

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

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

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## The Threefold Division of Faith: Sattvik, Rajasik, and Tamasik Paths

The **Chapter 17** of Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā is **Śhraddhā Traya Vibhāg Yoga - Yoga through Discerning the Three Divisions of Faith**

The session commenced with Deep prajwalan, the customary lighting of lamp, prayers to the Supreme, and salutations to all the Gurus.

**Vasudeva Sutam Devam, Kamsa Chanura Mardanam,  
Devaki Paramanandam, Krishnam Vande Jagadgurum.  
Yogesham Sachidanandam, Vasudeva Vraja Priyam,  
Dharma Sansthapaka Veeram, Krishnam Vande Jagatgurum.  
Śrī Guru Charan Kamalebhyo Namah.**

With the divine grace of Bhagavān, a rare and auspicious fortune has awakened in all, leading us toward the ultimate purpose of human life. The journey toward the highest realization has begun, with the study, service, and understanding of the Bhagavad Gītā. Engaging in its teachings and striving to bring its essence into daily life is a sacred endeavor. It is not by personal choice that one comes to the Bhagavad Gītā; rather, one is chosen by Bhagavān's grace to receive its wisdom. Without divine blessings, one cannot engage in the study of this sacred scripture. Having been granted this rare opportunity, the only effort must be to never let go of it, to hold onto its teachings with unwavering faith and practice.

In contemplating different chapters, the discussion reaches **the seventeenth chapter, Shraddha-Traya-Vibhaga-Yoga. Bhagavān highlights two essential aspects of life—heart and intellect.** Often, a debate arises on which holds greater significance. A household cannot function merely on emotions, nor can it be sustained solely through intellect; both have their own place. Traditionally, the role of the heart is attributed to the mother, while the father is seen as the guiding intellect. A child once wrote a beautiful sentiment: “My mother is the heart of the family, and my

father is the brain of the family; together, they form my family tree.”

Shraddha (faith) is a matter of the heart. On the spiritual path, those who become excessively entangled in logic find their progress hindered, while those who surrender with pure faith advance rapidly. In his final moments in Jagannath Puri, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu wept before Bhagavān, expressing how his intellect stood as an obstacle to divine realization. He wished only for a heart that could dissolve in divine remembrance. Similarly, at the end of his life, Bhīṣma Pitāmaha, lying on a bed of arrows, expressed a surprising desire for marriage. This bewildered everyone—how could a lifelong celibate warrior speak of marriage in his final moments? Seeing their confusion, Bhagavān Krishna smiled and asked whom he wished to marry. Bhīṣma Pitāmaha replied that he wished for his intellect to unite with Bhagavān, as it was the last barrier between him and the divine.

At the beginning of spiritual practice, intellect serves a purpose, guiding the seeker. However, at the culmination of the journey, even intellect must be surrendered, just as a vehicle used to reach a destination is left behind upon arrival.

A profound tale illustrates the power of faith over logic. In a famine-stricken village, a farmer, burdened by debt, was unable to repay the landlord. Seeing the farmer’s daughter, who had come of age, the landlord, though much older, proposed that she marry him in exchange for clearing the debt. The distressed farmer refused. A village panchayat was called to settle the matter. Unable to resolve it, they devised a test: a white stone and a black stone would be placed in a bag, and the girl would pick one. If she drew the black stone, she would have to marry the landlord, and if she drew the white one, the debt would be forgiven.

However, the landlord, acting deceitfully, placed two black stones in the bag. The girl, observing this trick, felt helpless but recalled a teaching she had once heard—when one is unable to solve a problem, surrender it to Bhagavān. She prayed to Maa Parvati and picked a stone. At that moment, a bird swooped down and struck her head, causing her to drop the stone. Since the remaining stone in the bag was black, it was concluded that the one she had picked must have been white. Thus, the landlord’s deceit was defeated, the farmer’s debt was erased, and the girl’s future was secured.

जब तुझसे न सुलझे तेरे उलझे हुए धंधे ।  
तू भगवान पर सब छोड़ दे बंदे ।।  
वही तेरी सब मुश्किलों को आसान करेगा ।  
जो तू नहीं कर पाया वह भगवान करेगा ।।

Faith holds immense power, far greater than logic. Logic has its place, but faith transcends all. Just as colors cannot exist independently and require a medium to be seen—red in a rose, green in leaves—faith too requires a medium to manifest. It expresses itself through devotion, prayer, service, and surrender.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Bhagavān begins with the concept of food, for it is the most universal experience. While not everyone engages in penance, charity, or rituals, food is a common necessity for all. The discussion on sattvic food leads into deeper aspects of spiritual practice, guiding one toward a life of purity and devotion.

The Bhagavad Gītā describes the characteristics of Sattvic food in verse 17.8:

**āyuh-sattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ  
rasyāḥ snigdhaḥ sthirā hṛidyā āhārāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ**

Foods that enhance longevity, purity, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction are dear to those with a Sattvic nature. These foods are nourishing, mild, stable, and naturally appealing to the heart. Alternatively, those who consume such foods gradually develop a Sattvic disposition. The relationship is reciprocal—Sattvic individuals prefer such food, and the consumption of Sattvic food fosters Sattvic qualities in a person.

In explaining this, the Gītā first outlines the effects of food on one's nature and then describes what should be eaten. It then explains how an individual's disposition aligns with their dietary preferences. However, in the case of Rajasic food, the sequence is reversed—the Gītā first lists the types of food consumed and then explains their effects. The reason behind this difference in presentation is further explored in the following verses.

