumbed by discursive intellect [...]” (James 2002: 380,381). It has an epistemic dimension, as it is a state of knowledge that can come through the experience of illumination (Ibid), contrary to ineffability considered a feeling (Cole-Turner 2021:2).¹⁴ James, for example, describes his experience with nitro oxide as having had a noetic quality as it led him to an insight into the unity of life, with all opposites merged into one (James 2002: 301). Noetic quality is widely recognised as a prominent category of ME among scholars. According to Cole-Turner (2021), it has gained significant popularity due to its adoption by contemporary laboratory research on psychedelics to delineate the results of their studies on altered states of consciousness.

¹⁴ Cole-Turner points out that Stace (1960) relabeled the category “noetic quality” to a “sense of objectivity or reality” (2021: 5).

However, noetic quality has faced criticism from Sanders & Zijlmans for its perceived blend of mysticism and science in psychedelic research,

The current blend of mysticism and science in psychedelic research risks damaging the credibility and potential of psychedelic science. A theoretical shift is needed to clarify the division between psychedelic science and supernatural or nonempirical belief systems [...].

(Sanders & Zijlmans 2021: 1254)

This critique, however, seems to lean towards biased theorising rather than an objective assessment because it approaches the topic from a secular/sacred divide perspective.

Passivity is the third mark for evaluating ME, used by James in reference to a state of relaxation (James:2002: 90) or a “[...] defensive and the aggressive mood” (Ibid: 37). It can be an induced state leading to the sense of a superior presence or power or a “[...] secondary or alternative personality” (Ibid: 382) that can trigger an altered state of consciousness, such as a mediumistic trance, automatic writing or prophetic speech (Ibid: 382). It is possible to induce such a state of passivity through practices such as certain physical exercises and concentration described in mystical manuals (Ibid: 295). James illustrates this state of passivity in the following way: “I was perfectly willing and obedient. There was no intellectual effort or train of thought. My dominant idea was: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord [...]’” (Ibid: 98). However, passivity is also a very vague mark of RE. Many instances in life can induce a state of passivity not linked to RE. For example, someone may enter a state of relaxation and passivity while lying in bed and thinking about life.

Finally, transience, the fourth mark, is a brief ME of half an hour or less to two hours (James 2002: 295), with a lighter noetic quality, leaving the impression of something significant and important in the mind. James uses the following example to illustrate transience, “I felt the happiness destined for man [...] I never felt something so great or so instantaneous” (Ibid: 368). However, it is necessary

to point out that the mark of transiency has also been criticised for its vagueness. Consider, for instance, Dewey's book "Common Faith," which "[...] portrays human life as pervaded by two interweaving themes: chance, transiency, loss [...]" (Alexander 2013: xvi). James' definition of transience is vague, as many factors can cause a slight noetic effect on a person to leave an impression of something significant.

James attempted to strengthen the four marks, ineffability, noetic quality, passivity and transience, by introducing other variables that need to be present to determine whether someone had a genuine religious ME, i.e., the moral fruits and philosophical reasonableness.

In this manner, it is not only necessary to establish whether the experience is merely mystical but also whether it is genuinely mystic-religious. Non-genuine RE does not result in moral fruits but in a feeling of something deeply meaningful. Examples of non-genuine RE are hearing something but failing to grasp its deeper significance conceptually. The feeling or sensation of being "here before" may be derived from a dream-like state, such as the feeling of coming closer to an enlarged perception that has not yet been fully realised (James 2002: 298). Some dream-like states, such as that of entering into a trance state, may lead to a loss of sense of self, caused by the sensation of obliteration of time and space (Ibid: 299).

Another level of ME is that brought by drugs such as alcohol and "[...] ether, especially nitrous oxide, when sufficiently diluted with air, stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree" (James 2002: 300), leading to a sense of deep meaning and being-there, described by James as a "monist insight, in which the *other* in its various forms appears absorbed into the One" (Ibid:301). Nature, too, can trigger ME because it can provide conditions of exaltation; deeper levels of mystical consciousness may be feelings of profound meaning and connection with everything around (Ibid: 298). For example, cosmic consciousness or the expansion of the mind, while leading the subject into an altered state,

[...] a state of moral exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation, and joyousness, and a quickening of the moral sense, which is fully as striking, and more important than is the enhanced intellectual power. With these somewhat may be called a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life, not a conviction that he shall have this, but the consciousness that he has it already.

(James, 2002: 308,309)

In this way, James supports the notion that genuine RE can encompass all phenomena associated with non-genuine ones. What differentiates the genuine from the non-genuine is the moral fruits, luminousness or philosophical reasonableness connected to the religious tradition of the mystic. The moral fruits of RE are “the highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, and bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves, have all been flown for religious ideals” (James 2002: 203, 294). James most likely coined the idea of the fruits of RE inspired by a passage in the *Sermon of the Mount* that warns against false prophets: “You Will Know Them by Their Fruits” (Matthew 7:15 NKJV). However, someone can have a ME, without moral fruits and luminousness associated with their religious traditions. James considers such experiences as non-genuine RE, linked to various phenomena such as dreamy and hypnotic states, visions, the feeling of presence, the feeling of being there, the feeling of union, and the feeling of an expanded self, which can lead to a not- so-intense noetic quality, or it can involve ineffability.

Finally, James mentions that it is possible to methodically cultivate mystical consciousness by practising yoga or intellectual concentration and moral disciplines aimed at helping the subject overcome the lower nature or self to achieve *samādhi* (Pali & Skt) coming “face to face with facts which no instinct or

reason can ever know.” James uses Vivekananda's¹⁵ (1863–1902) description of *samādhi*,

[...] the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a superconscious state, and that when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge beyond reasoning comes [...]

(Vivekananda cited in James 2002:310)

Vedantists say that one may stumble into super-consciousness sporadically without the previous discipline, but it is then impure. Their test of its purity, like our test of religion's value, is empirical: its fruits must be good for life. When a man comes out of Samādhi, they assure us that he remains “enlightened, a sage, a prophet, a saint, his whole character changed, his life changed, illumined.”

(James 2002:310)

2. 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, James proposed four marks—ineffability, noetic quality, passivity, and transiency—to determine whether an experience is religious. While these marks may lack objectivity, as they can be expressed in different facets of life, they do establish some parameters that have been used by scientists and religious scholars over time to explore the ME. Additionally, James emphasised the importance of evaluating the propensities of RE, such as asceticism, purity, and self-sacrifice. He even categorised RE into genuine and non-genuine, with moral fruits and philosophical reasonableness as the indicators of genuineness. While non-genuine experiences are fleeting, genuine ones lead to profound moral behavioural changes and luminousness. Furthermore, James argued that spiritual exercises like yoga systematically cultivate mystical consciousness. Lastly, he

¹⁵ Vivekananda was a yogi and thinker from India, who introduced yoga and some aspects of Vedanta to the Western World.

adopted the concept of the subliminal self (subconscious) to support his theory of RE, suggesting that the subconscious influences the self in ways science cannot comprehend. However, using the notion of the subconscious within a work aiming to bridge the gap between religion and science remains a controversial and ambiguous aspect of James' theory.

CHAPTER III

HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY & *THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE*

3.1. Introduction

The present chapter is divided into four subsections. The first subsection provides an introductory overview of Blavatsky's life and works, her involvement with Buddhism and her significant influence on esotericism. In the second subsection, we examine the extent to which Blavatsky's writings and her views on ME have been studied in the existing scholarly literature. The third subsection looks at the scholarly debate about the authenticity of *The Voice* as a genuine Buddhist work. The fourth subsection looks at the historical background of *The Voice*, shedding light on how and when it was written. Finally, the last subchapter provides an insightful overview of *The Voice* by outlining its structure and content.

3.2. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), popularly known as Madame Blavatsky, was a Russian émigrée to the United States and co-founder of the TS. She was born in Yekaterinoslav,¹⁶ Ukraine, the daughter of Colonel Piotr Alexeyevich von Hahn (1798–1873), who came from an aristocratic German family. Her mother was the Russian novelist and independent thinker Helena Andreyevna von Hahn (1814–1842), née de Fadeyev, who wrote under the pen name Zenaïda R. (Sinnett 1913: 14). When Blavatsky was eleven years old, her mother died. Together with her sister Vera Zhelikhovskaya (1835–1896) and her brother Leonid Petrovich Hahn (1840–1885), she moved to Saratov to live with her maternal grandparents, the Russian princess Yelena Pavlovna Dolgorukaya (1789–1860) and her grandfather Andrei Fadeyev (1789–1867). In 1849, Blavatsky married General Nikifor Vassilyevich Blavatsky but left him a few months later, claiming to the end of her life that the marriage was never consummated. She also married Michael C. Betanelly, a Georgian émigré in the United States, in 1875, from whom she divorced after three months, also claiming that the marriage was never consummated (Ryan 1985:55). Blavatsky claimed never to have had a child, but she was the guardian of an infant named August Youry¹⁷ (1862–1867), who died under her care.

One of the most significant sources of information on the early life of Blavatsky is the book *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, written in 1886 by Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921). The book is based entirely on first-hand accounts given by Blavatsky to Sinnett. In it, Blavatsky reveals that her family perceived her as a very nervous child who spoke loudly (Sinnett 1913:32). We also learn that she was born into an Eastern Orthodox family and longed for

¹⁶ From 1926 onwards Yekaterinoslav became known as Dnipro, Ukraine.

¹⁷ Some authors speculate August Youry was Blavatsky's son. Blavatsky denied it.

independence and freedom from an early age. At the same time, she developed a fascination with the mysterious and supernatural due to her numerous supernatural experiences. (Sinnott 1913:32, 27)

Blavatsky's early fascination with the supernatural is described in the context of the time she was living in her grandparents' villa, with many abandoned underground catacombs (Ibid:30). In such surroundings, the household staff told Blavatsky many ghost stories, such as the ghost of a young woman who was cruelly murdered for refusing the affections of her old master, and who was often seen floating in the catacombs at dusk (Ibid:31). In one of these subterranean places, Blavatsky secretly built herself a tower of old furniture, where she could hide while "reading a book titled 'Solomon's Wisdom,' in which every kind of folklore was taught" (Ibid). Blavatsky recalls some of her earliest MEs, such as being haunted in childhood by dreadful staring eyes that only she could see and talking to invisible friends and seeing ghosts (Sinnott 1913:34). She was also fascinated by stories of

[...] wise men who had existed in all ages, and existed even in our own days [...] making themselves known [...] only to those who were worthy of knowing and seeing them, and who believed in, instead of laughing at them [...]

(Sinnott 1913:47)

She also describes having had contact with one of these wise sages, first in a dream and after in real life, and that this sage became her master and guide. Blavatsky also nurtured an interest in Buddhism since childhood. She probably came into contact with Buddhists when her maternal grandfather, Andrei Fadeyev, was appointed civil governor of Astrakhan in 1837. Helena spent a year in Astrakhan, among the Gelug Tibetan Buddhists of the Kalmyk tribes and maintained contact with them throughout her youth (Chajes 2019:19). In 1868, Blavatsky claimed that she travelled to Tibet at the request of her Buddhist master Morya, where she lived for a year in the house of an adept named Koot Hoomi Lal

Singh.¹⁸ During this time, she is said to have been instructed in occult practices and to have learned the hieratic language Senzar, which she used as the basis for her *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*.

In the early 1870s, Blavatsky became involved in the Spiritualist movement and unsuccessfully tried to found a *Société Spirite* (Blavatsky 2003:21). She believed that spiritualist phenomena were genuine, but spiritualists could not communicate with the spirits of the dead. Instead, they communicated with spooks, "the cast-off second skins of their personalities that the dead shed in the astral light" (Ibid: 20). By the mid-70s, Blavatsky had become an outspoken opponent and critic of the spiritualist movement, as can be read, for example, in her commentary on mediumistic communication with the spirit of the dead in *Isis Unveiled*:

During the past twenty years, we have received through various mediums messages purporting to be from Shakespeare, Byron, Franklin, Peter the Great, Napoleon and Josephine, and even from Voltaire. The general impression made upon us was that the French conqueror of his consort seemed to have forgotten how to spell words correctly; Shakespeare and Byron had become chronic inebriates; and Voltaire had turned an imbecile.

(Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* I, 1877: 36)

The first major work Blavatsky wrote is *Isis Unveiled*, the writing process of which is linked to MEs as described by Col Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907):

To watch her at work was a rare and never-to-be-forgotten experience. We usually sat at opposite sides of one big table, and I could see her every movement. Her pen would be flying over the page, when she would suddenly stop, look out into space with the vacant eye of the clairvoyant seer, shorten her vision as though to

¹⁸ Blavatsky asserts that both M and KH inspired the foundation of the TS.

look at something held invisibly in the air before her, and begin copying on her paper what she saw [...] I remember well two instances when I, also, was able to see and even handle books from whose astral duplicates she had copied quotations into her manuscript, and which she was obliged to "materialise" for me to refer to when reading the proofs, as I refused to pass the pages for the "strike-off" unless my doubts as to the accuracy of her copy were satisfactory.

(Olcott 1895, I: 208, 209)

In 1875, Blavatsky and Col. Olcott founded the TS in New York.¹⁹ In 1879, they moved the TS to India, and Blavatsky and Olcott also moved there. In 1880 Blavatsky and Olcott travelled to Sri Lanka, where they took their lay vows as Buddhists. App claims that Blavatsky and Olcott "[...] were among the very first Westerners to officially declare themselves Buddhists (in 1880) and to play a major role in the world-wide propagation of this religion" (App 2021). However, this claim sounds somewhat speculative as there is no way to prove it. Instead, they are best known for playing a major role in spreading Buddhism in the Western world and its revival in India.

According to Weddle, Blavatsky's approach to Buddhism was more philosophical because it excluded the "superstitious belief in supernatural beings" (Weddle 2010: 134). This claim may be challenged, as Blavatsky supported the notion that supernatural beings exist by referring to devas (Blavatsky 1892: 98), elementaries (Ibid: 112), and elementals (Ibid: 111) in her writings. Nevertheless, Blavatsky's approach to Buddhism can indeed be considered rather philosophical, not because she excluded any form of belief in supernatural beings, but because

¹⁹ The Theosophical Society was founded by 16th persons. Blavatsky, Olcott were the main leaders (Santucci, 2005: 259-294).

she considered it from a non-dogmatic perspective, defining superstition as "cloaca of all dogmatic creeds that are based upon blind faith" (Blavatsky 1881: 60, 62).²⁰

In 1888, Blavatsky wrote her second major work, *The Secret Doctrine*, whose writing process was also related to MEs such as clairvoyance, as described in the proem of the aforementioned work:

AN Archaic Manuscript—a collection of palm leaves made impermeable to water, fire, and air, by some specific unknown process—is before the writer's eye. On the first page is an immaculate white disk within a dull black ground.

(Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 1888: 1)

In 1889 she wrote *The Voice*, which she called the Bible of the Theosophists. The writing process of the aforementioned work is also related to MEs, discussed in the present chapter, in the subsection entitled *The Voice of the Silence*.

Overall, the literature produced by Blavatsky is vast and consists of books, articles, interviews, scrapbooks, correspondence, and newspaper interviews, to name but a few. Her most influential works are *Isis Unveiled*, 1877; *The Secret Doctrine*, 1888; *The Key to Theosophy*, 1889; *The Voice*, 1889. Furthermore, Blavatsky founded two magazines: the official journal of the TS, *The Theosophist*, in 1879, which is still in circulation; and *Lucifer* magazine, in 1887 which ceased circulation in 1897.

Blavatsky was also a humanitarian and feminist advocate of freedom of thought, and freedom from social and racial prejudice, by promulgating ideas such as universal siblinghood:

We are all brothers—by the laws of Nature, of birth, and death... let us unite ourselves to form a practical "nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF RACE, CREED, OR COLOUR.

²⁰ See Blavatsky on superstition in *The Theosophist*, 1881, v. iii, n. 3, pp. 60-62.

(Blavatsky 2021:18)

The feminist ideas she espoused can be traced in her works. For example, in her article *Progress and Culture*, she states:

[...] modern Protestantism and Roman Catholicism owe their illegitimate existence, again, to priest-ridden and church-going women; to the mother who teaches her son his first Bible lesson; to the wife or sister who forces her husband or brother to accompany her to church and chapel to the emotional and hysterical spinster, the admirer of every popular preacher. And yet the predecessors of the latter have for fifteen centuries degraded women from every pulpit;" and "Let all the champions of women's rights strike, and pledge themselves not to set foot in church or chapel until their rights are re-established and their equality with men recognised by law."²¹

(Blavatsky 1890:443)

In 1891, Blavatsky suffered from obesity and various health problems and eventually succumbed to the Asiatic/Russian flu pandemic.

Since her death, Blavatsky's writings and the organisation she co-founded had a profound socio-cultural impact. Kraft considers Blavatsky the leading figure of contemporary occultism and the mother of the New Age movement (Kraft 2002:143). Hammer notes that Blavatsky has a significant impact on the history of religion (Hammer et al. 2013:1), particularly on "the development of contemporary Western spirituality and esotericism" (Rudbøg 2012:2), and claims that Blavatsky's Theosophy is of paramount importance to the academic study of esotericism (Rudbøg 2012:2), a sub-discipline within religious studies (Hanegraaff et al. 2008:44). He also refers to Blavatsky as a religious reformer,²² asserting that "the formation of the Theosophical Society [...] and the main events linked to the

²¹ See Bester's thesis 2017: 2: "Despite of the fact that one of the goals of the Theosophical Society was advancing comparative religion, H.P. Blavatsky has been excluded from standard accounts of the field." The thesis defends the inclusion of H.P. Blavatsky in the history of comparative religion.

²² See Blavatsky 1887: 55, in "Lucifer to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Greeting."

fate of this organisation, its key figure Helena Blavatsky [...] and her immediate successors also belong to the short list of pivotal chapters of religion history in the West" (Hammer et al. 2013:1). An example of Blavatsky's reformist approach to religion is her open letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward White Benson (1829-1986), in which she suggests that the church needs to change its discourse to survive.²³

Hanegraaff writes, "the basic metaphysical system of modern theosophy may be considered the archetypal manifestation of occultist spirituality at least until far into the 1970s" (Hanegraaff 2005: 297). According to Rudbøg and Reenberg, Blavatsky is one of the most influential persons in popularising Eastern philosophy in the West, as Eastern concepts such as karma and reincarnation were popularised through her writings (Rudbøg, T. & Reenberg 2020:6). According to Bester (2017), Blavatsky contributed to the discipline of religious studies by advocating a Theosophical methodology of comparative religion. Santucci writes that Blavatsky's *oeuvre*:

[...] has served as a basic source for later esotericists, literati, scientists, and entire movements, including the New Age. Unlike most of her contemporaries, she is as visible today as any modern trendsetting guru, and she will most likely remain the most memorable and innovative esotericist of the 19th century.

