

Shreya and Preya

Sonaram Chutiya

Human life, unlike other lives, is not simply for enjoying the fruit of *karma*; it is also a means (sādhan) of securing happiness for the future. In the Vedānta's opinion, the means of happiness (sukh-sādhan) are of two kinds:-

- **Shreya**

- **Preya**

Shreya, or the means of securing *permanent* happiness by contemplating on the Supreme Person (Param Brahma) in His essential ever-joyous form. And Preya, or the cause of indulging in all sorts of *material* enjoyment – happiness derived from wife-children, wealth-property, power-fame, etc. The means for attaining heaven is the means of Preya.

The majority of the people are easily attracted towards Preya as they do not think of the future. Remaining engrossed in direct enjoyment, they secure happiness only for an instant. On the other hand, the people favored upon by God, though very few in number, detach themselves from such (material) pleasures whose charms are only illusory and fraught with woeful results. These people remain engrossed in matters of Shreya (shreya-jijnāsā).

Between these two categories of people, the ones who embark on the path of Shreya without being swayed by Preya – they benefit themselves in every way. They are able to rid themselves of all kinds of worldly affliction. The ever-joyous Supreme Person of infinite, eternal joy these seekers become acquainted with. “*jīva amse tumi pravesilā gāve gāve*” [Kirttana] (“In parts as individual selves Thou hast entered into each body”) - one then intuitively realizes the meaning of these great words of the Mahāpurusha (Sankaradeva). It is certain that those who immerse themselves in the material enjoyment (bhoga) cannot make sufficient progress in the matter of achieving the *supreme target* of human life. One confusedly thinks the transitory gratification of the senses (bhoga) as identical to happiness (sukha); one is deprived of the extreme, everlasting, *real happiness*. The Vedānta has declared:-

**shreyascha preyascha manushyametaustau
samparitya vivinakti dhirah /
shreyo hi dhira'bhipreyaso vrinite
preyo mando yogakshemād vrinite //**

- Kathopanishad, 1/2/2

[shreyah cha preyah cha = Shreya and Preya, these two; manushyam etah = before man; dhirah = the intelligent person; tau = Shreya and Preya, between these two entities; samparitya = after deep consideration; abhivrinite = accepts as the best; yogakshema = with the desire of materialist yog and kshema (yoga = the obtaining of things not yet obtained; kshema = the preservation of things that have been obtained)]

Vyākhyā (Interpretation): - The majority of the people, because they do not believe in re-birth, do not feel the necessity of enquiring into Shreya and Preya, and thus they become deeply attached to worldly pleasures, and they ruin this precious (human) body which even the gods rare to get, in animal-like sense-gratification. On the other hand, the wise and steady persons (dhira) who believe in re-birth and the other world, they attempt to thoroughly understand the pros and cons of both Preya and Shreya and like the discriminating swan, they accept Shreya rejecting Preya.

Shreya and Preya - the analysis of these two great tattvas (entities) is very deep and subtle. The many temptations of this world - sons, progeny, etc, the enjoyment of wealth and property, and of the innumerable, divine pleasures of heaven, enjoying with women of matchless beauty. Only by cultivating indifference to and detachment from this external thirst (trishnā) for bhoga (enjoyment) must one enter the subtle arena of Shreya.

Only **Brahma-cintā** or contemplation of the Supreme Person, the creator, preserver and annihilator of infinite crores of universes, is the ultimate panacea for the inquisitive mind of the inquisitive devotee - the *supreme path* of the means of Shreya.

The supreme path of Shreya

And regarding this supreme path, the Vedānta has declared:-

**sarvevedā yatpadamāmananti
tapāmsi sarvāni ca yadvadanti /
yadicchanto brahmacaryamcaranti tatte
padamsamgrahena bravimomyetata //**

- Kathopanishad, 1/2/15

[sarvevedāh = the entire Veda; yat padam = the Supreme Goal which; āmananti = proves again and again; vadanti = [that] goal towards which [it] draws attention; samgrahena = in short; bravimomyetata (bravimi + om + iti + etata) = the mono-syllable (ekākshara) ‘Om’ denoting the Supreme Truth (parama tattva) of **Lord Purusottama** - I tell [you] about this]

Vyākhyā (Interpretation):-

[The advice of Dharmarāja Yama to the Brahma-inquisitive Nachiketā]

Who has been described in so many different ways in so many verses by all the Vedas; Who has been declared to be the Ultimate and the Supreme Goal to be realized through all meditation, tapas and all other means, and for attaining Which Truth, the sādhakas (spiritual aspirants) have so faithfully set themselves on the path of Brahmacharya and other vratas, - that Supreme Person, Lord Purusottama’s Supreme Essence I am telling you in short: That Supreme Essence (parama tattva) is “Om” “ॐ” (ॐ).

The symbol of Param Brahma (Supreme Spirit) or His Primordial Name is “Om”.

It is this ekākshara “Om” of the Vedānta, denoting Param Brahma, Which is the ‘**Krishna**’ “कृष्ण” of the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata*. That the religion propagated by Srimanta Sankaradeva also stands for *this* (Param) Brahma is proved primarily by the first two lines of his Vāṅmayī Murti (image-like holy book), the ‘*Kirtana Ghosā*’ :-

prathame pranāmo brahmarupi sanātana /

sarba avatārara kārana Nārāyana //

-Kirttana

First of all I bow to the Eternal Nārāyana Who in the form of Brahma is the cause of all
Incarnations.

It should be realized that the sat-cit-ānanda Brahma, though nirguna (attributeless;
indeterminate) and nirākār (formless), is yet the saguna sākāra **Krishna** and it is this incarnate **Krishna**
Who propagated the Religion of the Name (Nāma-Dharma):-

Krishna-surya bhoilanta udita /

Nām-Dharma karilā bidita //

-Kirttana

The sun named **Krishna** has risen,
The Religion of the Name (Nāma-Dharma) it has spread.

[A recipient of the prestigious Srimanta Sankaradeva Award, Vaisnava Pandit Sonārām Chutiya is a leading scholar of Assam Vaisnavism. Shri Chutiya also held the office of padādhikār of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, the largest socio-religious organization in Assam.]

Translated from the original 'Brahma-Cintā' written in Assamese and re-produced in Vaisnava Pandit Sonārām Chutiya Racanāvali (Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, 1998); English translation of the verse from the Kirttana Ghosā by Dimbeswar Neog ('Jagadguru Sankardew', 2nd Edition, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, 1998). Although we have tried our best to faithfully adhere to the original, we admit that it is impossible to convey the spirit of the original in case of writings of this stature. As such, our translation is most imperfect and we seek forgiveness from all, including the author, for any lapse on our part - editor@atributetosankaradeva.org