## 17.9

### **kaṭvamlalavaṇātyuṣṇa, tīkṣṇarūkṣavidāhinaḥ, 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.

Rajasic food is characterized by excessive bitterness, sourness, saltiness, extreme heat, pungency, dryness, and a burning nature. Such food is preferred by those with a Rajasic temperament. However, it leads to suffering, sorrow, and disease.

Food is of four kinds:

- **Bhakṣya:** chewable
- **Coṣya:** Suckable
- **Lehya:** Lickable
- **Peya:** Drinkable

A significant point to remember is that these parameters given by the divine are meant for self-assessment, not for judging others. Often, the intellect is misused to categorize people—identifying others as Rajasic or Tamasic while considering oneself Sattvic. However, these guidelines are intended as a personal measure, like a thermometer, to check one's own tendencies.

In the context of Sattvic food, the focus is first on its effects—how it enhances longevity, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction—before discussing what constitutes such food. However, in the case of Rajasic food, the order is reversed. The emphasis is first on the type of food consumed, and only afterward is its effect considered. This reflects the Rajasic mindset, which prioritizes immediate gratification over long-term consequences. The concern is not about what will happen later, but rather about fulfilling the present craving.

For instance, even when advised by a doctor to avoid sugar due to diabetes, a Rajasic individual might rationalize consuming it by planning to compensate with exercise later. The instant pleasure of eating outweighs the awareness of consequences. This tendency extends to preferences for extremely sour, bitter, spicy, or hot food. Some individuals prefer their tea scalding hot, even to the point of burning their lips, or relish dishes so spicy that they bring tears to the eyes. Some seek food that is excessively pungent or so dry that it lacks the soothing presence of ghee or milk. Such food choices often result in acidity and digestive issues.

Rajasic individuals find pleasure in intensely flavored foods—whether it be an extremely hot samosa,

an overwhelmingly spicy curry, or an excessive amount of salt and lemon on their meals. The craving for strong flavors becomes habitual, reinforcing their Rajasic tendencies.

The Bhagavad Gītā highlights that such foods contribute to distress, anxiety, and disease. The more one consumes Rajasic food, the more suffering, illness, and mental unrest follow. A person who predominantly eats Sattvic food remains free from anxiety, while one who consumes excessive Rajasic food becomes prone to tension and worry.

The saying "**Jaisa khaaye ann, waisa ho jaye mann**" (As one eats, so does one's mind become) holds true. When food does not bring a sense of calm and joy after consumption but instead results in restlessness or distress, it indicates a Rajasic diet. In the long run, such dietary habits lead to health issues—heart problems, kidney ailments, digestive disorders, and more.

In discussing Sattvic food, the emphasis is first on its beneficial effects, and then on the food itself. Conversely, when speaking of Rajasic food, the focus is initially on the type of food, with the consequences addressed later. For Tamasic food, there is not even a discussion of consequences, reinforcing the idea that one's diet directly influences one's mental and physical well-being.

## 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.

Food that is stale, tasteless, foul-smelling, decomposed, impure, or left over from another's meal is favored by those with a tamasic disposition. The term "**yātayāmaṃ**" refers to food that has either not been properly cooked or has been stored for an extended period, losing its freshness. This includes frozen foods, which are kept out of season and consumed long after their natural time. "**Gatarasaṃ**" describes food that has lost its natural essence due to exposure to elements such as sunlight or artificial processing, as in the case of milk or fruits from which nutrients have been extracted.

"**Pūti**" refers to food prepared by allowing natural decay, such as alcoholic beverages, which are made by fermenting fruits. Certain foods, like onions and garlic, naturally emit strong odors, which is why they are considered tamasic. The term "**paryuṣitaṃ**" is explained in-depth by Swami Ram Maharaj in '**Sadhak Sanjeevani**.' He clarifies that food containing water and salt becomes stale overnight, whereas items made from pure milk, ghee, sugar, or those cooked over fire, like laddoos or jalebis, remain fresh until they develop a foul odor or change shape.

"**Ucchiṣṭam**" refers to food that has been contaminated—either by being left over on someone's plate or touched by an animal, making it impure. If a dog, cat, or crow even sniffs at food, it becomes unfit for consumption. The term "**amedhyaṃ**" includes all impure foods, such as meat, fish, and eggs, which are derived from dead beings.

Scriptures dictate that even touching a corpse necessitates purification through bathing; consuming dead flesh, therefore, is entirely impure. These tamasic foods appeal to those who do not concern themselves with consequences, as such individuals do not reflect upon the impact of their diet on their health or mind.

A significant observation is that even sattvic food, when consumed with excessive indulgence, becomes rajasic. Eating for nourishment and sustenance aligns with sattvic principles, but when one eats simply for taste, delighting excessively in flavors, the act becomes rajasic. For instance, a simple dish like "amras" (mango pulp) is sattvic, but when consumed with great enthusiasm, constantly craving more, it becomes rajasic. If indulgence goes further and one overeats, ignoring the body's limits, the same food takes on a tamasic quality.

A famous anecdote illustrates this transformation. In Rajasthan, a man was so pleased with a particular sweet dish that he kept eating until he had consumed over eighty servings. Ultimately, he became severely ill. When urged to drink an antacid to aid digestion, he refused, claiming that had he room for the drink, he would have had another portion of the sweet instead. This exemplifies how an excess of even the purest food can lead to suffering.

