

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

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

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## The Importance of Yajna, Daana and Tapah

The 17th chapter of the Bhagavadgītā is '*Shraddhatraya Vibhaga Yoga*' - The Yoga of insightful knowledge of the Three Divisions of Faith.

In the beginning of the session the traditional ritual of lighting of the lamp was performed. The session started on the auspicious note of prayer to the Almighty, to the Guru Parampara and to the Bhagavad Gita.

Resonating with the title, the chapter mainly describes Shraddha or faith as the essential requirement for achieving eternal bliss; it is also present as an integral part of every human being. In chapter 14, Sri Krishna has vividly explained the three Gunas or modes of material nature and how these Gunas influence our behavior. **These Gunas, to a large extent, come with us from actions of our previous birth (Saṁskāras) and at the same time, these are also dependent on our mind and thought processes.**

In this chapter, Bhagavan has spoken about the practical aspect of the gunas. HE says that everyone holds faith and depending on the nature of his/her mind, this faith is followed in the mode of a particular Guna- Sattvik, Rajasic and Tamasic. The Gunas then forms the personality of the man. A man becomes Sattvik, Rajasic or Tamasic depending on the predominant Guna he has in his nature. **However, through efforts and by cleansing of the mind, one can change the composition and become more Sattvik.**

**Yajna (sacrifice), Tapa (austerity) and Dana (charity) are the three courses of action that every human being should observe.** These are the instruments of actions by which the cleansing is done. Further, HE says that depending on the material nature, these actions can take varied forms. Everyone must and should perform these three activities. Depending on the Guna the activity takes on the color of Sattva, Rajas or Tamas. All our actions must lead us to become Sattvik, as this is the ideal stage. One can find out from his nature whether he is Sattvik or not. If one practices more of Sattvik deeds, then he can construe his nature as being in the Sattvik state. Similarly, if one performs more of Rajasic or Tamasic deeds, then his nature accordingly changes its hue. We can check this from our habits and then start rectifying our actions. Our goal is to ultimately become Sattvik.

In the previous two sessions Yajna and Tapa had been discussed. We now will see Dana or charity and

what is the right way to perform charity. Danam can again be of three types depending whether it is performed in a Sattvik, Rajasic or a Tamasic manner.

In the 18th chapter Arjuna has asked Sri Krishna the difference between Sannyasa and Tyaga:

श्रीभगवानुवाच

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं सन्न्यासं कवयो विदुः

सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः

Bhagavān has explained in the above mentioned shloka that giving up all actions motivated by desire is Sannyasa whereas relinquishing the fruits of action is Tyaga.

**However, Bhagavān has reiterated time and again that Yajna, Tapa and Dana are the three necessary actions which everyone should perform. These three should be taken as compulsory tasks for every human being.** Being born as a human being, one cannot take Sannyasa from performing these three tasks. Performing these tasks in Sattvik manner is most desirable. **However, even if one is not adequately Sattvik, nevertheless performing these holy deeds in Rajasic or Tamasic manner is better than not performing the action at all.**

Let us take an example of a very hungry person stuck in a forbidden place, who comes across two types of men. One gives him food only after rebuking him while the other refuses to give him any food whatsoever. The first person may be Rajasic in nature, but at least he has provided food to a hungry man whereas the second person, however good or Sattvik he may be, has but failed to provide food to a hungry person. Needless to say, in this case it is the Rajasic person whose action turns out to be better.

It is popularly said, '*Bad Governance is better than having no Governance at all*'. Similarly, having police around is better than having no police at all. There is another famous saying: *something is better than nothing*. **While one should always try to perform Sattvik Karmas, it is to be noted that Rajasic and Tamasic karmas are also better than performing no Karmas at all.**

17.20

**dātavyamiti yaddānaṃ(n), dīyate'nupakāriṇe,  
deśe kāle ca pātre ca, taddānaṃ(m) sāt̥tvikaṃ(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 Sāt̥tvika.

One should perform charity as it is a compulsory action to be done. It is the responsibility of every human being. It is as essential a duty as casting our votes in an election. Charity done to the needy person without harboring any expectations is the right type of charity that would qualify as Sattvik Danam. Furthermore, charity should be done at the right place and at the right time: only then can it be considered a Sattvik act or an act of goodness.

**Deśhe kāle cha pātre** means charity to be done at the right place, at right time and to the right person, or one who is genuinely needy.

As per the scriptures, Danam should be done at holy places like Prayag Raj, Kashi, Mathura, Kanya Kumari, Tirupati and other similar bastions of pilgrimage.

Normally Ekadashi is considered a right time to do Dana. To give a small example of appropriateness of

time is that say one person has borrowed some money from his friend. When the lender asks for the money back, the borrower instead of returning the money back tries to play around and asks him to join a picnic in the forest area. Clearly, he has no intention of returning the money. Then suddenly they are attacked by a gang of miscreants who demands money from them. At this juncture the borrower friend returns the money to the lender friend knowing pretty well that any way he is going to lose the money. This place and situation of giving back the money brings him more discredits than credits.

