

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

1/2 (Ślōka 1-13), Sunday, 24 November 2024

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/2UzximuZFW4>

The Magic of Sattvik Choices

The 17th chapter of Bhagavadgītā is known as **Shraddha Traya Vibhaga Yoga** or "The Yoga of the Division of the Threefold Faith".

The session commenced with a prayer to Bhagavān Sri Krishna and lighting of the traditional lamp

In our last session, we explored Chapter 16 of the Bhagavad Gītā, which beautifully explained the qualities of **Daivi** (divine) and **Asuri** (demonic). We learned about 26 divine qualities, listed in verses:

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha

**abhayaṁ sattva-sanśhuddhir jñāna-yoga-vyavasthitiḥ
dānaṁ damaśh cha yajñaśh cha svādhyāyas tapa ārjavam
ahinsā satyam akrodhas tyāgaḥ śhāntir apaiśhunam
dayā bhūteśhv aloluptvaṁ mārdayam hrīr achāpalam
tejaḥ kṣhamā dhṛitiḥ śhaucham adroho nāti-mānitā
bhavanti sampadam daivīm abhijātasya bhārata**

These qualities are essential for a virtuous and fulfilling life. Bhagavān emphasized that acting according to scriptures ensures success and spiritual progress while neglecting them leads to dissatisfaction. But what if we don't know the scriptures in detail yet? This question was asked by Arjuna in **Chapter 17 Shraddha Traya Vibhaga Yoga**. Shraddha meaning faith and Traya referring to three types. This chapter will explore the three categories of faith.

17.1

arjuna uvāca

**ye śāstravidhimutsrjya, yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ,
teṣāṁ(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 wondered, "If someone acts with faith but without full knowledge of the scriptures, how do we classify their actions? Are they good or bad? Do they align with the qualities of Sattva (goodness), Rajas (passion), or Tamas (ignorance)?"

To explain, a simple story helps us understand:

The Story of Anay's Puja

- There was a little boy named Anay
- His family was very religious
- His father did puja every day
- Anay would watch carefully how his father performed the puja

One Special Day

- Father had to go somewhere important
- Mother was also busy
- Father asked Anay to do the puja
- Anay was excited but also nervous!

What Anay Did?

He remembered how his father would:

- Put haldi-kumkum on God's idol
- Give a bath to the deity
- Offer flowers
- Do aarti
- Offer bhog (food)

But Anay didn't know:

- The proper mantras
- How to make the mandala (sacred design)
- All the right steps

The Magic of Faith

Even though Anay didn't know everything:

- He did everything with pure love
- He kept saying the one shloka he knew: "**Sri Krishnam Vande Jagadgurum**"
- He offered bhog with complete devotion
- He did pranam (bow) with respect
- He even remembered to do pranam to his mother after the puja

The Big Lesson

Just like Anay, we might not know everything about our scriptures, but what matters most is:

- Our pure feelings (Shraddha)
- Doing things with love and respect
- Following what our parents and teachers show us
- Trying our best with a good heart

This is why Arjuna asked Śrī Krishna: "Where do such devotees stand - in Sattva, Rajas, or Tamas?"

This demonstrates that even without complete knowledge, actions born out of true faith (shraddha) hold value. However, Bhagavān Krishna explains that the nature of our faith determines the quality of our actions, categorized into three types:

- **Sattvic** Faith - Pure and selfless, aimed at spiritual growth.
- **Rajasic** Faith - Driven by personal gain or recognition.
- **Tamasic** Faith - Misguided or harmful, often rooted in ignorance.



The Role of Scriptures

Though it's ideal to act according to the scriptures, Bhagavān acknowledges that not everyone may have complete understanding. Yet, scriptures like the Gītā, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Vedas guide us in developing qualities that align with Sattva. Our elders, teachers, and parents also serve as living scriptures, teaching us through their words and actions.

