

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

1/2 (Ślōka 1-10), Saturday, 23 November 2024

Interpreter: GĪTĀ PRAVĪṆA RUPAL SHUKLA

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/1R573eu6LSI>

Attributes of the three gunas explained

The 17th chapter of Bhagavadgītā is known as **Shraddha Traya Vibhaga Yoga** or "**The Yoga of the Division of the Threefold Faith**". In this chapter, Bhagavān explains the three types of faith corresponding to the three modes of material nature: goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*), and ignorance (*tamas*).

The session commenced with a prayer to Bhagavān Sri Krishna and lighting of the traditional lamp. It was followed by prayers to the Guru Parampara to seek the blessing of all gurus.

In this chapter, Bhagavān shows how the concept of "guna" applies to four important aspects of life, namely:

- - sacrifices/rituals(**yajna**)
- - charity(**dana**)
- - austerities/ worship(**tapa**)
- - food (**aahara**).

yo yacchraddhah sa eva sah: Bhagavān and our scriptures say that we are what we believe in.

In this chapter Bhagavān explains how each of these common activities can be categorized as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic depending on the manner in which they are conducted and their application in our lives. Our goal is to engage in sattvic activities since that alone leads to spiritual development.

With the blessings of ancestors and our punya karmas in this life and previous births, we have this opportunity to learn Geeta, teach Geeta and spread the knowledge of Geeta throughout the world. Though many started on this spiritual journey of learning Geeta, only some could continue. One has to be truly blessed with 'sakshat krupa' of Sri Krishna to continue on this path.

In the 18th chapter, Bhagavan has described with superlatives that those devotees, who spread this most confidential knowledge perform the greatest act of love and are most dear to Him. On this spiritual path, we pray that we receive His grace to continue our journey.

**ya imam paramam guhyam, madbhaktesvabhidhasyati |
bhaktim mayi param krtva, mamevaisyatyasamsayah ||18.68 ||
na ca tasmanmanusyesu, kascinme priyarttamah |
bhavita na ca me tasmad, anyah priyatara bhuvi ||18.69||**

The reason for naming this adhyaya as **Shraddha Traya Vibhaga** is explained in the 3rd sloka by Sri Krishna Bhagavān as three types of Shradhha is followed by the people in the world. The type of Shraddha is based on the inherent character of the person. Bhagavān also says we become what we believe in. If the basic character of a person is Sattvic then his shraddha is sattvic shraddha. If the person is rajasic then the shraddha is rajasic. If he is tamasic, then the shraddha is also tamasic.

17.1

**arjuna uvāca
ye śāstravidhimutsrjya, yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ,
teṣāṃ(n) niṣṭhā tu kā kṛṣṇa, sattvamāho rajastamah. 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.

In 16th chapter, Bhagavān has said:

**yah sastravidhimutsrjya, vartate kamakaratah |
na sa siddhimavapnoti, na sukham na param gatim ||**

He who, having disregarded the injunctions of the scriptures and acts under the impulse of desire, attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the Supreme Goal.

This causes confusion in Arjuna. So he asks Śrī Krishna what is the condition of those people who worship gods with faith disregarding the injunctions of scriptures.

- **ye sastravidhimutsrjya**: who sets aside the ordinances of shastras
- **yajante sraddhayanvitah**: perform some sacrifice with faith
- **tesam nistha tu ka Krsna**: what is their position, Krishna
- **sattvamaho rajastamah**: sattva, rajas or tamas

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.

Sri Bhagavān says that faith (**shraddha**) of the embodied (**dehinam**) is three-fold (**trividha**). This faith is inherent in their nature (**sa svabhaja**).

For example, if a person's nature is sattvic then his faith is also sattvic, if the nature is rajasic then faith is also rajasic and if nature is tamasic then faith is also tamasic. Consider the events happening in Bangladesh. Hindus are targeted and the perpetrators are deriving sadistic pleasure by playing

with corpses, dancing and laughing as that's their inherent tamasic nature. This inherent tamasic nature results in tamasic faith.

Compared to those tamasic people, People with Rajasic or Sattvic nature cannot harm others and behave cruelly with their fellow human beings. Scriptures followed by the sattvic or Rajasic people do not encourage harm to fellow human beings. They always encourage truth, justice and harmony.

