

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

### Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

1/3 (Ślōka 1-10), Saturday, 14 June 2025

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

## A man's faith depends on his mind set, and can be of three types - sattvic, rajasic or tamasic.

The 17th chapter of Bhagavad Gītā is ***Shraddha traya vibhaga yoga***- Yoga through discerning the three divisions of faith.

In the 14th chapter, Sri Krishna had explained the three gunas or modes of material nature and how they govern human behavior. In this 17th chapter, HE goes deeper into the subject. HE says that faith is an inseparable aspect of human nature. However, depending on nature of their mind, their faith adapts a corresponding color: sattvic, rajasic or tamasic. The quality of life they lead is determined by the nature of their faith, including the food they prefer to eat. HE also classifies food into three categories and discusses the impact of each category upon humans.

Sri Krishna then moves to the subject of *yajna* (sacrifice) and explains that based on the modes of nature, sacrifice can manifest into varied forms. HE also discusses *tapah* (austerity) and describes the austerities of the speech, body and mind. Again, based on the modes in which these austerities are performed- goodness, passion or ignorance, they take different forms. Similarly, *dana* (charity) and its three-fold division based on the modes of nature are explained. Sri Krishna concludes this chapter by emphasizing that the acts of sacrifice, austerity and charity performed without faith and regard to the guidelines given in the scriptures, are futile.

The session began with ceremonial lighting of lamp. Prayers were offered to the Almighty and the gurus.

***sada siva samarambham sankaracarya madhyamam  
asmadacarya paryantam vande guru paramparam***

***om pārthaya pratibodhitam bhagavata narayanena svayam  
vyasena grathitam purana munina madhye mahabharatam***

**advaitamrta varsinim bhagavatim astadashadhyayinim  
amba tvam anusandadhmi bhagavad gite bhava dvesinim**

The 17th chapter is **shraddhatrayavibhaga yoga** in which the three types of shraddha will be explained. In the previous chapters, especially the 14th chapter, the three gunas are described and in this chapter the practical aspects are explained. It is not just enough to memorize the shlokas but also important to adapt it into our daily lives. Only on understanding the principles of Gītā, can we incorporate it into our daily lives. In this regard the 17th chapter is one of the easiest to understand. Sri Krishna talks of routine aspects of our life like food, *yajna*, *tapah* and *daan*. HE explains that **Shraddha** is the key aspect in the spiritual journey.

**What is shraddha?**

First we need to understand the gunas. In the 15th chapter Bhagavān has said that the entire cosmos is made up of three gunas (**gunapravrdha vishayapavalah**). Every object like house, laptop and everything we see, hear, eat, speak has the three gunas. Even we are made of these gunas and a person's nature is determined by these three gunas. Depending on these three gunas our habits, nature and shraddha are defined.

Now let us understand sraddha with an example. In mathematics, we start the equation by assuming  $x=y$ . Though we do not know the actual value of  $x$ , we assume it to be  $y$  as we are told by our teachers. Following this assumption, we start solving the equation step by step and follow all the rules to get the value of  $x$ . Similarly, in the spiritual journey we start out by being unaware of what is Paramātmā, moksha, atma, rajavidhya, rajaguhyā yoga, Purushottama, etc. But we believe in the words of Swamijis, gurus, scriptures, and other elders. Gradually, this belief leads us to read and understand these concepts in depth. All the understanding comes from believing. If initially we did not believe  $x=y$  then we could not have found the value of  $x$ . Similarly, in the spiritual path we have to believe the words of our guru, our scriptures; that is called *shraddha*. In Vedanta saar it is defined as having faith in the words of the guru:

**guru padistha vedanta vakyeshu vishwasah shraddha**

Vedanta is divided into three parts (**prasthanatrayi**)