Our Mission

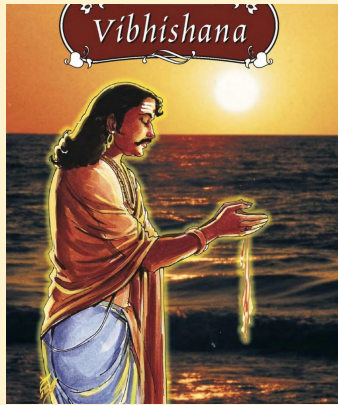
We've just started exploring the Gītā and may not know all its teachings yet, but we can begin by practicing faith and aligning our daily actions with what we've learned. Step by step, we can become more Sattvic and closer to Bhagavān's vision for us.

Remember: It's okay if we don't know everything - what matters is our pure heart and good intentions!

The Story of Three Special Colors in Every Heart!

Did you know there are three magical colors that live inside everyone's heart? Let's learn about them through an amazing story from our ancient books! Once upon a time, there were three brothers - and guess what? They help us understand these three special colors!

The White Light (Sattva)



Meet **Vibhishana** - he's like the bright, pure white light in our heart! Even though he lived in a golden city, he always chose to do what was right. When his brother did something wrong by taking Sita Mata away, Vibhishana said, "This is wrong! We should return her with respect." He's like that little voice in our head that tells us to be good and kind!

The Red Fire (Rajas)



Then there was **Ravana** - he's like a red, burning fire of wanting more and more! He had a city made of gold, but still wanted more. When he felt insulted at Sita Mata's Swayamvara) ceremony, he got so angry that he forgot what was right and wrong. Sometimes we feel like this too - when we absolutely MUST have something right now!

The Dark Cloud (Tamas)



And finally, there was **Kumbhakarna** - he's like a sleepy dark cloud! Would you believe he slept for six whole months? And when he woke up, all he did was eat and eat! Sometimes we feel lazy too, don't we?

This means that everyone has these three colors in their heart, just in different amounts. In this chapter, Bhagavān Krishna encourages us to evaluate the nature of our faith and actions, ensuring they lead us toward a life of virtue and wisdom. As we delve deeper into the Gita, let's embrace this journey of self-

improvement and spiritual growth.

17.2

śrībhagavānuvāca trividhā bhavati śraddhā, dehināṃ(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.

Śrī Krishna tells us that everything we do can be divided into three types: Sattvic (pure and good), Rajasic (passionate), and Tamasic (dark and harmful).

Types of Faith

- **Sattvic** Faith: Pure and selfless, like offering your efforts to God without expecting anything in return. It's the faith of doing good simply because it feels right.
- **Rajasic** Faith: Driven by desires, it involves doing things with expectations—like helping others but hoping for a reward.
- **Tamasic** Faith: Done carelessly or with harmful intent, such as rituals that hurt others or oneself, which God doesn't favor.

Just as a car needs a steering wheel, accelerator, and brake, life needs balance:

- *Sattvic* faith is the steering wheel, guiding us to goodness.
- *Rajasic* faith is the accelerator, driving our ambitions.
- *Tamasic* faith is the brake, needed sometimes but not too much—too much, and the car won't move!

17.3

sattvānurūpā sarvasya, śraddhā bhavati bhārata, śraddhāmayo'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.

Śrī Krishna reveals an important truth:

"Every individual possesses faith. Even those who deny the existence of God hold faith in something—be it science, logic, or material pursuits."

For example, a scientist who claims not to believe in God may still have unwavering faith in the principles of science. This reinforces the idea that faith, in any form, defines and drives us.

This means whatever we believe in strongly, that's what we become! Just like **if you believe you can be kind and brave, you will become kind and brave!**

**yajante sāt̥vikā 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.

Now, coming back to the verse where Bhagavān beautifully explains the different types of worship and their nature.



1. Sattvika Worship:

- Worshippers seek goodness, enlightenment, and universal welfare.
- They worship deities like Śrī Rama, Śrī Krishna, and Hanumanji.
- The aim is to imbibe the divine qualities of these deities.
- Worship is focused on self-purification and the well-being of all.
- The worship is selfless and not driven by personal desires.
- Bhagavān emphasizes that this is the purest form of worship.