17.3

**sattvānurūpā sarvasya, śraddhā bhavati bhārata,
śraddhāmāyayaṁ(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.

Sri Krishna explains that

- faith is influenced by one's sattva (purity of mind)
- faith reflects one's true nature
- faith shapes one's personality and behaviour

- **sattva anurupa sarvasya**: sattva is according to our antahakarna that is our mind
- **śraddha bhavati bharata**: faith is influenced by sattva, O Bharata
- **śraddhamāyayaṁ puruṣo**: one who is made of this nature
- **yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ**: whatever the nature of his faith, he is verily that

As a man's faith is, so is he. Any activity be it doing japa or listening to saint, is colored by the nature of his faith. Performing an action like *tantra Sāadhanā* on a person who has no faith will not have any effect. Similarly *mantra Sāadhanā* or puja performed by a person without faith will not yield optimal results.

17.4

**yajante sātṭvikā devān, yakṣarakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ,
pretānbhūtagaṇāṁścānye, yajante tāmasā janāḥ. 17.4**

Men of Sātṭvika 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.

In this shloka the connection between one's guna and spiritual practise is highlighted. A person can be recognised as sattvik or rajasic or tamasic disposition by their habits.

- **yajante sātṭvikā devān**: sattvic men worship gods(devas)
- **yakṣarakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ**: rajasic men worship yakshas or demons for a specific need. Kuber is a yaksha and he's worshipped for wealth
- **pretānbhūtagaṇāṁścānye, yajante tāmasā janāḥ**: tamasic men worship ghosts and spirits of dead. The results of this worship can be disastrous in the long run even if it gives short term rewards.

17.5

aśāstravihitam(ñ) ghoram(n), tapyante ye tapo janāḥ, dambhāhaṅkārasaṃyuktāḥ(kh), kāmarāgabalānvitāḥ. 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;

In shlokas 5 and 6, Sri Krishna describes people who practice severe penance of arbitrary type that are not prescribed by the scriptures.

We tend to ignore the ordinance of the Śāstras if it's not according to our convenience and to save the effort. If mango leaves needed for puja is not available, we'll compromise and use some other leaves just to avoid the trouble of getting the required leaves. While doing *anushtaan*s for a specific purpose, the shastras should not be compromised according to convenience. Person who intentionally ignore the scriptures, lacking faith and who does not follow traditions, should not question the circumstances of life.

Hinduism is the largest religion after Christianity and Islam. Of late atheism is overtaking hinduism to claim the 3rd place. This alarming trend of intellectual Hindus becoming secular does not bode well for Hinduism.

Though our Śāstras say '**vasudaiva kutumbakam**' we should not take things lying down.

Our Śāstras also says '**samadarshanam**' -treat everyone equally but not '**samvardana**'-not treating everyone same. We should take a stand when it comes to our dharma and protect ourselves. In Bangladesh the Hindus have united in the aftermath of violence to protect themselves. We should stand up for our dharma in our own small way.

dharmo rakshati rakshitah: if one stands up for one's dharma, dharma will protect you.

We can do our bit to awaken the younger generation to the greatness of our culture by

- - popularizing stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata
- - highlighting importance of our identity like tilak, shikha
- - teaching yagnas, anushtaan, rituals and their importance
- - explaining the shodasha samskaras
- - listening to pravachans of saints
- - practical application of the values from Mahabharata, Bhagavad Geeta
- - listening to kathas by Swami Govind Dev Giri ji Maharaj

aśāstravihitam: which is not in shastra

ghoram: terrific

Person who does terrific tapa which is not in scriptures will not yield the desired results. For example a person fasts for a couple of days without doing any puja or japa but wants the wish to be fulfilled.

But a similar fast prescribed by scriptures will have a certain method like

- - specific day, example: ekadashi, shravan month, monday fasting
- - specified puja
- - sankalpa
- - fast
- - next day parana

dambhāhaṅkārasaṃyuktāḥ: having hypocrisy and egoism

kāmarāgabalanvitāḥ: performing with lust

People who undergo severe austerities that is not prescribed by scriptures, but motivated by ego, pride and lust for power and wealth, will be harming their own self.

17.6

**karśayantaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(m), bhūtagrāmamacetasah,
mām(ñ) caivāntaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(n), tātviddhyāsuraṇiścayān. 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.