True sattvic eating involves consuming fresh, light, and nourishing food, offered first to the divine and eaten in moderation. This sustains both physical health and mental clarity. Rajasic eating is driven by sensory pleasures, prioritizing taste over well-being. Tamasic eating disregards all concerns of purity, leading to physical ailments and mental dullness. The quality of one's food influences the state of one's mind—"Jaisa anna, waisa man"—as one's diet shapes one's thoughts and consciousness.

Beyond the nature of the food itself, other factors influence its purity. Who prepares the food, with what intent, and through what means matters. If food is cooked with pure earnings and righteous means, it retains its sattvic quality. If obtained through unrighteous ways, it carries negative energy, affecting those who consume it.

This extends to consuming food given as charity or in communal offerings. Eating prasada from religious gatherings is highly sattvic but should be taken in moderation. Excessive hoarding or repeatedly taking more than necessary diminishes its sanctity, transforming it into rajasic or tamasic indulgence. Another significant principle is that eating without contribution diminishes one's merit. Partaking in food without offering anything in return leads to a decline in spiritual wealth.

Having discussed the three types of food—sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic—the discourse moves forward to explore the three types of yajnas (sacrifices). Just as food is categorized based on purity and intent, sacrifices also fall into these three classifications, shaping one's spiritual and worldly life accordingly.

## 17.11

### **aphalākāṅkṣibhīryajño, vidhidṛṣṭo ya ijjate, 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.

A yagna performed in accordance with scriptural injunctions, without any desire for personal gain, and with a mind firmly set on duty alone, is considered sattvic. The essence of sattvic action lies in the attitude of selflessness—where the act itself is seen as a duty rather than a means to attain a specific reward.

The concept of sattva is a progression towards selfless action. A person who performs their duties without expecting anything in return moves towards a higher state of sattva. A sattvic yagna is marked by the absence of desire for personal benefits. It is not done with the expectation of receiving blessings or rewards but out of a deep sense of duty.

For instance, when a person bows before their elders, if they do so with the expectation of receiving blessings, their action leans towards rajasik tendencies. They may continue to bow until acknowledged, revealing an underlying desire for recognition or blessings. However, if they bow simply because it is their duty, without concern for whether they are noticed or not, their action aligns with sattvic principles.

Actions are rarely absolute; they exist within a spectrum, with varying degrees of sattva, rajas, and tamas. One must self-reflect to understand where they stand within this range. Some actions may have a mix of both duty and desire, and the goal should be to gradually reduce the latter.

A truly sattvic individual adheres to scriptural wisdom, follows the guidance of saints and sages, and remains steadfast in their practice, irrespective of external validation. Over time, by adhering to the principles of sattva, one moves beyond the three gunas and reaches a state of transcendence, where duty is performed purely for its own sake. This is the essence of sattvic yagna as described in the scriptures.

## 17.12

**abhisandhāya tu phalaṁ(n), dambhārthamapi caiva yat,  
ijyate bharataśreṣṭha, taṁ(m) yajñam(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.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, it is stated that when a yagna is performed with the sole desire for its fruits or for the sake of ostentation, it falls under the category of rajasik yagna. The distinction between sattvic and rajasik karma is often subtle, as the external actions may appear similar, but the underlying intent makes all the difference.

A person whose focus remains on the rewards of their actions, or who is concerned about whether others are watching, is engaged in a rajasik act. Many individuals modify their behavior based on the presence of an audience. For instance, while sitting at home, they may be watching entertainment on television, but upon hearing the doorbell, they might switch to a religious channel to maintain a certain image. While not inherently wrong, such an act falls under the realm of rajasik karma because it is driven by the need to impress others rather than genuine devotion.

There are also those who take undue credit for work they have not done. If someone else initiates an idea, another executes it, but a third person claims it as their own, this is considered not just rajasik but a sinful act. Today, some individuals seek to associate themselves with noble deeds merely for recognition. If they do not receive the expected appreciation, they quickly withdraw. This is a sign that their intent was never pure seva (selfless service), but rather self-promotion.

Conversely, a sattvic person engages in karma without concern for recognition. They perform their duties simply because it is the right thing to do. In contrast, a rajasik person works with the expectation of acknowledgment and rewards. A tamasik person, however, goes a step further by actively undermining others' efforts. If they see no benefit for themselves, they may even attempt to sabotage the work.

A sattvic individual remains undisturbed by external validation, focusing solely on righteousness. A rajasik individual craves credit and recognition, while a tamasik individual seeks to diminish others' achievements out of envy or malice. Often, rajasik and tamasik tendencies can disguise themselves



under the guise of sattva. Initially, such individuals may appear virtuous, but over time, their true nature is revealed when it becomes evident that their actions were motivated by self-interest rather than selflessness.

The Bhagavad Gītā emphasizes recognizing these subtle differences in intent, ensuring that one's actions are aligned with true righteousness rather than superficial appearances.

### 17.13

**vidhihīnamasrṣṭānnaṃ(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.

The Bhagavad Gītā describes various types of **yajñas (sacrifices)** and classifies them based on their nature.