(Santucci 2006: 184)

²³ Ibid.

3.3. Blavatsky on ME

Although, as Hanegraaff suggests, Blavatsky's writings and the organisation she co-founded may be archetypal manifestations of occultist spirituality, her discourse on ME has been little explored. Some primary sources on Blavatsky's life and works are *The Old Diary Leaves* (1895) by Henty Steel Olcott (1832-1907); *The Letters of Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* (1925), *The Occult World* (1881) by Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921), recollections of family members, such as "The Truth about H.P. Blavatsky," (1883) by Vera Zhelihovsky (1835-1896), Blavatsky's writings such as "*Isis Unveiled*" (1877); *The Secret Doctrine* (1888); *The Key to Theosophy* (1889); *The Voice of the Silence* (1889). Also, hundreds of articles and notes were written by her, scattered across magazines, newspapers, scrapbooks, and correspondence with friends and foes. Other primary sources relevant to ME and Blavatsky were written by her foes who claimed she was a charlatan and that her writings were not derived from occult powers but plagiarised. To name but a few, Coleman (1895) accused Blavatsky of plagiarism; *The Hodgson Report* (1881), written by Richard Hodgson (1855–1905) for the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882), branded Blavatsky as the greatest charlatan of the 19th century. Most academic research on Blavatsky and MEs drew data from some of the aforementioned primary sources.

Some of the academic sources that deal with Blavatsky and ME are James' (1902) *VRE*, Kuhn (1930) "Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom," Deveney's (1997) paper "Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society," Bevir's paper (1994), "The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition," Kalnitsky's paper (2009) "An Examination of Blavatsky's Major Literary Works," Crow's paper (2012) "Taming the Astral Body: The Theosophical Society's Ongoing

Problem of Emotion and Control;" Hauch's PhD thesis, "Reassessing religious experience in a scientific age: early approaches to religious pluralism" (2013).

Kuhn discusses *The Voice* as part of the literature he calls "Theosophical Science of Yoga," (Kuhn 1930:273), suggesting that the work can be seen as an ethical offshoot of *The Secret Doctrine* while explaining that it consists of "ethic-spiritual maxims" (Kuhn 1930:272) and warnings against psychism while emphasising the ancient science of union or yoga and opposing the idea of practical magic (Ibid:272). He links the three fragments or halls of *The Voice* to the "[...] stages of the probationary path" (Ibid: 280) and explains that the "hall of ignorance" is the first stage associated with the phenomenal world and the probationary path (Ibid: 280), the second stage is associated with the path of "discipleship and instruction", i.e., the mystical life; and the third hall of wisdom is the path of enlightenment (Ibid: 280). Kuhn also points out that the focus of asceticism in *The Voice* is a "via dolorosa" (Ibid: 270) that does not involve self-torture, but a homiletical morality expressed in the following statement: "even ignorance is better than head learning with no Soul-Wisdom to illuminate and guide it"(Ibid). Finally, according to Kuhn, the "key to the whole of theosophical ethics" is found in the statement, "Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt though be saved and hear the whole word cry?" (Kuhn 1930: 270). Renunciation of the self is the key to Theosophical ethics. Overall, Kuhn presents a brief but helpful study of *The Voice*, highlighting themes such as the path and asceticism, which, as demonstrated in Chapter V, are important aspects of Blavatsky's discourse on ME.

Hauch claims that Blavatsky formulated Theosophy inspired by her own ME; and that the source of true knowledge in her discourse is the experience of a transcendent reality, which she defines as God (Hauch 2013:3, 192, 194). Also, Blavatsky emphasises experience

[...] in order to claim an epistemic status of religious knowledge, equal to that of scientific or empirical knowledge. In order to universalise this claim, they [Blavatsky & others] appealed to religious experience and religious knowledge originating in all faith traditions.

(Hauch, 2013: 2)

Although Blavatsky often avoids using the concept of “God” in her writings, the aforementioned view suggests that her discourse on ME is a central part of her worldview. Even though Hauch sees ME as central, she does not systematically explain how Blavatsky constructed her discourse nor suggests categories for ME. Instead, Hauch focuses on some of Blavatsky's ME, which she interprets as extraordinary, mainly involving telepathy, clairvoyance and different phenomena (Hauch 2013:128).

Deveney suggests that in the early years of the TS

[...] there was an undercurrent of practical occult or magical work among the members of the TS [...] This practice and its public advocacy was in sharp contrast to the later professions of the Society and is an indication of an undiscussed major change in direction (or at least in propaganda) within the TS.

(Deveney 1997: 1)

Like Deveney, Crow suggests two distinct periods in Blavatsky's worldview on ME. The first focuses on how to attain occult powers (Crow 2012: 693); the second on spiritual enlightenment, which he describes as

[...] a system of delayed spiritual gratification [...] contingent upon the individual's adoption of specific morals and values, while simultaneously maintaining control of the human body on all its levels: spiritual, social, physical, mental, and especially emotional.

(Crow 2012: 693)

The suggested underlying shift in the TS, from a discourse centred on occult powers to one centred on enlightenment, is an interesting topic that needs to be addressed in more depth, but it is not the focus of the present study.

Crow argues that Blavatsky's discourse can be interpreted as a system of *delayed spiritual gratification*, a power-strategic device to demonstrate how "emotions and the body are used within religious groups to maintain control and exercise authority over its members" (Crow 2012: 693). Crow's argument seems to stem from the Foucauldian notion of power relations. While power relations may be helpful in revealing ideas and meanings embedded in discourse, it may also be problematic because it involves circular reasoning by assuming a priori that the topic under investigation is inherently embedded within power dynamics. Nonetheless, Crow proposes two important categories of ME in Blavatsky's worldview: the discourse for enlightenment and occult powers. These two overarching classifications help comprehend the dynamics of the TS and Blavatsky's approach to ME, but they also have limitations. As Chapter four will elucidate, Blavatsky's approach to ME encompasses more intricate nuances than a simple binary classification. Furthermore, in Blavatsky's worldview, the path to enlightenment is entangled with occult powers. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the two proposed categories. Further research is required on this topic-matter.

Perhaps one of the first scholarly references to a work of Blavatsky as mystical writing comes from William James in *VRE*, in the chapter on *Mysticism*, where he discusses the paradoxical and self-contradictory nature of conceptual language in mystical literature, equating it with musical compositions and uses *The Voice* as an example of mystical scripture to make his point (James 1917: 319).

Another scholar who considers *The Voice* a mystical work is Bevir, who refers to it as Blavatsky's "best expression of [...] mysticism" (Bevir 1994: 755-1), in which she "introduced the mysticism that lay at the centre of the occult tradition" (Ibid: 755). Although William and Bevir refer to *The Voice* as a work within the category of mystical literature, they have not examined in more detail how Blavatsky constructs her discourse on ME.

Kalnitsky describes *The Voice* as an "inspirational and instructive stimulus to personal spiritual development" (Kalnitsky 2003: 272), as well as Blavatsky's "most explicit and calculated attempts of representing the theosophical worldview to the public as a consistent, encompassing and internally coherent body of knowledge" (Ibid). Although *The Voice* is considered Blavatsky's most important work on ME, I am not aware of any scholarly studies systematically evaluating her discourse in that work.

3.4. Buddhism in *The Voice of the Silence*

There is an ongoing debate about whether *The Voice* is a Buddhist work. While many Tibetan Lamas and Buddhists have praised it as such, some scholars claim that it is an invented Buddhism by Blavatsky, while others hold that it is genuine.

Olson writes that *The Voice* "was considered a Buddhist work written originally in an alleged ancient language that has never been identified" (Olson 2005: 251). Godwin describes *The Voice* as a "distillation of Mahayana [sic] Buddhist doctrines which was later given the stamp of approval by the Panchen Lama himself" (Godwin: 1994: 331). Kalnitsky writes that the content of *The Voice* reflects an "authentic Buddhist sentiment, even if not generally recognised as a pure Buddhist historical document" (Kalnitsky 2009: 322). Walter Evans-Wentz, a member of the Point Loma TS and an anthropologist who has pioneered research into Tibetan Buddhism, claims that excerpts from *The Voice* "have been bequeathed to us by the great Kagyüpta Sages" (Evans-Wentz 1958: 66) who lived as far back as the 11th century. However, Blavatsky claims that her master is associated with the Gelug sect, established in the 14th century by the tantric Tibetan and Lama Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1419) (Blavatsky 1893: 34), and asserts that the source of *The Voice* is linked to the Gelug tradition.

Furthermore, the Sanskrit scholar Reigle writes the following regarding Evans-Wentz's statement:

[...] the Kagyü lineage is different from the Gelug lineage, which Blavatsky associates herself with. When Evans-Wentz wrote, there was very little information available about Tibetan Buddhism. The lama he met happened to be connected to the Kagyü lineage, so Evans-Wentz assumed that Blavatsky's Tibetan Buddhism connection was also to that lineage. Of course, much of Tibetan Buddhism is shared by all lineages. But we know of no evidence that puts *The Voice* specifically in the Kagyu lineage, as Evans-Wentz wrote. On the contrary, its stressing of the Bodhisattva path is shared

by all the lineages. So, it is also not specifically connected with the Gelug lineage.

(Reigle 2022, *E-mail*, 8 of May.)

David and Nancy Reigle support the notion that *The Voice* is akin to the ideals expressed in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* (Skt), a text of the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist tradition, dating back to 700 AD that “extols the virtues of the Bodhicitta, which is altruistic intention to become enlightened in order to benefit all sentient beings” (Reigle 1999: 143). They point out that the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* was translated into English for the first time in 1970. Therefore, *The Voice*, published in 1889, can be considered the work that first brought the Heart Doctrine to the West (Reigle 1999: 144).

Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) remembers the following comments by the famous Buddhist scholar Edward Conze (1904–1979) about Blavatsky:

[...] 15 January, Yesterday and today, almost the whole time with Ed Conze. He gave two lecture son Buddhism—amusing and extremely well attended. Long conversations between us. I learned that he was, and still is a Theosophist: he admires *The Secret Doctrine*, and believes that Mme. Blavatsky was the reincarnation of Tsonkapa.

(Eliad 1977: 208)

Conze considered *The Voice* a Buddhist “scripture of outstanding value” (Conze 1979: 73) linked to the *Mahāyāna* tradition, as he quotes it when discussing *The Bodhisattva Ideal*:

Bodhisattvas are not quite beyond our ken, and we can appreciate that, while all the time intent on their transcendental goal, they remain during their struggles always aware of their solidarity with all that lives, in accordance with the famous saying:

Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer?
Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?
(Blavatsky, *The Voice of Silence*, p. 78).

(Conze 1967: 61,62)

Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966), a Zen Buddhism scholar, who was also a member of the TS, refers to *The Voice* as “The Real Mahayana [Sic] Buddhism” (Suzuki cited in Cranston 1993:85). Additionally, *The Voice* is included in the *Miscellaneous of The Buddhist Handbook: A Complete Guide to Buddhist Teaching and Practice*, by Snelling (1999), a former General Secretary of the Buddhist Society and editor of their journal “The Middle Way” considered “the most widely circulated Buddhist periodical in the West” (Simon & Schuster).

The editors of the Peking edition of *The Voice*, Alice Cleithor and Basil Crump say that the 9th Panchen Lama Thubten Choekyi Nyima (1883–1937) suggested them to re-print *The Voice*, as he considered it “[...] the only true exposition in English of the Heart Doctrine of the Mahayana [Sic] and its noble ideal of self-sacrifice for humanity.”²⁴ The Peking Edition also features a handwritten foreword by Panchen Lama, imprinted in "characters with heads [...] used for writing religious and other important matters, and for printing,"²⁵ which says:

All beings desire liberation from misery. Seek, therefore, for the causes of misery and expunge them. By entering the path, liberation from misery is attained. Exhort, then, all beings to enter the path.²⁶

In 1989, the centenary edition of *The Voice* featured a foreword by Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama, who wrote, among other things, that:

²⁴ Cited from the editorial foreword for the 1927 Peking Edition of *The Voice*.

²⁵ Cited from the appendix for the 1927 Peking Edition of *The Voice*.

²⁶ Free translation of the Panchen Lama notes to *The Voice*. Cited from the appendix for the 1927 Peking Edition.

I believe that this book has strongly influenced many sincere seekers and aspirants to the wisdom and compassion of the Bodhisattva Path. I very much welcome this Centenary Edition and hope that it will benefit many more.

(Tenzin Gyatso cited in Taylor 1999)²⁷

Taylor cites an interview by Nicholas Weeks with John Cooper in which he says that Sakya Trizin, the head of the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism, during a visit to the University of Sydney in 1988 stated:

I have read little of the writings of Madame Blavatsky, but from the little I have read, I believe that Madame Blavatsky either had direct contact with Tibetan teachings or had read some reliable texts on Tibetan Buddhism.²⁸

(Sakya Trizin cited in Taylor 1999)²⁹

In trying to locate the source of the interview, I was informed that there was no interview, but Cooper's comment was made during a telephone conversation, annotated by Weeks.³⁰

Furthermore, Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983), founder of the London Buddhist Society in 1924 and a Mahāyāna Buddhist, writes:

The Buddhists and Theosophists of the West, all converts, be it noted, from some other faith, have much in common: *The Voice of the Silence* ('a pure Buddhist work', as the late Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon wrote to me, and the Dalai Lama signed my copy long ago) and Colonel Olcott's Buddhist Catechism.

(Humphreys 1974: 32)

²⁷ Online edition, without a page number. See chapter on *Religious Practitioners on HPB*.

²⁸ Cited in Taylor 1999. Online edition, no page number. See chapter on *Religious Practitioners on HPB*.

²⁹ Online edition without a page number. See the chapter *Religious Practitioners on HPB*.

³⁰ Georgiades, E. (2022) Email to Nicholas Weeks, 23 of May 2022.

Sangharakshita writes that even though *The Voice* is not

the utterance of a Buddha, is nevertheless akin to the *sutra* rather than to the *sastra* group of texts [...] [because] it seeks more to inspire than to instruct, appeals to the heart rather than to the heart... the aim of which is to move.

(Sangharakshita 1958:1)

Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933),³¹ considered one of the first missionaries of Buddhism in the world and a forerunner in the rebirth of Buddhism in India, was a close associate of Blavatsky and used *The Voice* as a source of counsel" (Kemper 1944). Lopez (2020), however, points out that in 1906, Anagarika Dharmapāla rejected Blavatsky's Theosophy in an article entitled "Can a Buddhist Be a Member of the Theosophical Society?" and held that no Buddhist could be a member of that organisation. He might have changed his mind about *The Voice*.³²

There are also critical views, especially regarding the provenance of the sources presented in *The Voice*. In "The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings," Coleman accuses Blavatsky of plagiarism, saying that she did not compile *The Voice* from the *BGP* or translate it from the Senzar language. Instead, she uses a combination of books on Hinduism and Southern Buddhism. He claims that *The Voice* was sourced from the following books: *Buddhism in Tibet* (1863) by Schlagintweit; *Raja-Yoga: Being a Translation of the Vakyasudha* (1888) by Dvivedi; *Eastern Monachism* (1850) by Hardy; *Buddhism* (1870) by Rhys; and "The Dream of Ravan,' [first] published in the Dublin University Magazine, January 1854, extracts from which appeared in *the Theosophist* of January 1880" (Coleman 1895). Max Müller (1823–1900) holds the same view, as shown in his comment that both the "Stanzas and the text of *The Voice of the Silence* were Mme

³¹ In 1906, Anagarika Dharmapala repudiated Theosophy "and wrote an essay entitled 'Can a Buddhist Be a Member of the Theosophical Society?' The short answer was 'no.' See, Lopez 2020, "Orientalist vs. Theosophist," pp. 34-51.

³² See Ibid.

Blavatsky's own brilliant forgeries" (Carlson 1993:229). Furthermore, in a correspondence exchange with G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933), Müller stated that "two verses in *The Voice of the Silence* were quite Western in thought, and therefore betrayed their unguineness" without citing or giving any references to the mentioned verses" (Mead 1904: 129,140).

However, Caldwell (no date) claims that Coleman cannot sustain the charge of plagiarism because the passages are not so numerous. At the same time, it is important to point out that Blavatsky never claimed to have written the book herself and admitted that she used secondary sources to help translate the material. Furthermore, a number of 19th-century sources use the concepts Blavatsky used in *The Voice*. One of the earliest sources is Burnouf (1852) in the *Le Lotus de La Bonne Loi*, who discusses one of the most influential Buddhist Mahāyāna texts, the *Lotus-Sūtra* and the concept of the *Bodhisatva*. For a comprehensive analysis, it is necessary to perform a detailed examination of *The Voice*, comparing it to other writings, to determine similarities. It is important, however, to remember that a common intellectual milieu of the time was that authors could be influenced by similar themes and ideas.

Lopez claims that supporters of Blavatsky sustain that she was trained in Tibet and that both the *Stanzas of Dzyan* and *The Voice* are derived from Tibetan sources,

[...] from ancient tantras (*rgyud sde*, hence *Kiu-te*), thought by the uninitiated to have long since been lost. Hence, the devotees of HPB are undaunted by the fact that neither the Tibetan originals of the *Stanzas of Dzyan* nor the *Book of Golden Precepts* has been discovered in the tantras or tantric commentaries of the Tibet Canon.

(Lopez 1952: 51)

The debate about whether *The Voice* is a genuine Buddhist text or not is far from over. This dissertation does not aim to analyse whether Blavatsky's work is

an authentic Buddhist text nor to attempt to identify its sources and origin. However, the position this dissertation takes in this debate is that Blavatsky, during her childhood, had contact with Buddhists. In 1880, while in Sri Lanka, she converted to Buddhism and lived for many years in India. She, therefore, had first-hand experience with Buddhist practitioners and was an ardent advocate of the revival of Buddhism in India. In this way, it cannot be denied that *The Voice* was compiled and annotated by a Buddhist, namely Blavatsky, who attempted to present the Heart Doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that Blavatsky never claimed to be the author of *The Voice*, as shown in subsection 3.5. of this chapter, but that she translated and annotated it using various sources. Therefore, one might think that Hanegraaff's view, expressed concerning *The Secret Doctrine*, can also be applied to *The Voice*, "an attempt to reduce Blavatsky's later synthesis of western occultism and "Oriental wisdom" to specific sources is likely to suffer shipwreck on the capacity of her 'omnivorous mind' to assimilate whatever she found useful" (Hanegraaff et al. 2008: 454). This may be true to some extent, but whether or not one can trace the sources of Blavatsky's works is irrelevant to the fact that in *The Voice*, she portrays the ideal of the *Bodhisattva*. In this manner, even though some may consider *The Voice* not an authentic Buddhist text and even though its claimed source, i.e., *The Book of the Golden Precepts*, has not been traced, the work may still be considered pioneering in bringing the view of the Heart Doctrine to the "Western" world, and as such it can be considered as Buddhist until proven the contrary.