Sri Krishna describes those as demoniac disposition who:

- torture their bodies through extreme austerities
- emaciate the elements constituting their body as well as the Supreme Spirit dwelling in their heart
- **karśayantaḥ śarīrasthaṃ:** torturing all elements in body
- **bhūtagrāmamacetasah:** all the elements in body that are pancha buthas senselessly
- **mām caivāntaḥ śarīrasthaṃ:** Me also dwelling in body
- **tātviddhyāsuraṇiścayān:** they are of demoniac disposition(asuri) certainly

People who senselessly torture their body with lust, greed and strength also torture Paramātmā dwelling in their body and are of demoniacal nature.

In Sloka 15 of Chapter 15, Bhagavān says:

**sarvasya cāham hr̥di sanniviṣṭo
mattaḥ smṛtirjñānamapohanam ca,
vedaiśca sarvairahameva vedyo,
vedāntakṛdvedavideva cāham (15.15)**

Bhagavān is seated in everyone's heart and it is from HIM that all activities are initiated.

One has to understand and follow the scriptures. The scriptures have prescribed how the tasks have to be performed (**karya karyau vyasthito**), the procedures (**vidhi**) and prohibitions (**nishiddha**).

17.7

**āhārastvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ,
yajñastapastathā dānam(n), teṣāṃ(m) bhedamimaṃ(m) śṛṇu. 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.

This shloka introduces the classifications of:

- - food(**ahara**)
- - practices like sacrifices(**yagna**)
- - austerities(**tapas**)
- - charity(**Daan**)

based on gunas.

Sri Krishna emphasizes the importance of understanding these distinctions to make informed choices.

Food habits can indicate if a person is sattvic, rajasic or tamasic.

- **āhārastvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ:** food which is dear to each is three-fold
- **yajñastapastathā dānaṃ, teṣāṃ bhedamimaṃ śṛṇu:** sacrifice, austerity and charity are also three-fold, hear their distinction.

17.8

**āyuh(s) sattvabalārogya, sukhapṛītivivardhanāḥ,
rasyāḥ(s) snigdhāḥ(s) sthirā hr̥dyā, āhārāḥ(s) sāt̥tvikapriyāḥ. 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.

Sri Krishna describes the characteristics of sattvic food, as those which:

- - promote longevity (**ayuh**)
- - increase virtue (**sattva**)
- - enhance strength (**bala**)
- - enhance health (**arogya**)
- - foster happiness (**sukha**)
- - foster satisfaction (**priti**)
- - has a pleasing and juicy taste (**rasyah**)
- - has sweet taste (**snigdhah**) example jaggery
- - is substantial (**sthira**) example ghee, milk
- - is agreeable to heart (**hrdya**)

A sattvic person will want some sweet (*snigdhah*) to end a meal, but a rajasic person will want some savory to end meal.

Sthira food is that which is substantial like milk, ghee that enhances health and longevity.

Freshly prepared food is sattvic.

17.9

**kaṭvamlalavaṇātyuṣṇa, tikṣṇarūkṣavidāhinaḥ,
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.

Sri Krishna describes rajasic food as

- - bitter (**katu**)
- - sour (**amlam**)
- - salty (**lavana**) like pickle, chutney
- - excessively hot (**atushna**)
- - pungent (**tiksnam**)

- - dry (**ruksam**)
- - burning (**vidahinam**) like a sizzler

These foods are liked by rajasic people and causes pain (**dukah**), sorrow (**shoka**), and diseases (**amaya**).

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.

Sri Krishna describes the characteristics of tamasic food as

- -putrid (**yatayamam**). Food which is cooked and kept for more than a yama(period of 3 hours)
- -stale (**gatarasam**)
- -ill-cooked (**puti**)
- -decomposed and stinking (**paryusitam**)
- -remnants of food eaten by others (**ucchistam**)
- -impure (**camedhyam**), eg. finding hair in food

Such types of food is dear to tamasic people.

Sattvic food becomes tamasic after 3 hours of being cooked and kept. This can be prevented by cooking when required and only as much as required. Restaurants store cooked food in freezers for days together which makes it tamasic. Addition of onion, garlic, mushroom and ajinomoto also makes food tamasic.

A sadhak asked Swami jiif food prepared at home using onion & garlic can be offered as prasada and does it become sattvic?

Swami ji just said that it is tamasic as it has onion & garlic and they are considered to be tamasic. According to pauranik stories, onion & garlic are considered tamasic because of their strong bad smell and it has been proven scientifically too. Even though some say that it has health benefits, it is tamasic. Similarly, non-vegetarian foods like chicken, though high in protein, is tamasic.

