

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 14: Guṇatraya-Vibhāga-Yoga

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/ZqA2iMNIAPl>

Our dominant guna decides our progress or regress in the next birth

The **14th chapter** of the **Bhagavadgītā** is '**Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga**' - **Yoga through Understanding the Three Modes of Material Nature.**

The second session on the said subject began with the Auspicious Lighting of the traditional lamp that lights the steadfast flame, guiding us towards the path of Dharma, and cleansing our Antaḥkaraṇa with the light of knowledge shedding the path of Ignorance. It was followed by recitation of following prayers to the Guru Parampara, and to the source of Divine Knowledge of Yoga, The Bhagavadgītā:

**sadāśiva-samārambhāṁ
śaṅkarācārya-madhyamāṁ.
asmadācārya-paryantāṁ
vande guru-paramparāṁ**

I bow with reverence to the Guru Parampara, lineage starting with the all-pervasive Lord śiva consciousness (Sadasiva) with Adi Sankara in the middle and all those teachers up to my own Guru.

What does **Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga** mean?

It means understanding the differences in the three Gunas due to which actions are performed. During our journey in Geeta Learning program, the first time we heard about Gunas was in level 1, when chapter 15 got discussed.

In shloka 2 of the said chapter, it was said:

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः ।
अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके ॥ २॥

The branches of the tree extend upward and downward, nourished by the three guṇas, with the objects of the senses as tender buds. The roots of the tree hang downward, causing the flow of karma in the human

form. Below, its roots branch out causing (karmic) actions in the world of humans.

Bhagavān was explaining one gets birth in different yonis and the basis behind its allocation is our karmas. The same are nourished by three kinds of Gunas i.e. Sattva Guna, Rajo Guna and Tamo Guna. If the soul has given priority to Sattva Guna, then the person will get placed in branches that are placed up, means will get birth in good Yonis. If the soul has given importance to Rajo Guna, then he or she will get birth in yonis which are positioned in the middle or among the branches in the middle. If the soul has majorly done karmas associated with Tamo Guna, then the person shall get birth in **Adham** Yonis, the downside branches. Example of *Adham Yonis* would be species like flies, mosquitoes etc.

Bhagavān has explained the gunas in detail in chapter 14. Later in chapter 15, he just indicated those by saying *guṇa-pravṛiddhā*, meaning, nourished by the modes of material nature.

- **guṇa**: modes of material nature
- **pravṛiddhā**: nourished by

In this chapter we shall be learning the following:

- about each Guna in **detail**.
- about **the difference** in them
- what would be **their result**,
- about the **Vrittis** of a person who is inclined to be choosing mostly **Sattvic activities**,
- about the **Vrittis** of a person who is inclined to choose mostly **Rajasic activities**, and
- about the **Vrittis** of a person who is inclined to choose mostly **Tamasic activities**.

In the first five shlokas, Bhagavān talked about how we are connected with this world and how this world gets created. In 6th shloka, characteristics of Sattvic Gunas got discussed and how the same binds us with the world. In the 7th and 8th shlokas, Bhagavān talked about Rajasic and Tamasic Guna respectively. In the 9th shloka Bhagavān summarizes what HE said in shlokas 6, 7 and 8. HE said, **Sattva binds one to material happiness; rajas conditions the soul toward actions; and tamas clouds wisdom and binds one to delusion.**

Few examples of how people in animal business capture animals:

- A trap made of wires is used to catch birds. Seeing the food around the trap, birds get attracted and sit on those wires. Immediately, the trap mechanics come into play and the birds end up hanging on the wire, upside down. From that position they see the sky and start to fear that if they leave, they will end up falling. The fear is baseless as they have the power to fly back. But, due to this delusion their hanging continues, and this gives opportunity to the bird hunter to catch them alive.
- Monkey's traps are built using a beaker or a Surai like utensil with a narrow opening. Food is kept inside such utensil and when the monkey puts its hand inside the beaker, it is trapped. This happens because it forms a fist to hold the food. Since the mouth of the beaker is small, the fist hand cannot come out of the utensil. The monkey starts to feel that it has got trapped and so remains in that delusion. This gives enough time to the hunter to catch the trapped monkey alive.

In same manner, we know that jealousy, hatred etc. are not good qualities to have. But we ignore that and end up remaining trapped in delusion (Maya).

**rajastamaścābhibhūya, sattvaṃ(m) bhavati bhārata,
rajaḥ(s) sattvaṃ(n) tamaścaiva, tamaḥ(s) sattvaṃ(m) rajastathā. 14.10**

Overpowering Rajas and Tamas, Arjuna, Sattva prevails; overpowering Sattva and Tamas, Rajas prevails; even so, overpowering Sattva and Rajas, Tamas prevails.