3.5. *The Voice of the Silence*

As briefly demonstrated, ME is a central theme in Blavatsky's discourse, notably in her book *The Voice*, which she dedicates to the few mystics of the TS (Blavatsky 1889: xi). As Falby points out, *The Voice* is her most widely read book (Falby {2004: 284). It became popular, particularly among Theosophists, soon after its publication, as Blavatsky mentions in a letter to her sister Zhelihovsky (1890) that "The Voice of the Silence, tiny book though it is, is simply becoming the Theosophists' bible" (Blavatsky 1890: 268).³³ Therefore, the data informing this dissertation is central to understanding her discourse on ME.

Blavatsky began writing *The Voice* in London, as she writes in one of her letters to George Robert Stow Mead (1863–1889) (Zirkoff no date: p. 5), but the main compilation and translation took place in Fontainebleau, France, in 1889. Annie Wood Besant (1847–1933), a close associate of Blavatsky, visited her during the time she was writing *The Voice* in France and gave the following testimony,

[...] She wrote it swiftly, without any material copy before her. I sat in the room while she was writing it. I know that she did not write it referring to any books, but she wrote it down steadily, hour after hour, exactly as though she were writing [...] from memory [...]

(Besant 1977: 32-3)

In the preface, Blavatsky explains that she used a mnemonic process to write *The Voice*, and on the title page, she introduces herself not as an author but as a translator and annotator. She also claims that the source from which she compiled the precepts comprising *The Voice* is *The Book of the Golden Precepts*³⁴ (*BGP*), a work that originally contained ninety passages, thirty-nine of which she memorised (Algeo 1988:4). And that the *BGP*, originally written in a mysterious

³³ See *Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, XIII 1890.

³⁴ Blavatsky also explains that the *BGP* is part of the same collection "from which the 'Stanzas of the Book of Dzyan'" forming the basis of Blavatsky's work *The Secret Doctrine* have been taken.

hieratic and ideographic language called Senzar, is part of the same series compiled from *The Book of Dzyan*, the main source of *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky explains that Senzar has its own alphabet, which can be represented in various ways, "writing in cypher characters, which partake more of the nature of ideographs than of syllables" (Blavatsky 1889: vii). In this way, she attributes the source of *The Voice* to a mysterious and unknown work called *BGP*, written in an unknown hieratic language, which she claims to have learned during her occult training in Tibet and also in dreams from one of the masters or adepts with whom she was in contact:

Then, in my dream still, three months after as I was made to feel in that vision—I was standing before Mah. [Mahātmā] K.H. near the old building taken down he was looking at, and as Master was not at home, I took to him a few sentences I was studying in Senzar in his sister's room [...]

(Blavatsky 1886)

Although Blavatsky claims that the original *BGP* was written in Senzar, she explains that the source she used to compile *The Voice* was in Telugu:

They are grand aphorisms, indeed. I may say so, because you know I did not invent them! I only translated them from Telugu, the oldest South-Indian dialect. There are three treatises, about morals, and the moral principles of the Mongolian and Dravidian mystics. Some of the aphorisms are wonderfully deep and beautiful. Here they have created a perfect furore [...]

(Blavatsky, 1890, *Letters from H. P. Blavatsky* XIII: 268.)

The way she refers to the Telugu language gives the impression that she knows it. However, years before she wrote *The Voice*, she mentioned the following to her sister Zhelihovsky:

I never tell anyone here about my experience with the Voice. When I try to assure them that I have never been in Mongolia, that I do not know either Sanskrit or Hebrew or ancient European languages, they do not believe me. 'How is this,' they say, 'you have never been there, and yet you describe it all so accurately? You do not know the languages and yet you translate straight from the originals!' and so they refuse to believe me. They think that I have some mysterious reasons for secrecy; and besides, it is an awkward thing for me to deny when everyone has heard me discussing various Indian dialects with a lecturer who has spent twenty years in India. Well, all that I can say is, either they are mad or I am a changeling!³⁵

(Zhelihovsky 1894: 265-270)

In this case, *The Voice* she refers to is that of her Master, whilst admitting that she knows none of the ancient Eastern or European languages.

On Blavatsky's knowledge of Telugu, Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854–1934), who met her and was a prominent but controversial member of the TS, writes that Blavatsky did not know Telugu and that she may have used clairvoyant powers to compile the manuscript:

It will be noticed that Madame Blavatsky speaks of translating the precepts [of *The Voice of the Silence*]—a remark which raises some interesting questions since we know that she was unacquainted with any Oriental tongue, except Arabic.

(Leadbeater et al., 1930: 334)

Furthermore, Blavatsky says that *The Voice* is derived from "*three treatises, about morals, and the moral principles of the Mongolian and Dravidian mystics*"³⁶ and that:

³⁵ See, 1894, *The Path*, December, ix, pp. 265-270.

³⁶ See Blavatsky, 1890, "Letters from H. P. Blavatsky XIII," p. 268.

The Book of the Golden Precepts—some of which are pre-Buddhistic while others belong to a later date—contains about ninety distinct little treatises. Of these I learnt thirty-nine by heart, years ago. To translate the rest, I should have to resort to notes scattered among a too large number of papers and memoranda collected for the last twenty years and never put in order, to make of it by any means an easy task.

(Blavatsky 1889: ix, x)

So, she claims that to translate the entire *BGP*, she would need the help of notes scattered in a plethora of documents that she collected over the last two decades of her life, but which were never systematically organised. This is quite revealing, suggesting that she may have drawn on existing sources to help translate the precepts. She also states that the original precepts of the *BGP* are

[...] engraved on thin oblong squares; copies very often on discs. These discs or plates are generally preserved on the altars of the temples attached to centres where the so-called "contemplative" or Mahâyâna [sic] (Yogâchâra [sic]) schools are established. They are written variously, sometimes in Tibetan but mostly in ideographs.

(Blavatsky 1889: vii)

Blavatsky, however, links the *BGP* not only to the Tibetan Mahâyâna tradition but also to pre-Buddhistic texts (Blavatsky 1889: ix), saying that the aphorisms in *The Voice* were published in various works, such as the *Jñānēśvarī*, commentaries on *The Bhagavad Gita* by Sant Dnyaneshwar (1275–1296); the writings of Paramārtha (b. 499 CE); the Upanishads, more specifically the *Kata Upanishad*; the *Sutta Nittapa*; the works of Āryāsanga one of the founders of the Yogācāra Mahâyâna School of Buddhism, attributing in this manner Vedantic and Buddhist origins to it.³⁷

³⁷ See Preface to *The Voice of the Silence*, 1889.

3.6. Overview of *The Voice of the Silence*

According to Blavatsky, *The Voice* is written for the few mystics of the TS,³⁸ as a guide to enlightenment, spiritual illumination leading to *nirvāna*, emancipation from the cycle of birth and death, and suffering, followed by renunciation of the blissful state of *nirvāna* to return to the earthly world out of compassion to help to liberate all beings from suffering. *The Voice* mentions that there are two paths: one to achieve liberation named *dharma* (Skt) or doctrine of the "eye," also called the path of the *Pratyeka* (Skt & Pali) *Buddha*; and the path of liberation and renunciation known as the *dharma* or the doctrine of the "heart," also called the path of the *Bodhisattva* (Skt). The knowledge of these two paths is essential for students because liberation and renunciation can be achieved through the awakening of higher *siddhis* (Skt), defined by Blavatsky as "attributes of perfection; phenomenal powers acquired through holiness by Yogis" (Blavatsky 1892: 298). The higher *siddhis* can be associated with a state of mind free from mental formations, leading to a profound realisation of the nature of things.

On the title page of *The Voice*, Blavatsky writes that the work is dedicated "For the Daily Use of Lanoos (Disciples)."³⁹ "Lanoos" is a word of unknown origin. Fergus attempted to trace its etymology but could not identify it (Fergus 2020). Instead, he found words with similar spelling but different meanings. In Middle Chinese, for example, the word 練 means "liàn" or "làn," pronounced len/lenoo, meaning "to practice, to drill, to exercise, to train" (Ibid). In Nepalese the word लानु "lānu," means "to take away, to bring, to carry" (Ibid), while the Sinhala word "ලානු" "lanu," translates as "strings, cords, lines, ropes" (Ibid). He links the Sinhala word "lanu," to the following passage in *The Voice*, "Disciples may be likened to the

³⁸ According to Blavatsky, in the Theosophical system there is no fundamental distinction between a mystic, a theosophist, an esotericist, and an occultist. See, Blavatsky, "What Shall We do For Our Fellow-Men."

³⁹ See title page image infra.

strings of the soul-echoing *Vīṇā*"(Ibid). Finally, Fergus suggests that further research needs to be done and points out that in *The Voice* Blavatsky gives the word *Śrāvaka* (Skt) the same meaning as the word *lanoo*, i.e., "a listener or student who attends to the religious instructions" (Blavatsky 1889: 87).

In Blavatsky's view, "lanoo" is the disciple of a *Mahātmā* (Skt meaning Great Soul or Spirit), a student of a Master of Wisdom or, as described in *The Theosophical Glossary*,

An adept of the highest order. Exalted beings who, having attained to the mastery over their lower principles are thus living unimpeded by the "man of flesh" and are in possession of knowledge and power commensurate with the stage they have reached in their spiritual evolution. Called in Pali Rahats and Arhats.

(Blavatsky 1892:201)

Mahātmā, Arhats, Adepts, and Masters of Wisdom are terms Blavatsky uses interchangeably to refer to enlightened individuals of varying degrees, paragons of ethical virtues such as love, compassion, *Bodhisattvas* who have overcome the passions of the flesh, achieved, or will achieve, enlightenment, liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth, but have renounced it and chosen out of compassion to incarnate again to liberate all beings from suffering. Blavatsky also refers to the *Bodhisattvas* as the "Buddhas of Compassion" who after becoming Arhats, refuse to be absorbed in the blissful state of *nirvāṇa* "as it would then become beyond their power to assist men even so little as Karma permits" (Blavatsky 1888: 95). She also refers to disciples as *chela* (Skt चेल *cela*), defined in *The Theosophical Glossary* as:

Chelâ (Skt.). A disciple, the pupil of a Guru or Sage, the follower of some adept of a school of philosophy (lit., child).

(Blavatsky 1892:79)

However, in *The Voice*, the master is also considered as the higher self. In this manner, *The Voice* is dedicated to the *lanoos* following a Mahātmā, Arhat, Adept, Masters of Wisdom, Guru or Sage or the higher self.

TITLE PAGE OF *THE VOICE*

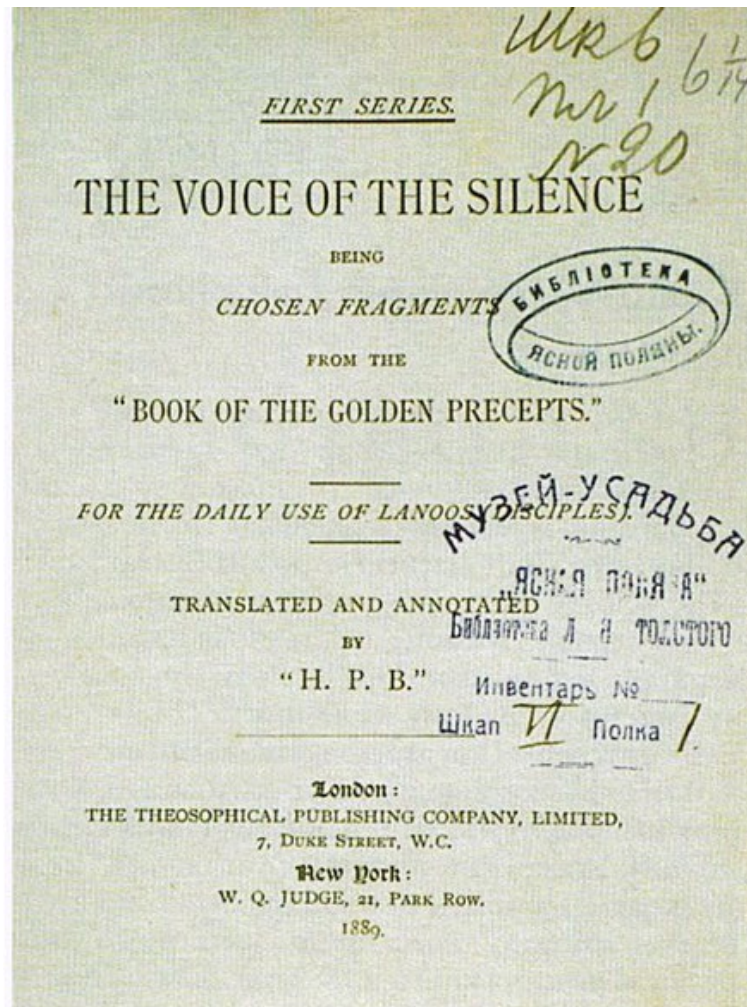


Image 1: Blavatsky 1889, title page of *The Voice*.

The Voice is divided into three fragments, poetically called the *three halls*. The first fragment is entitled *The Voice* and is the *Hall of Ignorance* or *Avidyā* (Skt); the second fragment is *The Two Paths*, the *Hall of Learning*, *Viveka* (Skt); and the third fragment is *The Seven Portals*, the Hall of Wisdom. The three halls lead to the fourth, liberation:

The name of the first Hall is IGNORANCE— Avidyâ.

It is the Hall in which thou saw'st the light, in which thou livest and shalt die.

The name of Hall the second is the Hall of Learning. In it thy Soul will find the blossoms of life, but under every flower a serpent coiled.

The name of the third Hall is Wisdom, beyond which stretch the shoreless waters of AKSHARA, the indestructible Fount of Omniscience.

If thou would'st cross the first Hall safely, let not thy mind mistake the fires of lust that burn therein for the Sunlight of life.

If thou would'st cross the second safely, stop not the fragrance of its stupefying blossoms to inhale freed thou would'st be from the Karmic chains, seek not for thy Guru in those Mâyâvic regions...

Seek for him who is to give thee birth, in the Hall of Wisdom, the Hall which lies beyond, wherein all shadows are unknown, and where the light of truth shines with unfading glory...

...If through the Hall of Wisdom, thou would'st The voice of the silence. reach the Vale of Bliss, Disciple, close fast thy senses against the great dire heresy of separateness that weans thee from the rest.

(Blavatsky 1889:6-9)

The halls in *The Voice* represent mystical states of consciousness or the three different types of yogi states known as *jāgrat* (Skt), the state of wakefulness; *svāpna* (Skt), the state of dreaming; and *susupti* (Skt), the condition of profound sleep. These three yogi states pave the way for the fourth, also known as *turīya* (Skt), which is a state of elevated spiritual consciousness that goes beyond the dreamless state; also described by Blavatsky as “the one above all, a state of high spiritual consciousness” (Blavatsky, 1889: 75). In this manner, *The Voice* is divided into three fragments, linked to the three states of consciousness that the mystic experiences until enlightenment is attained.

Fragment one indicates that the mystic is in a state of *avidyā* (Skt) or ignorance and offers guidance by pointing out the need to develop *dhāraṇā* (Skt), concentration, silence the mind, and connect with the higher self (soul). It also warns against the deceptive nature of mental formations: "The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer" (Ibid:1); and alerts against the illusory nature of psychic powers.

The second fragment suggests that the mystic has reached a state of consciousness receptive to learning. However, the mystic remains ignorant and must cultivate *viveka* (Skt) or discernment to seek the mystical union of mind and soul. To be receptive to learning, the mystic must avoid *avidyā* (Skt), ignorance and look within. In *The Voice*, knowledge gained from sense-perception and the sense of separateness are examples of what is considered "ignorance." In addition, it encourages the mystic to practice self-knowledge, exercise compassion, follow the wheel of duty (*dharma*), and practice patience, devotion and humility in daily life. It introduces the two paths, i.e., the "open path," which is the way of the *pratyekabuddhas* (Skt) and leads to liberation, or to the path of the "heart," which is the way of the *Bodhisattvas* (Skt) leading to liberation and then renunciation of the blissful state of *nirvāna*:

The Open path leads to the changeless change—
Nirvâna, the glorious state of Absoluteness, the Bliss
past human thought.
Thus, the first Path is liberation.
But Path the Second is—renunciation, and
therefore called the "Path of Woe.

(Blavatsky 1889: 41)

In the third stage, known as the hall of wisdom, the aspirant humbly approaches the teacher and asks, “what shall I do to reach to Wisdom?” (Blavatsky 1889: 25). At this pivotal point, wisdom is attained through two distinct levels first, by gaining knowledge of the paths, and second, through liberation and renunciation. To gain knowledge of the path, the mystic must:

Search for the Paths. But, O Lanoo, be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey. Before thou takest thy first step learn to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting. Learn above all to separate Head-learning from Soul Wisdom, the "Eye" from the "Heart" doctrine.

(Blavatsky 1889: 26)

Upon entering the path, the mystic plunges into the waters of *akṣarā* (Skt), an all-encompassing state of consciousness characterised by divine omniscience. This state is said to be achieved by one’s union with the higher self or soul. This results in the loss of one’s sense of personal identity. This condition is characterised by a state of pure awareness and oneness. But this is not the end. If the mystic has chosen the path of renunciation, it is still necessary to reach the other shore, because such a path leads the mystic from the three halls to the fourth, where the mystic must cross what Blavatsky calls the “seven portals” (Blavatsky 1889: 41) of the *pāramitās* (Skt) or perfections:

Thou seest well, Lanoo. These Portals lead the aspirant across the waters "[...] to the other shore." Each Portal hath a golden key that openeth its gate, and these keys are:—

1. Dâna [Skt and Pali], the key of charity and love immortal.
2. Śîla [Skt], the key of Harmony in word and act, the key that counterbalances the cause and the effect, and leaves no further room for Karmic action.
3. Kshânti [Skt], patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.
4. Virâg' [Skt], indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived.
5. Vîrya [Skt.], the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal TRUTH, out of the mire of lies terrestrial.
6. Dhyâna [Skt.], whose golden gate once opened leads the Naljor toward the realm of Sat eternal and its ceaseless contemplation.
7. Prajñâ [Pali], the key to which makes of a man a god, creating him a Bodhisattva[...]

