

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

2/2 (Ślōka 11-28), Sunday, 12 June 2022

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/4TcQdGLtfik>

Austerity, Sacrifice and Charity leading to Spiritual Belief

The **17th Chapter** is **Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga**, that explains the importance of faith influenced by the three *Guṇas* present in every living being. These modes of material nature also influence the ways of sacrifice, austerity and charity performed by humans.

The session began after offering prayers followed by ceremonial lighting of the lamp.

The 14th Chapter enlightened about the nature of the three *guṇas* and their manifestations in the practical life will be explained in this chapter. One's nature or *swabhava* results from a combination of these *guṇas*, whichever is dominant in a person, one acts accordingly. Importance of intention in every action has been discussed in the previous session.

Sattvaguna, *Rajoguna* and *Tamoguna* are reflected in the ways one performs sacrifice, austerity and charity too.

Yajña in general is sacrifice which are of 5 types or *havan* is just a way to perform it. The five great Vedic *yajña* (sacrifices) include:

- **Brahma yajña** - Refers to realization of Brahman by *Swādhyāya* (study of scriptures) and gaining knowledge from our surroundings.
- **Deva yajña** - Refers to sacrifice offered to Gods for fulfilling our desires. E.g. *Putr kāmēṣṭhi yajña* performed by King Janaka for getting a son.
- **Pitr yajña** - Refers to sacrifice offered to ancestors.
- **Bhuta yajña** - Refers to performing good deeds always.
- **Manushya yajña** - Refers to performing community service like the services rendered by volunteers of Gita Pariwar.

In *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, sacrifice is one's duty and responsibility in performing actions in life. *Tapa* is self-denial and exercising control over thoughts. *Daan* is charity or charitable actions performed for the welfare of the society.

17.11

**aphalākāṅkṣibhīryajño, vidhidṛṣṭo ya ijjate,
yaṣṭavyameveti manaḥ(s), samādhāya sa sātṭvikaḥ. 17.11**

The sacrifice which is offered, as ordained by scriptural injunctions, by men who expect no return and who believe that such sacrifices must be performed, is Sātṭvika in character.

A sacrifice performed according to scriptures and without expecting any reward is **Sātṭvika** in nature. One must consider it as a duty and complete it without any hesitation. The Supreme advises Arjuna to act and be a *aphalakankshi*, who never thinks about consequences. Arjuna is *nimitta*, who is just a medium to perform an action and HE has already decided the outcome.

It is the duty of a student to work hard in studies. Though he should aim at good marks, not completely focusing only on the marks. Similarly an employee's duty is to work but not always thinking about the salary. One should not be attached to the fruits of the action, rather they should focus on the action in their hand and feel it as their responsibility to act in the best way.

In 2nd Chapter, Paramātmā says that one's right is only to perform action because one can't control the consequences already decided by HIM. If one attaches deeply with the outcome, it leads to sorrow and pain of not able to achieve it.

Many experience fear of not knowing the future, feeling stressed and anxious because of the attachment to the result. This can be controlled by accepting every action as responsibility that needs to be fulfilled.

A mother asks a child, "do you love me and why..." The child gives various reasons for his love, which do not satisfy her. In the end he gets annoyed by repeated questions, asks the same to his mother. She answers that she loves him because he is a her part and she never felt separated. Her love is unconditional and without a reason.

The feeling of love and devotion towards one's duty, and feeling responsible towards work is Sātṭvik.

17.12

**abhisandhāya tu phalaṃ(n), dambhārthamapi caiva yat,
ijjate bharataśreṣṭha, taṃ(m) yajñaṃ(m) viddhi rājasam. 17.12**

That sacrifice however, which is offered for the sake of mere show or even with an eye to its fruit, know it to be Rājasika, Arjuna.

Rājasik perform sacrifice with a motive or to achieve something. One expects self-glorification and fame, a consequence of attachment to the materialistic world.