#### **Tāmasic Yajña (Ignorant Sacrifice)**

The characteristics of a tāmasic yajña are outlined as follows:

- **1. Vidhihīnam** - A sacrifice that is devoid of scriptural injunctions.
- **2. Asrṣṭānnaṃ** - One that does not include the offering of food (**annadāna**).
- **3. Mantrahīnam** - A yajña where mantras are not properly recited.
- **4. Adakṣiṇaṃ** - A yajña where no dakṣiṇā (offering or donation) is given.
- **5. Śraddhāviraḥitaṃ** - A yajña performed without faith and devotion.

Any sacrifice lacking these essential elements falls under the category of tāmasic yajña. The degree to which these aspects are missing determines the intensity of its tāmasic nature. For example, if one or two of these elements are absent, the yajña may be partially tāmasic, but if all are missing, it becomes completely tāmasic.

A common example is when individuals fast and, upon mistakenly consuming something, immediately break the fast entirely. Instead of continuing with the spirit of the fast, they abandon it altogether. This lack of perseverance indicates a tendency towards tāmasic actions.

#### **The Story of King Drupada and the Tāmasic Yajña**

A notable example of a tāmasic yajña is found in the story of King Drupada. When Dronacharya used his disciples, the Pandavas, to defeat and imprison Drupada, the latter was humiliated and had to part with half his kingdom. Though Dronacharya considered this a restoration of balance, Drupada felt deeply dishonored. Seeking revenge, he approached his Kulaguru, Yaja, and requested a Putrakāma yajña to beget a son who would slay Dronacharya.

Yaja, being a wise sage, refused, saying that although such a yajña was prescribed in the scriptures, its intent was tāmasic, as it aimed at another's destruction. He advised Drupada to seek the assistance of his brother, Upayaja, who, being driven by greed for dakṣiṇā, would be willing to perform it.

Drupada then turned to Upayaja, who agreed to conduct the yajña. From this ritual, Draupadi was born first, followed by Drṣṭadyumna, the warrior destined to kill Dronacharya. Despite being executed according to scriptural mandates, with proper mantras and offerings, the yajña remained tāmasic

because it was performed with malice and vengeance in mind. Even noble acts, when carried out with ill intent, become tāmasic in nature.

### Lessons from the Tāmasic Yajña

This story emphasizes that actions must not only be righteous in execution but also in intent. Even if performed according to tradition, a yajña done with the desire for another's harm remains impure. True spirituality requires moving from tāmasic tendencies towards sāttvic actions, eventually aspiring to a state of complete selflessness (niṣkāma karma).

The Bhagavad Gītā encourages individuals to rise above tāmasic and rājasic inclinations, striving towards pure and selfless service. Those who wish to engage in true spiritual acts must ensure their actions are rooted in faith, sincerity, and the well-being of all.

Following this, the Gītā introduces the threefold classification of tapas (austerity) – physical, mental, and verbal – each of which also falls under the three guṇas: sāttvic, rājasic, and tāmasic. These classifications provide further insight into how one's actions and intentions define their spiritual progress.

## 17.14

**devadvijaguruprājña, pūjanaṁ(m) śaucamārjavam,  
brahmacaryamahimsā ca, śārīraṁ(n) tapa ucyate. 17.14**

Worship of gods, the Brāhmanaṁ, one's guru, elders and great soul, purity, straightforwardness, continence and non-violence –these are called penance of the body.

The Bhagavad Gītā describes the concept of "**Sharira Tap**" or bodily austerity in the verse 17.14

**देवज गुरु प्राज्ञ पूजन शौच मार्जवं चर मंसा शरीर तप उते**

*Bodily austerity consists of worshiping the divine, the learned, and the wise, maintaining purity, simplicity, celibacy, and practicing non-violence.*

### The True Meaning of Bodily Austerity

Often, the notion of bodily penance brings to mind images of standing in water while chanting, meditating in the Himalayas with raised arms, or enduring harsh physical conditions like the ascetics of Naga traditions. However, true bodily austerity is not about extreme physical hardship; rather, it is about reverence, purity, simplicity, self-discipline, and non-violence.

#### 1. Worship of the Divine (Devata Puja)

Adi Shankaracharya prescribed the worship of the "Panchayatana Devata" for householders, advocating the daily reverence of five deities:

- **Surya Dev** (the Sun God): Offering water every morning.
- **Bhagavān Shiva**: Keeping a Shivalinga or an idol of Bhagavān Shiva in the home.
- **Bhagavān Vishnu**: Worshiping any form of Bhagavān Vishnu, whether as Bhagavān Vishnu himself, Śrī Rama, or Śrī Krishna.
- **Gauri** (Devi): Keeping an idol of any Goddess, such as Maa Durga, Lakshmi Mata, or Maa Parvati.
- **Ganesha ji**: The presence of Ganesha ji's idol is essential.

These five deities must be worshiped daily, and one should place their personal "**Ishta Devata**" (chosen deity) at the center while seeking devotion for them through the other deities. The worship of



deities is not optional; it is essential for a sattvic life. The Bhagavad Gītā states: "**sāttvikāḥ sajjante devān**"—sattvic people worship the divine.

## **2. Worship of Brahmins (Dvija Puja)**

Worshipping the Brahmins is another essential aspect of bodily austerity. However, one should not consider someone a Brahmin merely by birth. A true Brahmin is one who studies the Vedas, performs agnihotra (fire sacrifices), and dedicates their life to scriptural study and practice. Such individuals are worthy of reverence.

