

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

1/2 (Ślōka 1-11), Sunday, 16 November 2025

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

The Science of Faith: How Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas Shape Human Actions

The 17th Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā: Śraddhātrayavibhāga Yoga, explores the threefold division of faith, sāttvic, rājasic, and tāmasic—revealing how an individual’s nature, shaped by the guṇas, determines the quality of their beliefs, worship, and actions.

The discourse began with the traditional lighting of the divine lamp, symbolising the dispelling of ignorance through wisdom. As the gentle flame flickered, heartfelt prayers were offered at the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān, suffusing the atmosphere with deep reverence and spiritual serenity.

Bowing in Reverence to Our Guru—The Eternal Source of Wisdom

गुरु ब्रह्मा गुरु विष्णु, गुरु देवो महेश्वरा

गुरु साक्षात् परब्रह्म, तस्मै श्री गुरुवे नमः

Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru Devo Maheshvara,

Guru Sākṣāt Parabrahma, Tasmai Śrī Guruve Namah.

With deep humility and devotion, we bow to our Guru, who manifests as Brahma—the creator, Vishnu—the preserver, and Maheshwara—the destroyer. The Guru is the ultimate embodiment of Supreme Consciousness.

When the sixteenth chapter, Daivāsura-Sampad-Vibhāga Yoga, concluded, it was natural that many profound questions arose in Arjuna’s mind. These were not ordinary queries; they were fundamental, arising straight from the heart of a seeker standing at the edge of life and death. For this, every listener and reader owes gratitude to Arjuna, because the very questions that arise within the hearts of ordinary people were courageously presented by him before Bhagavān. And Bhagavān, with immense compassion, offered detailed answers.

This is Arjuna’s grace upon all seekers: The doubts hidden in the depths of every mind were expressed by Arjuna, and clarified by Bhagavān.

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो, दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः।

पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता, दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत।।

In doing so, Bhagavān Himself “milked” the essence of the Upaniṣads, traditionally compared to cows, and offered the pure nectar to Arjuna. Arjuna played the role of the calf, yet all of humanity became fortunate recipients of this same nectar through him. Thus, the wisdom flowing through Arjuna becomes accessible to all.

Arjuna’s questions carry special weight because they were not asked in a hermitage, a peaceful forest, the Himalayas, or the quiet presence of a guru. Questions asked in peaceful surroundings are easy, and so are their answers.

But Arjuna asked his questions in the very midst of a battlefield, where life was at stake, where every moment could bring death, where arrows could fly without warning.

In such an intense setting, any question that arises becomes deeply authentic, and the answers offered by Bhagavān become exceptionally profound.

After learning about Daivī and Āsurī dispositions in Chapter 16, Arjuna was struck by a dilemma: Those dominated by tamas naturally develop demonic tendencies, deceit, arrogance, anger, harshness, and ignorance. They act according to their innate nature.

So Arjuna wondered:

If one must perform all actions with śraddhā, then what if someone acts with sincere faith, but without knowledge of the śāstras?

After all, studying the vast body of śāstras, four Vedas, numerous Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, ancillary texts—is not easy for ordinary people.

Most do not have the time, capacity, or qualification to study them in depth.

So what happens if

- a person has śraddhā,
- performs an action sincerely,
- but unknowingly violates śāstric injunctions?

What is the nature of such śraddhā?

- Is it valid?
- Is it faulty?
- Is it uplifting or misleading?

This was Arjuna’s question, simple in appearance, but profound in spirit. And Bhagavān answered it beautifully, giving rise to the seventeenth chapter: **Śraddhātraya Vibhāga Yoga**, the analysis of the three types of faith.

This becomes the perfect bridge between the description of Daivī-Āsurī tendencies and the concluding instructions of the Gītā.

17.1

arjuna uvāca
ye śāstravidhimutsṛjya, 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.