Rajasa Worship:

- Worshippers are driven by personal gain, power, or selfish desires.
- They may worship beings like Yakshas and Rakshasas.
- Rituals and mantras are performed with attachment to worldly ambitions.
- The worship is ego-driven and motivated by material desires.

- This type of worship lacks purity of intention and is more focused on fulfilling selfish needs.



Tamasa Worship:

- Worshippers perform dark, eerie rituals, often involving spirits or ghosts (Preta and Bhuta).
- Such practices are typically carried out in secluded or ominous places, like cremation grounds.
- The intent behind these practices is often harmful or filled with fear, ignorance, and negativity.
- This form of worship is harmful and Bhagavān does not endorse it.

So, here Bhagavān categorically identifies the kind of worship each type of individual performs and what it reveals about their nature. As devotees striving to be Sattvika, we should aim for pure devotion, focusing on universal welfare and self-improvement.

17.5

aśāstravihitam(ñ) ghoram(n), tapyante ye tapo janāḥ, dambhāhaṅkārasamyuktāḥ(kh), kāmarāgalānvitāḥ. 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;

Bhagavān then elaborates on the types of austerities (Tapas) performed by people. He mentions that **Rajasic** and **Tamasic** tapas are often extreme and not in alignment with dharma.

For example, we've seen depictions in mythological stories of asuras performing severe penances—standing on one leg for years, enduring scorching heat or freezing cold—all to gain a boon for dominance or destruction. Bhagavān says such austerities are driven by **Dambha** (pretentiousness) and **Ahankara** (ego), and they lack true devotion.

He warns that excessive penance, causing unnecessary pain to oneself, is not appreciated by Him. Why? Because the body is a temple where Bhagavān resides. If we harm our bodies, we are, in essence, causing pain to Him.

17.6

**karśayantaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(m), bhūtagrāmamacetasah,
mām(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 says, you end up hurting Me when you harm yourself. Instead, Tapasya should aim for higher ideals, such as serving others or maintaining self-discipline for the greater good.

For instance, if we give up our comfortable bus or train seat to an elderly person, we endure some inconvenience. But this act of service aligns with Sattvika values and is appreciated by Bhagavān. He stresses that such sacrifices, made selflessly, are acceptable forms of tapas.

17.7

**āhārastvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ,
yajñastapastathā dānaṃ(n), teṣāṃ(m) bhedamimaṃ(m) śrṇu. 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.

Now comes the most exciting part! Bhagavān starts talking about food—**Ahara**, which is something we all love, don't we? He explains that the type of food we prefer reveals our guna (nature). Sattvika people are naturally inclined towards pure, nourishing, and fresh food that enhances vitality, strength, and clarity of mind. Rajasa individuals prefer spicy, salty, or overly rich food that stimulates the senses and creates restlessness. On the other hand, Tamasa individuals are drawn towards stale, fermented, or excessively processed foods, which dull the mind and body.

Here comes the beauty of Bhagavān's teaching—He says that while our food preferences reflect our current guna, the reverse is also true. By consciously shifting our diet towards **Sattvika Ahara**, we can transform our mind and elevate our nature. So, if someone loves Rajasa or Tamasa food, they shouldn't worry or feel disheartened. Bhagavān advises us to gradually regulate our diet, shifting towards healthier and purer options. Eventually, the joy derived from Sattvika food will surpass all other cravings.

The transition might seem challenging at first—because let's admit, Rajasic and Tamasic foods are often tasty! But Bhagavān assures us that with time, we'll experience the real bliss of Sattvika food, which nourishes not just the body but the soul too.

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.

Now, as we shift our mindset towards making healthier and more mindful choices, we will notice changes in our habits too. Even if we currently enjoy certain tamasic foods—perhaps because they're

flavorful—we can start regulating our consumption and gradually transitioning to sattvik foods. Over time, we will realize the true joy and nourishment that sattvik food provides, which goes beyond the temporary pleasures of rajasic or tamasic diets.