- **Brahmāsutras**
- **Upanishads**
- **Bhagavad Gītā**

Vedas are considered the supreme source of knowledge, and the gist of vedas is vedanta. If we do not have faith in Bhagavān, our guru, our scriptures then we will be destroyed (*vinashyati*). Bhagavān has said **samshayatma vinashyati**. But it does not mean that we should have blind faith either and believe everything. To avoid blind faith we need to read everything. This is achieved by **shravan**, **manan**, and **nididhyasan**. First we have to listen (*shravan*) with faith. This is followed by contemplation (*manan*). Contemplation can help in understanding the texts and clearing doubts and questions. Once the doubts are cleared then we can bring this knowledge into our life and actions. So sraddha is essential. Sri Krishna has said:

**asraddhya hutam dattam, tapastaptam krtam ca yat|  
asadityucate pārtha, na ca tatpretya no iha || 17.28 ||**

In the last shloka of this chapter, Sri Krishna Himself has said that any good deed done without faith will be futile.

**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 Sri Krishna about those people who do not follow scriptures (**shastravidhimutsrjya**) but worship with faith (**yajante shraddhyanvitah**). He wants to know in which category they belong - **sattvic, rajasic or tamasic**.

- **Sattvic**-stands for goodness like good habits and good virtues
- **Rajasic**-stands for attachment, desires, hyperactivity, restlessness, aggressive
- **Tamasic**-stands for inertia, ignorance

To understand why Arjuna is asking this question we need to take a step back to the 16th chapter. In the 16th chapter the twenty-six daivi gunas and asuri gunas are explained by Bhagavān. HE says

**tasmacchastram pramanam te, karyakaryavyavasthitau |**  
**jnatva shastravidhanoktam, karma kartumiharhasi || 16.24 ||**

HE concludes the 16th chapter by comparing and differentiating between the divine and demoniac natures.

HE drives home the point that the Vedic scriptures are the absolute authority in ascertaining the propriety of any activity, or lack of it. HE tells us to understand the scriptural injunctions and teachings, and then perform the actions accordingly. Arjuna knows that it may not be possible to follow scriptures at all times. This could be due to lack of knowledge of scriptures, lack of opportunity to learn Śāstras, or our limited capacity to understand the scriptures. So Arjuna is asking how a layman, who does not have easy access to scriptures can perform activities with sraddha. Many of us read Bhagavad Gītā daily after joining learn gītā program but do not read *karanyasa* or *hrdyanyasa* which we will be taught at a later stage. At a parayana there may be rules which we are unaware of and may not follow. This will not cause us to get sin as the karma of reading Bhagavad Gītā is done with faith.

## 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 Krishna explains that sraddha is of three types, which corresponds to the three gunas

- **sattvic**
- **rajasic**
- **tamasic**

Sri Krishna says the sraddha belongs to the soul residing in the body (**dehinam**). We often mistake the physical body for the atma, but the soul residing in the body is the **Jīvātmā**.

There can be three sources of sraddha

- **sanghaja:** comes due to good company. For example Gītā parivar where all Gītā seekers are trying to achieve spiritual motivation with positivity from each other. The opposite could also be true.
- **shastraja:** comes from reading scriptures like Bhagavad Gītā, puranas, itihās
- **svabhavaja:** comes from previous lives. For example, we have certain interests from childhood.

Sri Krishna tells Arjuna to hear from HIM as he explains the same.

### 17.3

**sattvānurūpā sarvasya, śraddhā bhavati bhārata,  
śraddhāmāyo'yaṁ(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 gives a very important principle of **think positive, speak positive and do positive to attract positive energy to yourself**. Only if we think positive can we speak positive, as the *vak karma* is dependent on mind. Only if we think and speak positive, will we do positive. So always think positive.

Shraddha depends on our sattva which depends on **antahkaran**.

The four components of antahkaran are **mana, buddhi, chitta and ahankar**.

- **Mana** is mind. **sankalpa vikalpa atmika vridhhi mano**. There are many thoughts flowing in the mind with many options.
- **Buddhi** is intellect. **nishchaya atmika vridhhi buddhi**. Intellect takes firm and final decision.
- **Chitta** is the storage of previous memories.
- **Ahankar** is identification/ "I"ness and not pride or ego. Every person is identified by a name. Even a toddler who cannot tell his name has a sense of identity.

