

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

1/2 (Ślōka 1-10), Saturday, 28 September 2024

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/-76lA5feqTg>

One is Defined by One's Faith (śraddha)

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 started with the traditional lighting of the lamp, prayers to Sri Bhagavān and offering Pranams to Param Pujya Swami ji Govind Dev Giri ji Maharaj.

Due to Bhagavān's blessings, our good Karmas in the past lives and present life, we are getting opportunities to read, learn and practice this immortal divine knowledge and spread it across the world. Let us make the best use of the opportunity, and become Bhagavān's most favourite disciple.

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 Shradhha 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.

In the 16th chapter, 23rd sloka, Bhagavān said that people who do not follow the "ordinance of the Śāstras / Scriptures" will not be able to achieve the noble things. They will never be satisfied.

**"yaḥ śāstravidhimutsṛjya, vartate kāmakārataḥ,
na sa siddhimavāpnoti, na sukhaṁ na parāṁ gatim"**

Arjuna is confused about this concept. He started asking Bhagavān about those people who do the yajnas which are not in the Śāstra and not knowing about the ordinance of the scriptures.

arjuna uvāca
ye śāstravidhimutsrjya, 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 asks Bhagavān to clear his confusion about the state of people who are doing sacrifices in the yajnas and ignoring the ordinance of the Śāstras.

Arjuna wanted to know under what category their shraddha is being included- Sattvic, Rajasic or Tamasic, because whatever yajnas they perform, it is being done with utmost faith though not following the ordinance of the Scriptures.

Sri Krishna Paramātmā has already explained in the 15th chapter about the three gunas in details and how they influence the worldly state of affairs.

17.2

śrībhagavānuvāca
trividhā bhavati śraddhā, dehināṃ(m) sā svabhāvajā,
sāttvikī rājasī caiva, tāmasī ceti tāṃ(m) śrṇu. 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 speaks about the three types of Shradhha. Based on the nature / inherent character of the person, shraddha is born in a person. If a person's nature is Sattvic, then his faith is Sattvic. If the nature of the person is Rajasic, then his Shraddha is Rajasic, and if the nature of the person is tamasic, his shraddha is tamasic.

if we look at the worldly affairs going on like disturbance in Bangladesh, people are killing innocent people out of hatred and ignorance. The behavior of these people is cruel. Their nature is termed as tamasic. Only tamasic people can be so selfish and cause harm to others.

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,
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.

Bhagavān says to Arjuna that the faith of each or of all human beings conforms to the nature of their mind. Eventually one would become the nature of faith in which one believes in as everyone is born of the nature of his/her faith.

Whenever we are doing any act, whoever is having whichever kind of faith they would become that faith. In simple words, If one believes in something called kind heartedness, then one would become a kind hearted person. If someone is doing *Tantra Sāadhanā* to make someone unhappy or to harm someone, it will only work on someone who believes in *Tantra Sāadhanā*, and will not work on someone who doesn't believe in it.

Bhagavān explains that a person's faith is shaped by their inherent qualities or nature. The type of faith one has whether it is *sattvic*, *rajasic*, or *tamasic* reflects their inner disposition. Essentially, the quality of one's faith determines their character and actions.

17.4

yajante sātṭvikā devān, yakṣarakṣāṃsi rājasāḥ, pretānbhūtagaṇāścānye, 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.

Bhagavān explains the meaning of the convictions of *Śāstras* and what kind of results we get when we offer our prayers to gods and demigods. The nature of one's faith influences the object of worship.

We can not determine one's nature just by looking at them physically, but can determine by observing their habits like eating, activities, behaviour, etc.

Sattvic (Goodness) people with a pure heart and mind worship the gods.

Rajasic (Passion) people, driven by desires and ambitions for achieving *siddhi* or specific things, worship powerful beings like *yakshas* (demi-gods) and *rakshasas* (demons). For example, If one wants to earn money then he or she worships Kubera. People will also worship Ravana to achieve some qualities that are specific to him.

Tamasic (Ignorance) people with deluded minds worship ghosts (*Pretas*) and spirits (*Bhutas*). This is not recommended as one will end up in a very low level or *Tamasic* world forever or as long as they perform such acts.

17.5

aśāstravihitam(ṅ) 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;

Bhagavān explains about the people who are intentionally ignoring the ordinance of the *Śāstras*, their status, position, and where they would end up.

