

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

### Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

1/2 (Ślōka 1-10), Saturday, 16 March 2024

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## Śraddhā is dictated by one's Gunas

The 17th chapter of Bhagavadgītā is **Śraddhātraya Vibhaga Yoga - The Yoga through discerning the three divisions of faith.**

The session started with Deepa prajwalan- the auspicious lighting of the lamp, and salutations to Param Pujya Guruji.

**Sada Shiva Samarambham Shankaracharya Madhyamam,  
Asmadacharya Paryantham Vande Guru Parampara**

“Salutation to the lineage starting with lord Sadashiva, with Adi Shankara in the middle and continuing up to my immediate teacher.”

It was followed by obeisance to our sacred text, Srimad Bhagavad gītā  
**om pārthāya pratibodhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayam  
vyāsenā grathitām purāṇa-muninā madhye mahābhāratam  
advaitāmṛta-varṣiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādasādhyāyinīm  
amba tvām anusandadhāmi bhagavad-gīte bhava-dveṣiṇīm**

The 17th Chapter deals with the topic of Śraddhā or Faith. The 14th Chapter, Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga, explained the characteristics of the three gunas (Sattva, Rajo and Tamas) that act as the modes of Prakṛti, and govern human personality.

- Sattvik Guna comprises of goodness.
- Rajasik Guna comprises of attachment (kama), anger (krodha), and greed (lobha).
- Tamasik Guna comprises of ignorance. The person has no knowledge about the dharma and adharma.

These gunas affect one's personality, Saṁskāras, and the daily life. While the 14th chapter dealt with the theory part of the gunas, the 17th chapter deals with the practical part. It teaches us how to bring the learnings of Gītā into our life. Geeta Pariwar's motto is '**read gītā, teach gītā, live gītā**'. The first two aspects of reading and teaching are relatively easy. Many sadhaks are already following

them by regularly attending the classes and vivechans. Some are also involved in teaching the Gītā to others, through sewas in various departments of Geeta Pariwar's Online class platform. The third part i.e. bringing Gītā into our life is the most difficult aspect.

Understanding Gītā is easier, but applying it in life is very difficult. Everyone knows that anger is not good. God proclaims in the 16th chapter, that lust, anger and greed are the three gates to hell.

***tri-vidham narakasyedam dvaram nasanam atmanah  
kamah krodhas tatha lobhas tasmad etat trayam tyajet (16.21)***

Yet, one cannot control these emotions. One needs to do sādhanā to get these qualities into his life.

In the 17th chapter, Bhagavān explains how one can increase the sādhanā and progress in the spiritual path, through the choice one makes on food, daily routine, and activities including tapas, yajna, and dhana. The key word in this chapter "Śraddhā", meaning faith, is one of the most popular words in the Gita. That Sri Krishna has mentioned it in many shlokas in various chapters and contexts, highlights the importance HE gives to the term. Without it, knowledge cannot be attained.

***sraddhaval labhate jnanam tatparah samyatendriyah  
jnanam labdhva param santim acirenadhigacchati (4.39)***

One can get knowledge from his guru, only if he has faith in the guru. A student's mind is limited, and cannot comprehend everything the all-knowing guru is trying to teach. But with faith in the guru, the student will accept the guru's words and follow his teachings without questioning.

***ajnascasraddadhanas ca samsayatma vinasyati  
nayam loko 'sti naparo na sukham samsayatmanah (4.40)***

Doubt leads to one's downfall. Śraddhā erases one's doubts and prevents his downfall.

Śraddhā also generates motivation to do any action. A student will automatically put more efforts on his studies to score good marks and impress his favourite teacher. Śraddhā in a particular work or towards a person will motivate a human being to work better, and strive for perfection. Śraddhā is an important aspect of Guru Parampara. It is not possible for a person to personally verify everything in this short span of life, and hence it is advisable to accept the Guru's teaching with complete faith and hasten the learning process. Concepts like Brahmān and Atman are beyond ordinary man's comprehension. In order to understand these concepts, one needs to accumulate a lot of sādhanās which is not easy. Beginners should accept the explanations given by Gurus, with Śraddhā.

Sri Krishna ended the 16th chapter with the advice that one should learn the right and wrong by following the scriptures.

***tasmac chastram pramanam te karyakarya-vyavasthitau  
jnatva sastra-vidhanoktam karma kartum iharhasi (16.24)***

This arose a question in Arjuna's mind, which is put forth here.