Shraddha will be according to our sattva, antahkaran and our thoughts. A person's mind creates his sraddha and whatever the nature of shraddha so will be his personality. If a person wants to earn lots of money, his shraddha will be for money or big companies. Slowly he becomes the same as his thoughts and sraddha tends towards rajasic. But if shraddha is sattvic, then thoughts, speech and actions tends towards sattvic. Similarly is the case for tamasic.

Shraddha is made from antahkaran which has some tendencies and habits from previous births. Some habits and tendencies we develop in this life according to our karma (*kriyaman*) we do. Some days we may not want to attend Gītā class for various reasons, but if we control ourselves and attend class, our sraddha will develop slowly and so shall we. With sattvic sraddha one can get spiritual and physical progress due to discipline, punctuality and eating the right food. This will ultimately lead to success, peace of mind and happiness in life. Sattvikta is not only the spiritual path, but a disciplined and balanced lifestyle.

### 17.4

**yajante sāttvikā devān, yakṣarakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ,  
pretānbhūtagaṇāṁścānye, 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.

Sri Krishna describes the different types of worship (**upasana**) according to the three gunas. Everyone does worship in some form like praying in temple, meditating, spending time to analyze themselves, to kickstart their day. This will give satisfaction, peace and fulfillment. In our culture we do *upasana* in the morning to prepare ourselves for the entire day. Whether that *upasana* is sattvic, rajasic or tamasic, it will accordingly affect our thoughts, actions, efficiency of our work in office or at home and concentration in studies.

The different types of worship are

- **Sattvic:** Those with sattvic faith worship the gods (**devan**), deities seeking spiritual growth, self-realization and welfare of family and self.
- **Rajasic:** Those with rajasic faith worship demons and demigods (**yaksaraksamsi**) seeking power, wealth and material gain.
- **Tamasic:** Those with tamasic faith worship spirits of dead and ghosts (**pretanbhutaganamscanye**) seeking to fulfill their material desires, selfish interests to harm others.

## 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;

Some people perform severe austerities not sanctioned by the scriptures. This severe penance of arbitrary type, is not motivated by shraddha, but because of hypocrisy (**dambh**), and pride (**ahankar**). These austerities are performed to fulfill their desires (**kama**), attachments (**raga**) and have pride of power (**balanvitah**).

## 17.6

### **karśayantaḥ(ś) śarīrastham(m), bhūtagrāmamacetasah, mām(ñ) caivāntaḥ(ś) śarīrastham(n), tānviddhyāsuranīscayān. 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.

Some people perform severe austerities that torture and harm their body and suppress the sense organs (**bhutagramamacetasah**). Sri Krishna tells that such people impelled by desire and attachment, torment not only the elements of their body, but also HIM who dwells within them as the Supreme Spirit (**mam caivantah sharirastham**). These senseless people should be known as possessing demoniac nature (**tanviddhyasuraniscayan**).

**sarvasya chaham hr̥di sannivisto  
mattah smrtirjanamapohanam ca|  
vedaishca sarvairahameva vedyo  
vedantakrdvedavidēva chaham || 15.15 ||**

In this shloka from 15th chapter, Bhagavān says that HE resides in the hearts of all living creatures. Hence, torturing the body amounts to torturing Bhagavān HIMSELF.

## 17.7

### **āhāstvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ, yajñastapastathā dānaṃ(n), teṣāṃ(m) bhedaṃ(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.

In this next shloka, Bhagavān talks about food (**āhāra**). The food people prefer is according to their dispositions. The same is true for sacrifice (**yajna**), austerity (**tapas**) and charity (**daan**) they are inclined or predisposed toward.

Initially, Bhagavān has described how the three kinds of people do three different kinds of upasana. Now HE tells us about the different types of food to analyze ourselves. To increase the sattvic qualities we have to increase consumption of sattvic food and at same time reduce consumption of rajasic and tamasic food. "We are what we eat."