Such people perform terrific practices or engage in harsh and extreme forms of penance and austerity that are not mentioned in or recommended by the *Śāstras*. Such people intentionally avoid following the ordinance of the scriptures and perform acts just per their interests and wishes.

Some people will do some extreme acts like fasting for days together, without indulging in any spiritual

practice like japa, or puja. Their focus is only on the results or favour they think the act of fasting will deliver. The *Śāstras* ordinate about some specific rituals to be performed during *Upavas* (fastings). Simply fasting without performing the rituals will not yield any benefit.

Such terrific practices are driven by:

- Hypocrisy (**dambha**) - pretending to be virtuous or pious.
- Egoism/Arrogance (**ahankara**) - a sense of self-importance and pride.
- Lust and Attachment (**Kama-Raga**) - desires and attachments that compel them to undertake such severe practices.

17.6

**karśayantaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(m), bhūtagrāmacetasah,
mām(ñ) caivāntaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(n), tñviddhyāsuraniścayān. 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.

It is said that good is drawn to good and bad to the bad. Those imbued with sattva guna are attracted to the Divine as they perceive qualities of goodness. Bhagavān gives examples of people with demoniac qualities. HE says some people perform strict austerities not mentioned in the scriptures but are motivated by hypocrisy and egotism. Desire and attachment impels them to torment their body, thus hurting the Bhagavān who dwells within them.

In Sloka 15 of Chapter 15, Bhagavān says

**sarvasya cāhaṃ hṛdi sanniviṣṭo
mattaḥ smṛtirjñānamapohanaṃ ca,
vedaśca sarvairahameva vedyo,
vedāntakṛdvedavideva cāham (15.15)**

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

It is important to know that such people who torment the Bhagavān within themselves, are demoniacal. One should know what one should do as per the scriptures or what one should not do.

17.7

**āhārastvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ,
yajñastapastathā dānaṃ(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 sloka brings forth a question of how one knows which guna one belongs to.

The mind has three Gunas:

- **Sattva** (light, bliss, goodness)

- **Rajas** (passion)
- **Tamas** (inertia, darkness).

There are three Vrittis in the mind corresponding to the three Gunas.

- **Santa Vritti** (peace) comes from Sattva Guna
- **Ghora Vritti** from Rajo Guna
- **Muda Vritti** from Tamo Guna

The purpose of this sloka is to tell that people's preferences for food and actions like yajna and tapah are also according to their dispositions. By observing the food habits of people, one can judge to which guna the person belongs.

17.8

āyuh(s) sattvabalārogya, sukhapritivivardhanāḥ, rasyāḥ(s) snigdhaḥ(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.

There are 3 types of food; sattvic, rajas, and tamas.

People in the mode of goodness eat sattvic food that promotes life span, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Such sattvic food is juicy, nourishing and substantial.

The food one eats and one's personality is related. The Bhagavad Gītā also explains that the act of eating per se should be an offering to Bhagavān:

**yatkarōṣi yadaśnāsi, yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat,
yattapasyasi kaunteya, tatkuruṣva madarpaṇam (9.27)**

'Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation to the sacred fire, whatever you bestow as a gift, whatever you do by way of penance, offer all that to Me'.

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.

Foods that are too bitter (*Katu*), sour, salty, very hot, pungent, dry, and burning are dear to *Rajasic* people. These types of food, while stimulating, ultimately lead to discomfort, sorrow, and health issues. Such foods cause pain, grief, 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 people, under the influence of the mode of ignorance, prefer foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure. Such foods are considered unhealthy and detrimental to both physical and spiritual well-being.

Having food with onion and garlic also comes under *Tamasic*. Gandhi ji's wife Kasturba was advised to have non-vegetarian food as medicine, when bed-ridden. 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:

Sal Srivastava JI

Q: What is the difference between Bhagavad Gītā and Bhagavatam?

A: Bhagavad Gītā is the conversation between Bhagavān and Arjuna. Bhagavata Purana or Srimad Bhagavatam explains Sri Krishna's leelas/maya.

Kiran JI

Q: What can we do with the left over food, instead of throwing away?

A: You can use the leftover food to feed cows.

Satish JI

Q: What is being told in the seventeenth chapter in short?

A: As the chapter name "**Shraddha Traya Vibhaga** Yoga" says, Bhagavān is explaining to Arjuna about three Shraddhas (Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic) and the distinctions/differences between them in terms of Yajna, Dana, Tapah and Karma.



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Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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