**17.1**

**arjuna uvāca  
ye śāstravidhimutsṛjya, yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ,  
teṣāṃ(n) niṣṭhā tu kā kṛṣṇa, sattvamāho rajastamaḥ. 17.1**

Arjuna said:

Those, endowed with faith, who worship gods and others, disregarding the injunctions of scriptures,

where do they stand, Kṛṣṇa,- in Sattva, Rajas or Tamas.

Arjuna asked Sri Krishna about those people who do not know the ordinance of the Śāstras, yet perform their karmas as per the Śāstras, with Śraddhā. Would their faith be considered as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic?

Śāstras might not be available nor understood by everyone. Common people simply follow some age-old practices that have come down through generations, without knowing whether those practices are right or wrong. Children follow in the footsteps of the elders in the family, because of their faith in their elders. Girls learn to cook by mimicking their mother, because they have faith in their mother's cooking. These people do not follow any scriptures, but just follow in the footsteps of those people who they have faith in.

Bhagavān proceeds to explain about the different types of Śraddhā.

## 17.2

**śrībhagavānuvāca**  
**trividhā bhavati śraddhā, dehinām(m) sā svabhāvajā,**  
**sāttvikī rājasī caiva, tāmasī ceti tāṃ(m) śṛṇu. 17.2**

Śrī Bhagavān said :

That untutored innate faith of men is of three kinds- Sāttvika, Rājasika and Tāmasika. Hear of it from Me.

Bhagavān said that **there are three types of shraddha based upon people's previous karmas or nature**. Nature is made of three Gunas - Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. A person of sattvic nature will have sattvic Śraddhā. Rajasic person will display rajasic Śraddhā, and if nature is tamasic, the person's Śraddhā also will be tamasic.

## 17.3

**sattvānurūpā sarvasyā, śraddhā bhavati bhārata,**  
**śraddhāmāyo'yaṃ(m) puruṣo, yo yacchraddhaḥ(s) sa eva saḥ. 17.3**

The faith of all men conforms to their mental disposition, Arjuna. Faith constitutes a man; whatever the nature of his faith, he is verily that.

**A person's Śraddhā will be decided in accordance to the person's mind.** In turn, a person's personality will develop according to the Śraddhā. Intentions arise in the mind, which in turn is connected to one's nature. Sattvic thoughts make a person more sattvic. Rajasic thoughts like greed make a person more rajasic. Tamasic thoughts like over eating, and laziness makes a person more tamasic. This is the reason why intentions are more important than actions.

Wrong actions done unknowingly, but with faith, do not amount to sin and do not generate bad karmas. There is a story about a little boy who was an ardent devotee of Bhagavān Shiva. He had a desire to touch the photo of Shiva ji that was hanging high up on the temple wall. He climbed upon the sacred Shivaling to reach the photo. The act of stepping on the Shivaling was definitely not appropriate, but the intention behind his action was pure and filled with Śraddhā, that Bhagavān Shiva revealed himself to the little boy and granted his wish. Similarly, teachers or parents punishing children with the pure intention of their well-being, are not wrong in their acts. **It is important that intentions remain pure and sattvic, because the mind and personality will**

be modeled likewise.

#### 17.4

### **yajante sāttvikā devān, yakṣarakṣāṃsi rājasāḥ, pretānbhūtagaṇāṃścānye, yajante tāmasā janāḥ. 17.4**

Men of Sāttvika disposition worship gods; those of Rājasika temperament worship demigods and demons; while others, who are men of Tāmasika disposition, worship the spirits of dead and ghosts.

People choose their deities according to their Śraddhā. **Sattvic people will always worship devatas**, as their purpose of worship is purification of mind and their work is for the benefit of others. Alternatively, those who worship devatas will become sattvic, because the devatas are positive entities and spread positive vibes.

**Rajasic people worship entities like yakshas and demons**, with the intention of greed and selfish benefits. They want quick results and worship these spirits with the misconception that their wishes will be easily fulfilled. But in reality, only the Almighty Ishwara can fulfil anyone's desires. Those who worship the spirits will tend to become more rajasic in nature.

**Tamasic people worship negative entities like ghosts and spirits**, with the main intention of harming others. They also indulge in sacrifices of animals and humans too. With a desire to have a child of their own, they will not hesitate to offer someone else's child into the sacrificial fire. The more one worships the negative entities, the more tamasic one becomes.