(Blavatsky 1889: 47, 48)

In Buddhism, the *pāramitās* hold great significance as they represent the virtues of an enlightened being. These virtues vary in number across different Buddhist traditions. By embodying the *pāramitās*, the practitioner progresses towards becoming a Bodhisattva—an enlightened being who dedicates their existence to the welfare and enlightenment of all sentient beings. This state of enlightenment, known as *turiya* (Skt), is characterised by pure consciousness, where one transcends the limitations of mundane existence and attains profound insight and wisdom. From this elevated perspective, the Bodhisattva is reborn, motivated by compassion and driven to walk the path of the heart. Given the

significance of the *pāramitās* and their transformative effect on the practitioner, it can be said that *The Voice* is indeed a mystical scripture, as James suggests. As a guide to enlightenment, it offers insights into the cultivation of compassion, which lies at the core of the Mahāyāna Buddhism.

CHAPTER IV

CATEGORIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES & RELIGIOUS PROPENSITIES IN *THE VOICE*

4.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to identify, develop and classify ME categories in *The Voice*. This is done through an interpretative approach, interpreting the data as it reveals itself. To this end, the five emerging themes identified through qualitative analysis using word counting reduction with the assistance of NVIVO software — “path,” “soul,” “self,” “light,” and “heart” — have been divided into three themes: a. “The Divided Self,” featuring the themes of the “path,” “self,” “soul,” and “heart;” b. “Sense Impressions,” featuring the themes “path,” “self,” and “soul;” c. “Knowledge and Belief,” featuring the themes “light” and “heart”. Finally, the five most frequent foreign words, *Buddha*, *nirvāṇa*, *Boddhisatva*, *arhat* and *lanoo*, are interpreted along with the five main emerging themes.

In the second sub-chapter, the themes “path,” “self,” “soul,” and “heart” are explored under the theme of 'Divided Self' because they relate to the Jamesian notion of the twice-born, which was discussed in chapter two. Blavatsky uses the theme of “path” as a metaphor for the ascetic self to represent the journey to spiritual enlightenment, which is characterised by self-discipline and asceticism. The "soul" theme refers primarily to the human mind, the seat of consciousness responsible for perceiving and understanding the world around us. Furthermore, the theme of “self,” divided into material and spiritual, reflects the struggle between earthly desires and spiritual aspirations. Finally, this subchapter shows that the most prominent ME propensity in the data ME is asceticism, suggesting that ME is often associated with the renunciation of worldly pleasures and a disciplined approach to spiritual practice.

The third subchapter on sense impressions also focuses on the themes of “path,” “self,” and “soul” and shows that Blavatsky's worldview on ME highlights several essential aspects of ME, such as ineffability, passivity, transiency, and indifference to sense stimuli. Ineffability suggests that the experience of ME is beyond ordinary human understanding and defies verbal expression. Transiency suggests the experience is fleeting; passivity indicates receptivity and openness; and indifference to sense stimuli indicates a state of consciousness indifferent to pleasure and pain.

The fourth sub-chapter deals with knowledge and belief. It shows that the kind of knowledge *The Voice* refers to cannot be fully grasped or comprehended with the rational mind alone. It is a form of intuitive knowledge that arises from direct ME. In contrast, beliefs play an important role in determining the outcome of the ME as they shape the perception, interpretation and perhaps the experience itself. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.2. The Divided Self.

➤ 4.2.1. The Path

According to Blavatsky, *The Voice* was written for those who long for final liberation and, in desolation, are "starving for bread of wisdom" (Blavatsky 1889:39, 37). The "bread of wisdom" is synonymous with true knowledge, enlightenment or *nirvāṇa*.⁴⁰ Blavatsky defines *nirvāṇa* as an ineffable state "of absolute existence and absolute consciousness [...]" (Blavatsky 1892:232). To feed on the "bread of wisdom," one must become the "path," the first emerging theme in *The Voice*:

In this path, to whatever place one would go, that place one's own self becomes (Ibid:78);

Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself (Ibid:12);

Thou art the Path'... 'I am the way and the Path' (Ibid:78).

These quotes suggest that the path is not a spatiotemporal path that one can tread that leads to liberation. Instead, it is a psychological state experienced as a longing for union with the divine. In identifying the "path" with the "self," the spiritual journey is presented as a process of self-realisation and growth that involves purification and asceticism. In *The Voice*, the "path" can be interpreted as the experiences of the ascetic self actively seeking wisdom and *nirvāṇa*. Therefore, the path is a metaphor for the ascetic self, discussed infra (Ibid: 60).

⁴⁰ *Nirvāṇa* is also referred to here as illumination or enlightenment.

➤ **4.2.2. Heart**

The “path” is closely intertwined with the fifth emergent theme, the “heart.” The ascetic self, longing for union with the divine, must choose between two paths: liberation or renunciation. Blavatsky considers the path of liberation as open and exoteric, also called the “doctrine of the eye” or “head learning.” This path involves the practice of four-fold *dhyāna*⁴¹ (Skt), resulting in the mystic becoming a *Pratyekabuddha* (Pali).⁴² That is, reaching a profound state of detachment to earthly things or liberation and entering a condition of absorption in *nirvāṇa*, becoming free from any future physical incarnation (Blavatsky 1889: 42). The liberation path is considered selfish, as the *Pratyekabuddha* becomes indifferent to the suffering of other living beings and solely absorbed in a state of blissful existence.

The other path, the one of renunciation, is called by Blavatsky as the path of the heart, the “great sifter,” the “dharma of the heart,” the esoteric and secret path that leads to the *pāramitās* (Skt) or virtues of perfection. It is also related to *bodhi* (Skt & Pali), enlightenment, and *prajñā* (Skt), which means wisdom. It is the Doctrine of the Heart, characterised by the renunciation of *nirvāṇa*,

To reach Nirvāna’s [sic] bliss, but to renounce it, is the supreme, the final step—the highest on Renunciation’s Path.

(Blavatsky 1889: 33).

This act of self-sacrifice, revered by Blavatsky as a saintly deed, is regarded as the pathway to becoming a *Bodhisattva*, an enlightened being reborn in the world to help free all creatures from suffering. Compassion and self-sacrifice are, therefore, the highest moral fruits Blavatsky links to ME.

⁴¹ In the eight-step Yoga practice developed by Patanjali, “dhyāna” refers to the seventh *anga* (limb or level) which is the last step before entering samadhi, also known as “absorption.” See, Srinivasan 2013.

⁴² An individual who achieves Buddhahood following a lonely way, “remains in seclusion and does not teach the *Dharma to others.” See Keown 2005:222.

In *The Voice*, however, one can still have a genuine ME, like the absorption in *nirvāṇa*, but be selfish, like the *Pratyekabuddha*. This suggests that moral fruits cannot be used to determine genuine ME, as James suggests. Moreover, the “path” is defined here as the ascetic self. It is thus closely interwoven with the self.

➤ 4.2.3. Soul

The second emergent theme from the data is the human “soul,” which, according to Blavatsky, is one aspect of the self, called mind or *manas* (Skt). The mind is dual, its material aspect is linked to the lower self while its spiritual aspect is linked to the higher self. Blavatsky explains it as follows:

[...] dual—lunar in the lower, solar in its upper portion,’ [...] That is to say it is attracted in its higher aspect towards Buddhi, and in its lower descends into, and listens to the voice of its animal soul full of selfish and sensual desires; and herein is contained the mystery of an adept’s as of a profane man’s life, as also that of the post-mortem separation of the divine from the animal man [...]

(Blavatsky 1888, ii: 495,496).

In this vein, the human soul is divided into lower and higher mind. The lower mind processes physical sense impressions, while the higher mind processes spiritual sense impressions. The human soul is an intrinsic part of the self and the link between the lower material and higher spiritual realms.

➤ **4. 2. 4. Self**

The third emerging theme is the “self,” also referred by Blavatsky as the “ego,” in the following manner:

Ego (*Lat.*) the consciousness in man “I am I”—or the feeling of “I-am-ship”. Esoteric philosophy teaches the existence of two Egos in man, the mortal or personal, and the Higher, the Divine and the Impersonal, calling the former “personality” and the latter “Individuality.”

(Blavatsky 1892:111).

In this way the “ego” or “self” is divided into the "self of matter" or the “lower self” (Ibid:60) and the "self of spirit" or the “higher self” (Ibid: 12). The lower self, of which the lower *manas* is an aspect, is embodied, inferior, impermanent and ignorant due to the illusion of separate existence. The higher self, of which the higher *manas* is an aspect, is eternal, “indestructible, which kills not nor is it killed” (Ibid: x). Like the human soul, the self is thus divided into a lower and a higher aspect. This division reveals a distinction between the material and spiritual realms. The lower aspects are associated with ignorance, suffering and mortality. In contrast, the higher aspects are divine and immortal. The self is thus presented as divided between the material and spiritual realms. This division can be interpreted from the perspective of the divided self proposed by James. This means that the self is ‘divided’ between the lower mundane existence and the aspiration for union with the higher divine realms.

Furthermore, asceticism is important in *The Voice*, where purification, self-sacrifice, longing for divine union, liberation and enlightenment are central to ME. Asceticism is defined here as the act of refraining from sensual activities or thoughts in order to further one's spiritual development, leading to purity. Purity

means being free from sensual desires and illusions derived from sense impressions. It is the inevitable result of an ascetic life, at least in *The Voice*, where to become the “path,” one needs to live a saintly life. One must become an ascetic to purify oneself from earthly pollutions such as those derived from sensual desires and external impressions, “Thou hast removed pollution from thine heart and bled it from impure desire” (Blavatsky 1889:59). Pollution, in Blavatsky’s worldview, is the desire to experience the passions of the flesh and ignorance derived from the external sensory world. In *The Voice*, *nirvāṇa* can only be achieved by purifying the emotions and mind from sensual desires and suspending sense impressions.

According to this view, ME, which leads to enlightenment, depends on a lifestyle based on purity and detachment from earthly things. Therefore, the “path” is a dynamic psychological ascetic self striving for enlightenment. The data thus suggest that asceticism is an essential prerequisite for attaining *nirvāṇa* and is the central propensity of ME in *The Voice*.

Furthermore, a view of radical pessimism is expressed in several excerpts in *The Voice*: “This Earth, Disciple, is the Hall of Sorrow [...]” (Blavatsky 1889:4). The aspect of the self that is immersed in the material world experiences suffering, while it is only the spiritual aspect of the self that is unrestricted, not susceptible to sorrow, impersonal, non-embodied and transcendental. Thus, Blavatsky prioritises the transcendental over the material, providing a vision of pessimism and bleakness to the embodied self and indicating that the only possibility of freedom and salvation is through union with the spiritual self.

In summary, the themes “path,” “self,” and “soul” suggest a longing for divine union and purity from earthly attachments, indicating asceticism as a prominent ME propensity in the data. Also, *The Voice*, in particular, showcases the Jamesian temperament of the divided self or twice-born, as Blavatsky expresses the notion of surrendering the self of the flesh to be reborn into the self of the spirit. This highlights the belief that the self is divided and that the physical world is a realm of suffering and sorrow. Furthermore, the themes of “path” and “heart” in

the data reflect Blavatsky's perspective that moral fruits are not a parameter for determining genuine ME. This is highlighted by the notion that the *Pratyekabuddha* can be absorbed in the bliss of liberation, which is considered selfish. However, Blavatsky emphasises compassion and self-sacrifice as the noblest moral outcomes of ME. Finally, the identified category of ME aligns with *nirvāṇa*, characterised by the loss of self-identity, union, and bliss. These states go beyond conceptual formulations and resonate with the Jamesian concept of ineffability.

4.3. Sense Impressions

In *The Voice*, the themes “path,” “self,” and “soul” are also prominently featured concerning sense impressions. The experience of the path is based on sense impressions, divided into low/material and high/spiritual. The duality within the self is also reflected in sense impressions. In this manner, ME may be of a low or high nature. For this reason, Blavatsky defines low ME as psychic experiences based on sense impressions linked to the external world, such as visions and dreams. The low ME is discursive and transient. However, the high ME is derived from spiritual sense impressions. Such experience is ineffable, leaving a lasting impact on the mystic: “The three that dwell in glory and in bliss ineffable, now in the world of Mâyâ have lost their names” (Blavatsky 1889:19).

In this manner, the goal of the path is *nirvāṇa* and will lead the mystic through various states of consciousness eventually becoming indifferent to external sense impressions. To become indifferent to sensory stimuli involves disciplined training practices. One of such practices is withdrawing sense of impression from the external world (Hartranft 2003), known as *pratyāhāra* (Skt), referred to by Blavatsky as follows:

[...] after the practice of Pratyāhāra—a preliminary training in order to control one’s mind and thoughts—count Dhāranâ, Dhyâna and Samâdhi and embraces the three under the generic name of Samyama.

(Blavatsky, *The Voice*, 1889: 80)

Another practice is *vairāgya* (Skt), which Blavatsky interprets as meaning “indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived” (Blavatsky, *The Voice*, 1889: 48), and as a “[...] feeling of absolute indifference to the objective universe [...].” (Blavatsky, *The Voice*, 1889: 90,91). *Vairāgya* is a concept used in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, where it is defined as “dispassion, non-reaction, non-attachment” (I.15) (Hartranft 2003).

Indifference to sensory stimuli leads one to a state of consciousness called *titikṣā* (Skt.), (Blavatsky 1889:65) defined as:

[...] the fifth state of Râja Yoga—one of supreme indifference; submission, if necessary, to what is called ‘pleasures and pains for all,’ but deriving neither pleasure nor pain from such submission—in short, the becoming physically, mentally, and morally indifferent and insensible to either pleasure or pain.

(Blavatsky 1889:64)

In the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (10:24), *titikṣā* is defined as “The bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them, being free (at the same time) from anxiety or lament on their score [...]” (Sri Sankaracharya 1921). In this manner, *titikṣā* and *vairāgya* are linked to a state of consciousness indifferent to sensory stimuli. The level of indifference may vary, but the one described in *The Voice* seems to be linked to a profound state of meditation in which the subject may be in a deep trance or ecstasy derived from the experience of *nirvāṇa*.

Furthermore, Blavatsky hints that indifference to sensory stimuli can be attained by practising meditation, asceticism and the deliberate seeking of enlightenment. In addition, she suggests that one loses the feeling of separateness and individuality upon attaining *nirvāṇa* and that the resultant state of consciousness is ineffable (Blavatsky 1889: 72).

In this way, the ascetic self may be considered as treading a sensory path in which the human soul seeks to merge the material with the spiritual senses, a state that can be attained by suppressing the mind from external and internal sensory stimuli. The mind needs to be quiet and “limpid as a mountain lake (Blavatsky 1889:30), passive, while “the army of the thought sensations [...]” (Ibid: 56). According to *The Voice*, the higher spiritual senses can only see, hear, comprehend or remember when the lower illusionary senses (Ibid: 3) and the notion of a separated existence are overcome, “Ere thy Soul’s mind can understand, the bud of personality must be crushed out, the worm of sense destroyed past resurrection”

(Ibid: 12). To achieve a state of quietude, one needs to be passive, receptive to the higher spiritual senses, and overcome the sense of separateness derived from the illusion of independent existence. Then, passivity emerges as a category of ME.

Furthermore, in *The Voice*, to see with the eye of the soul is different from seeing with the physical eye (Ibid: 15); to hear with the ear of the soul is different from hearing with the physical ear. The human senses should be merged with the spiritual ones:

Merge into one sense thy senses, if thou would'st be secure against the foe. 'Tis by that sense alone which lies concealed within the hollow of thy brain, that the steep path which leadeth to thy Master may be disclosed before thy Soul's dim eyes.

(Blavatsky 1889:17)

Additionally, it is explained in *The Voice* that the soul on the way to *nirvāṇa* follows a specific empirical sensory path, which is hearing, the first (Ibid 19); spiritual hearing and seeing, the second (Ibid: 18); spiritual hearing, seeing, smelling, the third; spiritual hearing, seeing, smelling and tasting, the fourth; the fifth, is the spiritual hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching (Ibid: 19). The sixth is *dhāraṇā* (Skt), defined by Blavatsky as:

[...] the intense and perfect concentration of the mind upon some interior object, accompanied by complete abstraction from everything pertaining to the external Universe, or the world of the senses”

(Blavatsky 1889: 73).

Finally, the seventh is the total absence of human sense-perception:

When thou hast passed into the seventh, O happy one, thou shalt perceive no more the sacred three, for thou shalt have become that three thyself. Thyself and mind, like twins upon a line, the star which

is thy goal, burns overhead. The three that dwell in glory and in bliss ineffable, now in the world of Mâyâ have lost their names.

(Blavatsky 1889:19)

Blavatsky refers to the seventh state as “bliss ineffable.” She describes it as “Dhyâna, the right precursor of Samâdhi” (Blavatsky 1889:19). In Buddhism, *dhyâna* (Skt) is a mental state typically translated as meditation, defined by Blavatsky as a “[...] state in which the ascetic loses the consciousness of every individuality including his own. He becomes—the All” (Ibid: 80). When explaining how the high ME occurs, she says that only when the mind is quiet, the body passive, the soul pure and firm on its goal (*nirvâṇa*), will kundalini rise and reach the chamber of the heart, and the mystic will hear the sound or the *voice of the silence* (Ibid:9). When talking about this state, she once again refers to ineffability in the following manner:

[...] from the deep unfathomable vortex of golden light in which the Victor bathes, ALL NATURE’S wordless voice in thousand tones ariseth to problem.

(Blavatsky 1889:72).

Finally, the topic of sense impressions, focusing on the themes “path,” “self,” and “soul,” helped to identify and develop the following categories of ME: ineffability, passivity, transiency, indifference to sensory stimuli, whilst the philosophy informing it involves the concept of high spiritual or low psychic experiences.

4.4. Knowledge & Belief

“O candidate for light?”[...] “The path that leadeth on, is lighted by one fire—the light of daring, burning in the heart.”