After hearing Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa describe Tāmasika tendencies and Asuric dispositions in detail, Arjuna becomes inwardly unsettled. A genuine seeker, he wonders: *O Kṛṣṇa, those who ignore the guidelines of the Śāstras but worship devatās with faith, what is their state? Is it Sāttvika, Rājasika, or Tāmasika?*

Arjuna's anxiety is simple but deep: *“What if one has genuine faith, but unknowingly fails to follow every detail of śāstric injunctions? Does that become sinful?”*

This question appears because the moment Arjuna hears of Tāmasika worship, Asuric tendencies, and the consequences of incorrect conduct, his heart trembles. He fears that, in the complexity of life, an earnest person may still falter.

To illuminate Arjuna's thought process, one may consider a relatable, modern incident.

A Real-World Parallel: When Rules Exist in Thousands, How Can One Follow All?

When the speaker was a very young man, he had just entered his family business. His heart brimmed with sincerity: “I will be completely honest. I will not bribe anyone, nor allow anything wrong to happen.”

One day, the Factory Inspector arrived. He expected a certain “something,” but the young man, being idealistic and transparent, simply said, “Sir, please inspect the factory and point out any shortcomings so that we may correct them.”

But the inspector had different expectations. He began searching for faults.

First, he asked about toilets.

“There are about 25 toilets, 10 for women, 15 for men.”

“How many employees work here?”

“About 2,500.”

Immediately, he opened the rulebook: For every 10 workers, there must be one toilet. Therefore, for 2,500 employees, the factory must have 250 toilets.

He wrote this as a violation.

Then he examined the windows.

Although there were many windows, abundant ventilation, fans, and even background music, he insisted that the open window area did not meet the exact square-foot requirement. “Increase their size,” he said, and left a notice.

A month later he returned.

By now, the windows had indeed been enlarged.

“Good,” he said. “Now show me the 250 toilets. Otherwise, come to my office.”

The speaker visited his office, and found not a single toilet inside. Every window in the inspector's room was blocked by piles of files, preventing even a sliver of air from entering.

The speaker, half amused, asked gently: "Sir, you enlarged our windows. But here, none of yours even open!"

The inspector shrugged: "This is my office. That is your factory. I am the Factory Inspector. Whatever you do, you can never follow all rules perfectly."

The speaker realised something profound: It is nearly impossible to follow every regulation without fail. But that does not make him anti-national. He still has love for the country, loyalty to duty, and sincerity in intention.

He had not studied law. He did not know each clause, sub-clause, amendment, and case reference. Yet he was not a traitor. He was simply a sincere man trying his best.

Arjuna's Understanding Deepens

Arjuna becomes exactly like this young man, earnest, sincere, but fearful of error.

When life itself hangs in the balance, he asks Kṛṣṇa something that every seeker wonders:

"What if I have śraddhā but lack perfect precision in following every śāstric detail? What if something is missed due to ignorance or human limitation?"

This is what makes Arjuna a true seeker.

His questions guide not only himself but all future generations who will open the Bhagavad Gītā with their own confusions.

Kṛṣṇa's Assurance: Addressed to Arjuna, Applicable to All

Bhagavān responds with compassion. He clarifies that He reveals this ultimate wisdom only because Arjuna is both His devotee and His friend:

"bhakto 'si me sakhā ceti rahasyam hy etad uttamam"

"He reveals this supreme secret because Arjuna is His devotee and His friend."

This assurance is universal, but only if one approaches like Arjuna.

So one must ask oneself:

- Do we make Bhagavān our sakhā (friend)?
- Do we love Him with the same intimacy and affection with which we love a true companion?

If such love awakens, something magical happens: Even without reading every scripture, the heart becomes aligned with Dharma.

Kabīr Dāsa expresses this beautifully:

“पोथी पढ़ि-पढ़ि जग मुआ, पण्डित भया न कोय।

ढाई आखर प्रेम का, पढ़े सो पण्डित होय।”

“pothī paḍh paḍh jag muā, paṇḍit bharyā na koī
ḍhāī ākhar prem kā, jo paḍhe so paṇḍit hoī.”

One may read innumerable books and still not become wise; But whoever understands the “two and a half letters” of love becomes truly learned.

“Rāmo Vighrahavān Dharmah - When Life Becomes Dharma”

When Bhagavān Rāma departed for His exile, Bharata returned to Ayodhyā and approached Guru Vasiṣṭha with a deeply earnest question: “*Gurudeva, teach me the true nature of Dharma. Explain its pathways. Which road must I follow? By what standard should I act?*”

Vasiṣṭha replied with a statement that has become immortal in the Dharma-śāstras:

रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः।”

“Rāmo vighrahavān dharmah.”