#### 17.5

### **aśāstravihitam(ñ) ghoram(n), tapyante ye tapo janāḥ, dambhāhaṅkārasamyuktāḥ(kh), kāmarāgabalanvitāḥ. 17.5**

Men who practice severe penance of an arbitrary type, not sanctioned by scriptures, and who are full of hypocrisy and egotism are obsessed with desire, attachment and pride of power;

Sometimes people perform very difficult austerities that are not recommended by the Śāstras (Aśhāstra-vihitam). Our Śāstras are more focused on teaching us about mind control, and performing one's duties with dedication like tapas. People mistake tapah to be some difficult austerity, overcoming which will be appreciated by the deities. They will torture their body in the process. No parent will like to see their children in pain. Bhagavān, the universal parent will of course not be happy with the torture of his children, in the name of tapah.

In the 9th chapter HE declared that he will happily receive simple things like flowers, fruits and water, if offered with faith.

***patram puspam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati  
tad aham bhakty-upahrtam asnami prayatatmanah (9.26)***

This body has been given by HIM as a gift. No person has the right to harm it unnecessarily, even in the name of tapah or fasting. Some people will torture their body in order to keep fast on certain days like Ekadashi. Moderate fasting is good as it helps to detoxify the system. Some will restrain from consuming water also. Keeping total fast is acceptable if the body is fit for the same. But torturing the body with the misconception that it will please the Gods amounts to ignorance. The tongue or tastebuds that is controlled in the name of fasting is only one of the sense organs. **True fasting will mean control of all the other sense organs too!** Eyes should be restrained from seeing

obscenities; ears from hearing bad; mouth from speaking ill; and most importantly the mind must be totally controlled and directed towards thinking of God.

Sometimes these people will indulge in the difficult and unnecessary austerities out of hypocrisy and ego, either to prove that they are better devotees, or to show that they are capable of tolerating pain and suffering in the name of God. For example, if a student wishing to impress his favourite teacher, wrote his assignment with his own blood instead of ink, will the teacher will be pleased, and reward him for his self-torture? Obviously, the teacher will not be impressed by such foolish endeavour. Similarly, some people indulge in extreme kinds of tapas wrongly assuming that God will be impressed and they will be rewarded.

## 17.6

### **karśayantaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(m), bhūtagrāmamacetaś, māṃ(ñ) caivāntaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(n), tāvīddhyāsuraniścayān. 17.6**

And who emaciate the elements constituting their body as well as Me, the Supreme Spirit, dwelling in their heart- know those senseless people to have a demoniac disposition.

Bhagavān is saying that while doing such actions, without proper knowledge, the person is destroying himself as well as the supreme spirit dwelling within. Such people should be considered as demonic in nature.

The person is harming the body which is given as a gift by HIM. It is meant to be used for self-purification and for the welfare of others. When talking about the purpose of human life, Swami Vivekananda ji would often refer to the phrase mentioned in Rigveda - '**Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha**' (for the salvation of our individual self and for the well-being of all on earth).

It is better to use one's power for the welfare of others, rather than indulge in harmful actions that cause pain to the body as well as to the supreme soul residing. HE has mentioned in the 15th chapter that HE resides in the heart of everyone.

### **sarvasya caham hr̥di sannivisto (15.15)**

## 17.7

### **āhāstvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ, yajñastapastathā dānaṃ(n), teṣāṃ(m) bhedaṃ(m) śr̥ṇu. 17.7**

Food also, which is agreeable to different men according to their innate disposition is of three kinds. and likewise sacrifice, penance and charity too are of three kinds each; hear their distinction as follows.

Sri Krishna further differentiates food, yajña (sacrifice), tapas (austerity) and dānaṃ (charity) into three categories, based on the gunas.

HE classified food into three categories- sattvic, rajasic and tamasic, and proceeds to explain the classification in the following shlokas.

## 17.8

## **āyuh(s) sattvabalārogya, sukhapritivivardhanāḥ, rasyāḥ(s) snigdhāḥ(s) sthirā hr̥dyā, āhārāḥ(s) sāttvikapriyāḥ. 17.8**

Foods which promote longevity, intelligence, vigor, health, happiness and cheerfulness, and which are juicy, succulent, substantial and naturally agreeable, are liked by men of Sāttvika nature.

Here, the qualities of sattvic food are explained. A sattvic person chooses these types of food. Alternatively, a person who wishes to imbibe more of sattvic nature should choose these types of food described here.