After learning 14th chapter, one will not only end up learning about the three gunas, but will also at the same time come to know that these Gunas are in one's own hands. It means, whenever a person wants, he or she can put a stop to Tamo Guna by just raising the bar of Sattvic Guna. **In this shloka Bhagavan shares key principle that all the three Gunas do not work in the same ratio. That means, if one Guna is getting priority then other two will get subdued.**

Tulsidas ji has brought this up very beautifully in Ramcharitmanas. A meeting was going on to decide who will go to Lanka. Such a visit was required as they wanted to be sure of where Sita mata was, before they start to plan the entire operation. It also involved construction of bridge over the ocean that was coming in their way to Lanka. Hanuman ji kept listening and absorbing the discussion quietly. He was not aware of his own power, and his rajo guna was dormant, due to maya. Listening to how the discussion was moving, Jambavan ji, the King of bears, approached Hanuman ji and said:

कहइ रीछपति सुनु हनुमाना। का चुप साधि रहेहु बलवाना॥
पवन तनय बल पवन समाना। बुधि बिबेक बिग्यान निधाना॥2॥

O Hanuman! You are having strength same as wind, you are a reservoir of wisdom and science, what is making you keep quiet?

At this juncture Jambavan Ji even took to telling Hanuman Ji that He had taken birth for Śrī Ram, who was avatar of Vishnu Bhagavān. After listening to this Hanuman ji got reminded of His goal. His rajo guna got activated and he increased his form almost equivalent to the size of the mountain, **Bhayāvaha**. However, he also knew how to manage the three gunas perfectly. While he was travelling towards Lanka, He came across following three obstructions:

- Mainak Parvat
- Sursa
- Demon

His way of tackling the obstructions teaches us about how one should act on the path of Kartvaya karma. While one is on duty, the obstructions can be of Tamasic, Rajasic or even Sattvic. Which guna should take precedence is something that one can pick up from these instances.

- **Instance 1:** While travelling to Lanka, Hanuman Ji happened to come across Mainak Parvat, who offered him place to rest for some time. Since Mainak Parvat was his father Pavan Devta's friend, Hanuman ji respectfully accepted his offer, rested for a small duration and giving his salutation to Mainak, flew away to his duty. This shows that goodness must be dealt with complete respect but indulgence should be avoided
- **Instance 2:** Next, Hanuman ji came across demoness Sursa. She obstructed Hanuman ji by increasing her form at much greater pace and put forth a challenge that Hanuman should pass through her mouth if he wanted to continue his journey. Hanuman Ji observed the demon was increasing in size and so decided to reduce his form to almost the size of mosquito. Before Sursa could close her wide open mouth, Hanuman Ji entered and exited her mouth. The essence to learn from this is that passion should be addressed smartly. Hanuman Ji did not enter into the race of increasing his size, and at the same time handled the thing in such a manner that the required act got completed quickly.

- **Instance 3** - He came across another demon, who had the power to stop him by holding on to his shadow. As soon as Hanuman ji realized this, He brought her down by killing her. This incidence teaches us that ignorance should not be succumbed to at any time, but should be dealt promptly as it can take over one's senses.

While performing duty, Sattva Guna has to be given due respect, but at the same time the duty should not stop. As for Rajo Guna one should not get sucked into the whole act, instead find a way to handle it quickly. If one comes across Tamo Guna, the same has to be eliminated instantly. For example, if one is feeling sleepy and does not want to get out of the bed in the morning, the person needs to get up without giving a second thought.

Next three shlokas Bhagavān has shared the formula of finding out which Guna is dominating at a moment.

14.11

**sarvadvāreṣu dehe'smin, prakāśa upajāyate,
jñānaṃ(m) yadā tadā vidyād, vivṛddhaṃ(m) sattvamityuta. 14.11**

When light and discernment dawn in this body, as well as in the mind and senses, then one should know that Sattva is predominant.

When all gates of the body are illuminated by light / knowledge, it marks the manifestation of Sattva Guna.

The signs are:

- One remains happy in all situations,
- Works for welfare of others,
- Chooses Sattva Guna qualities over Tamas and Rajas.

Infact, just by observing, one can make out in which state the person is. For instance, a person overpowered by Rajo Guna cannot sit calmly at one place. One will always find him doing something or the other. On the contrary, Ashu Bhaiya, Sanjay Bhaiya and Swami ji are Sattva Guna Pradhan personalities. The Teja on such people's face is the light / Prakash. What they speak amounts to Knowledge. When the Jnana and Prakash are increasing, we can say that Sattva Guna is on the rise.

14.12

**lobhaḥ(ph) pravṛttirārambhaḥ(kh), karmaṇāmaśamaḥ(s) sprhā,
rajasyetānijāyante, vivṛddhe bharatarṣabha. 14.12**

With the preponderance of Rajas, Arjuna, greed, activity, undertaking of action with an interested motive, restlessness and a thirst for enjoyment make their appearance.

The signs of predominance of Rajo Guna are:

- Greed,
- Undertaking excessive activity for worldly attainments,
- Restlessness of mind, and
- unreasonable attachment (**sprhā**) to the objects of senses.

14.13

**aprakāśo'pravṛttiśca, pramādo moha eva ca,
tamasyetāni jāyante, vivṛddhe kurunandana. 14.13**

With the growth of Tamas, Arjuna, obtuseness of the mind and senses, disinclination to perform one's obligatory duties, frivolity and stupor-all these appear.

