

27<sup>th</sup> January 2021

## Instructions

**“He who sees by himself, needs no instruction. But the miserable, afflicted fool who delights in pleasures and whose miseries do not cease, is turned around in the whirl of pains.”**

*Jaina Sutras, Ācārāṅga Sutra Book 1 (6<sup>th</sup> century BC)*

The bookcase behind me where I'm writing this comes from *Ikea*. It's basic as bookcases go, but it fits the space and hasn't fallen over. At the bottom, out of sight behind a strategically placed box, is a piece that's back-to-front. Instead of the veneer showing to match the rest of the bookcase, there's bare wood. When I was building the bookcase, I fitted it the wrong way round – because I didn't follow the instructions. I'm one of those the quote above refers to, “who sees by himself” and “needs no instruction”. Not surprisingly, there have been numerous times when “miseries do not cease” over the years. My wife says, “It's a man thing.” No! I'll take ownership of this character flaw. It's me! I *should* read the instructions.

But what if the “instructions” were for something *much* more important than a bookcase? There are roadworks close to our home with a busy road restricted to one lane. So there are instructions for passing motorists. “Road Works”, “No Parking”, “Narrow lane”. But the most important ones are: “Priority over oncoming vehicles” and “Give way to oncoming vehicles”, so that, one by one, the cars can pass safely. Ignore the instructions? Bang! You have a major collision.

A man asks Jesus, “What must I do to have eternal life?” Follow the instructions, he's told. You have the Commandments, clear instructions for building a good life. “But I've done all that,” he replies. “OK,” says Jesus, “but you still lack one thing. Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor.” But the man doesn't like this at all. His face falls and he goes away sorrowful, we're told, ignoring the most important instruction.

What are the instructions that matter to us? Rules to follow, or challenges to our attitudes? And when *we* don't follow the instructions, do we hide our mistakes, own up to our failures, go away sorrowful, or head for a crash? Instructions! Who needs them? It looks like we all do.

### **A prayer for today**

*Direct me, Lord, in your way; guide me, Lord, in your truth; instruct me, Lord, in your life, that I might go, and do, and live, and love for you. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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