Rāma Himself is Dharma embodied.

Instead of struggling to grasp every rule, every nuance, every injunction, which is nearly impossible, Vasiṣṭha instructed Bharata:

“In any situation, simply reflect: What would Rāma do? Hold that conviction, follow that example, and that will be Dharma.”

This principle becomes the background to Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa’s guidance in the Gītā. The Gītā does not say run away; it says wake up. Arjuna is ready to escape. He is prepared to renounce everything, wealth, kingdom, duty. He refuses the very throne that rightfully belongs to him. “I cannot rule over a kingdom soaked in the blood of my own kin,” he says. “If achieving power requires such cruelty, let me instead beg for alms and live as a sannyāsī.”

Many people think similarly: When life becomes complicated, let me withdraw. Let me go to Vṛndāvana, to Ṛṣikeśa, or to a Himalayan cave. Let me renounce everything.

But nothing changes by merely changing location. One may go to Vṛndāvana, Ṛṣikeśa, or the Himalayas, but if one’s inner nature has not changed, no outward change will transform life.

The outer world shifts only when the inner vision shifts.

Yathā dṛṣṭiḥ tathā sṛṣṭiḥ, as the vision, so the world.

The Tale of Salīm and the Green Colour

Once, Prince Salīm, the son of Emperor Akbar, was afflicted with a severe disease. A famed ḥakīm was summoned. After examining the prince, he declared: “The disease is grave, and the treatment is unusual.” Akbar replied, “Do not worry about the expense; tell us the remedy.”

The ḥakīm said, “Wherever the prince walks, he should feel greenery beneath his feet. And wherever he looks, he should see only the colour green. Make these arrangements, and he will recover.”

Akbar instantly issued orders: every street, home, and building in Agra should be repainted green; greenery must be planted everywhere.

But Bīrbal intervened, saying, “Give me just two days. I will accomplish what would take months.” Akbar trusted his wisdom and granted the time.

Two days later, Bīrbal returned with a small bag. Akbar questioned him: “Nothing in the city has changed! Two days were too little to repaint Agra.”

Bīrbal smiled and called Prince Salīm. From his bag he produced a pair of shoes, their soles covered with artificial green grass—so that wherever the prince walked, he would feel as if he were treading on fresh greenery. Then Bīrbal put on the prince a pair of spectacles tinted entirely green. “Now look,” he said.

Salīm exclaimed with delight, “Everything is green!”

Akbar was astonished. “Bīrbal, how do you accomplish such impossible things?”

Bīrbal replied gently:

जैसी दृष्टि, वैसी सृष्टि।”

“Jaisī dr̥ṣṭi, vaisī sṛṣṭi. When the vision changes, the world changes.”

The Bhagavad Gītā teaches the same. External escape is unnecessary. If one’s inner outlook shifts, if one begins to see Kṛṣṇa as one’s sakhā, one’s intimate companion; if one perceives the presence of Bhagavān in every being; if the heart releases prejudice and hostility, then one’s very home becomes Vṛndāvana. Peace begins to pervade naturally.

The Vipassanā Lesson in Beijing

The largest Vipassanā centre in China is located in the midst of a noisy, foul-smelling fish market in Beijing. The stench is intense, flies swarm everywhere. The moment one closes the eyes for meditation, a fly inevitably lands on the face. Most people become irritated.

But the teachers there insist: “Whatever happens externally, flies, noise, discomfort, you must remain inwardly still. External chaos must not disturb inner calm.”

This is precisely the spirit of the Gītā’s teaching.

Why Kṛṣṇa’s Path is One Step Beyond Renunciation

The paths of Buddha and Mahāvīra are noble; they emphasize renunciation, withdrawal, austere detachment. But Kṛṣṇa’s path moves one step further:

He does not teach fleeing from life; He teaches transcending life while living fully within it. He does not ask for escape from the world; He invites a transformation of one’s vision within the world.

Thus, there is no need to turn away from life. The only need is to descend within, awaken the inner current, make that inner flow luminous—make it Rādhā.