(Blavatsky 1889: 51, 54)

➤ 4.4.1. Belief

In *The Voice*, the themes “path,” “self,” and “soul” are also featured concerning the way belief shapes and reshapes the self on the path to *nirvāṇa*. Blavatsky refers to probations on the path as derived from a state of mind imprisoned in “Attavâda, the heresy of the belief [...] the separateness of Soul or Self from the One Universal, infinite Self” (Blavatsky 1889:74). In this way, belief is viewed as a driving force that can have profound effects on individuals, including the potential immersion into ignorance, infliction of suffering, or the potential for liberation and enlightenment. Blavatsky defines ignorance as the belief in the existence of a separate self, giving ME an epistemological dimension, based on the view that true knowledge is the realisation of the impersonal, transcendental and spiritual self:

This earth, disciples, is the Hall of Sorrow, where traps are set along the path of terrible trials to ensnare your EGO by the delusion called the "Great Heresy.

(Ibid: 4).

The *Great Heresy* is the belief in the existence of a separate self, the cause of suffering and pain, and the source of that belief is sense impressions. This suggests that belief greatly shapes and reshapes the path towards enlightenment, determining the type of ME. Therefore, belief can be considered a category of ME.

➤ 4.4.2. Light

In *The Voice*, knowledge is highlighted in relation to the fourth most frequent theme, “light.” It is also intertwined with all the other themes, “soul,” “self,” “path,” and “heart.” Light is also dual, just like the self, the soul, and sense impressions, it is divided into the light of ignorance and the light of spiritual wisdom. The light of ignorance is derived from external sense impressions, and does not allow the spiritual light to shine. This light is also referred to as the Jewel of Māra⁴³ (Skt) or the light derived from the fire of passions and lust. It is the light that results in fear. It keeps the mystic imprisoned, with no courage to fight against the army of passion that casts a shadow onto the path of light, which is *nirvāṇa*.

In contrast, the light of knowledge and eternal truth, the spiritual light, is derived from living a noble and virtuous life which leads to enlightenment. It is the true eternal light, “that light which burns without a wick or fuel” (Blavatsky, 1889:4). To reach spiritual light, one needs to “Stifle the voice of flesh, allow no image of the senses to get between its light and thine that thus the twain may blend in one...” (Ibid: 7). The mystic must withhold the mind from external sense impressions, and allow the spiritual ones to be manifest. Blavatsky also links virtues to light by stating that one needs to have the courage to approach spiritual light by overcoming the light of ignorance and delusion. Courage, in this instance, is considered a virtue.

Additionally, Blavatsky's view of knowledge becomes apparent when she discusses the modes of truth one attains after overcoming the five hindrances or impediments in Buddhism (Ibid: 21), outlined as follows:

1. “knowledge of all misery;”
2. the conquering of illusion;
3. a sinless state;

⁴³ A demon, also synonymous with illusion.

4. “Tao, ‘the Path’ that leads to knowledge;”
5. “perfection of all knowledge [...] SAMÂDHI—the state of faultless vision” (Ibid).

Therefore, "the" modes of truth are associated with the knowledge one attains after overcoming the illusion of separate existence.

Moreover, the knowledge of the two paths, renunciation and liberation, is also important. *The Voice* aims to show that one must “discern between ‘Head-learning’ from Soul Wisdom, the ‘Eye’ from the ‘Heart’ doctrine” (Blavatsky 1889:25). To follow the doctrine of the heart, the soul must move on beyond illusions and seek the “eternal and the changeless SAT” (Ibid). Only when the mind has moved beyond all illusion is the knowledge of the spiritual self attained. Therefore, the type of knowledge emerging from the data involves a profound and transformative noetic quality derived from ME. For example, in *The Voice*, there is a reference to noetic quality in the following terms:

Saith the Great Law: —“In order to become
the knower of ALL SELF thou hast first of
self to be the knower.” To reach the knowledge
of that self, thou hast to give up Self to Non-Self [...]

(Blavatsky 1889:5)

In this instance, noetic quality is described as a state of unity; the sense of selfhood is replaced by the experience of the self-dissolving or merging with the object of meditation, leading the subject to becoming the knower of “ALL SELF.” Thus, knowledge in *The Voice*, can be classified within the category of noetic quality.

In conclusion, the themes of “knowledge” and “belief” show that the type of knowledge referred to in *The Voice* is non-conceptual and non-discursive, i.e., ineffable. It is also profoundly transformative, as it is derived from a state of enlightenment. Therefore it can be considered a type of knowledge involving a

powerful noetic quality. In comparison, the data suggests that belief determines the outcome of ME. Therefore, the themes “light,” “heart,” “path,” “self,” and “nirvāṇa,” helped to identify and develop knowledge and belief as important factors of ME. The themes have been classified into the following categories of ME: knowledge is inserted in the category of noetic quality, while belief is inserted in a category of its own. Therefore, belief emerges as a new category of ME that differs from the four marks proposed by James.

4.5. Conclusion

In summary, the five main themes emerging in *The Voice*, “path,” “heart,” “soul,” “self,” “light,” and “heart,” have been divided into three main topics: “The Divided Self and the Path,” “Sense Impressions,” “Knowledge and Belief.” The first topic, *The Divided Self and the Path*, focuses on the themes of “path,” “heart,” “soul,” “self,” “Bodhisattva,” and “nirvāṇa.” It shows that the soul and the self are complex and multifaceted constructs divided between mundane and spiritual realms. It suggests that the path is the ascetic self; revealing asceticism as the major propensity of ME in the data. The type of asceticism highlighted in *The Voice* is derived from a deep longing for union with the divine, a sentiment that leads one to live an ascetic life, seeking detachment from earthly attachments. Therefore, the topic helped to identify asceticism as a propensity of ME, and the divided self as a temperament type.

The second topic, *Sense Impressions*, primarily focused on the themes “path,” “self,” and “soul,” highlights that Blavatsky divides sense impressions into low or material, and high or spiritual. The low ME is derived from external or low sense impressions that are transitory and fleeting. The high ME is derived from high spiritual sense impressions, having a profound transformative impact and a noetic quality. To experience the high sense impressions, the mystic must be passive and indifferent to sensory stimuli. Passivity emphasises the surrender of the self to something greater, while indifference to sensory stimuli refers to reaching a meditative state indifferent to pain or pleasure. Underlying indifference

to sensory stimuli is the idea that transcending distractions and impressions of the physical world leads to inner tranquillity and union with the higher self. Therefore, the topic helped to identify and classify the following categories of ME: passivity, transiency, and indifference to sensory stimuli.

The third topic, *Knowledge and Belief*, focused on the themes “path,” “self,” “soul,” and “light.” In *The Voice*, Blavatsky posits that true knowledge can only be obtained by surpassing the lower self and attaining illumination. In Blavatsky’s view, true knowledge is ineffable and can only be achieved through enlightenment. It is profoundly transformative and involves a powerful noetic quality. Noetic quality refers to a deep understanding that surpasses ordinary cognition and taps into a higher realm of knowledge and wisdom that comes with ME. On the other hand, belief underscores the importance of personal beliefs in shaping and reshaping the ME. Therefore, the present topic helped identify two categories of ME: belief and noetic quality.

It is noteworthy to mention that in *The Voice*, moral fruits cannot be used as parameters to determine a genuine ME. Nevertheless, Blavatsky emphasises that the highest state of illumination requires self-sacrifice and renunciation, suggesting that ME should guide individuals towards a compassionate, selfless, and righteous life. Thus, Blavatsky’s discourse on ME encompasses the transcendence of personal self, the significance of personal beliefs, the importance of psychological propensities and the transformative power of disciplined spiritual practices to achieve a state of indifference to sensory stimuli.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF THE CATEGORIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF BLAVATSKY & JAMES.

5.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to classify and identify potential new categories of ME based on the data gathered. By doing so, a more comprehensive understanding of Blavatsky's worldview on ME can be obtained. To achieve that, this chapter systematically compares and contrasts the categories of ME, propensities and temperament types postulated by James with those that have emerged from the data. To that purpose, this chapter is divided into three subsections, each with a distinct focus. The first subsection, "Categories of ME," explores six topics: "Noetic Quality," "Ineffability," "Passivity," "Indifference to Sensory Stimuli," "Transiency," and "Belief." The second subsection, entitled "Propensities of ME," consists of two sub-topics: "Asceticism" and the Divided Self." This subdivision allows for an in-depth analysis of the propensities associated with ME. Finally, the third and last subchapter focuses on the "Moral Fruits."

5.2. CATEGORIES OF ME

5.2.1 Noetic Quality

As demonstrated in chapter two, noetic quality is one of the most critical categories of ME, defined by James as a type of knowledge gained through experience that gives "[...] insight into depths of truth unplumbed by discursive intellect [...]" (James 2002: 322, 380, 381). It is a state of knowledge involving a sense of authority, full of meaning and important revelations (Ibid: 295). As chapter four explains, noetic quality in *The Voice* emerges from knowledge, imparting an epistemic dimension to ME. It is described as the knowledge that liberates and illuminates the path to *nirvāṇa* in the form of light. This type of knowledge is defined by Blavatsky as "perfection of all knowledge [...] the state of faultless vision" (Blavatsky 1889: 21).

In comparing and contrasting James' and Blavatsky's views, it becomes evident that while they share some common understandings, they have contrasting perspectives with regards to noetic quality. Both agree that noetic quality entails a deep sense of meaning and important revelations, but their differences lie in their sources of data and their focus on specific types of experience. James approaches the concept of noetic quality through a broad range of sources, including various traditions and firsthand accounts. He also draws on his own experiences, such as his encounter with nitrous oxide.

The Voice focuses primarily on the noetic quality that arises from enlightenment, drawing heavily on Buddhism and Vedanta, highlighting the attainment of *nirvāṇa* as the ultimate source of true knowledge and authoritative revelations. Blavatsky's perspective emphasises the significance of achieving a state of oneness and the dissolution of the sense of a personal self. While she acknowledges the possibility of noetic quality

in other ME types, in *The Voice*, she focuses on the noetic quality that results from enlightenment.

Furthermore, while James considers psychedelics as providing a noetic quality, Blavatsky, in her rules to the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, forbids the use of any drugs as she considers them to hinder spiritual progress:

The use of wine, spirits, liquors of any kind, or any narcotic or intoxicating drug, is strictly prohibited. If indulged in, all progress is hindered, and the efforts of teacher and pupil alike are rendered useless. All such substances have a direct pernicious action upon the brain, and especially upon the "third eye," or pineal gland [...]. They prevent absolutely the development of the third eye, called in the East "the Eye of Shiva.

(Blavatsky 1980: 496)

This suggests that James and Blavatsky also have contrasting views on the role of psychedelics in the noetic quality of ME. James considers substances, such as psychedelics, as a gateway to transcendent knowledge and insights. He explores the potential of these substances to illuminate the depths of truth beyond the limitations of intellectual comprehension. However, Blavatsky, in her rules to the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, strictly forbids the use of any drugs, considering them a hindrance to spiritual progress. She argues that substances like alcohol and narcotics harm the development of the "third eye," preventing the attainment of genuine noetic quality. This disagreement reflects their contrasting beliefs and approaches to noetic quality as a category of ME. Nonetheless, the noetic quality category is an important outcome of ME in both views.

5.2.2 Ineffability

As described in chapter two, in *VRE*, ineffability is one of the central categories of ME. James defined it as states of feelings that defy language (James 2002:295). Such states can only be experienced and are devoid of mental conceptual formations. He based his view on first-hand experiences such as the one described by a clergyman from Starbuck's manuscript collection, who, among other things, says, "[...] The ordinary sense of things around me faded. For the moment nothing but an ineffable joy and exaltation remained. [...]" (cited in James 2002: 56). He also uses the example of paradoxical languages, such as the one used in *The Voice*, i.e., soundless sound (Blavatsky 1889:1) to describe ineffability in mystical literature (James 2002: 326). In this manner, ineffability for James is a state of feeling derived from ME, deprived of conceptual formation and non-discursive. It transcends articulation since no adequate description of its contents can be conveyed in words (James 2002: 295). It is a feeling unique to each individual's experience, comparable to sensory experiences like smelling the fragrance of a flower, for example, or the feeling evoked by tasting an apple. Therefore, ineffability involves cognitive states one may comprehend only by experiencing them.

As shown in chapter four of *The Voice*, ineffability emerges from the theme of knowledge; it is non-conceptual based on sensations divided into low or material, i.e., sense-perception derived from external impressions, and higher or spiritual impressions, ineffable, internal. In this manner, the ME occurs via sense impressions characterised as low or high. The low ME is derived from sense impressions of the external world, it is discursive and transient. The high ME is ineffable and non-discursive and described by Blavatsky as a condition of profound bliss and joy in the realm of stillness or silence (Blavatsky 1889: 13), i.e., "The three that dwell in glory and in bliss ineffable, now in the world of Mâyâ have lost their names" (Ibid: 23,

24). Blavatsky links ineffability to spiritual states of consciousness beyond the ones reachable by known sense impressions and cognitive processes.

In comparing and contrasting ineffability as a category of ME in the views of Blavatsky and James, it is possible to discern both similarities and differences. One similarity is that both James and Blavatsky attribute ineffability to ME. In this vein, both views accommodate nonconceptual mental states and the limitations of language to express the ME. The differences are that James links ineffability to feelings, sensations, the subconscious and the notion of pure experience. He also suggests that ineffability may be linked to some states of noetic quality, imparting a non-conceptual sense of authority. Blavatsky, however, gives a more transcendental epistemic view to ineffability and links it specifically to noetic quality, as in her view, true knowledge is non-conceptual, non-verbal, untranslatable, and beyond the realm of sensations linked to sense-impressions and known cognitive process imparting knowledge.

5.2.3 Passivity

As explored in the second chapter, passivity holds its significance as the third criterion in evaluating ME. James defines it as a state of relaxation and tranquillity or an inclination towards a defensive and aggressive mood (James 2002: 37). Additionally, it can also result in expressing a secondary or alternate personality, triggering an altered state of consciousness (Ibid: 382). The state of passivity is often induced through various practices of physical exercise and concentration mentioned in various mystical manuals. James provides an example of induced passivity to a higher power, for example, “I was perfectly willing and obedient. There was no intellectual effort or train of thought. My dominant idea was: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord [...]’” (Ibid: 98). In this way, in the Jamesian view, passivity may be considered as involving two different aspects, one that is entering a state leading to a heightened sense of the presence of a superior power, inducing a trance-like state; the other a state that could even be considered as having pathological dimensions, as that of double personality.

As shown in chapter three of *The Voice*, passivity emerges as a crucial aspect of ME, linked to indifference to sensory stimuli, discussed infra. Blavatsky equates the path with the self, suggesting that the human soul can only merge its material senses with its spiritual senses by stopping the mind from external and internal sensory movement (Blavatsky 1889: 30). To achieve a state of quietude, one must be passive and receptive to the higher spiritual senses. This passivity entails silencing the army of thought sensations and the constant flow of internal and external sensory activity. Only then can the spiritual senses hear, see, comprehend or remember effectively, and overcome the sense of separateness derived from the illusion of independent existence. Thus, passivity emerges as a key category within the framework of the self, as Blavatsky suggests that only by being passive and receptive to higher spiritual senses can one achieve *nirvāṇa*.

In comparing and contrasting the views of Blavatsky and James on passivity, it is possible to notice both similarities and differences. For both, passivity is an aspect of ME that can be induced through some exercises. However, James adds a psychopathological dimension to it when he links it to cases of double personality. For Blavatsky, passivity is a state achieved through practices that entail an important aspect of ME, without which it is impossible to achieve higher states of consciousness, such as the one linked to *nirvāṇa*. Blavatsky does not add a psychopathological dimension to her view, while James attempts to approach the topic from a scientific perspective. Despite the differences in approach, in *The Voice*, passivity is a crucial aspect of ME, while James places more emphasis on noetic quality and ineffability.

5.2.4 Transiency

As mentioned in chapter two, James described transiency, the fourth mark of ME, as experiences lasting between half an hour and two hours (James 2002: 295), which may or may not have a faded noetic quality. He uses the following example to illustrate transience, “I felt the happiness destined for man [...] I never felt something so great or so instantaneous” (James 2002: 368). A transient ME allows a fading understanding of the world in ways normal states of consciousness cannot achieve.

Transiency in *The Voice* is linked to low ME, namely psychic experiences derived from low and fleeting sense impressions, in contrast to spiritual ones with a deeper noetic quality and a lasting impact on the subject's life. Thus, the views of both James and Blavatsky include transiency as part of ME. However, in Blavatsky's view, the notion of transiency is broader as everything related to the material world is transient, emphasising the need to replace such fleeting moments with the everlasting. Therefore, in James' view, transiency is a mark of a ME that

may have a light impact on the individual. In Blavatsky's worldview, all ME derived from the low sense impressions involves transiency. Therefore, the mystic should attempt to replace the fleeting with the everlasting.

5.2.5 Indifference to Sensory Stimuli

Indifference to sensory stimuli, as examined in chapter four, is a prominent category of ME arising from the data derived from sense impressions. In *The Voice*, Blavatsky distinguishes between material and spiritual sense impressions. ME occurs when the mind is calm and passive, and the physical body remains unaffected by material or external sensory stimuli. Through this lens, *The Voice* can be interpreted as highlighting the importance of contemplative and meditative practices in achieving indifference to sensory stimuli, thereby transcending mundane distractions and attaining inner peace.

Blavatsky's view of indifference to sensory stimuli is closely connected to various states of mystical consciousness involving different experiential dimensions. She posits that the path to *nirvāṇa* is paved with spiritual sense experiences that guide the mystic through diverse states of consciousness. To tread this path, the mystic needs to withdraw from sense impressions derived from the physical world through preliminary training to control one's mind and thoughts, which are listed in no particular order here. The training involves several steps, such as practising *pratyāhāra*, indifference to bodily pain and pleasure, and indifference to emotions and thoughts arising from sensory stimuli. The practice of *dhāraṇā* involves concentration upon a single object or thought, while maintaining a state of indifference to external sensory stimuli. *Vairāgya* involves indifference to sensory stimuli thus overcoming illusion and leading the mystic to an inner state of truth. This is based on an absolute indifference to sensory stimuli derived from the physical world. Also, *titikṣā*, is a state of consciousness indifferent to bodily pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, and so forth.

Thus, indifference to sensory stimuli emerges as a significant, if not central, category of ME in *The Voice*.

James, however, does not consider indifference to sensory stimuli a category because, from his radical empirical perspective, ME is

[...] *a feeling of objective presence, a perception* of what we may call “*something there*,” more deep and more general than any of the special and particular “senses” by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.

(James 2002: 50)

In James' view, the “something there” is pure experience that includes but also transcends sensory experiences. He also linked subconscious processes to mystical states of consciousness. The subconscious, as explained in chapter two, is a non-conceptual mental process that emotions or thoughts must pass through before they can be articulated as conceptual mental formations (Meyer 1918: 15). Thus in James's view, ME is based on subjective feelings of the subconscious mind. For him, pure experience supersedes sensorial impressions.

