

Translation of Balbodh by Shyamdas.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL CHILDREN

The next teaching in the Sixteen Works is Shri Vallabhacharya's Instruction for Spiritual Children, the Bala Bodha. It was originally written for Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple Narayandas. It is truly a guide for novices on the spiritual path and it maps out the different approaches to liberation. After explaining four possible ways to achieve liberation, the Master touches upon the Beloved Devotional Practice. Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya explains...

After bowing to the all-blissful Hari, I now explain the essence of all teachings to those souls who are young on the spiritual path. (1)

Sages have revealed that there are four pursuits of human life; dharma, wealth, desire and liberation. These teachings have been considered by teachers as well as God. (2)

The Vedas have already addressed the divine reality in terms of how to attain it as well as the object of that attainment. The pursuits of life have also been proclaimed by sages living in the world according to the teachings they received from God. (3)

I will now explain the goals that sages have revealed. The Vedas have explained the divine reality. (4a)

The doctrines that address dharma (proper behaviour), wealth and erotics have already explained the way of attaining these three pursuits of life and so I will not discuss them here. In this world there are four traditions concerning liberation, the fourth pursuit of life. Two schools teach that liberation is attained through self-effort while the other two paths take the assistance of God. (4b-5)

Both Yoga and Sankhya have been mentioned as the two schools whereby self-effort can produce the liberated state. The Sankhya system teaches external renunciation while the school of eight-fold yoga does not promote external renunciation. (6)

Practitioners in these two schools are deemed spiritually accomplished when they become forever free of all of their mistaken identifications relating to "me and mine". Then they become established in their true form. (7)

The actual methods for liberation have been revealed in certain portions of the Puranas. Enlightened sages have spoken about liberation in many different ways and the final reward that they all refer to is the same, as long as it doesn't contradict Vedic traditions. (8)

In the Path of Yoga, renunciation is not external, but is done inwardly with the mind. The eight-fold practice of knowing what to do, what to avoid, sitting properly, breath control, focus, one-pointed concentration, meditation and total absorption (samadhi) must all be perfected in this yoga for the practitioner to become accomplished. (9)

The two-fold path of liberation that relies upon the help of another (either Vishnu or Shiva) has also been recognized in Vedic literature. Know that the Creator Brahma is worshipped only by Brahmins in order for them to perfect their Brahmanhood. Therefore Brahma is not resorted to for liberation although there are a few mentions of Brahma awarding it. (10-11a) For those souls who desire to attain liberation with the help of another, both Shiva and Vishnu have been known to be their benefactors in this world. (11b)

Vishnu is the sustainer of creation while Shiva is the destroyer. Both have been revealed as such in their own scriptures. Know without a doubt that the Supreme Brahman is both Vishnu and

Shiva for they have both been declared as the Self of all things. They have also been described in their own scriptures as being flawless and replete with all divine virtues. (12-13a)

Even though both are able to award enjoyment and liberation, it is quite clear that Shiva gives enjoyment while Vishnu bestows liberation. (13b-14a)

A powerful person in the world does not give away that which he cherishes most, except on rare occasion and even then, he would only give to someone who is very dear to him. Since Shiva's greatest asset is liberation and Vishnu's great joy is His enjoyment with Laxshmi, Shiva gives enjoyment while Vishnu awards liberation. They reward those who belong to Them and have taken their refuge. (14b-15a)

Vishnu and Shiva each have their own specific practices that their followers adhere to in order to attain their respective rewards. If either Shiva or Vishnu have to give something that They are not accustomed to giving, then it is very difficult for Them to do that. (15b-16a)

Souls are by their very nature impure. In order for them to become forever free from impurities, they should practice devotional listening and other appropriate spiritual practices. Everything becomes accomplished when love arises from all their efforts. (16b-17a)

So know that liberation is easily attained from Vishnu and similarly, enjoyment is readily granted by Shiva. (17b)

A practitioner certainly attains the exalted position of belonging to Him when there is Self-dedication. If the divine state of Belonging has not arisen, then one should take His shelter and feel that one belongs to Him while observing at least some dharma practices that are prescribed for that particular stage of life. (18)

If one does not attend to these practices, then one's burden will be two-fold, for the spiritual state of Belonging has not been achieved nor has the merit of proper action. By understanding all that I have said in this teaching, confusion concerning the pursuits of life will never arise. (19-20a)