The Ascetic Whose Anger Returned

A sage once performed intense tapas in the Himalayas for thirty years. After attaining profound inner stillness, he visited the Kumbha Melā. Accustomed to utter solitude, he now found himself amidst a massive crowd. As he walked toward the Gaṅgā for a bath, someone’s shoe accidentally stepped on his foot. A sharp pain arose, and with it a spark of anger and pride:

“How dare someone step on the feet of such a yogī? People usually bow at these feet!”

Words of irritation escaped him.

The very next moment, self-awareness struck: “What have I done? Anger is the gateway to hell. How could I let this arise after thirty years of restraint?”

Bhagavān declares:

“trividhaṁ narakasyedaṁ dvāraṁ nāśanam ātmanaḥ, kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhaḥ”

Lust, anger, and greed are the three gates to hell.

How can anger arise in a Himalayan cave when no one is there to provoke it? True mastery of anger comes only when living amidst people—family, workplace, society—where different temperaments collide and one must remain steady.

Thus, remaining peaceful in a cave is easy; remaining peaceful in the marketplace is Yoga.

Kṛṣṇa’s Practical Yoga

Therefore, Bhagavān's instruction to Arjuna becomes supremely practical:

“tasmāt yogī bhava Arjuna” —therefore, O Arjuna, become a yogī.

Not by escaping, not by renouncing the world, not by sitting in a cave, but right here, in the battlefield of life.

Thus, Arjuna's questions in the seventeenth chapter are profoundly significant. When such questions arise in sincere seekers, they are always original and deeply authentic. And through Kṛṣṇa's answers, the Gītā becomes a manual for living, practical Dharma applied to life.

And so begins Bhagavān's response.

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.

Bhagavān explains:

“Trividham bhavati śraddhā dehānusā svabhāvajā sattvikī rājasī ca tāmasī”, Śraddhā manifests in three forms: Sattvika, Rājasika, and Tāmasika.

He begins by explaining **dehānam sā svabhāvajā**, that which arises naturally from the body. Every embodied being has a body that is the union of puruṣa and prakṛti. When the individual soul (puruṣa) unites with nature (prakṛti), the body is formed. Prakṛti provides everything else: the five elements form the physical frame, the five sensory organs, the organs of action, mind, intellect, and ego.

Yet the soul, the ātman, remains the spark of Paramātmā, seated as His representative within. Everything else, the body, mind, senses, and organs, are of prakṛti. And prakṛti is inherently triguṇātmak, imbued with sattva, rajas, and tamas.

From the very moment of birth, these three qualities accompany the embodied being. This is a natural, transgenerational inheritance. Just as physical traits or predispositions may pass from parents to children, so too do these three guṇas enter the individual: Sattvika, Rājasika, and Tāmasika. They are intrinsic, unchangeable by mere desire.

Bhagavān emphasizes: even if one resolves, “I will live only in sattva; I will reject tamas entirely”, it is impossible. Nature will not permit it. The body and mind require the presence of all three guṇas to function.

The Necessity of Tamas and Sleep

Consider sleep. One may assume that life needs only food, clothing, and shelter, yet sleep is essential. Sleep arises due to the tamoguna. Without tamas, the body cannot rest. Suppressing this quality would make life unsustainable. Experiments in controlled deprivation demonstrate this: prisoners kept awake for eight days became mentally unstable; by the fifteenth day, many perished. Sleep is indispensable, and it is tamas that allows it to occur.

Sattvic individuals require comparatively less sleep, four hours may suffice, because their inner balance is strong. Bhagavān illustrates with an example: Swāmī Govind Dev Giri Mahārāj often worked

until midnight and resumed tasks at four in the morning. Even though others would have needed rest, His increasing sattvika nature allowed minimal sleep. In contrast, ordinary individuals require longer periods: children may need up to eighteen hours, pre-schoolers around ten hours, adolescents eight hours, and adults generally seven hours.

Prāṇāyāma serves as a tool to reduce required sleep. Ten to fifteen minutes of consistent practice can substitute for one hour of rest, making it a strategic investment for those seeking more productive time.