#### ***jaisa khayе annа vaіsa bane mann***

Therefore, to increase sattvic sraddha we have to increase consuming sattvic food and reduce rajasic and tamasic food.

## 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.

he characteristics of sattvik food are

- increased longevity (**ayuh**)
- purity(**sattva**)- our antahkaran will become more pure
- strength(**bala**)
- health (**arogya**)
- happiness (**sukha**)
- cheerfulness (**priti**)

The sattvik foods are

- juicy (**rasya**) - fresh fruits and vegetables which are juicy
- succulent (**snigdhaḥ**) - ghee
- nourishing (**sthira**) - milk, ghee, fresh curd
- naturally agreeable (**hr̥dyā**) - natural sweeteners (honey, jaggery), herbal teas

As per Patanjali yoga, **arogyam parama sukh**. Consuming sattvik foods increases peace, vitality, longevity and promotes clarity. Healthy body has a sound mind.

## 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.

The characteristics of rajasic food are

- bitter (**katva**)
- sour (**amla**)
- salty (**lavana**)
- very hot (**ati ushna**)
- pungent (**tikshna**)
- dry (**ruksha**)
- burning (**vidahinah**)

These foods cause

- pain and suffering (**dukha**)
- grief (**soka**)
- sickness (**amaya**)

Spicy food, fried food, coffee, tea, garlic, excessive salt, fermented foods (pickles, vinegar) and excessive sweets are rajasic foods. Increased consumption of rajasic foods causes restlessness, aggression, increased attachments, ambition and hyperactivity.

### **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.

The characteristics of tamasic foods are

- stale (**yatayamam**)-cooked food kept beyond three hours (3 hours=1 yamam)
- tasteless (**gatarasam**)
- putrid (**puti**)
- polluted (**paryusitam**)
- rotten (**ucchistamapi**)
- impure (**amedhyam**)

Leftovers, spoiled or overcooked food, rotten fruits / vegetables, contaminated food, alcohol, processed junk food, meat and fish, and fermented/ impure food are examples of tamasic foods. These foods lower energy and consciousness. They cause laziness, dullness, inertia and negativity.

The session ended with prayers to the Almighty.

### **Questions & Answers session**

#### **Siva Maddineni ji**

**Q:** Is praying to devatas a rajasic guna?

**A:** Praying to devatas alone in order to receive something is rajasic. Praying to devatas as well as Bhagavān as a duty or for love of Bhagavān is sattvic. It is not wrong to pray to devatas. Infact, Adi Shankaracharya ji advocates that every family person should pray daily to any form of five devatas - Bhagavān Vishnu, Bhagavān Siva, Ganesh ji, Surya dvata and Devi.

**Q:** What is the difference between chitta and ahankara?

**A:** Ahankara is not to be mistaken as ego. Aham is one role our antahkarana (inner self) plays, the other three being manah (mind), buddhi (intellect) and chittah (perception/ assumption about ourself). Chitta is whatever we picture about ourself, like 'I am intelligent', etc. Aham is the part within us (inner self) that is awake when the body sleeps.

### **Meenu ji**

**Q:** How can we overcome overthinking?

**A:** Overthinking occurs when we feel we want more than what we have, and want to try the situation to our liking. Bhagavān has said in chapter 12 - '**santusto ena kena cith**' '*Be satisfied as it is*'. We should not try to change any situation, but try to be satisfied in all conditions.

### **Saswath ji**

**Q:** Please explain the characteristics of tamasic people.

**A:** We are all a mixture of the three gunas - sattva, rajas and tamas. No one is totally a sattvic person, or a tamasic person. When we suppress rajasic and tamasic qualities, and enhance our sattvic qualities, we are termed as good. On the contrary, if we suppress sattvic guna and enhance tamasic quality, we are considered as bad or tamasic person, who does bad or evil things to others.

### **Jalaja ji**

**Q:** How can we overcome the guilt of not following rituals?

**A:** Rituals play a role in uplifting our life. It is not compulsory that we follow the rituals, but if we do, our life will improve; if not, we don't get the benefit.



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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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