## **3. Worship of the Guru (Guru Puja)**

A true spiritual guide (Sadguru) is necessary for spiritual progress. Without a Guru, there is no direction in life, and liberation remains unattainable. Thus, one must worship and serve their Guru with devotion.

## **4. Reverence for the Wise (Prājña Puja)**

Apart from one's Guru, any enlightened being or spiritually awakened soul should be respected and honored. Seeking wisdom from such individuals and expressing gratitude towards them is also a part of bodily austerity.

## **5. Purity (Shaucha)**

Personal cleanliness and purity are paramount. Regardless of the weather conditions, one should maintain hygiene and cleanliness as a daily discipline. Inner and outer purity is essential in leading a spiritual life.

## **6. Simplicity (Arjava)**

Simplicity means being free of deceit and pretense. One should be genuine, neither exaggerating one's wealth, intelligence, or religiousness, nor attempting to deceive others. In the words of the Ramayana:

**"सरल सब छल हीना"**

(Simplicity means being free from deceit.)

Being straightforward and transparent in one's dealings is one of the highest virtues.

## **7. Celibacy (Brahmacharya)**

Self-control over the senses is the essence of brahmacharya. This includes control over what one sees, hears, eats, speaks, and touches. Restraining the senses from indulgence leads to spiritual elevation.

## **8. Non-Violence (Ahimsa)**

Ahimsa is not merely refraining from harming animals or people but ensuring that no being, in any form, suffers due to one's actions. True non-violence extends beyond physical harm to include avoiding actions that cause mental or emotional distress to others.

A story illustrates this concept beautifully. A businessman, known for his righteousness, once refrained from riding his scooter because a small puppy was sleeping underneath it. Despite attempting to leave multiple times, he chose not to disturb the puppy and waited patiently until it awoke and moved away. Such sensitivity to all forms of life reflects true ahimsa.

Ahimsa also applies in daily interactions. For instance, forcing a sick employee to continue working or ignoring the well-being of subordinates is a form of violence. One must strive to reduce the suffering of others in every way possible.

## The Essence of Bodily Austerity

True bodily austerity is not about extreme physical trials but about living a life of reverence, purity, honesty, self-discipline, and kindness. It is about being mindful of one's actions, ensuring they do not cause harm, and practicing self-restraint in every aspect of life. Through these principles, one can attain spiritual progress and inner peace.

### 17.15

**anudvegakaram(m) vākyaṃ(m), satyaṃ(m) priyahitaṃ(ñ) ca yat,  
svādhyāyābhyasanaṃ(ñ) caiva, vāñmayam(n) tapa ucyate. 17.15**

Words which cause no annoyance to others and are truthful, agreeable and beneficial, as well as the study of Vedas and other Śāstras and the practice of the chanting of Divine Name— this is known as penance of speech.

This verse emphasizes the significance of speech as a form of austerity. It highlights that true austerity of speech consists of words that do not cause agitation (**anudvegakaram**), that are truthful (**satyaṃ**), pleasant (**priya**), beneficial (**hitaṃ**), and involve the study and recitation of sacred texts (**svādhyāya-abhyasanaṃ**).

Austerity is not limited to physical discipline alone; the restraint and sanctity of speech hold immense importance. Words have the power to either calm the mind or disturb it.

Just as still water in a bucket becomes agitated when a stone is thrown into it, so too does the mind experience turmoil when harsh words are spoken. This disturbance (udvega) must be avoided.

Four things must be refrained from in speech:

- 1. Words that cause agitation (anudvega).
- 2. Words that are unpleasant (apriya).
- 3. Words that are false (asatya).
- 4. Words that are harmful (ahita).

Similarly, four aspects should be cultivated:

- 1. Speaking the truth.
- 2. Speaking in a way that is pleasing.
- 3. Speaking in a way that is beneficial.
- 4. Engaging in the recitation and study of scriptures and divine names.

Speech should not be used as a weapon to hurt others. Merely stating that something is true does not justify saying it if it causes harm or distress. Truth must meet three criteria—it should not cause agitation, it should not be unpleasant, and it should be beneficial. Otherwise, even truth becomes a form of verbal violence.

Speech is one of the quickest ways to understand a person's nature. While appearances can be deceiving, a short conversation is often enough to reveal a person's true disposition.

A poet once remarked:

"ऊपर वाले को शक्ति पसंद नहीं जबान में,  
इसलिए तो हड्डी दी नहीं ज़बान में।"

("The Almighty does not favor power in the tongue, which is why He did not place any bones in it.")

A parable illustrates this further. A conflict arose between the teeth and the tongue. The teeth, being strong, threatened to crush the tongue. The tongue responded, "You may hurt me, but remember, if I utter a single word, all thirty-two of you can be broken." The story highlights the immense power of speech.

Hanuman himself attested to the importance of humility in speech:

**"सुन पवनसुत रहनी हमारी, जिमि दसनन्ह महुँ जीभ बिचारी।"**

("Listen, O son of the wind, my condition is like that of the helpless tongue amidst the mighty teeth.")

A similar lesson is found in the story of an aged Buddhist monk nearing his final moments. His disciples gathered around him and asked for his last teaching. He simply opened his mouth. Observing closely, they saw that his soft tongue remained, but his strong teeth had all fallen out. He then said, "The rigid and harsh perish, but the soft and gentle endure."