Another factor to be considered while doing Dana is that, one should give that thing to the needy what he needs and not somethings which he has extra. To give an example, in a desert one needs water. One should provide him water and not milk as milk might not quench his thirst.

**Patre** - means to the right person. Help should be rendered to the needy person. Providing money to the affluent persons is not considered as appropriate Dana. One may choose to do so expecting some favour in return. In such cases it is not considered as Sattvic Danam.

## 17.21

**yattu pratyupakārārthaṁ(m), phalamuddiśya vā punaḥ,  
dīyate ca parikliṣṭaṁ(n), taddānaṁ(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.

Yat tu pratyupakārārthaṁ means work which is done with the hope of a return.

In normal life it is very difficult to do work without expecting something in return. Most of the human relationships are interdependent and expect returns for the services given. Wherever work is continuously done in a one-sided way, benefiting only the other side, the relationship does not last long. It breaks at some point. In society, the rule is 'give and take'. Even a mother who adores her child and does everything for the child, somewhere in the back of her mind, expects the child to take care of her in her old age. Some expectation lurks in her mind. **Selfless Karma or Satvik Karma is a utopian idea in present-day society. It is difficult to be perfect or ideal.**

Selfless work or Dana without expecting anything in return is what is considered as Sattvik Dana or Seva. **One example of such Seva is what Geeta Parivar Sevis are all doing. They do it without any expectation. Giving selfless Seva is like a Sadhana. Slowly it becomes a part of one's life and gives immense satisfaction.** By doing selfless Seva, one feels as if one is paying back to Bhagavan. Although they are not rewarded financially or recognition wise, they derive immense pleasure out of such Sevas. This mental satisfaction is their remuneration or reward. This work is no doubt Sattvik but with a tinge of expectation of getting blessings from Ishwara. If one can rise above all these feelings then one becomes a perfect person.

A popular saying goes - **Seva is for others. Sādhana is for self.**

**phalam uddiśhya vā punaḥ** means any reward or expectations

**dīyate cha parikliṣṭam** means is given reluctantly

Charity done with reluctance or with an expectation of reward is considered as an act of passion or Rajasic.

If one wants to donate Rs 100 willingly and is pressured to donate another Rs 50, he may do it but with little reluctance in his mind. Such charity is again Rajasic.

## 17.22

**adeśakāle yaddānam, apātrebhyaśca dīyate,  
asatkṛtamavajñātam(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.

**Adesha** means at the wrong place

**Kale** implies the wrong time

**Apatrebhyah** means giving alms to an unworthy person

**Asat-kritam** denotes without respect

**Avajnatam** refers to contempt

Charity which is given with contempt at the wrong place, at the wrong time and to an unworthy person, is held to be Tamasik in nature.

We have earlier cited a story of two friends, one of whom had to be given back his money. Returning the money when the robbers attacked, is an example of daanam being performed at the wrong place.

Charity at the wrong time implies giving something to another person when the occasion is ill-timed. **Donating winter clothes during the peak of summer or giving ice-cream to a child on a cold winter night are perfect examples of benefaction extended at an inappropriate timing.**

Verbal insults can hurt more than actions. Similarly, while performing an act of charity, **if one disparages and humiliates the recipient of the alms, then the whole exercise becomes a futile act of daanam done in the Tamasik mode.**

One should carry out the act of charity with respect and dignity to the other person, instead of insulting him. Sometimes while we are working on an assignment which carries a time deadline, or while traveling in a public transport, we may come across needy people repeatedly pestering us for money or food. At such times, it is inevitable that we would get irritated. If we do not want to donate any money, being hard-pressed due to circumstances beyond our control, then we should politely decline the plea of the other person who has asked for monetary aid, instead of scolding or abusing him. It is indeed an acid test of one's patience and tolerance. Our response depends on the control we have over our minds.

## 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.

There are different interpretations of this shloka.

'Aum', 'Tat' and 'Sat' are indicators and names of Paramātmā. The beginning of the Srishti saw the

creation of Brahman, along with the universe, the four vedas and the yajnas. Here Brahman does not denote the caste; it means one who knows Brahman or the Supreme power.

Everything manifested in this entire universe: prithvi, swargaloka, pataal-loka and other lokas, come under Om. There are three syllables that comprise 'Aum'- 'A' 'U' and 'M'.

We should realize that the word Aum is not a letter, it is a dhvani or sound. As mentioned before, the entire universe is covered with Aum.

'Aum' further comprises akaar ukaar and makaar. For every syllable, tjat is 'A', 'U' and 'M', there is a devta, sthaan and sthiti attached.