Nonetheless, he offered two different explanations for ME that potentially may inhibit physiological processes, resulting in indifference to sensory stimuli. The first is what he calls the “pantheistic explanation,” which is the feeling of bliss achieved by the union of the narrower self with the larger universal self, which he names the subconscious self. This involves the shutting down of physiological processes, such as anxiety and stress. The second is the neurological positivist explanation, which is when cerebral processes act in automatic ways, and may inhibit physiological processes (James 2002: 91).

James refers to *dhyāna* as involving both indifference to sensory stimuli and indifference to memory (James 2002: 311). In *VRE*, he also

discusses indifference in other instances, and suggests that anyone can be trained to be indifferent to one thing or another, but not all can live a saintly life (Ibid: 41). While he allows for the possibility of suspension of psychophysiological processes, either due to subconscious mind or due to neurological factors inhibiting physiological processes, such as pain, pleasure and so on, he does not consider it a mark of ME.

In summary, in *The Voice*, indifference to sensory stimuli emerges as an important, if not central, category of ME. However, James does not consider indifference to sensory stimuli a category of ME, because he links indifference to rational processes and aims at imparting feelings to mystical states rather than intellectual processes (James 2002: 295).

5.2.6 Belief

As discussed in chapter two, when focusing on ineffability as a category of ME, James prioritises emotions over doctrine, claiming that most probably no philosophical theology could emerge without religious sentiment. Therefore, for him, feelings supersede beliefs. However, he does recognise the importance of discourse and beliefs, especially regarding the category of noetic quality, which is epistemological as it relates to the authority of knowledge acquired via ME.⁴⁴ In his view, the output of ME is a more expansive state of consciousness, transcending personal and limited beliefs, as indicated in this passage, for example,

[...] we pass into mystical states from out of ordinary consciousness as from a less into a more, as from a smallness into a vastness, and at the same time as from an unrest to a

⁴⁴ Turner, suggests that the Jamesian view of noetic quality is not related to replacing one belief with another but expanding former beliefs (2021:3).

rest. We feel them as reconciling, unifying states. In them the unlimited absorbs the limits and peacefully closes the account [...]

(James 2002: 322)

In James' view, the notion of the divided self or the twice-born involves the belief that the material world is mundane and the spiritual life divine; the need to die in the material world to be reborn in the spiritual one. In this vein, he links temperament types to beliefs one may embrace. From this perspective, belief is not dependent on rational processes but on innate feelings, leading to worldviews he labelled as pessimist or optimist. Therefore, it could be said that James did not consider belief an important factor in ME because psychophysiological processes determine the outcome of such experiences.

Contrary to James' view, Blavatsky supports the notion that belief plays an important role in shaping and reshaping ME, influencing the outcome of such experiences. In her commentaries to the letters of Caspar Lavater, she writes the following:

It is curious how all these untrained psychics see each in the terms of his own religion or theory, and because they experience some new sensation, are straightway convinced of the absolute truths of their experience. We know a dozen people who believe with all their souls that they have made the intimate acquaintance of Jehovah (!), and will tell you how he is dressed, even to the minutest details of his toilette; others again, a still more numerous classes, who are the bosom psychic friends of Jesus Christ (!!); and so on.

(Blavatsky, *The Letters of Johann Caspar Lavater* 1980: 212)

In Blavatsky's view, belief shapes and reshapes the ME of untrained psychics, while those trained would perhaps not be subject to such restraints as their experience is ineffable, involving non-conceptual mental formations. However, belief is undoubtedly a critical factor in determining the ME in *The Voice*, as illustrated in chapter four under "Knowledge and Belief." In *The Voice*, Blavatsky asserts that belief is instrumental in shaping the self's journey towards *nirvāṇa*. This is apparent in her condemnation of the belief in the separateness of the self as a heresy (Blavatsky 1889: 74). This suggests that Blavatsky views belief as having the potential to be both empowering or detrimental to ME, depending on its nature and content.

Additionally, Blavatsky's perspective on the relationship between belief and knowledge is underscored by her definition of ignorance as the belief in a separate self. Her epistemology is rooted in the notion that true knowledge rests on the perception and realisation of the impersonal, transcendental, and spiritual self. For this to occur, it is necessary to drop the belief in a personal self. This firmly establishes belief as a category of ME in the data.

Furthermore, Blavatsky connects virtues with knowledge, arguing that developing spiritual virtues necessitates overcoming the darkness of ignorance and delusion; and that the courage to approach spiritual light arises from the ability to discard the light of ignorance. This stance emphasises the crucial role belief plays in developing the virtues towards ME. Therefore, in *The Voice*, the importance of belief in shaping the path towards enlightenment is a central conceptual framework that can profoundly transform the self, leading to suffering or liberation.

In comparing and contrasting the views of Blavatsky and James, it becomes clear that James prioritises emotions and sensations over belief, while Blavatsky prioritises beliefs over emotions and sensations. However, James recognises the importance of discourse and beliefs, especially regarding the category of noetic quality, which is epistemological as it relates to the authority of knowledge acquired via ME, resulting in an expansion of beliefs. Therefore, belief is not dependent on rational processes but on innate feelings, resulting in worldviews he

labels as pessimist or optimist. On the other hand, Blavatsky did not associate beliefs with psychological temperaments but considers them possible to be shaped, re-shaped, and changed by way of reasoning.

In summary, it can be said that both Blavatsky and James approach “belief” from different perspectives. For Blavatsky, belief is central for ME, while for James, innate tendencies are the central factor shaping the type of beliefs. Furthermore, the Jamesian noetic quality is different from Blavatsky’s view on belief. James holds an a posteriori view on the importance of belief, ME has a profound impact and imparts a sense of authoritative knowledge, whilst Blavatsky holds an a priori view on belief, namely, it is the belief that will shape, re-shape and determine the type of ME. Therefore, for Blavatsky, belief emerges as an important category of ME.

5.3. Propensity of ME

This subsection compares and contrasts the propensity of ME in the data with the ones suggested by James, focusing on asceticism and the twice-born personality type. It demonstrates that asceticism and saintliness are intrinsic to *The Voice's* discourse and James' view.

5.3.1 Asceticism

In *VRE*, James refers to asceticism as one of the aspects of saintly life in the following manner,

The self-surrender may become so passionate as to turn into self-immolation. It may then so overrule the ordinary inhibitions of the flesh that the saint finds positive pleasure in sacrifice and asceticism, measuring and expressing as they do the degree of his loyalty to the higher power.

(James 2002:214)

James links asceticism to saintliness and the twice-born personality type because it involves a view that the material world is bleak and dark, the source of ignorance and evil, and therefore purification, achieved through asceticism, from the desires of the flesh is a crucial aspect of saintly life. In this manner, *VRE* establishes a relationship between saintliness, asceticism and purity as important components of ME:

The shifting of the emotional centre brings with it, first, increase of purity. The sensitiveness to spiritual discords is enhanced, and the cleansing of existence from brutal and sensual elements becomes imperative. Occasions of contact with such elements are avoided: the saintly life must deepen its spiritual consistency and keep unspotted from the world.

In some temperaments this need of purity of spirit takes an ascetic turn, and weaknesses of the flesh are treated with relentless severity.

(James 2002: 214)

Chapter Four shows that asceticism is also an important element in *The Voice*. The notion of purifying oneself from sensual desires and illusions derived from sense impressions. Furthermore, the data suggests that to become the “path,” one needs to live a saintly life by becoming free from the desire to experience the passions of the flesh and ignorance derived from the external sensory world. In this way, in Blavatsky's discourse, asceticism is essential to attaining *nirvāṇa* and is the major propensity of ME in *The Voice*. Therefore, asceticism as a propensity of ME is common to both James and Blavatsky.

5.3.2 The Divided Self

The divided self was discussed in chapter two and is a concept James uses to refer to the self in light of the twice-born personality type, whose worldview is bleak and pessimistic, and involves the idea that the embodied self is polluted and subject to sorrow and sin; while the spiritual self is divine and involves happiness and freedom from suffering. The twice-born personality type seeks to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh by achieving union with the divine, to be reborn in the light of the spirit. In this way, the divided self is predicated on a philosophy that regards the material world as the cause of anguish and unhappiness, or, as James puts it:

[...] the belief that there is an element of real wrongness in this world, which is neither to be ignored nor evaded, but which must be squarely met and overcome by an appeal to the soul's heroic resources, and neutralised and cleansed away by suffering.

(James 2002:282)

The divided self or the twice-born expresses a radical pessimism because it is based on the idea that the world is a place of suffering and pain; embodiment represents the confinement of the soul in the flesh, and as such, anything related to the material world is inferior, polluted, and should be overcome and transcended through union with the divine. The twice-born can also be considered an allusion to the idea that union with the spirit or the divine self represents death to the self of matter, and rebirth into the divine or spiritual self. James defines the concept of the twice-born as a worldview involving the notion that "There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other" (James 2002:132).

In *The Voice*, as discussed in chapter three, liberation and renunciation are central ideas, i.e., one must die to the lower self to be reborn into the divine self, liberation. However, one must also renounce the state of bliss to be reborn in the world of matter again, to help free all beings from suffering. Hence, *The Voice* involves the notion of an ultimate act of self-sacrifice and renunciation out of compassion for all beings. The divided self is a common theme in *The Voice* and the *VRE*. However, in my opinion, James' religious temperaments are limited since the boundaries between the pessimist and optimistic personality types may not be as straightforward as he claims. It is evident that the discourse in the data involves a more pessimistic outlook on life, as renunciation, for example, is also called the “path of woe.”

In comparing and contrasting the worldview in *The Voice* with that of the twice-born of James, it becomes clear that radical pessimism characterises Blavatsky's worldview: the self is divided between the mundane and spiritual realms. Additionally, there can be no happiness and bliss while there is suffering. Furthermore, the data suggests that the achievement and renunciation of *nirvāṇa* involve the view that embodied existence is suffering and cause of sorrow. It also supports the notion that spiritual happiness and bliss should be renounced by the mystic as an extreme act of self-sacrifice to re-enter a state of sorrow and pain to help to liberate all beings from suffering. Thus, the *Bodhisattva* personality type involves an extreme pessimism that seems to fit James' twice-born personality type.

5.4. Moral Fruits

This subsection compares and contrasts moral fruits in *The Voice* and James. Chapter two shows, among other things, that James considers two types of ME: genuine and non-genuine. Genuine ME is closely related to a saintly life and, for this reason, should have a positive and transformative impact on the individual's character and moral disposition. Therefore, in his view, moral fruits are an important parameter in determining the genuineness of ME.

However, as shown in chapters three and five, *The Voice* presents a challenge, posed by liberation and renunciation, to moral fruits as a determining factor for the genuineness of ME. The "doctrine of the eye" represents the path of liberation, upon which the mystic is absorbed in the state of *nirvāṇa*, disregarding the world of form, and signifying the path of the *Pratyekabuddha*. This path is described as a selfish one, since the mystic pursues their own bliss. In contrast, the "doctrine of the heart" signifies the path of the *Bodhisattva*, where the mystic driven by compassion renounces absorption in *nirvāṇa* to aid in liberating all beings from suffering. The act of self-sacrifice in the "doctrine of the heart" suggests that the enjoyment of *nirvāṇa* and the derived bliss are unimportant compared to the force of compassion that compels one to help others. Therefore, *The Voice* posits that both the selfish path of the *Pratyekabuddha* and the compassionate path of the *Bodhisattva* can lead to the genuine ME or *nirvāṇa*, even though they differ in ethical outcomes. Thus, according to the data, moral fruits cannot be used as a parameter to determine whether a ME is genuine or not.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter contrasted and compared the categories, propensities and moral fruits of ME emerging from *The Voice* with the ones of the *VRE*. By comparing and contrasting noetic quality, it becomes evident that it is a shared ME category in the works of both Blavatsky and James. However, there are notable differences in their approaches. *The Voice* emphasises noetic quality resulting from enlightenment, while *VRE* extends this category to encompass a broader range of ME. Thus, their perspectives on noetic quality diverge. James introduces the idea that psychedelics can potentially lead to the experience of noetic quality. In contrast, Blavatsky strongly condemns the use of psychedelics, arguing that they hinder attaining genuine noetic quality. Notwithstanding these differences, both Blavatsky and James recognise noetic quality as a significant aspect of ME in their respective works.

In comparing and contrasting the views of Blavatsky and James on ineffability, it becomes apparent that there are both similarities and differences between their perspectives. Both Blavatsky and James attribute ineffability to ME, acknowledging the existence of nonconceptual mental states that transcend linguistic description. However, there are significant differences in their views. James associates ineffability with feelings, sensations, the subconscious, and the notion of pure experience. He suggests that certain states of consciousness defy verbal expression and that a sense of authority or truth may accompany ineffability. Blavatsky, on the other hand, presents a more transcendental view of ineffability linking it specifically to noetic quality. In her view, true knowledge is non-conceptual, non-verbal, and untranslatable. It exists beyond the realm of sensory impressions and known cognitive processes, imparting a form of knowledge that is beyond the capabilities of language. Therefore, while James focuses on the role of feelings, sensations, and pure experience, Blavatsky emphasises the transcendental nature of true knowledge and its inherent

inability to be fully expressed in language. Despite these differences, ineffability emerges as an important category of ME in *The Voice*.

Passivity is another important aspect of ME for both James and Blavatsky. However, James adds a psychopathological dimension, linking it to cases of double personality. Blavatsky, on the other hand, views passivity as an important state to be achieved by contemplation and meditation practices, without the psychopathological elements mentioned by James. Therefore, passivity emerges as a category of ME in *The Voice*.

Transiency in ME also showcases similarities and differences between James and Blavatsky. For James, transiency may indicate a ME with a lighter noetic quality impact on the mystic. On the other hand, Blavatsky links transiency to ME experiences derived from low sense impressions. Therefore, transiency is also a category of ME emerging from *The Voice*.

Furthermore, two categories of ME emerge from the data: sensory stimuli and belief. James acknowledges indifference to psychophysiological processes, because he focuses more on the role of noetic quality and the impact of ME on feelings. Hence, he does not consider it a category of ME, as he links indifference to rational processes. Blavatsky, on the other hand, views indifference to sensory stimuli as being intertwined with ME. She believes that in progressing towards *nirvāṇa*, the mystic must undergo preliminary training to control their mind and thoughts aiming to achieve indifference to sensory stimuli. Therefore, indifference to sensory stimuli emerges as a new and important category of ME in *The Voice*.

Belief emerges as an important category of ME in Blavatsky's view, James focuses more on the role of noetic quality and the impact of ME on personal experiences and feelings. In this manner, belief is not considered a ME category by James but emerges as an important one in Blavatsky's view.

A further contrast in the views of Blavatsky and James is related to moral fruits. James argues that a genuine ME should result in transformative moral character and moral fruits. In contrast, Blavatsky

suggests that a ME can be genuine regardless of its moral fruits, highlighting the possibility of individuals having ME, even though they may be pursuing enlightenment for self-serving purposes.

In comparing and contrasting the views of Blavatsky and James on the propensities of ME, it becomes evident that the Jamesian notions of asceticism and the divided self are prominent themes in *The Voice*. Both Blavatsky and James recognise asceticism as a crucial aspect of ME. Blavatsky emphasises the importance of ascetic life in attaining *nirvāṇa*. James also acknowledges the role of asceticism as a means to detach oneself from worldly attachments and desires.

The notion of the divided self is another common propensity observed in the views of Blavatsky and James. Both argue that the self is torn between the mundane world and the yearning for unity with the divine. This perspective portrays the world as a source of suffering and sorrow, leading individuals to seek solace in the divine. In *The Voice*, this notion of a divided self is even more pronounced, as the Bodhisatva—in an act of ultimate self-sacrifice—renounces liberation to assist in freeing all beings from suffering. This extreme pessimism aligns with James' characterisation of the twice-born personality type. Overall, the similarities between Blavatsky and James regarding asceticism and the divided self highlight their shared understanding of these propensities leading to ME.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the findings of the present Master of Research dissertation entitled *Categories of Mystical Experience in The Voice of the Silence by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky*. It does so by answering its guiding question, “what are the categories of ME in *The Voice*,” and by outlining the findings of its aims, i.e., to identify, classify and develop categories of ME in *The Voice*. Its objectives are: a. to determine if the MEs in *The Voice* can be inserted into James' categories of RE; and b. to ascertain if a new category of ME can be developed, distinct from the four categories proposed by James. Furthermore, it demonstrates how its findings may contribute to further studies on ME, while also discussing and acknowledging its limitations and weaknesses. It concludes with recommendations for future research.

This study is informed by a moderate constructivist approach, and as such, defined ME as contextualised conceptual mental formations based on propositional attitudes attributed to altered states of consciousness. The data informing it is the literary text, *The Voice*, by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Additionally, the present study combines two data approaches, exploratory and hypothesis-driven. In the first approach, the data was explored without linking predetermined categories to the data. Instead, the categories were created based on the result of the qualitative data analyses based on word frequency in the data, namely, path, soul, self, light and heart. Then, the five most frequently emergent themes were explored by reading and re-reading the data using the phenomenological bracketing inspired by Husserl. Next, the data was considered from a hypothesis-driven perspective based on the following predetermined analytical categories, namely "mystical" and "experience," and the categories of RE suggested by James, “ineffability,” “noetic quality,” “passivity” and “transiency.”

Finally, the last analytical tool was to compare and contrast William James' ME categories with those emerging from the data.

The five main emerging themes in *The Voice*, “path,” “soul,” “self,” “light,” and “heart,” were divided into three main topics: Sense Impressions, The Divided Self & the Path, Knowledge & Beliefs. In evaluating the emerging themes under the mentioned topics, it was possible to identify, develop and classify ME propensities and categories. This resulted in the following ME categories: noetic quality, ineffability, passivity, indifference to sensory stimuli, transiency and belief. The classification of the following propensities for ME are as follows: asceticism and the personality type of the twice-born.

The six aforementioned ME categories, plus the propensities in the data, were then contrasted and compared with the ones in the *VRE*, indicating that the moral fruits is not a parameter that can be used to establish a genuine ME. This is indicated in the notion of the *Bodhisatva*, who, driven by compassion, renounces the bliss of *nirvāṇa* to help free all beings from suffering, versus the *Pratyekabuddhas* who selfishly seek liberation. Both achieve *nirvāṇa* and experience what James would define as a genuine ME. However, the moral fruits are an outcome of the *Bodhisatva* but not of the *Pratyekabuddha*. Additionally, the propensities of ME in the data, namely asceticism and the personality type of the twice-born, are somehow compatible with James' view.