The Role of Rajas: Motivation and Action

Yet, tamas alone is insufficient. Rajas is equally essential. Without rajas, no action arises. Life would stagnate; houses would not be built, businesses would not function, labor would remain idle. Rajas motivates, propels, and energizes. It gives desire and initiative, making work possible. To live fully in the world and participate in creation, one must have rajas.

The Role of Sattva: Progress and Liberation

Finally, to progress toward spiritual elevation and liberation, sattva is indispensable. Sattva brings clarity, discernment, and purity. Only with sattva can one align with dharma, cultivate genuine devotion, and ultimately experience higher states of consciousness.

The Synthesis: How Śraddhā Manifests

Thus, Śraddhā is the manifestation of these three guṇas in the embodied being:

- **Sattvika Śraddhā** arises from wisdom, purity, and truthfulness.
- **Rājasika Śraddhā** arises from desire, attachment, and aspiration for results.
- **Tāmasika Śraddhā** arises from ignorance, laziness, or delusion.

Bhagavān instructs: recognize their natural presence in the body, mind, and nature itself. Do not attempt to annihilate one guṇa entirely, for the body and mind require balance. Instead, cultivate sattvika śraddhā while acknowledging and managing rajas and tamas appropriately.

Bhagavān's explanation continues further: the type of śraddhā determines how one should act, what path one should follow, and how one may progress toward dharma, devotion, and ultimate liberation.

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 explains: O Bhārata, the śraddhā of all humans arises according to their inner disposition. Just as the mind is, so is the śraddhā. This śraddhā manifests in the individual's conduct and dedication.

Hence, naturally, certain tendencies align with the varṇa system: by birth, some qualities tend to manifest in individuals. Yet Bhagavān explicitly declares: **“Chātur-varṇam mayā sṛṣṭam guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ”** The four varṇas were created by HIM according to guṇa (qualities) and karma (actions), not by birth.

Despite this, in practical observation, we notice patterns: a doctor's child often becomes a doctor, an

engineer's child an engineer, a businessman's child a businessman. This is a natural transgenerational transmission, an inheritance of tendencies. The genetic and environmental constitution of an individual shapes disposition, through family, education, upbringing, and surroundings.

Śraddhā Determines the Nature of Action

For instance, the natural dharma of a kṣatriya is to protect and fight in righteous battle; the natural dharma of a vaiśya is trade, commerce, and wealth creation. But the outcome depends on the motivation and śraddhā behind the action.

A trader earning money solely for personal pleasure, neglecting family or society, acts without proper dharmic intent. Wealth must be earned and utilized with responsibility, for family welfare and societal benefit. Similarly, a kṣatriya cannot engage in killing indiscriminately. When battle arises for protection of the kingdom or the people, it becomes a sattvic act of courage. Even acts of killing in such a context may be considered dharmic, as in the example of a soldier who fires upon an intruding terrorist.

The soldier acts with sattvic courage, defending lives, preventing larger harm. The soldier's bravery may be honored with awards such as the Paramvir Chakra. Yet, the act is motivated by duty, not hostility. The essence lies in the inner intention—the śraddhā of the doer determines the quality of action.

Śraddhā Shapes Worship and Devotion

Bhagavān further emphasizes: the type of śraddhā defines whom the individual worships:

- Sattvika persons worship Paramātmā and the higher, benevolent principles with devotion and clarity.
- Rājasika persons worship powerful beings or entities to gain personal benefits, influence, or recognition.
- Tāmasika persons may worship demonic or inauspicious entities, driven by fear, ignorance, or selfish desire.

Thus, the inner disposition, motivation, and intent determine not only action but also the orientation of devotion. Śraddhā governs conduct, dharma, and ultimately, spiritual progress.

Bhagavān's teaching underlines: action without alignment to inner śraddhā may be futile, even if externally performed correctly. The quality of śraddhā, sattvic, rājasik, or tāmasik, guides one toward dharma, duty, and liberation.

17.4

yajante sātṭvikā 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.

Bhagavān explains: The worship performed by humans arises according to their inner disposition:

- Sattvika persons worship devas,
- Rājasika persons worship yakṣas and powerful beings,
- Tāmasika persons worship preta, bhūta, and lower spirits.