For example during navaratri celebrations many arrange *bhajan* and *puja* on a grand scale, with the intention to out show the others. This is purely the result of arrogance and pride. *Jaateshti yajña* in Upanishads is performed for fulfilling the desire of having children. **One should ultimately aim at becoming *triguṇātīt* by rising above all the *guṇas*.**

17.13

**vidhihīnamasrṣṭānnaṃ(m), mantrahīnamadakṣiṇaṃ,
śraddhāvirahitaṃ(m) yajñaṃ(n), tāmasaṃ(m) paricakṣate. 17.13**

A sacrifice, which is not in conformity with scriptural injunctions, in which no food is offered, and no sacrificial fees are paid, which is without sacred chant of hymns and devoid of faith, is said to be Tāmasika.

Tāmasik performs sacrifice against all believed ideas. One does not follow the scriptural sanctions, never recite the needed *mantra* and has no faith in the performance. In the same way it is not accompanied by *annadana* or *dakshina*. One does not distribute food during the ritual and grudges in paying the full amount of money to the priest.

17.14

**devadvijaguruprājña, pūjanaṃ(m) śaucamārjavam,
brahmacaryamahimsā ca, śārīraṃ(n) tapa ucyate. 17.14**

Worship of gods, the Brāhmanaṃ, one's guru, elders and great soul, purity, straightforwardness, continence and non-violence –these are called penance of the body.

The word *Tapa* or *Tapasya* immediately makes us imagine a half covered man sitting cross legged under a tree in deep meditation, or deep in water with eyes closed and joined hands.

The true meaning of Tapa is self-denial, which is denying the mind to mingle between several thoughts. This is difficult to achieve because mind is connected to all the senses that are always in contact of materialistic world, developing desires and making the mind anxious to continue action. Arjuna in Chapter 6 says controlling mind is like controlling air.

A student has to concentrate on his studies, for which he has to deny himself many things like going to parties, movies, spending a lot of time on social networking sites. Even these small things need a lot of effort to be controlled that can lead to depression and anxiety, creating distraction.

There are three levels of Tapa: body, mind and speech; shareera, mana and vachana tapsya.

Austerity of the body is reflected in one's actions. One needs to worship the *devatās* residing in Heaven for their blessings to complete a task properly. In 4th and 18th Chapter, *Śrī Bhagavān* points out the importance of worshipping them.

The Brahmins who know the *Sastras* and Scriptures should be worshipped for their knowledge. The *Shiksha guru* and *deeksha guru* who teach and guide one's life should be venerated. Then come the wise men or intellectuals, who are the pillars of society. It is said *vidyawaan sarvasya pujiyate*, an intellectual is praised and worshipped in all the worlds.

This body is a gift, and the Divine dwells in the heart. So it should always be kept clean. Swamiji says, "Till the time we need food, all the *nitya karmas* should be performed regularly." All the *vidhi*, *vidhan* should be followed meticulously.

Brahmacharya is an important aspect of *tapa*, where one needs to exercise control over sensual pleasures. The last Tapa for the body is the non-violent behaviour. One should not harm other lives either physically or even in the mind also. All these are considered the austerity of the body.

17.15

**anudvegakaram(m) vākyaṃ(m), satyaṃ(m) priyahitaṃ(ñ) ca yat,
svādhyāyābhyasanaṃ(ñ) caiva, vāñmayam(n) tapa ucyate. 17.15**

Words which cause no annoyance to others and are truthful, agreeable and beneficial, as well as the study of Vedas and other Śāstras and the practice of the chanting of Divine Name— this is known as penance of speech.

Austerity of speech lies in using the language truthfully and in a pleasant beneficial manner. To point out on the face of a blind person that he cannot see is harsh. One should respect other's sentiments and should use words to comfort and provide happiness.

A story about a King and an astrologer highlights this fact. An astrologer visited a court and predicted the King's future. He said "Oh King, You will live long and many near and dear will die before you." The King became furious and put him in jail. His brother visited the King the next day and said, "Oh King, your lifeline is long. Many will look up to you and you will be their strength in their last days." The King was pleased with these words and rewarded him. In both the cases the implication is the same. But with the former it is *apriyam*, and in the latter it is presented in a pleasant way.

Svadhya is the study of holy scriptures that leads to introspection and analysis.