The power of speech extends even to great philosophical debates. The legendary debate between Jagadguru **Ādi Śaṅkarācārya** ji and **Maṇḍana Miśra** is considered one of the greatest intellectual exchanges in history. The judge for this debate was none other than Maṇḍana Miśra's wife, Bhārati, demonstrating the deep respect for women's wisdom in the spiritual traditions of India.

To determine the winner, Bhārati placed a garland around both scholars' necks and declared that the one whose garland withered first would be the loser. As the debate progressed, Maṇḍana Miśra's garland wilted, while Śaṅkarācārya's remained fresh. When asked about the rationale behind this method, Bhārati explained that speech infused with truth is cool and soothing, while speech tainted with falsehood generates heat. The warmth of falsehood had caused Maṇḍana Miśra's garland to wither, proving that Śaṅkarācārya's words held greater truth.

Tulsidas also emphasized the importance of sweet speech:

**"तुलसी मीठे वचन से, सुख उपजत चहुँ ओर।**

**वशीकरण इक मंत्र है, तज दे वचन कठोर॥"**

("Sweet words spread happiness in all directions. The true art of influence lies in abandoning harsh speech.")

**वचन सम्भाल के बोलिए वचन के हाथ ना पांव।**

**एक वचन औषधि करें एक करेगा घाव॥**

*Words have the power to heal or wound.*

While the physical pain of a wound may heal, the scars left by harsh words can last a lifetime. A single word can destroy relationships and inflict suffering beyond measure. Therefore, controlling speech is a profound form of austerity.

To practice this austerity, one must strive to make their words gentle, truthful, beneficial, and free from malice. Just as there is austerity of the body, there is also austerity of speech and of the mind. A truly disciplined mind reflects in one's words, bringing peace to oneself and to others.

## **manaḥ(ph) prasādaḥ(s) saumyatvaṃ(m), maunamātmavinigrahaḥ, bhāvasaṃśuddhirityetat, tapo mānasamucyate. 17.16**

Cheerfulness of mind, placidity, habit of contemplation on God, control of mind and perfect purity of inner feelings—all this is called austerity of the mind..

**Manah prasādaḥ**—keeping the mind joyful and at peace—is an essential aspect of mental austerity. The term **prasāda** is often associated with the sacred offering given in temples, but its deeper meaning is prasannata—pure joy. What is received from the Divine as prasāda is, in essence, an acceptance of Bhagavān's joy. In the same way, a person whose mind is naturally serene, free from agitation, embodies this state of manaḥ prasādaḥ.

A mind that is **saumyatvaṃ**—gentle, free from cruelty, deceit, or malice—is a mark of true mental discipline. The virtue of tolerance is exemplified in the Vishnu Sahasranama, where Bhagavān Vishnu is addressed as saishnu—the most tolerant. The legend of Maharishi Bhrigu's test of Bhagavān Vishnu illustrates this. When the sage kicked HIM on the chest, Bhagavān Vishnu, instead of reacting with anger, gently held Bhrigu's feet and expressed concern: “Oh great sage, I hope my chest, which is hard, did not hurt your soft feet.” Such unparalleled patience and compassion define true saumyatvaṃ.

**Akrūratā:** One should not harbor malice even towards those who have wronged them. When Śrī Rama sent Angad as a messenger to Ravana, he instructed him with just one guideline—“**kāju hamāra tāsū hita hoī ripu sana karehu batakahī soī ||**”. Even in dealing with an enemy, Rama's concern was for the enemy's welfare, not vengeance.

**Maunam**, or silence, is often misunderstood as a mere absence of speech. In reality, the true maunam of the mind is deep contemplation—manan—repeatedly reflecting upon noble thoughts until they are fully assimilated into one's consciousness. Just as sugar dissolves into water more completely the more it is stirred, an idea, when deeply contemplated, integrates into one's being and influences actions. A fleeting thought does not transform life, but constant reflection does.

**Ātmavinigrahaḥ**—self-restraint—is another facet of mental austerity. It is the ability to control impulses, not just at the physical level but at the level of thought. This involves choosing the right company, avoiding influences that pollute the mind, and being selective about what one consumes through the senses.

Finally, **bhāva-saṃśuddhiḥ**—purity of intent—is the foundation of mental austerity. It is not merely about controlling external expressions but ensuring that thoughts themselves remain untainted.

Just as Śrī Rama, upon seeing Mata Sita in the Pushpavatika, was overwhelmed by her divine presence yet remained deeply pure in his thoughts, exclaiming—“**mohi atisaya pratīti mana kerī jehiṃ sapanehuṃ paranāri na herī ||**”—even in dreams, his mind had never wandered towards another's wife. Such is the power of mental purity.

This is the essence of mental austerity—joyfulness, gentleness, contemplation, self-restraint, and purity of thought. Just as bodily austerity disciplines actions and speech, mental austerity refines the very fabric of one's being, leading the soul towards true liberation.

**śraddhayā parayā taptam(n), tapastattrividham(n) naraiḥ,  
aphalākāṅkṣibhiryuktaiḥ(s), sātṭvikam(m) paricakṣate. 17.17**

This threefold penance performed with supreme faith by Yogīs expecting no return is called Sātṭvika.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, it is explained that austerities—whether of the body, speech, or mind—can be classified as sātṭvika, rājasika, or tāmasika. In verses 17.17 to 17.19, the nature of these different forms of austerities is described.