So, let us now explore what the Bhagavad Gītā has to say about these three types of foods. Bhagavān begins by describing sattvik food in the 8th verse:

This verse explains that sattvik food increases longevity (**āyuh**), purity (**sattva**), strength (**bala**), health (**ārogya**), happiness (**sukha**), and affection (**prīti**). Such food is nourishing, pleasant in taste, and prepared with love and care.

For instance, when a mother cooks fresh, clean food at home, it embodies her pure emotions—her desire to care for her family. She doesn't simply divide portions; even when she asks for half a roti, she'll end up sliding the larger half onto your plate. Her intention is always full of love and generosity. This positive intent in preparing food enhances its sattvik qualities.



On the other hand, food made in commercial places, like restaurants, is often prepared with the motivation to earn money. This difference in intent impacts the food's energy and effect on the eater.



Freshness and Balance

Freshly prepared food, such as clean vegetables and fruits, is sattvik. **Snigdha** (unctuous) food like ghee and oils—especially pure cow ghee—is also highly beneficial. Cow ghee, for instance, is not harmful to cholesterol and is known for its nourishing properties. Our grandparents often stress how consuming such foods in childhood contributes to lifelong strength and health.



17.10

**yātayāmaṃ(ñ) gatarasaṃ(m), pūti paryuṣitaṃ(ñ) ca yat,
ucchiṣṭamapī 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.

Finally, Bhagavān speaks about tamasic food:



Tamasic food is stale (**yātayāmaṃ**), devoid of taste or essence (**gatarasaṃ**), foul-smelling (**pūti**), or prepared uncleanly (**paryuṣitaṃ**). For example, leftovers stored in the fridge lose their vitality and nourishment over time.

Likewise, foods with a strong odor, such as meat, or items that are unhygienic—like eating from a shared or unclean plate—are tamasic. The practice of sharing a single piece of cake at birthday parties, for instance, may seem harmless but can lead to the spread of germs or illness.

Even foods like pizzas and burgers, often prepared with mostly refined flour and little nutrition, fall into this category. Over time, these foods lack the sattva necessary to nourish the body and mind.

Bhagavān encourages us to reflect on our eating habits and understand how they influence our nature. Sattvik food enhances intellect and strength, helping us excel in all aspects of life. By making mindful choices, we align ourselves with purity and balance, fostering overall well-being.

17.11

aphalākāṅkṣibhiryajño, vidhidṛṣṭo ya iyyate, yaṣṭavameveti 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.

As Bhagavān continues in the next verses, He describes the three types of yajñas (sacrifices)—sattvik, rajasic, and tamasic—and their distinct characteristics.

Let's remember that mindful eating is itself a yajña that nurtures both the body and the spirit.

A sattvik yajna is performed selflessly, with a pure heart, and in alignment with scriptures. It is done with the intent of benefiting everyone, without expecting personal rewards.

The rajasic yajna, on the other hand, is driven by a desire for specific outcomes—"If I do this, I'll get that"—like bargaining for material gains.

Then we discussed the tamasic yajna, which is performed carelessly, without adherence to prescribed methods, and lacks devotion or understanding.

17.12

abhisandhāya tu phalaṃ(n), dambhārthamapi caiva yat, ijyate bhārataśreṣṭha, 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.

Let's understand the concept of yajna. The act of studying can be considered a yajna if done with the right intention—not for selfish gain but to grow into responsible individuals who contribute positively to society and serve the nation. This selfless approach, where teamwork and a collective benefit are prioritized, aligns with the sattvik yajna. A sattvik yajna is one performed according to scriptural guidance with a pure and selfless heart.

Next, the rajasic yajna, offering practical and relatable examples. A rajasic yajna is done with an expectation of reward. How children often strike deals with their parents: "If I score good marks in exams, what will I get in return?" They describe situations where students negotiate for gifts like video games or new clothes, sometimes even before putting in any effort. This is an example of a selfish yajna, where the action is driven by the question, "What's in it for me?" While such actions are not inherently wrong, they lack the selflessness of a sattvik yajna.