17.16

**manaḥ(ph) prasādaḥ(s) saumyatvaṃ(m), maunamātmavinigrahaḥ,
bhāvasaṃśuddhirityetat, tapo mānasamucyate. 17.16**

Cheerfulness of mind, placidity, habit of contemplation on God, control of mind and perfect purity of inner feelings—all this is called austerity of the mind.

Austerity of the mind is being happy and serene in any state. One has to live through many tough and difficult situations, but through every adversity one should maintain equanimity. This comes when one cultivates purity in their thoughts and exercises control over all senses.

Mounam is an important aspect not only for speech but mind too, through which one should try to control the flow of thoughts. This will lead to giving up of excessive desires that can be achieved by constantly meditating and focusing on Yogeshwar, helping others and doing deeds beneficial to others.

17.17

**śraddhayā parayā taptaṃ(n), tapastattrividhaṃ(n) naraiḥ,
aphalākāñkṣibhiryuktaiḥ(s), sāttvikaṃ(m) paricakṣate. 17.17**

This threefold penance performed with supreme faith by Yogīs expecting no return is called Sāttvika.

A Sāttvik performs austerity by following all the *mana*, *vacha* and *shareera tapasya* and devote their actions to The Supreme with supreme faith, not expecting anything in return. Śraddhā is the core of this chapter as its name suggests, one must have unwavering faith and devotion in HIM.

One will be doing *malajapa*, but their mind will be wandering or one does it to show one can do more number of chants than another person. This act is not accepted by The Divine.

17.18

**satkāramānapūjārthaṃ(n), tapo dambhena caiva yat,
kriyate tadiha proktaṃ(m), rājasam(ñ) calamadhruvam. 17.18**

The austerity which is performed for the sake of renown, honor or adoration, as well as for any other selfish gain, either in all sincerity or by way of ostentation, and yields an uncertain and momentary fruit, has been spoken of here as *Rājasika*.

A *Rājasik* performs austerity and expects respect, appreciation and to become popular, which are purely transitory.

17.19

**mūḍhagrāheṇātmano yat, pīḍayā kriyate tapaḥ,
parasyotsādanārthaṃ(m) vā, tattāmasamudāhṛtam. 17.19**

Penance which is resorted to out of foolish obstinacy and is accompanied with self-mortification or is intended to harm others, such penance has been declared as *Tāmasika*.

Tāmasik performs austerity by torturing self and others. They trouble others and do not care for anyone.

A mother advised her younger daughter to always follow her elder sister. The younger daughter sincerely followed this advice. The elder daughter once decided to fast on *Ekadasi* only to trouble her sister as she knew she could not be on fast for a long time. This type of penance does not benefit anybody.

17.20

**dātavyamiti yaddānaṃ(n), dīyate'nupakāriṇe,
deśe kāle ca pātre ca, taddānaṃ(m) sātṭvikam(m) smṛtam. 17.20**

A gift which is bestowed with a sense of duty on one from whom no return is expected, at appropriate time and place, and to a deserving person, that gift has been declared as *Sātṭvika*.

Daan (charity) is again of three types according to the *guṇas*. Charity done with a genuine purpose and to those who are truly in need, without any expectations is *Sātṭvik*. The charity should be given to the right person and at the right place.

One should donate freely when one visits *dharmik* places like Kashi, temples, etc

17.21

**yattu pratyupakārārthaṃ(m), phalamuddiśya vā punaḥ,
dīyate ca parikliṣṭam(n), taddānaṃ(m) rājasam(m) smṛtam. 17.21**

A gift which is bestowed in grudging spirit and with the object of getting a service in return or in the

hope of obtaining a reward, is called Rājasika.

Charity performed expecting returns, or with a worldly favour or material gain in mind is considered as *Rājasik*. One should not think that today one is giving other something and tomorrow that person should do something in return or be obliged to hereafter, is not desirable action.

17.22

**adeśakāle yaddānam, apātrebhyaśca dīyate,
asatkṛtamavajñātaṃ(n), tattāmasamudāhṛtam. 17.22**

A gift which is made without good grace and in disdainful spirit out of time and place and to undeserving persons, is said to be Tāmasika.

Tāmasik does charity whimsically having no respect for others. One does not care if one is giving it to needy or not, but also looks down on the receiver, speaking negatively and demeaningly about others.