Austerities performed with supreme faith, without any desire for rewards, purely out of duty and sincerity, are considered **sātṭvika**. Whether practiced through the body, speech, or mind, when done selflessly and with devotion, they remain free from personal gain and are classified as **sātṭvika tapas**.

**17.18**

**satkāramānapūjārtham(n), tapo dambhena caiva yat,  
kriyate tadiha prokṭam(m), rājasam(ñ) calamadhruvam. 17.18**

The austerity which is performed for the sake of renown, honor or adoration, as well as for any other selfish gain, either in all sincerity or by way of ostentation, and yields an uncertain and momentary fruit, has been spoken of here as Rājasika.

Austerities undertaken with the intention of gaining honor, respect, or recognition, or those performed out of hypocrisy and self-interest, are rājasika. These are often temporary and unstable, lacking depth and sincerity. Such tapas may be practiced through the body, speech, or mind, but since they are driven by desires and expectations of acknowledgment, they are considered rājasika.

In daily life, many engage in tapas of the body, speech, and mind. When encountering someone influential or powerful, there is often a tendency to speak sweetly, bow respectfully, and exhibit extraordinary humility. This behavior stems from a desire to gain favor or recognition, making it rājasika in nature. A person may even highlight their spiritual practices, such as rituals and prayers, with the underlying expectation of praise and validation. The moment an expectation arises, the austerity loses its purity and becomes rājasika.

Thus, **true tapas remains sātṭvika only when performed without ulterior motives, with devotion and sincerity, and without any desire for rewards. When undertaken for personal gains, honor, or recognition, it shifts to the domain of rājasika, becoming fleeting and unstable.**

**17.19**

**mūḍhagrāheṇātmano yat, pīḍayā kriyate tapaḥ,  
parasyotsādanārtham(m) vā, tattāmasamudāhṛtam. 17.19**

Penance which is resorted to out of foolish obstinacy and is accompanied with self-mortification or is intended to harm others, such penance has been declared as Tāmasika.

Tapas, or austerity, when performed with ignorance, stubbornness, and the intent to cause suffering—either to oneself or to others—is considered **Tāmasic**. Such penance is undertaken without wisdom and leads to harm rather than upliftment.

When tapas is done with the sole purpose of causing pain to the body, mind, or speech, or to bring destruction to others, it loses its true essence and becomes Tāmasic. It is characterized by delusion and lack of discernment. The absence of wisdom in performing austerity is a defining trait of this category. Ravana, for example, performed severe penance to please Bhagavān Shiva. However, his austerities were not Sāttvic, as they were ultimately aimed at causing suffering to the world. His penance, though intense, was Tāmasic because it brought distress to others.

Similarly, when Shurpanakha approached Lord Rama and Lakshmana, she spoke in a sweet and charming manner. However, her intent was impure and driven by ignorance. This too is an example of **Tāmasic** tendencies, where external appearances might seem pleasant, but the underlying intentions are harmful. True austerity must be free from deceit and malice; otherwise, it falls into the category of **Tāmasic tapas**.

Tapas performed with bodily discomfort, mental anguish, or harsh words, all with the aim of inflicting pain on others, is considered impure. It is essential to cultivate discernment and engage in austerities that elevate rather than degrade. Austerities undertaken without wisdom and for the sake of harming others will never lead to spiritual growth.

With this understanding of the threefold nature of tapas—**Sāttvic, Rājasic, and Tāmasic**—one must strive for wisdom, self-restraint, and purity in all forms of austerity.

True penance should be devoid of selfish motives and should aim for inner purification rather than outward recognition or harm to others.

The discourse concludes with a moment of devotion through kirtan:

**Hari Sharanam, Hari Sharanam...**

May Yogeshwar Śrī Krishna Chandra bestow divine wisdom and guide all towards the righteous path.

## Question Answers

**Kamini Ji**

**Q:** Is there any specific size for the deity idol that we keep in our home temple? It is said that the idol should not be more than 12 inches. If the idol is above 12 inches, it is considered a "Jagrut Devata," and any shortcoming in its worship can bring dosha. Also, Prana Pratishtha must be performed properly, and daily service should be done with complete devotion. If the idol is above 12 inches and Prana Pratishtha is not performed, will it bring dosha?

**A:** If your devotion is strong and you are completely dedicated to Bhagavān's service, then you can keep a larger idol and worship it with utmost sincerity. However, traditionally, it is advised to keep idols smaller than 12 inches in homes to avoid the complexities of elaborate rituals and possible shortcomings in service. If the idol is larger, proper Prana Pratishtha and daily service are necessary.

**Q:** If someone relocates to a rented house and finds that the previous tenants have left behind pictures or idols of Devi-Devtas, what should be done? Should we keep them or not?

**A:** If you have a connection with the previous tenants and can communicate with them, it is best to return the idols or pictures to them. Since you do not know how the vigraha was brought and worshipped, it is important to find out about it. If returning is not possible, you can inform the landlord and let them handle it. If no other option remains, you should worship them yourself, as disrespecting Devi-Devtas is never appropriate.

**Nalini Ji**



**Q:** If we speak the truth and it temporarily causes someone pain but benefits them in the long run, should we still say it?

**A:** There are three things to consider before speaking the truth:

1. Do I have the right to say it?
2. Is it necessary for me to say it?
3. How can I soften my tone and deliver it in a way that does not hurt unnecessarily?