Furthermore, six categories of ME emerged from the data. Four of these categories align with the Jamesian categories, while two new categories emerged. Therefore, the findings of the present dissertation can be summarised as follows:

- A. There are six categories of ME identified in *The Voice*: 1. noetic quality, 2. ineffability, 3. passivity, 4. indifference to sensory stimuli, 5. transiency, and 6. belief.
- B. Four of the six categories are the same as those proposed by James: 1. ineffability, 2. noetic quality, 3. passivity, and 4. transiency.

- C. Two new ME categories developed, distinct from James: 1. indifference to sensory stimulus, and 2. belief.

A potential problem with the conclusions drawn here is that the data informing James' study is mainly based on first-hand experiences reported in the literature, whereas the data informing the present study is not. Therefore, it can be argued that the potential difference in terms of data could compromise the findings. However, it is important to note that James did not only use data from first-hand experiences but also used a large variety of literature derived from Vedanta, Buddhism and even from *The Voice*. In this way, he drew on data from *The Voice*, Mahāyāna Buddhism and other sources to create categories of ME rather than just first-hand experience data.

Another potential issue that could be raised regards *The Voice* as it is structured around a central notion of Mahāyāna Buddhism, i.e., the Doctrine of the Heart. As such, the foreign words should have been explored in more depth to show the extent to which Blavatsky's work is linked to this tradition and provide contextualisation. To this objection, it is important to point out that the foreign words have been acknowledged in Table B and mentioned in relation to the main five emergent themes. However, it is not the aim of this dissertation to demonstrate whether *The Voice* is a Buddhist text or not, although the position this dissertation takes is stated in chapter three, i.e., it considers *The Voice* to be a text connected to Mahāyāna Buddhism and also influenced by other traditions, such as Vedanta.

A further potential problem arising from the methodology informing this dissertation is that it is reductionist. As such, it could potentially overlook important information, such as the relevance of the relationship between a *lanoo* and a guru or master. This relationship is interpreted here in the manner it was expressed in *The Voice*: "The "great Master" is the term used by *lanoos* or *chelas* to indicate one's "Higher Self" (Blavatsky 1889: 75). Therefore, it can be said that, even though this relationship was not discussed, it is an intrinsic aspect of the ME addressed here because such a union results in a mystical state of consciousness.

Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that a reductionist approach may indeed overlook other important aspects of the data, while not affecting the findings of this dissertation.

Further research should investigate the sources of *The Voice*, the extent to which they relate to Buddhism and the Vedanta traditions, and the extent to which Blavatsky's Christian Orthodox background may have influenced her structuring of *The Voice*. Another important issue is to explore how Blavatsky uses foreign words, i.e., Sanskrit and Pali, to structure her discourse and evaluate potential challenges arising from her definitions. Additionally, the role of gender in the construction of ME in the 19th century is another issue to be explored. Finally, in order to have a more objective view of Blavatsky's discourse on ME, further study is needed on her writings that make up the Theosophical literature.

Finally, this study provides a comprehensive knowledge of Blavatsky's discourse on ME by thoroughly exploring *The Voice* and providing an in-depth analysis of the five main emerging themes. It also reviews studies focusing on Blavatsky's discourse on ME and the Jamesian categories of RE. It presents findings based on evidence drawn from the data and suggests future studies. Furthermore, it contributes to further religious studies by providing a comprehensive interpretation of ME categories in the context of Blavatsky's discourse in *The Voice*. Exploring her discourse on ME is important because she is the leading figure of the contemporary Theosophical movement. Additionally, Blavatsky's discourse on ME, can help scholars better understand how discourse on ME shapes and re-shapes esoteric and religious beliefs and practices. It also sheds light on the development of alternative religious discourses in the 19th century, which challenged traditional religious institutions and practices. It can offer insights into the role of gender and cross-cultural influences in shaping Theosophical beliefs and practices. It highlights how ME was understood in the *fin de siècle* in the Theosophical Society. Most importantly, it identifies and classifies six ME categories in one of the most important booklets making up the Theosophical literature, *The Voice*.

APPENDIX

TABLE C

TABLE OF MEANINGS WITH ANNOTATIONS FOR “PATH.”

ANNOTATIONS	MEANINGS
<p>Knowledge of one path and two goals; the path is one goal twofold; the path is open or exoteric and secret or esoteric; the open path leads to <i>nirvāṇa</i>; open path leads to liberation; open is selfish bliss; the secret path leads to woe for the living dead; the secret path leads to paranirvanic bliss; the secret path leads to gain and loss of <i>nirvāṇa</i>; secret path renunciation of <i>nirvāṇa</i> bliss.</p>	<p>“The Path is one for all, the means to reach the goal must vary with the Pilgrims” (Blavatsky 1889: 45); “The path is one, Disciple, yet in the end, twofold” (Ibid: 41); “two Paths in one” (Ibid: 24); “The “Open” and the “Secret Path”— [...]the exoteric and ... the Secret Path” (Ibid: 86); “The Open path leads to the changeless change—Nirvāna, the glorious state of Absoluteness, the Bliss past human thought” (Ibid: 41); “The open path” (Ibid: 33); “Path of Liberation” (Ibid: 33); “O beginner, this is the Open Path, the way to selfish bliss, shunned by the Bodhisattvas” (Ibid); “The “Open Way,” no sooner hast thou reached its goal, will lead thee to reject the Bodhisattvic body and make thee enter the thrice glorious state of Dharmakāya which is oblivion of the World and men for ever;” (Ibid 42); “The secret path” (Ibid: 33, 34); “That Secret Path leads the Arhan to mental woe unspeakable; woe for the living Dead” (Ibid:42); “The “Secret Way” leads also to Paranirvānic bliss—but at the close of Kalpas without number; Nirvānas gained and lost from boundless pity and compassion for the world of deluded mortals” (Ibid); “Now hast thou rent the veil before the secret Path and taught the greater Yāna” (Ibid); “Know, O Naljor, thou of the Secret Path, its pure fresh waters must be used to sweeter make the Ocean’s bitter waves—that mighty sea of sorrow formed of the tears of men” (Ibid: 67); “To reach Nirvāna’s bliss, but to renounce it, is the supreme, the final step—the highest on Renunciation’s Path and therefore called the “Path of Woe” (Ibid: xii, 33); “Thou hast the knowledge now concerning the two Ways” (Ibid: 43); “Which wilt thou choose, O thou of dauntless heart? The Samtan of “eye Doctrine,”</p>

	<p>four-fold Dhyâna, or thread thy way through Pâramitâs, six in number, noble gates of virtue leading to Bodhi and to Prajñâ, seventh step of Wisdom” (Ibid: 46); “It is the shadow of thyself outside the Path, cast on the darkness of thy sins” (Ibid: 47); “rocky path” (Ibid: 53); “shade will fall from thine own heart upon the path, and root thy feet in terror to the spot” (Ibid: 54).</p>
<p>One must become the path; you are the path; the path whatever place one goes the place becomes oneself; way to final liberation within the self; path between spirit and self-highway of sensations; goal of the path is bliss; path of woe begins afterwards; first path is liberation; the second path renunciation; path of sorrow.</p>	<p>“Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself” ((Blavatsky 1889: : 12); “In this path, to whatever place one would go, that place one’s own self becomes” (Ibid: 78); “Thou art the Path’ is said to the adept guru and by the latter to the disciple, after initiation. “I am the way and the Path” says another Master” (Ibid); “This “Path” is mentioned in all the Mystic Works” (Ibid: 78); “The way to final freedom is within thy self. That way begins and ends outside of Self” (Ibid: 39); “the path that lies between thy Spirit and thy self, the highway of sensations, the rude arousers of Ahankâra” (Ibid: 56); “The goal of bliss and the long Path of Woe are at the furthest end” (Ibid: 44); “There is but one road to the Path; at its very end alone the “Voice of the Silence” can be heard” (Ibid: 55); “Path that leads toward the field of Battle” (Ibid: 40); “the first Path is liberation”(Ibid 41); “Path the Second is—renunciation” (Ibid); “Path of sorrow”(Ibid); “On Sowan’s Path, O Srotâpatti, thou art secure. Aye, on that Mârğa, where nought but darkness meets the weary pilgrim, where torn by thorns the hands drip blood, the feet are cut by sharp unyielding flints, and Mâra wields his strongest arms” (Ibid: 69); “Yea, Lord; I see the PATH; its foot in mire, its summits lost in glorious light Nirvânic” (Ibid:47); “the three vestures of the Path” (Ibid: 32); “Om! I believe it is not all the Arhats that get of the Nirvânic Path the sweet fruition” (Ibid: 70).</p>
<p>Search for the paths; clean heart; face passions incarnate; Dâna, giving, generosity is the entrance to the path; daring; passion and desire will remove you from the path; Virâga, indifference to sensory objects is the second path.</p>	<p>““Search for the Paths [...] be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey” (Blavatsky 1889: xii, 25); The Paths are two; the great Perfections three; six are the Virtues that transform the body into the Tree of Knowledge” (Ibid: 23); “The rugged Path of four-fold Dhyâna winds on uphill” (Ibid: 45); “Thou hast to fight thy way through portals seven, seven strongholds held by cruel crafty Powers—passions incarnate” Blavatsky 1889:</p>

	<p>46); “The Pâramitâ heights are crossed by a still steeper path” (Ibid); “Pâramitâs of perfection—the virtues transcendental six and ten in number—along the weary Path” (Ibid:49); “To “practise the Pâramitâ Path” means to become a Yogi with a view of becoming an ascetic” (Ibid 85); “Dâna, the gate that standeth at the entrance of the path” (Ibid: 52); “The path that leadeth on, is lighted by one fire—the light of daring, burning in the heart” (Ibid: 54); “Path fourth, the lightest breeze of passion or desire will stir the steady light upon the pure white walls of Soul” (Ibid: 56); “Hast not thou entered Tao, “the Path” that leads to knowledge—the fourth truth?” (Ibid: 21); “Stern and exacting is the virtue of Virâga. If thou its path would’st master, thou must keep thy mind and thy perceptions far freer than before from killing action” (Ibid: 57); “Know, Conqueror of Sins, once that a Sowanee hath cross’d the seventh Path, all Nature thrills with joyous awe and feels subdued” (Ibid: 65); “Thou wilt be master of the sevenfold Path: but not till then, O candidate for trials passing speech” (Ibid: 61); “Arhats lead man into “the Path of Righteousness” (Ibid: 95); “The “Path of Salvation”—is the last one” (Ibid: 80).</p>
<p>Merge lower senses with higher; sacrifice personal self to impersonal SELF; distance oneself from objects of senses by travelling the sensory path of hearing, listening, seeing, touching et al; the first path is Nirvanic ocean; the second Sakridâgâmin; the third Anâgâmin and the fourth Rahat or Arhat.</p>	<p>“Merge into one sense thy senses, if thou would’st be secure against the foe. ’Tis by that sense alone which lies concealed within the hollow of thy brain, that the steep path which leadeth to thy Master may be disclosed before thy Soul’s dim eyes” (Blavatsky 1889: 16); “Before thou standest on the threshold of the Path; before thou crossest the foremost Gate, thou hast to merge the two into the One and sacrifice the personal to SELF impersonal...” (Ibid: 50); “When thou hast reached that state, the Portals that thou hast to conquer on the Path fling open wide their gates to let thee pass” (Ibid: 61); “Thou hast estranged thyself from objects of the senses, travelled on the “Path of seeing,” on the “Path of hearing,” and standest in the light of Knowledge. Thou hast now reached Titikshâ state” (Ibid: 64); “Mârga—’Path” (Ibid: 68); “Such is the Dhyâna Path, the haven of the Yogi, the blessed goal that Srotâpattis crave” (Ibid: 69); “Not so when he hath crossed and won the Aryahata Path (Arthat or Arhan)” (Ibid); “Such is the Ârya Path, Path of the Buddhas of perfection” (Ibid 70, 71). “Sowanee is one who practices Sowan, the first path in Dhyân, a Srotâpatti” (Ibid: 93); “Srotâpatti—(lit.) “he who has</p>

entered the stream” that leads to the Nirvânic ocean. This name indicates the first Path. The name of the second is the Path of Sakridâgâmin, “he who will receive birth (only) once more.” The third is called Anâgâmin, “he who will be reincarnated no more,” unless he so desires in order to help mankind. The fourth Path is known as that of Rahat or Arhat. This is the highest. An Arhat sees Nirvâna during his life. For him it is no post-mortem state, but Samâdhi, during which he experiences all Nirvânic bliss” (Ibid: 87, 88); “This is the fourth “Path” out of the five paths of rebirth which lead and toss all human beings into perpetual states of sorrow and joy. These “paths” are but subdivisions of the One, the Path followed by Karma” (Ibid: 81); “Antahkarana is the lower Manas, the Path of communication or communion between the personality and the higher Manas or human Soul. At death it is destroyed as a Path or medium of communication, and its remains survive in a form as the Kâmarûpa—the ‘shell” (Ibid: 88, 89); “Jñâna-Mârga is the “Path of Jñâna,” literally; or the Path of pure knowledge, of Paramârtha or (Sanskrit) Svasamvedana “the self-evident or self-analysing reflection” (Ibid: 92); “This same popular reverence calls “Buddhas of Compassion” those Bodhisattvas who, having reached the rank of an Arhat (i.e., having completed the fourth or seventh Path), refuse to pass into the Nirvânic state or “don the Dharmakâya robe and cross to the other shore,” as it would then become beyond their power to assist men even so little as Karma permits” (Ibid: 95); “The Bodhisattva develops it in himself as he proceeds on the Path” (Ibid: 96); “Long and weary is the way before thee” (Ibid: 16); “point thou the way to other men” (Ibid: 23); “Point out the “Way”—however dimly, and lost among the host—as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness” (Ibid: 36); “the Vale of Refuge—Jñâna Mârga, “path of pure knowledge” (Ibid: 60); “For change is thy great foe. This change will fight thee off, and throw thee back, out of the Path thou treadest, deep into viscous swamps of doubt” (Ibid: 62).

TABLE D
TABLE OF MEANINGS WITH ANNOTATIONS FOR “SOUL.”

ANNOTATIONS	MEANINGS
<p>Soul must unite with the silent speaker; soul of earth; The senses of the soul are different from the physiological ones. For instance, for the soul to hear, the mystic must become deaf to sense-impressions derived from the material world. If the soul believes in a separate existence “I” is delusion.</p>	<p>“Before the Soul can hear, the image (man) has to become as deaf... Before the soul can comprehend and may remember, she must unto the Silent Speaker... For then the soul will hear, and will remember” (Blavatsky 1889: 2,3); “If thy soul smiles while bathing in the Sunlight of thy Life; if thy soul sings within her chrysalis of flesh and matter; 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” (Ibid:3); “When to the World’s turmoil thy budding soul lends ear; when to the roaring voice of the great illusion thy Soul responds; when frightened at the sight of the hot tears of pain, when deafened by the cries of distress, thy soul withdraws like the shy turtle within the carapace of SELFHOOD, learn, O Disciple, of her Silent “God,” thy Soul is an unworthy shrine” (Ibid:3, 4); “When waxing stronger, thy Soul glides forth from her secure retreat...when beholding her image on the waves of Space she whispers, “This is I,”—declare, O Disciple, that thy soul is caught in the webs of delusion” (Ibid:4); “thy Soul should linger and be caught in its deceptive light” (Ibid:8); “The unwary Soul that fails to grapple with the mocking demon of illusion, will return to earth the slave of Mâra” (Ibid) “Behold the Hosts of Souls...” (Ibid).</p>
<p>One soul, universal parent.</p>	<p>“Universal Parent (SOUL)” (Ibid: 9); “the breath of the ONE-SOUL, the voice which filleth all, thy Master’s voice” (Ibid); “unseen by any save the eye of Soul” (Ibid: 15).</p>
<p>Compassion; chase away ambition, anger, hatred, e’en to the shadow of desire; Compassion Absolute.</p>	<p>“Let thy Soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun” (Ibid: 12); “from the stronghold of your Soul, chase all your foes away—ambition, anger, hatred, e’en to the shadow of desire—when even you have failed” (Ibid:63); “the more thy Soul unites with that which IS, the more thou wilt become Compassion Absolute” (Ibid:70).</p>

<p>Merge into one sense thy senses; flesh must be passive; unless the flesh is passive, head cool, the soul as firm and pure as flaming diamond, the radiance [kundalini'] will not reach the chamber; Hold back objects of sense impression; Hold back inner visions because they dull your Soul-light. Suspend movement of exterior and interior impressions; Both movement and stillness may be possible for you; body may be restless, mind may be at peace, and your soul may be as clear as a mountain lake; The inner being is the boundless fields of the Unknown; The soul first begins longing for final liberation; "slain the army of the thought sensations that, subtle and insidious, creep unasked within the Soul's bright shrine;" Control and master soul and body.</p>	<p>"Merge into one sense thy senses..."Tis by that sense alone which lies concealed within the hollow of thy brain, that the steep path which leadeth to thy Master may be disclosed before thy Soul's dim eyes" (Ibid: 16); "unless the flesh is passive, head cool, the soul as firm and pure as flaming diamond, the radiance will not reach the chamber, its sunlight will not warm the heart, nor will the mystic sounds of the Âkâsic heights reach the ear, however eager, at the initial stage"(Ibid: 18); "Withhold thy mind from all external objects, all external sights. Withhold internal images, lest on thy Soul-light a dark shadow they should cast" (Ibid: 19); "Both action and inaction may find room in thee; thy body agitated, thy mind tranquil, thy Soul as limpid as a mountain lake" (Ibid:30); "Fix thy Soul's gaze upon the star whose ray thou art, the flaming star that shines within the lightless depths of ever-being, the boundless fields of the Unknown" (Ibid: 31); "O Lanoo, becomes one in that birth when for the first the Soul begins to long for final liberation. Yet, O thou anxious one, no warrior volunteering fight in the fierce strife between the living and the dead" (Ibid: 39); "O thou of eager Soul, when thou hast reached the end and passed the seven Portals. Thy mind is clear" (Ibid: 39); "Beware of fear that spreadeth, like the black and soundless wings of midnight bat, between the moonlight of thy Soul and thy great goal that loometh in the distance far away" (Ibid: 53); "slain the army of the thought sensations that, subtle and insidious, creep unasked within the Soul's bright shrine" (Ibid: 56); "Thy Soul cannot be hurt but through thy erring body; control and master both, and thou art safe when crossing to the nearing 'Gate of Balance'" (Ibid: 58); "Till then, a task far harder still awaits thee: thou hast to feel thyself ALL-THOUGHT, and yet exile all thoughts from out thy Soul" (Ibid: 61).</p>
<p>Separate head learning from soul wisdom; separate eye from the heart doctrine; ignorance is better than head learning deprived from soul wisdom; mind needs breadth and depth; seek the eternal in the changeless sat; mind is like mirror; blend mind and soul; personality must be crushed out; light of spirit cannot dispel darkness of soul; master your soul; make hard your soul against the traps of the self, to deserve the name</p>	<p>"Learn above all to separate Head-learning from Soul Wisdom, the "Eye" from the "Heart" doctrine" (Ibid: 25); "... ignorance is better than Head-learning with no Soul-wisdom to illuminate and guide it" (Ibid); "The seeds of Wisdom cannot sprout and grow in airless space. To live and reap experience, the mind needs breadth and depth and points to draw it towards the Diamond Soul. Seek not those points in Mâyâ's realm; but soar beyond</p>

diamond soul; soul is human ego or manas, mind; heresy is to believe in the separate self; Mara is a demon who kills the soul; master of the soul is Alaya the universal soul or Atman; Consciousness merged in the Universal Consciousness, or Soul devoid of every attribute.

