



ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

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Interpreter: GĪTĀ PRAVĪṆA RUPAL SHUKLA

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The nature of food (sattvic, rajasic, tamasic) plays a role in building the nature of our mind.

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 (**guna**): 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 mad-bhaktesv abhidhāsyati |
bhaktim mayi parām kṛtvā mām evaiśyaty asaṁśayaḥ || 18 - 68 ||**

He who instructs this most confidential knowledge of the Bhagavadgītā to My devotees will attain the topmost transcendental devotion to Me. Thus becoming free from all doubts, he will finally attain Me.

**na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu kaścin me priya-kṛttamaḥ |
bhavitā na ca me tasmād anyaḥ priyataro bhuvī || 18 - 69 ||**

No one in human society is more dear to Me than one who explains this message of the Gītā to others, nor will there ever be anyone more dear to Me than him.

The reason for naming this adhyaya as **Shraddha Traya Vibhaga** is explained in the 3rd sloka by Sri Krishna Bhagavān, as three types of Shraddha 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,
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.

In 16th chapter, Bhagavān has said:

**yaḥ śāstra-vidhim utsrjya varttate kāma-cārataḥ |
na sa siddhim avāpnoti na sukhaṁ na parām gatim || 16 - 23 ||**

He who discards the injunctions of scripture and acts according to his whimsical desires, attains neither perfection, happiness, nor the supreme destination.

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 Śāstras
- **yajante sraddhayanvitah**: perform some sacrifice with faith
- **tesam nistha tu ka Krsna**: what is their position, Śrī Krishna
- **sattvamaho rajastamah**: sattva, rajas or tamas

17.2

śrībhagavānuvāca
trividhā bhavati śraddhā, dehinām(m) sā svabhāvajā,
sāttvikī rājasī caiva, tāmasī ceti tām(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,
śraddhāmāyoyam(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 bhārata**: faith is influenced by sattva, O Bharata
- **śraddhamāyoyam 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 sāttvikā 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.

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

- **yajante sāttvikā devān:** sattvic men worship gods(devas)
- **yakṣarakṣāmsi rājasāḥ:** rajasic men worship yakshas or demons for a specific need. Kubera is a yaksha and he is worshipped for wealth
- **pretānbhūtagaṇāṃścānye, 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), 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;

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 *anushtaanas* for a specific purpose, the shastras should not be compromised according to convenience. People who intentionally ignore the scriptures, lacking faith and who do 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**'- 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 raksitah: 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 yajnas, anushtaanas, 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

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.

A fast prescribed by scriptures will have a certain method like

- - specific day, example: Ekadashi, Shravana month, Monday fasting
- - specified puja
- - Sankalpa
- - fast
- - next day Parana

dambhāhaṅkārasamyuktāḥ: having hypocrisy and egoism

kāmarāgabalanvitāḥ: performing with lust

People who undergo severe austerities that are 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), tānviddhyāsuraṇīścayān. 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 butha* senselessly
- **mām caivāntaḥ śarīrasthaṃ:** Me also dwelling in body
- **tānviddhyāsuraṇīścayān:** 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 hṛdi sanniviṣṭo mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanaṃ ca |
vedaīś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāham || 15 - 15 ||**

I am situated as the indwelling Supersoul in the hearts of all living entities. From Me come remembrance, knowledge and the destruction of both. By all the Vedas I alone am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of Vedanta and the knower of the Vedas.

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 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.

Based on the gunas this shloka introduces the classifications of:

- - food (**aahara**)
- - practices like sacrifices (**yajna**)
- - austerities (**tapas**)
- - charity (**dana**)

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.

Verses 8, 9 and 10 are very important and one should memorize them, for they explain the three types of food that should be taken and those which should be avoided.

17.8

āyuh(s) sattvabalārogya, sukhapṛītivivardhanāḥ, 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.

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 (**pṛīti**)
- - has a pleasing and juicy taste (**rasyah**)
- - has sweet taste (**snigdhāḥ**) example jaggery
- - is substantial (**sthira**) example ghee, milk
- - is agreeable to heart (**hr̥dyā**)

A sattvic person will want some sweet (**snigdhāḥ**) 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 (**ati ushna**)
- - 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 (**amedhyam**), 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 ji if 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 food 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

Amrutha Acharya ji

Q: Does adding salt to food make it rajasic?

A: Adding too much salt is rajasic. Too much of anything brings in the quality of rajasic.

Shailesh Parekh ji

Q: I soak seeds and nuts overnight, which makes it more than 4 hours. Does it make it tamasic?

A: Cooked food should be consumed within four hours. Soaking raw seeds or nuts overnight does not make them tamasic.

Savitri ji

Q: If we cook food in the morning and pack it to have it for lunch at 2PM, does it make it tamasic?

A: Today's situation is such that we find it difficult to follow all Śāstras to the dot. But when we get this knowledge of the dos and don'ts, it will help in gradually tuning our mind towards following them. It may not happen overnight, but gradually we can shift towards sattvic way of life.



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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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