If you have the right and necessity to say it, then speak the truth, but ensure that it is conveyed in a soft and considerate manner.

**Q:** Bhagavān knows everything. Why was Śrī Krishna partial towards Duryodhana and Karna when Arjuna was also there? Were they all not equal?

**A:** No, they were never equal. Karna always considered himself equal to Arjuna out of jealousy, but he never proved himself to be so. Arjuna never lost a battle in his life, whereas Karna lost many. Karna lost to Arjuna, lost to the Gandharvas, and even fled from battles multiple times. Arjuna, on the other hand, defeated Mahadev himself and fought against Indra and all the Devatas alongside Śrī Krishna. Karna never defeated any great warrior.

Karna's intelligence was corrupted due to bad company, especially because of his association with Duryodhana and his indulgence in intoxication. During Draupadi's vastraharan, Karna made disgraceful remarks, saying that she should sit on Duryodhana's thigh and be disrobed. During the exile of the Pandavas, Karna suggested to Duryodhana that they should camp near the Pandavas' forest dwelling and indulge in luxury to make them envious. When they did so, they encroached upon the territory of the Gandharva king Chitrasena, who defeated and captured them. Karna was the first to flee from the battlefield.

When the Pandavas learned of Duryodhana's capture, Bhima initially refused to help, but Yudhishtira insisted that they must rescue him because, against an external enemy, they were still brothers. Arjuna alone defeated the entire Gandharva army and rescued Duryodhana and Karna. Now tell me, how can Karna and Arjuna be considered equals?

**Q:** But Karna was the eldest brother of the Pandavas and suffered due to his circumstances. Shouldn't his actions be judged considering this?

**A:** No, circumstances do not determine whether a person is righteous or unrighteous. It is their actions that matter. A court does not excuse a criminal just because they had a difficult upbringing. Similarly, Karna made his own choices.

Ekalavya was born in a Bhil clan and was denied education by Dronacharya. Yet, he did not adopt tamas like Karna did. Instead, he persevered and became a great archer. Karna, on the other hand, accepted adharma. He chose to align himself with Duryodhana, engaged in intoxicants, and indulged in wicked deeds. The words he used for Draupadi were disgraceful. He was never equal to Arjuna; he was simply a fallen warrior who had potential but chose the wrong path.

Karna was indeed known for his generosity, which is one of his commendable qualities. However, generosity alone does not define a person's character. A person can be a great donor and still be unrighteous. His danveer nature was overshadowed by his many adharmic actions.

This is a modern distortion. Many novels and texts written today attempt to glorify characters like Karna, Ravana, and even Mahishasura to weaken our faith in our true ideals. These narratives are false.

For example, Karna was part of the seven warriors who attacked Abhimanyu from behind and killed

him. A true warrior would never attack a 16-year-old boy from behind. Arjuna, on the other hand, has no single incident in his life where he abandoned righteousness.

Similarly, there is an agenda to glorify figures like Aurangzeb while ignoring the greatness of Shivaji Maharaj. History should celebrate righteous figures, not those who aligned with adharma.

Karna's original name was Radheya, but after being declared the ruler of Anga by Duryodhana, he accepted his favor and remained loyal to him, despite knowing that Duryodhana was on the side of adharma. This was his greatest mistake. It was his jealousy of Arjuna and his association with Duryodhana that led to his downfall.

### **Mukesh Ji**

**Q:** There were two questions. I found the answer to one, but the second one remains: When we go to someone's house for a meal or when someone comes to our house for a meal, we often say out of courtesy, "The food is very delicious." Then, as part of manuhar (insisting someone to eat more), we say, "You must take a little more." In such cases, does the food become rajasik or tamasik?

**A:** No, absolutely not. You should definitely perform manohar (hospitality). Manuhar is an aspect of sattvikta (purity).

**Q:** But if we say the food is delicious and take more of it, does it then become rajasik or tamasik?

**A:** No, it does not. You should indeed make the experience manohari (pleasant). The atithi (guest) is regarded as a deity seated within, and they become pleased with this manohar. However, if someone offers you more food and you keep eating excessively, then you should exercise restraint. The duty of manuhar (insisting) lies with the host, but the responsibility to control consumption lies with you. It is their job to offer, but it is your duty to decline when necessary.

### **Suryendra Ji**

**Q:** My question is: You just mentioned that in a home temple, one must also establish Ganesh Ji. Is Ganesh Ji a Devata or Ishwar? Who is he?

**A:** Even Bhagavān Shankar himself worshipped Ganesh Ji in the sukha vibhaga (auspicious sections of rituals). Ganesh Ji is known as Sarvapratham Pujya (the one worshipped first) because he was granted this boon. That is why his worship is essential in any place of worship.

Thus, in panchayatana (the five-deity worship system), Ganesh Ji has a rightful place.

**Q:** So, is Ganesh Ji among the Devatas?

**A:** A Devata is one who has taken birth. So how was Ganesh Ji born? Even at the time of Shiv Ji's wedding, Shiv Ji himself performed his worship.

Now, these are discussions of different Kalpas (cosmic cycles), so let's leave those aside. The essential truth is that Ganesh Ji is a Devata. However, one can also worship Ganesh Ji as Parabrahma—that is a different matter altogether. But fundamentally, he is a Devata.

The session concluded with prayers and chanting Hanuman Chalisa.

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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar – Creative Writing Department

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