

Śrī Brhad-bhāgavatāmṛta

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Volume-2

Śrī-goloka-māhātmya

The Glories of Goloka

Chapter-2

Jñāna: Knowledge

We fully approve
of this "bheda-abheda" tattva
In fact, if presented with logical
argument, everything about it is correct

2.2.196

asmin hi bhedābhedākhye
siddhānte 'smat-su-sammate
yuktyāvatārite sarvaṃ
niravadyaṃ dhruvaṃ bhavet

We fully approve (asmat-su-sammate) of this philosophical doctrine (asmin siddhānte), called bhedābheda (bheda abheda ākhye). Indeed, when it is presented with logical argument (yuktyā avatārite hy), everything about it (sarvaṃ) is certain and irrefutable (niravadyaṃ dhruvaṃ bhavet).

The scriptures dedicated solely to propounding pure devotional service agree with the concept of bhedābheda and with its logical supporting arguments.

With the help of this philosophical framework for understanding the identities, relationships, and purposes of all things that exist, the bhakti-śāstras faultlessly explain the path of devotional service and reconcile all possible doubts and contradictions, both spoken and unspoken.

Thus the presentation of the bhakti-śāstras is definitive (dhruvam).

The impersonalists say that since the jīvas come into being from Brahman and are again absorbed back into Brahman they are altogether nondifferent from Brahman.

But even according to this theory the happiness of impersonal liberation is meager, because that liberation rules out perception of the totality of Brahman.

Waves do arise in one part of an ocean and dissolve in another, on the ocean's shore, and since the waves and the ocean consist of the same water they are nondifferent.

Yet even though the waves, when they dissolve, again become one with the ocean in the sense that their separate existence is no longer visible, the waves don't have the same depth as the ocean, nor can they generate precious jewels, so the waves and the ocean are also different.

Applying the metaphor of the ocean and the waves, one formulation of impersonalist theory would have it that when jīvas attain liberation by merging back into the individual portions of Brahman from which they originated they again become one with Brahman.

But the bhakti-śāstras respond that because the jīvas are by their very nature separate and finite they cannot become the undivided Supreme and enjoy all of His unlimited bliss.

On the contrary, even according to the theory, they continue to exist separately in liberation, retaining their individuality even in union with the Supreme.

This implies that although they are nondifferent from Brahman they are also in some ways different from Him.

The scriptures accordingly describe that sometimes, by the Supreme Lord's special mercy, a liberated soul merged into oneness with Brahman becomes eager for the joys of bhakti and once again assumes his distinct identity so that he can have a spiritual body with which to serve the Lord. On this point Śrī Śaṅkarācārya-pāda has said:

saty api bhedāpagame nātha
tavāham na māmakīnas tvam
sāmudro hi taraṅgaḥ kva-
ca na samudras tāraṅgaḥ

“My Lord (nātha), even when all difference is gone (bheda apagame saty api), I am still Yours (tava aham), though You are not mine (na māmakīnas tvam). A wave belongs to the ocean (sāmudro hi taraṅgaḥ), but surely the ocean does not belong to the wave (kva ca na samudras tāraṅgaḥ).” (Prārthanā-ṣaṭpadī 3)

This statement by Ācārya Śaṅkara, expressing the basic idea of the bhedābheda philosophy, is very much to the point.

Even after the jīva's illusory difference from the Lord is destroyed his real difference of belonging to the Lord remains.

If this were not so, there would be no meaning to the words nātha tavaṁham (✓) (✓) (“Lord, I am Yours”).

The separate river waters cannot literally become the ocean, which has qualities the rivers do not possess, like the ability to produce gems.

The rivers are only said to become one with the ocean because after they flow into the ocean their separate existence is no longer visible.

But in fact that oneness is unreal.

In the same way, liberation as impersonally conceived is unreal, for it implies that liberation equals nonexistence, like that of an extinguished flame.

Again, if the liberated self has become completely one with Brahman, he has no scope for happiness, since the liberated self is not supposed to keep the mind and the other faculties of individual consciousness with which happiness could be tasted.

Even when liberated, the soul remains individual.

Partial Pralaya
→ Death.

Mukti
Complete Pralaya

Thus when the standard scriptures consider the four kinds of annihilation—the constant degradation of matter, the partial destruction of the universe at the end of Brahmā's day, the total destruction of the universe at the end of Brahmā's life, and the liberation of individual souls—the scriptures distinguish between liberation and total annihilation.

The words &
of great souls should be
accepted as standard evidence
in all circumstances

2.2.197

sadā pramāṇa-bhūtānām
asmākaṁ mahatām tathā
vākyāni vyavahārās ca
pramāṇam khalu sarvathā

We scriptures are always accepted as authoritative (sadā pramāṇa-
bhūtānām). Our words (asmākaṁ vākyāni), and the words and
behavior (tathā vākyāni vyavahārās ca) of great souls (mahatām),
are standard evidence (khalu pramāṇam) in all circumstances
(sarvathā).

In the opinion of some transcendentalists, the Absolute Truth, eternally one without a second, becomes differentiated only by the superficial covering of illusion, which makes the one Absolute falsely appear as many jīvas.

And when, by knowledge of reality, that false appearance is stripped away, only the Absolute Truth remains, manifest alone.

Thus when illusion is dispelled—the illusion that arises when circumstantial designations make the jīvas seem to separately exist—one attains mukti, in which one perceives, as before, the intense bliss of one's true identity as Brahman.

And so, by this reasoning, Brahman realization does constitute substantial happiness.

In mukti, furthermore, according to this view, there is no longer attraction to the false ego, even in its most subtle forms.

Indeed, even the very person who once relished false happiness from false ego no longer exists.

Thus in mukti real happiness is known, the happiness that comes from realizing the true identity of the self.

The proponents of devotion to the Personality of Godhead may believe that when the personal identity of Śrī Bhagavān, the embodiment of sac-cid-ānanda, is constantly revealed they can enjoy the most sublime and concentrated bliss, greater than that of liberation, and so they may claim that bhakti is greater than mukti.

But these beliefs are incorrect; the bliss of Brahman is perfect and complete.

Such are the views of impersonalists.

And in texts 197 through 204 the bhakti-śāstras refute such views.