The following qualities are signs of Tamo Guna taking predominance:

- not able to differentiate between good and bad
- not willing to take up his or her duties,
- choosing adharma,
- increase in delusion
- rise in negligence

A question can come up as to how to bring about change or remain in higher Gunas?

The solutions are:

- To take up doing the right thing even if one is not interested in doing it. For example, if one knows that meditation is good but the same does not attract the person, then he should take up doing the thing by force.
- Whatever we eat affects our body. To inculcate sattvic guna, one should partake of sattvic food.

14.14

**yadā sattve pravṛddhe tu, pralayaṃ(m) yāti dehabhṛt,
tadottamavidāṃ(m) lokān, amalānpratipadyate. 14.14**

When a man dies during the preponderance of Sattva, he obtains the stainless ethereal worlds (heaven etc.,) attained by men of noble deeds.

If the Sattva guna is dominant at the time of death, the person will go to pure abodes of knowledgeable souls and God. Here the world **Pralay** denotes one's death and not the holocaust.

The **Swargloka** or dev loka are the higher lokas than the *mrityu loka* or Manushya loka. A sattva guni person would always welcome death while remembering God, doing his Naam japa etc. and his soul will reach up to higher abodes after death.

14.15

**rajasi pralayaṃ(ñ) gatvā, karmasaṅgiṣu jāyate,
tathā pralīnastamasi, mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate. 14.15**

Dying when Rajas predominates, he is born among those attached to action; even so, the man who has expired during the preponderance of Tamas is reborn in the species of the deluded creatures such as insects and beasts etc.

If the Rajoguna is predominant at the time of death, or the person dies in the mode of passion, he will go to the abode of people who have great attachment to their karmas or are always driven by karma. If the mind of a person was dominated by the rajoguna, then the person will be born again in the *Manushya yoni* and will get a birth according to his Karmas. He will go to such abodes which are in the middle. People who have lobha or get carried over by greed and have worldly ambitions will be born

in such families who are engaged in intense materialistic activities.

On the other hand, if the thoughts of a person were dominated by the Tamoguna at the time of death or his mind was in the mode of ignorance, he will go to *adho yoni* (lower abodes), and be born in the *Mudha yoni* (animal, insect, birds etc.) . People who have been lazy and have always been shunning away from their duties or taken over by ignorance, are sure to descend down (*adho gati*) on the evolutionary ladder and be born in animal kingdom.

Although we are lucky to be born in *Manushya yoni*, there always is an option to go to the higher abode after death, or stay where we were (in the *mrityu loka*, where death is unavoidable) or still go down the ladder neglecting the spiritual path.

14.16

**karmaṇaḥ(s) sukṛtasyāhuḥ(s), sātṭvikaṁ(n) nirmalaṁ(m) phalam,
rajasastu phalaṁ(n) duḥkham, ajñānaṁ(n) tamaśaḥ(ph) phalam. 14.16**

The reward of a righteous act, they say, is Sāttvika i.e., faultless in the form of joy, wisdom and dispassion etc., sorrow is declared to be the fruit of a Rājasikā act and ignorance, the fruit of a Tāmasika act.

This verse talks about the fruit of each quality.

- The fruit of actions performed in the mode of goodness are bestowed with superior results for being kind and gentle towards everyone.
- Actions done in the mode of passion result in pain and sorrow, as they didn't achieve their desire
- Those performed in the mode of ignorance result in darkness and devoid of knowledge.

Thus, it is important for us to think and act mindfully all the time and to keep check on each of the qualities in our daily activities to lead a happy life. If we want to lead a happy life, we need to walk on spiritual path doing self less service to others. If one has too much attachment to desires, and when those desires are not fulfilled, pain follows. No spiritual upliftment is possible for a tamoguni person because he is always engaged in bad karmas.

Questions and Answers:

Richa ji

Q: Most of us are tamasic in nature, which can be attributed to the food we consume. Since our nature decides our next life, is it possible to change our current nature by changing the type of food we eat?

A: Yes, the food we eat has an impact on our nature. Besides, no one is totally tamasic or rajasic or sattvic. We are all a mixed bag of all the three gunas, with one guna in higher proportion than the others. The choices we make in our life will change the proportions of these gunas. Whatever guna is predominant at the time of death will decide our next life.

Kruthika ji

Q: If tamasic guna is predominant at the time of death, and the soul enters into a lower yoni like animal, will the rules of the gunas still apply to that yoni?

A: The gunas will prevail in the animal, becoming its basic nature, but the rules like food etc will not apply to the animal. Bharat muni was a highly enlightened sage, who could remember all his previous

births. He was sattvic for the whole of his life time, but at the time of death, he became attached to a little deer. As the focus of his mind was on the deer, he had to take birth in the form of a deer. Even in the form of a deer, he was purely sattvic, because that was his basic nature. Gunas get carried over to the next life also.



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Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar – Creative Writing Department

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