HE described the sattvic food as:

- that which is juicy (**rasyāḥ**),
- rich in nutrients (**snigdhāḥ**) and
- good for heart (**sthirā hr̥dyā**).

Such foods increase one's lifespan, vigor, health and happiness. It is believed that each person has a fixed number of breaths that define his lifespan. Consuming sattvic food is said to help in slowing the number of breaths per minute, thus ensuring a longer and healthier life. Sattvic food include juicy fruits and milk and milk products like ghee. These foods have long lasting effect, extending even to old age. The body becomes strong, nourished, and healthy.

### **17.9**

## **kaṭvamlalavaṇātyuṣṇa, tīkṣṇarūkṣavidāhinaḥ, āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā, duḥkhaśokāmayapradāḥ. 17.9**

Foods which are bitter, sour, salty, overhot, pungent, dry and burning, and which cause suffering, grief and sickness, are dear to the Rājasika type of men.

Rajasic food is characterized as bitter (kaṭvam), sour (amla), salty (lavana), very hot (atyuṣṇa), pungent (tīkṣṇa), dry (rūkṣa) and burning (vidāhinaḥ). All fancy foods fall under the rajasic category. These types of food are preferred by rajasic people, and result in distress and disease.

### **17.10**

## **yātayāmaṃ(ñ) gatarasaṃ(m), pūti paryuṣitaṃ(ñ) ca yat, ucchiṣṭamapi cāmedhyaṃ(m), bhojanaṃ(n) tāmasapriyam. 17.10**

Food which is ill-cooked or not fully ripe, insipid, putrid, stale and polluted, and which is impure too, is dear to men of a Tāmasika disposition.

Tamasic food refers to food that has become stale (yātayāmaṃ), tasteless (gatarasaṃ), bad smell (pūti), and spoiled (paryuṣitaṃ). Remnants or left overs from food eaten by others (ucchiṣṭam), and impure or polluted (amedhyaṃ) food is also tamasic in nature. Such foods are preferred by tamasic people.

The food one eats is important because it influences one's thoughts and actions.

**जैसा खाए अन्न वैसा बने मन**

Thoughts have an influence on one's Śraddhā and the ensuing karmas. Hence, it is important to keep

one's thoughts pure and sattvic. Consuming sattvic food is the fundamental step to building sattvic thoughts.

Sri Krishna has given us this important knowledge about what food to choose and not to choose, in order to progress in the spiritual path. It is in our hands to choose what we wish to become. Swami Vivekananda ji has said 'we are our own friend, and our own enemy'. If one wishes to become sattvic in nature, he should choose sattvic food.

The session was concluded with Nama Sankirtana, followed by a Questions and Answers session.

### Questions and Answers:

#### Arun Vinayak ji

**Q:** If we consider the phrase '*jaisa khaye anna, vaisa bane man*', does it mean that if we consume animal milk, we will imbibe qualities or nature of the animal?

**A:** No. We also consume fruits and vegetables, but it does not give us any qualities of the plants. We can consume foods that are naturally created for our consumption. Items like meat are not created for human consumption. Those will have negative impacts and should be avoided.

#### Rajiv ji

**Q:** Is it wrong to display our devotion for God, to the society? It is common for us to share about our pujas or vratas with friends and family.

**A:** It is not wrong to talk about the pujas or vratas that are done out of shradda. But, doing the pujas or vratas with the egoistic intention of getting appreciation or praise is wrong, and should be avoided.

#### Mahendranath Dasari ji

**Q:** Is eating non-vegetarian not allowed in our scriptures?

**A:** Non-vegetarian food is allowed in our shastra, based upon the time and place. For example, there was a drought in Orissa, and people had to find alternative food in the form of animal meat. The practice was passed on to generations, and even now people consume meat. In West Bengal, fish is considered as sea food. Wherever possible, we should try to avoid consumption of meat. But depending upon circumstances, one can eat meat. It is not considered a sin, if it is for the basic maintenance of life.

#### Prateek Swamy ji

**Q:** Do the package foods come under rajasic or tamasic category?

**A:** Almost all package foods come under tamasic category. But sweets that are in package are not considered as tamasic; they fall under sattvic food.



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**Thank you-For reading the summary**

You have enjoyed this vivechan writeup! In spite of intense editing and proofreading, errors of grammar, as also of omission and commission may have crept in. We appreciate your forbearance.

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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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