17.13

vidhihīnamasṛṣṭāṇṇaṃ(m), mantrahīnamadakṣiṇaṃ, śraddhāviraḥitaṃ(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.

Then the tamasik yajna, which is described as actions performed carelessly, without proper understanding or faith. Understand from the story of Anay, who performs a ritual hurriedly, just to fulfill an obligation. Despite knowing how to conduct the ritual properly, he rushes through it, prioritizing his leisure activities over devotion. This lack of sincerity and respect reflects a tamasik yajna. Additionally, even skipping essential aspects of a yajna, such as offering respect or gratitude to those who guide us, turns it into a tamasik act.

Understand from the examples of rituals performed without following proper procedures or with reluctance, such as offering incomplete dakshina (offerings to priests). Such actions, even if completed outwardly, lack the spirit and respect that make a yajna meaningful.

Gratitude and the Spirit of Giving

Gratitude is very important, especially towards parents, teachers, and those who support us. Instead of constantly demanding more, we should thank our parents for providing the resources and opportunities we need to succeed. This spirit of gratitude and acknowledgment is essential for cultivating the right mindset in life and in yajna.

Simple contributions can serve as dakshina in a modern context. For example, by encouraging friends to join Gītā classes or supporting the organization's mission, participants can contribute meaningfully, regardless of their age or resources.

The Call to Reflect

Reflect on your actions and habits. If tendencies lean towards rajasic or tamasik traits, efforts should be made to realign with sattvik values—those that prioritize selflessness, faith, and collective good.

Takeaway for Life:

- 1. Reflect on Yourself:** Are your actions sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic? Try to shift towards sattvic.
- 2. Gratitude:** Say thank you to your parents and loved ones often!
- 3. Pray with Love:** Never rush through your prayers or rituals. Do them with care and joy!
- 4. Faith Shapes Us:** Choose role models wisely. If we admire Lord Rama or Hanumanji, we grow to embody their virtues.
- 5. Share the Light:** Spread the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita with friends and family. Even if one out of ten joins, it's God's plan!
- 6. Strive for Balance:** Too much indulgence or neglect can misguide us. Aim for actions that uplift your soul and others around you.

The session ends with a promise to explore the three types of austerities (tapas) and charity (daan) in the next session, with a thoughtful reminder to live with intention and gratitude.

Question Answers

Utsav Ji

Question: What is the difference between sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic sacrifices?

Answer: The difference is-

- Sattvic: Performed selflessly and with full faith in God.
- Rajasic: Done with some expectation of reward or recognition.
- Tamasic: Performed without devotion or with indifference.

Sattvic sacrifices are considered the best because they are done without attachment.

Vajra Ji

Question: My friend wants to join Bhagavad Gītā classes. When should they start?

Answer: Advise them to fill out the registration form now. The next batch starts in January. Share the provided registration link with them.

Mitali Ji

Question: What is the meaning of "Shraddha-Traya Vibhaga Yoga"?

Answer: It means the "Yoga of Division of Threefold Faith." It explores the types of faith—sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic—and explains how they influence behavior, eating habits, sacrifices, and austerities. Sattvic faith leads us toward God.

Hitaya Ji

Question: Is animal sacrifice considered sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic?

Answer: Animal sacrifice is tamasic. It does not align with God's will, as He doesn't desire suffering or extreme acts of devotion that cause harm to others.

Pathavi Ji

Question: I try to encourage my friends to join Gītā classes, but they don't listen. Is it my fault?

Answer: It's not your fault. Your responsibility is to share the message of the Gita. Whether they join or not depends on God's will and their readiness. Continue spreading the word with love and patience.

Question: Can you explain the meaning of the third shloka again?

Answer: The third shloka highlights how one's faith is shaped by their nature, which is determined by past actions and upbringing. Faith influences behavior, and it's essential to direct faith toward righteous and noble ideals.

The session concluded with prayers and chant of Hanuman Chalisa



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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.

Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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