Akaar is whatever we can experience through the sense organs. It comes from the throat. The Devta of akaar is Brahma. In Akaar we have jagrut avastha when our sense organs, body parts and praana are active.

Swapna avastha is when sense organs get dissolved, the body is not active but the mind is active. That is the state in which we dream and see visions shown by the mind.

Then comes the Sushupti avastha when the mind, body and intellect get dissolved, while only YOU remain. At the akaar level we have the jagrut avastha or the awakened state, at the ukaar level we have swapna avastha or dream-like state and at the makaar level, we have the sushupti avastha.

Similarly, at the akaar level we have Brahma devta, at the ukaar level we have Vishnu devta and at the maakar we have Shankar devta attached to each stage. Once again, the role of the gunas comes into play. For example, at the akaar level we have Rajasic guna which needs to be activated for creation.

It has been mentioned in the earlier shlokas that each guna has its own necessity. At night for example we need the Tamasik guna to be able to sleep. Each level is attached to a place or sthaana as well. Akaar comes from throat, ukaar from heart and makaar emanates from the navel .

**The letter Aum thus includes everything manifested in this world.**

**The word 'Tat' means 'that'. It denotes anything which we can see, give a name to and for which we can visualize a form.** The sky or aakash for example, has a name though we cannot touch it as it has no shape. Yet, because it has a name, it can be considered a part of 'Tat'.

Water is yet another example of 'Tat'. It should be noted though, that water we see is not in its undiluted form. Water itself is a combination of several forms.. We have Panchikaran and Apanchikaran.

***Pancikarana* is the creation of the elements (*bhūtasarga*) by a process in which subtle matter (or the prior stage of matter) transforms itself into gross matter. Intelligence is the subtle manifestation of consciousness and matter its gross manifestation. *Pancikarana* is the "quintuplication" of the basic/primordial five subtle elements.**

Panchikaran prakriya is described in the Upanishads. Then, we have five tan-matras: akaash-matra, jal tej, vayu and prithvi matras . These purest forms cannot be seen by us as we are also made of the panch-mahabhoot. When these panchmatras and tanmatras combine, this prakriya or process is called Panchikaran. The universe contains each of these elements in a certain percentage of proportion. Akaash incorporates 12.5 elements, agni, vayu and jal too comprise 12.5 parts each of the universe while prithvi comprises 50 % of the elements.. This entire combination is what constitutes the prithvi tattva. Whatever we are experiencing therefore, is the Panchikaran process

Thus, when we say 'Tat' it means we only see what has name and form, and which came after Panchikarnan

**Sat is the ultimate reality that exists in all the three dimensions, in the past, present and future. It will never get destroyed. It's the ultimate reality. The meaning of sat can only be experienced. It is beyond sense organs.**

**These three syllables, Aum, Tat and Sat are indicators of Sacchidanandaghan Paramātmā. Breaking the word into smaller components, we can see that 'Sat' is reality, 'chitta' means chetna or consciousness and 'anand' denotes happiness.**

Anand itself is of different types. We have Vishaya-anand, that is, anand through sense organs coming in contact with objects. Then we have Vaasna-anand or getting pleasure out of imagination. In such a state, happiness is real though the imagination is not real. Then the third state is anand- the happiness we get when we are free from the first two kinds of pleasures: then we are in a state of sushupti. **In the ultimate state of Parmananda, happiness is permanent. This coveted state comes only when we realize ourselves, our nature. Ghan means from everywhere . In the universe there is Sacchitanandghan in all dimensions.**

**To reiterate and to put this concept in more concise and simpler words, "Om Tat Sat" has been identified as the symbolic representation of the Supreme Absolute Truth. That is the Supreme Consciousness or the Paramātmā. Aum represents the beginning of the creation. Tat means that. Sat means truth.** It represents the entire manifested and unmanifested Universe, whatever we see around us the sky, the earth, the water everything came out of the syllable AUM. When there was nothing, no form, no time and space and everything was in Avyakta, AUM sprang out, from which the creation appeared. Thus AUM is comprehensive. It represents the sonic representation of the Divine. AUM is the configuration of the three letters A U M. It is not a mere congregation of letters. It represents a Dhvani or syllable. The last letter 'M' comes out of the nose. It is a nasal sound. It is often found at the beginning and the end of the chapters in the Vedas, the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and other Hindu scriptures. As a syllable, it is often chanted in spiritual recitation and during meditation. AUM represents the three aspects of Paramatma: The Brahma(A), the Vishnu(U) and the Shiva(M)

Although one experiences Ananda, there is one more state in which a human being can experience Parama Ananda. That is the fourth state or Turiya. That is the everlasting Parama-Brahman.