17.23

**om tatsaditi nirdeśo, brahmaṇastrividhaḥ(s) smṛtaḥ,
brāhmaṇāstena vedāśca, yajñāśca vihitāḥ(ph) purā. 17.23**

OM, TAT, and SAT- this has been declared as the triple appellation of Brahma, who is Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss. By that were the Brāhmaṇas and the Vedas as well as sacrifices created at the cosmic dawn.

Ōṃ Tat Sat indicate *Paramātmā* in different forms. They are the noun, pronoun and adjective of The Supreme respectively.

As a noun denotes the name, so is *Ōṃ*, the true name of *Yogeshwar*. Pronoun is used to indicate an unknown identity, so is *TAT*, the unique indication used only for HIM. Adjective defines one's quality, so is *SAT* depicting that HE is present everywhere everytime.

These three words are always used to address The Divine. *Brahmans* chant the Vedic hymns and rituals beginning with *Ōṃ*.

17.24

**tasmādomityudāhṛtya, yajñadānatapaḥ(kh) kriyāḥ,
pravartante vidhānoktāḥ(s), satataṃ(m) brahmavādinām. 17.24**

Therefore, acts of sacrifice, charity and austerity as enjoined by sacred precepts are always commenced by noble persons, used to the recitation of Vedic chants, with the invocation of the divine name 'OM'.

All auspicious actions begin by addressing God with the epithet *Ōṃ*. Chanting and recitation is done with it as it is a sacred word. It is also used to ask for forgiveness for mistakes committed during recitation or rituals.

17.25

**tadityanabhisandhāya, phalaṃ(m) yajñatapah(kh) kriyāḥ,
dānakriyāśca vividhāḥ(kh), kriyante mokṣakāṅkṣibhiḥ. 17.25**

With the idea that all this belongs to God, who is denoted by the appellation 'TAT', acts of sacrifice and austerity as well as acts of charity of various kinds are performed by seekers of liberation, expecting no return for them.

Tat indicates that everything belongs to Śrī Bhagavān. Uttering **tat** one performs sacrifice and charity for spiritual development. It means everything belongs to *Paramātmā* and one is not seeking any worldly gain from their rituals, charity or penance but liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

17.26

**sadbhāve sādhubhāve ca, sadyetatprayujyate,
praśaste karmaṇi tathā, sacchabdaḥ(ph) pārtha yujyate. 17.26**

The name of God, 'SAT' is used in the sense of reality and goodness. And the word 'SAT' is also used in the sense of a praiseworthy and auspicious action, Arjuna.

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17.27

**yajñe tapasi dāne ca, sthitiḥ(s) saditi cocyate,
karma caiva tadarthīyaṃ(m), sadyevābhidhīyate. 17.27**

And steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity and charity is likewise spoken of as 'SAT' and action for the sake of God is verily termed as 'SAT'.

Paramātmā says to Arjuna that **Sat indicates anything good and auspicious. It conveys a good and desirable action.** The good practices in life, anything performed with love, empathy and having good intention in mind is referred as **sat**. Devotion in sacrifice, austerity and charity, doing good work for others is referred with the word.

17.28

**aśraddhayā hutaṃ(n) dattaṃ(n), tapastaptaṃ(ñ) kṛtaṃ(ñ) ca yat,
asadyucyate pārtha, na ca tatpretya no iha. 17.28**

An oblation which is offered, a gift given, an austerity practiced, and whatever good deed is performed, if it is without faith, it is termed as naught i.e., 'asat'; therefore, it is of no avail here or hereafter.

Parameśvara finally conclude by emphasizing that any act of sacrifice, penance and charity done without *Śraddhā* is *asat* and hence useless. It has no value.

The discourse ended with *RAM NAAM SANKIRTANAM*.

**om tatsaditi śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu
brahmavidyāyāṃ(m) yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde**

śraddhātrayavibhāgayogonāma saptadaśo'dhyāyaḥ.

Thus, in the Upaniṣad sung by the Lord, the Science of Brahma, the scripture of Yoga, the dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, ends the seventeenth chapter entitled “The Yoga of the Division of the Threefold Faith.”



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Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar – Creative Writing Department

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