illusions, search the eternal and the changeless sat, mistrusting fancy's false suggestions" (Ibid: 25, 26); "For mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects. It needs the gentle breezes of Soul Wisdom to brush away the dust of our illusions. Seek O Beginner, to blend thy Mind and Soul" (Ibid: 26); "Ere thy Soul's mind can understand, the bud of personality must be crushed out, the worm of sense destroyed past resurrection" (Ibid: 12); "Shalt thou abstain from action? Not so shall gain. Thy soul her freedom" (Ibid: 31); "In Kshânti's essence bathe thy Soul; for now thou dost approach the portal of that name, the gate of fortitude and patience" (Ibid: 54); "Have mastery o'er thy Soul" (Ibid: 59); "No light that shines from Spirit can dispel the darkness of the nether Soul, unless all selfish thought has fled therefrom; Thy Soul-gaze centre on the One Pure Light, the Light that is free from affection, and use thy golden Key" (Ibid: 54); "Make hard thy Soul against the snares of Self; deserve for it the name of "Diamond-Soul" (Ibid: 60); "Diamond Soul" "Vajrasattva," a title of the supreme Buddha, the "Lord of all Mysteries," called Vajradhara and Âdi-Buddha" (Ibid: 83); "Soul is used here for the Human Ego or Manas, that which is referred to in our Occult Septenary division as the "Human Soul" (Vide the *Secret Doctrine*) in contradistinction to the Spiritual and Animal Souls" (Ibid: 74); "Attavâda, the heresy of the belief in Soul or rather in the separateness of Soul or Self from the One Universal, infinite Self (Ibid: 74); "Mâra is in exoteric religions a demon, an Asura, but in esoteric philosophy it is personified temptation through men's vices, and translated literally means "that which kills" the Soul" (Ibid: 76); "The "MASTER-SOUL" is Alaya, the Universal Soul or Âtman, each man having a ray of it in him and being supposed to be able to identify himself with and to merge himself into it" (Ibid: 88); "higher Manas or human Soul" (Ibid: 89); "The Dharmakâya body is that of a complete Buddha, i.e., no body at all, but an ideal breath: Consciousness merged in the Universal Consciousness, or Soul devoid of every attribute" (Ibid: 96); "The name of Hall the second is the Hall of Learning. In it thy Soul will find the blossoms of life, but under every flower a serpent coiled" (Ibid: 6).

TABLE E
**TABLE OF MEANINGS WITH ANNOTATIONS FOR “SELF” &
 RELATED TO SELF.**

ANNOTATIONS	MEANINGS
<p>Higher ego, manas or mind is the thinking self or principle; higher self is atman; living and immortal higher ego; SELF eternal; Christ, Krishna, Inner God = higher self; great master is the higher self; soul refers to either human, ego or manas; personal lower self; Manas is knowledge itself;</p>	<p>“Higher Ego or Thinking self” (Ibid: 59); “The “Higher Self” the “seventh” principle” (Ibid: 84); “Mind (Manas) the thinking Principle or Ego in man, is referred to “Knowledge” itself, because the human Egos are called Mânasaputras the sons of (universal) Mind” (Ibid: 84); “Deva Egos...the reincarnating Ego” (Ibid: 29); “Soul is used here for the Human Ego or Manas” (Ibid: 74); “Every spiritual Ego is a ray of a ‘Planetary Spirit’” (Ibid: 84); “Reincarnating Ego is True Man” (Ibid: 83); “The “living” is the immortal Higher Ego, and the “dead”—the lower personal Ego” (Ibid: 86); “SELF which is ‘eternal’” (Ibid: x); “Krishna-Christos, the “Higher Self” (Ibid: xi); “Inner God the Higher Self” (Ibid: 9); “Silent self” (Ibid: 30); “The “great Master” is the term used by lanoos or chelas to indicate one’s “Higher Self” (Ibid: 73); “Âtman the “Self” (the Higher Self) with the Brahmins, and Christos with the ancient Gnostics” (Ibid: 74); Soul refers to “Human Ego or Manas” (Ibid); “Soul or Self from the One Universal, infinite Self” (Ibid); “Astral or Personal Self” (Ibid: 77); “Weaker Selves;” “Personal lower ‘Self’” (Ibid: 85); “The Self of matter and the SELF of Spirit can never meet” (Ibid: 12); “War between Lower & Higher Self” (Ibid: 55); “Victim of thy Lower Self” (Ibid: 57); “the ‘dead’—the lower personal Ego” (Ibid).</p>
<p>True self is divine, the self of matter and self of spirit; non-self.</p>	<p>“True self” (Ibid); “Self-Divine” (Ibid: 38); “The Self of matter and the SELF of Spirit can never meet” (Ibid: 12); “Non-Self” (Ibid: 5); “Infinite Self;” “One Self;” “All-Self (Ibid).</p>
<p>Self immolation; renunciation of the self; self sacrifice; eternal bliss; praise leads to self-delusion; selfishness lead to death; selfish fear; liberation for the sake of the self is selfish; eternal harmony.</p>	<p>“Praise leads to self delusion” (Ibid: 4); “Self-gratulation” (Ibid); “Self-regard” (Ibid: 37) ‘Self-doomed;’ “To perish doomed is he, who... should act for Self” (Ibid: 35); “Snares of self;” “Selfhood” (Ibid: 4); “Shall selves be sacrificed to Self” (Ibid: 10,32); “selfish bliss” (Ibid: 10, 33); “selfish fear” (Ibid: 10, 35); “Liberation for the sake of Self” (Ibid: 10, 43). “Pratyeka-Buddha, makes his obeisance but to his Self”</p>

	(Ibid: 10, 45); “Self-doomed to live” (Ibid: 10, 68); “eternal Harmony, Alaya’s SELF” (Ibid: 69).
<p>Self-knowledge is compassion; self analysing reflection; know the SELF; way to freedom within the self.</p>	<p>“Self-knowledge” (Ibid:10,32); “Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child” (Ibid: 10, 31); “Svasamvedana “the self-evident or self-analysing reflection” (Ibid: 10, 92); “Self to be the Knower” (Ibid: 5); “The way to final freedom is within thy self. That way begins and ends outside of Self” (Ibid: 39); “Thou hast to saturate thyself with pure Alaya” (Ibid: 57); “That beam is thy life-guide and thy true Self, the Watcher and the silent Thinker, the victim of thy lower Self” (Ibid); “in the care of Self thy Soul should lose her foothold on the soil of Deva-knowledge” (Ibid: 62); “Deva-Wisdom thou hast won, must, from thyself, the channel of Alaya, be poured forth” (Ibid: 67); “The Tattvajñānin is the “knower” or discriminator of the principles in nature and in man; and tmajñānin is the knower of Âtman or the Universal, One Self” (Ibid: 74).</p>
<p>Slain thought and sensations; powers of the self should be known; highway of sensations; lower mind must be paralyzed; exile all thoughts from mind; the mind is controlled when the self is forgotten; turn away from objects of the senses; slain desire; feel yourself biding in all things and all things in self (union); diamond soul; restrain lower self; lower personality must be destroyed; personal consciousness needs to be paralyzed.</p>	<p>“mustered all the mental changes in thy Self and slain the army of the thought sensations” (Ibid: 55); “Knowest thou of Self the powers” ” (Ibid: 56); “the path that lies between thy Spirit and thy self, the highway of sensations” ” (Ibid: 56); “Mânasa rūpa. The first refers to the astral or personal Self; the second to the individuality or the reincarnating Ego whose consciousness on our plane or the lower Manas has to be paralysed” (Ibid: 77); “thou hast to feel thyself ALL-THOUGHT, and yet exile all thoughts from out thy Soul” ” (Ibid: 61); “in forgetting SELF, thy Soul lose o’er its trembling mind control” ” (Ibid: 62); “Thou hast estranged thyself from objects of the senses” ” (Ibid: 65); “those gifts and powers are not for Self” ” (Ibid: 66); Self Divine has slain the very knowledge of desire” ” (Ibid: 10, 38); “to feel thyself abiding in all things, all things in SELF” ” (Ibid: 1, 49); “Make hard thy Soul against the snares of Self; deserve for it the name of ‘Diamond-Soul’ ” (Ibid: 60); “Restrain Lower Self” ” (Ibid: 38); “Lower Personality is Destroyed” ” (Ibid: 78); “Ego...consciousness has to be paralysed” ” (Ibid: 77); “reincarnating Ego whose consciousness on our plane or the lower Manas—has to be paralysed” ” (Ibid: 77); “embodied Self not in the SELF which is ‘eternal’” (Ibid: x); “Thy body is not self, thy</p>

	<p>self is in itself without a body” (Ibid: 26); “sacrifice the personal to SELF impersonal” ” (Ibid: 50); “self, thou hast to give up Self to Non-Self” ” (Ibid: 5); “thy Self is lost in SELF, thyself unto THYSELF, merged in THAT SELF from which thou first didst radiate” ” (Ibid: 20).</p>
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TABLE F
TABLE OF MEANINGS WITH ANNOTATIONS FOR “LIGHT.”

ANNOTATIONS	MEANINGS
<p>Light of illusion and ignorance. Earth’s Twilight before the true light Sunlight of life, light of illusion and ignorance Fire of passions; Mara’s jewel blinds the mind and bewitches the senses; goal is bathed in the light of spirit; flesh passive, mind tranquil, the soul pure and firm, kundalini will not reach the heart, and the mystic sounds won’t be heard; withhold mind from external object, external sights, withhold internal images. Sensory images and sights cast a dark shadow.</p>	<p>“If thy soul smiles while bathing in the Sunlight of thy Life... know, O Disciple, thy Soul is of the earth” (Ibid: 3); “This earth... is but the...entrance leading to the twilight that precedes the valley of true light—that light which no wind can extinguish, that light which burns without a wick or fuel” (Ibid: 4); “is the Hall in which thou saw’st the light, in which thou livest and shalt die” (Ibid: 6); “Sunlight of life” (Ibid); “Beware, Lanoo, lest dazzled by illusive radiance thy Soul should linger and be caught in its deceptive light” (Ibid: 8); “This light shines from the jewel of the Great Ensnarer, (Mâra). The senses it bewitches, blinds the mind, and leaves the unwary an abandoned wreck” (Ibid: 8); “the goal—beyond which lie, bathed in the sunlight of the Spirit, glories untold, unseen by any save the eye of Soul” (Ibid: 15); “The light from the ONE Master, the one unfading golden light of Spirit, shoots its effulgent beams on the disciple from the very first. Its rays thread through the thick dark clouds of matter” (Ibid: 17, 18); “Now here, now there, these rays illumine it, like sun-sparks light the earth through the thick foliage of the jungle growth. But, O Disciple, unless the flesh is passive, head cool, the soul as firm and pure as flaming diamond, the radiance will not reach the chamber, its sunlight will not warm the heart, nor will the mystic sounds of the Âkâsic heights reach the ear, however eager, at the initial stage” (Ibid: 18); “Withhold thy mind from all external objects, all external sights. Withhold internal images, lest on thy Soul-light a dark shadow they should cast” (Ibid: 19); “And now, Lanoo, thou art the doer and the witness, the radiator and the radiation, Light in the Sound, and the Sound in the Light” (Ibid: 20); “The light that falls upon them shines from thyself, O thou who wast disciple but art Teacher now” (Ibid: 21); “Behold! thou hast become the light, thou hast become the Sound, thou art thy Master and thy God” (Ibid: 22); “Fix thy Soul’s gaze upon the star whose ray thou art, the flaming star that shines within</p>

	<p>the lightless depths of ever-being, the boundless fields of the Unknown” (Ibid: 31); “The Shangna robe, ’tis true, can purchase light eternal” (Ibid:33).</p>
<p>Light of truth; light of knowledge; allow no image of the senses to interfere with spiritual light; candidate for light; the path that leads to light (<i>nirvāna</i>); light of daring; passion and desire will stir the light upon the pure white; man is a beam of light.</p>	<p>“Hall which lies beyond, wherein all shadows are unknown, and where the light of truth shines with unfading glory” (Ibid: 7); “light of Knowledge” (Ibid: 65); “Stifle the voice of flesh, allow no image of the senses to get between its light and thine that thus the twain may blend in one” (Ibid: 7); “Yea, Lord; I see the PATH; its foot in mire, its summits lost in glorious light Nirvānic” (Ibid: 47); “before thou wert made fit to A saint, an adept meet thy Teacher face to face, thy MASTER light to light, what wert thou told?” (Ibid: 49); “O candidate for light?” (Ibid: 51); “The path that leadeth on, is lighted by one fire—the light of daring, burning in the heart” (Ibid: 54); “No light that shines from Spirit can dispel the darkness of the nether Soul...” (Ibid); “For, on Path fourth, the lightest breeze of passion or desire will stir the steady light upon the pure white walls of Soul” (Ibid: 56); “Man is its crystal ray; a beam of light immaculate within, a form of clay material upon the lower surface” (Ibid: 58); “Thy Soul-gaze centre on the One Pure Light, the Light that is free from affection, and use thy golden Key” (Ibid: 58); “golden light in which the Victor bathes...” (Ibid: 72); “Step out from sunlight into shade, to make more room for others” (Ibid: 32).</p>
<p>Daring approaches light; fear remains in darkness; compassion by giving light to all.</p>	<p>“The more one dares, the more he shall obtain. The more he fears, the more that light shall pale—and that alone can guide. For as the lingering sunbeam, that on the top of some tall mountain shines, is followed by black night when out it fades, so is heart-light” (Ibid: 54); “For as the lingering sunbeam, that on the top of some tall mountain shines, is followed by black night when out it fades, so is heart-light. When out it goes, a dark and threatening shade will fall from thine own heart upon the path, and root thy feet in terror to the spot” (Ibid: 54); “the light acquired, like to the Bodhisattvas twain” (Ibid: 67); “give light to all, but take from none” (Ibid: 67); “universal essence, the light of everlasting Right...” (Ibid: 70); “Behold, the mellow light that floods the Eastern...” (Ibid: 72).</p>

<p>Pilgrim desolation and starving for bread of wisdom.</p>	<p>“Give light and comfort to the toiling pilgrim, and seek out him who knows still less than thou; who in his wretched desolation sits starving for the bread of Wisdom and the bread which feeds the shadow, without a Teacher, hope or consolation, and—let him hear the Law” (Ibid: 37).</p>
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TABLE G
TABLE OF MEANINGS WITH ANNOTATIONS FOR “HEART.”

ANNOTATIONS	MEANINGS
Kundalini; fiery power; chamber of the heart.	“fiery power retire into the inmost chamber, the chamber of the Heart” (Ibid: 9); “The inner chamber of the Heart, called in Sanskrit Brahmapura. The “fiery power” is Kundalini” (Ibid: 76); “Then from the heart that Power shall rise into the sixth” (Ibid: 9); “Kundalini, the “Serpent Power” or mystic fire” (Ibid: 13).
Karmic heart, Mystic sounds.	“its sunlight will not warm the heart, nor will the mystic sounds of the Âkâsic heights...”(Ibid: 18); “The hand of Karma guides the wheel; the revolutions mark the beatings of the Karmic heart” (Ibid: 27).
Clean heart; compassion; patience; daring; attune heart and mind to universal mind; remove pollution from heart; merciful heart.	“make clean thy heart” (Ibid: 11); “be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey...”(Ibid: 25); “Let thy Soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun” (Ibid: 12); “let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain, nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed” (Ibid: 13); “O thou of heart most merciful...”(Ibid: 35); “O thou of patient heart. Be of good cheer and rest content with fate” (Ibid: 13); “let not the fruit of action and inaction be thy motive, thou of dauntless heart” (Ibid: 41); ““Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind?” (Ibid: 51); “so must the heart of him ‘who in the stream would enter,’ thrill in response to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes” (Ibid: 50, 51); “the light of daring, burning in the heart” (Ibid: 54); “When out it goes, a dark and threatening shade will fall from thine own heart upon the path, and root thy feet in terror to the spot” (Ibid); “Aspirant, look deep within the well of thine own heart, and answer. Knowest thou of Self the powers, O thou perceiver of external shadows?” (Ibid: 56); “Thou hast removed pollution from thine heart and bled it from impure desire” (Ibid: 59).
Doctrine of the Heart; Dharma of the Heart; Soul Learning; Soul Wisdom Doctrine of the Eye; Head Learning; Open Path; Selfish.	“Doctrine of the Heart...”(Ibid: 23); “Who shall first hear the doctrine of two Paths in one, the truth unveiled about the Secret Heart?” (Ibid:

	<p>23); “yet fails to reach the heart of all” (Ibid: 25); “Head-learning from Soul Wisdom, the “Eye” from the “Heart” doctrine” (Ibid); “The “Doctrine of the Eye” is for the crowd, the “Doctrine of the Heart,” for the elect” (Ibid: 27); “Great Sifter” is the name of the “Heart Doctrine...”(Ibid); “Thus saith the “Doctrine of the Heart” (Ibid: 29); “The Dharma of the “Heart” is the embodiment of Bodhi, the Permanent and Everlasting” (Ibid); “Open Path, the way to selfish bliss, shunned by the Bodhisattvas of the “Secret Heart,” the Buddhas of Compassion” (Ibid: 33); “Yet, if the “Doctrine of the Heart” is too high winged for thee...”(Ibid: 34).</p>
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