**Parama Brahman or Supreme consciousness is ever existent, unchangeable and infinite. It can not be objectified. It has no name, no shape, no size, no color. We have seen two dimensional and three-dimensional objects and movies but Param-Brahman is all-dimensional and all directional.** It has no beginning or end. All objects in the manifested Universe can be described because they have a name, form or color. However, it is impossible to describe and comprehend Bramham. It can only be realized through Sādhana. That ultimate blissful state is called Sat-Chit-Ananda (Satchidananda), which has been described earlier in this shloka.

**17.24**

**tasmādomityudāhṛtya, yajñadānatapaḥ(kh) kriyāḥ,  
pravartante vidhānuktāḥ(s), satataṁ(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'.

**Tasmād om ity udāhṛitya** - This is a composite word meaning "therefor by uttering sacred syllable OM"

**Brahma-vādinām** - expounders of Vedas who are believers of Brahma or Paramatma.

Thus, all kriyas or works of Yajna, Dana, Tapa can be performed after uttering the sacred syllable AUM. This is in accordance with the Vedic practices. If you utter AUM, it gives a feeling of completion. Every Yogic action should start with utterance of Om and also end with the utterance of AUM. This is practised by the followers of Vedas because AUM includes everything and is all encompassing. Yajna, Dana and Tapa come under everything which is all encompassing. All actions should be dedicated to the all-pervasive AUM.

## 17.25

**tadityanabhisandhāya, phalaṃ(m) yajñatapaḥ(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.

Mokṣha-kāṅkṣibhiḥ means persons aspiring liberation.

Anabhisandhaya means without desiring.

Every one aspires to get liberation or Moksha. Generally we think Moksha is something which one gets after death in heaven. But that is not true, Moksha is liberation or freedom from all desires. A desireless mind is a blissful mind. And this blissful state is liberation which one can strive to achieve while being in this embodied form. Mind has to be made free of thoughts, desires and attachments. This is when external events do not affect us. This is the initial level of moksha.

**People who want moksha or liberation have been performing these practices. After uttering 'Tat', they perform the yajna, daana and tapah.**

## 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.

**Sad-bhāve** means with the intention of eternal existence and goodness

**Sadhu-bhave** means with the auspicious intention

Sat means ultimate reality; it is the all-encompassing umbrella to describe all types pious work like sacrifice, penance, and charity.

## 17.27



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

In Chapter 18, Bhagavān has emphasised that the three basic actions one has to perform are Yajna, Dana and Tapa. And such actions are Sat. One who performs such acts with right earnest, and one who is established in steadiness, is doing Sat Karmas.

**17.28**

**aśraddhayā hutam(n) dattam(n), tapastaptam(ñ) kṛtam(ñ) ca yat,  
asadityucyate 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.

**Arjuna uvācha**

**ye śhāstra-vidhim utsṛijya yajante śhraddhayānvitāḥ  
teṣhāṃ niṣhṭhā tu kā kṛishṇa sattvam āho rajas tamah**

This the first sloka of this chapter where Arjuna had asked Bhagavan – O Krishna, what about those people who disregard the injunctions of the scriptures, but still worship with faith. Will their Sraddha or faith be construed as mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance. They do not know the ordinances of Sastras.

In this sloka Bhagavan had replied oh! Partha(son of Pritha), whatever acts of sacrifice, charity or penance are done without faith they are construed as **Asat**.

**Elaborating further, it can be said that there are people who have faith in Śāstras and are performing all the recommended practices; but they not know the ordinance of the Śāstras. Sri Krishna says that if they have shraddha but are not doing the ordinances, that is somewhat acceptable. However, those who perform the yajna, daana and tapah without faith end up making these practices 'asat'. The entire exercise becomes fruitless and has no benefits.**

*It should also be noted that some rituals and practices, like tarpan and shraadh, may not be beneficial now, but later after death they will accrue benefits. In the same vein, we perform yajnas to attain heaven; however, we can only get this much coveted place after death, and not while we are alive. Without faith though, even in the after-life we do not get the benefits. To build faith, we have to get a Guru to show us the right direction, and practice Sāadhanā. We, for example, have got the Geeta pariwar. Gradually we will all strengthen our shraddha and our yajna will become 'sat.'*

**The vivechan was followed by the Question-answer session**

**Q & A**

**Priyadarshan Pant ji**

**Q. if we give daanam or charity to a pandit who is well off and is conducting a yajna, would that daana be considered sattvik?**



**Answer.** It is sattvik as you are giving daana to a brahmin. Śāstras too say this. In the varna system Brahmin had only the money earned from conducting yajnas as a means of livelihood. Secondly, yajna is not easy. So we should give a Brahmin charity for all his efforts.

**The session was concluded with a rendition of the Hanuman Chalisa.**

**om tatsaditi śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu  
brahmavidyāyām(m) yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṁvāde  
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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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.

**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar – Creative Writing Department

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