Kasturba Gandhi in her last days was advised to eat non-veg food to gain strength. She rejected the suggestion, as she had never consumed non-vegetarian food in her life, and did not wish to do so when she was dying.

In these slokas, Bhagavān has given us important insights and information on different types of food that one can consume and what are the benefits or disadvantages of doing so. It is up to us to make our decision about what to eat. Thoughts influence our shraddha and karmas. So, we must keep our thoughts pure and sattvic. Sattvic thoughts and minds that help us continue on our spiritual journey can be developed by consuming sattvic food.

Questions and Answers

Inderpal ji

Q: Is tea and coffee considered tamasic?

A: No, it is considered rajasic. Intoxicants and cigarettes are considered tamasic. Fruit juices are

sattvic.

Q: Many people may not be in a position to get sattvic food due to various reasons, so how to manage it?

A: Any food prepared at home is good & considered sattvic. But food from restaurants is rajasic or tamasic. The manner in which the food is prepared, by whom it's prepared and the emotions of persons preparing it, affects the food. That's why fruits and salads are considered most sattvic.

Janmejai ji

Q: Are the three gunas different typologies or are they prevalent in one person?

A: Every person has all three gunas but the frequency of each guna matters. The percentage of each guna may differ- 60% sattva guna, 30% rajo guna 10% tamo guna or 40% rajo guna, 30% sattva guna and 30% tamo guna but all three gunas are present in one person. It should be the endeavor of every person to increase the sattva guna.

Indra ji

Q: How to recognize a person as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic?

A: A person's faith defines his/her nature as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic. This is defined by the food consumed, the actions performed, the choices made with their intellect. This nature(vritti) can be changed by efforts and choices.

Q: Should we tell the person or just accept it as their nature?

A: One should realize that it's their nature depending on their karmas of previous births and can be called out only where they have that right. One can correct their children but not an elder or friend who does not ask for advice.

Nirmaladevi ji

Q: What is the definition of *shraddha*?

A: *Shraddha* means belief and what we choose for ourselves every moment.

Q: What is the difference between yajna and tapa?

A: Yajna is a ritual done for community (*samasti*) and tapa is a ritual done for oneself (*vesti*). For example, learning geeta is mahayagna as it's done for benefit of all.

Geetha ji

Q: Where can we get the meaning of each word of Gītā?

A: Anvay Gītā - code 17 and Sadhak sanjeevani, both by Gītā press

Devraj ji

Q: Why is there a difference in pronunciation between Geeta parivar and others?

A: There is a difference in pronunciation as Geeta parivar follows the vedic principles of pronunciation while others may not.

Rakesh ji

Q: Does God differentiate a person who enjoys tamasic foods like onion and garlic even if food is prepared at home?

A: God loves all equally. But it is upto the individual how he/she proceeds on the spiritual path as these tamasic foods may just slow down their spiritual progress. Sadhak may get affected by tamasic foods as it impacts their mind and focus, leading to deviation from sadhana path.

Q: In kaliyuga, is there existence of spirits?

A: We believe in mantra effects and deities(devtas). When we worship devtas with sakama bhava, do pujas and japas, we get punyas generated that affects us. One has to put efforts to get punyas and there is no magic or shortcuts.

Mukul ji

Q: Is upavas considered tamasic?

A: Upavas like the navratri upavas that are prescribed by scriptures is not tamasic. However, any upavas not prescribed in scriptures is considered tamasic.

Narhari ji

Q: Which guna can be harmful to others?

A: This can be subjective as all three gunas can harm others. For example a person doing too much bhajans (sattva guna) may not augur well with others. Rajasic or tamasic guna can directly or indirectly harm others, like slapping someone (tamasic guna) or wishing ill for others (rajasic guna).



We are sure you enjoyed reading the Vivechan write- up. Please invest three minutes of your time to provide us your feedback. Use the link below:

<https://vivechan.learngeeta.com/feedback/>

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

Har Ghar Gītā, Har Kar Gītā !

Let's come together with the motto of Geeta Pariwar, and gift our Geeta Classes to all our Family, friends & acquaintances

<https://gift.learngeeta.com/>

Geeta Pariwar has taken a new initiative. Now you can watch YouTube videos and read PDFs of all the interpretation sessions conducted earlier. Please use the below link.

<https://vivechan.learngeeta.com/>

Learn Geeta, Spread Geeta, Live Geeta

|| OM ŚRĪKṚṢṆĀRPAṆAMASTU ||