Here, the term deva does not refer only to Indra or other celestial beings. Even Bhagavān is included as the highest Deva, since the qualities and powers associated with devas ultimately guide humans toward Bhagavat realization. Hence, the sattvika person worships both devas and Bhagavān.

Some question: "Why perform yajña or offer oblations to other devas if one worships only Bhagavān?" Bhagavān clarifies that this is like governance: even if one knows the Prime Minister personally, local issues, like a dead dog outside one's house, cannot be reported directly to HIM. It must be addressed step by step through municipal officers, local councils, and administrative layers. In human life, the worship of Bhagavān is essential, but devas also must be propitiated, as each governs specific aspects of the world, ensuring harmony and order.

Thus:

- **Sattvika persons** worship devas, fulfilling dharmic duties completely, analogous to citizens paying all taxes properly.
- **Rājasika persons** worship yakṣas and other beings for personal gain or influence, often cutting corners or avoiding dharmic responsibility, akin to a businessman manipulating credit for profit but not paying proper taxes.
- **Tāmasika persons** worship pretas, bhūtas, and other low spirits, acting out of ignorance, fear, or selfish desire. They support wrongdoing and disorder, much like criminals who exploit others.

Bhagavān also clarifies that pitr (ancestral spirits) are not included in these three categories; their worship is considered sattvika. However, if someone worships the spirits of the deceased in fear or superstition, it is tāmasika devotion.

The essential principle Bhagavān emphasizes is that inner disposition (śraddhā) determines the nature of worship, just as it determines the quality of action and dharma. The sattvika worshiper fulfills responsibilities with clarity and duty. The rājasika worshiper seeks power or personal advantage. The tāmasika worshiper acts through fear, ignorance, or indolence.

Even in the human world, this distinction can be observed: those who perform acts honestly and responsibly, paying their dues and respecting order, are sattvika. Those who manipulate systems for personal gain are rājasika. Those who encourage or assist wrongdoing, avoiding responsibility entirely, are tāmasika.

Bhagavān concludes that these tendencies are reflected not only in worship but in all aspects of life. Some rare individuals perform extreme austerities or penances, even beyond what is described in the scriptures, yet their inner disposition still defines the nature and value of their practice.

17.5

aśāstravihitam(ñ) 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 describes: There are humans who engage in austerities devoid of scriptural guidance. These extreme penances are performed without śāstraic direction, and are characterized by dambha (conceit) and ahaṅkāra (ego). They are motivated by kāma (desires), rāga (attachments), and personal strength, and they begin to inflict suffering on their own bodies.

Such austerities, though performed with great intensity, lack dharmic alignment because they are detached from wisdom, scriptural instruction, and proper intention. Bhagavān emphasizes that without śāstra and correct śraddhā, even the most intense tapasya can be distorted by ego and desire, resulting not in liberation but in attachment, pride, and potential harm to oneself.

17.6

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

Bhagavān explains: Tapas performed with the aim of controlling the beings residing in the body (the senses, the mind, the subtle energies) and for realizing Paramātmā within the heart is the true tapas. Those who, out of ignorance, perform austerities without such knowledge, are considered asuric in nature.

Bhagavān points out that many people today engage in rituals and vows without understanding their true essence. They may observe fasts, like Ekādaśī, but the observance is superficial, accompanied by indulgence. They may say they are fasting, but simultaneously consume copious amounts of food, khichṛī in the morning, followed by aloo and other preparations, constantly planning the next meal. In such cases, the fast loses its spiritual value, for it is merely external and devoid of inner focus.

The speaker illustrates with a personal anecdote: Once, as a guest in a household, the lady of the house (buā-ji) served him tea and biscuits. Soon after, another relative repeatedly asked buā-ji if certain refreshments should be brought. This went on every five minutes, creating a ritual of constant questioning and indulgence. Bhagavān observes that this type of fast, driven by ego and external attention rather than devotion, is an example of tāmasika fasting. It arises from dambha (conceit) and ahaṅkāra (ego), the desire to be in control, to assert authority, or to gain recognition, rather than from true śraddhā or focus on Paramātmā.

The essence of upavāsa: the word literally means “residing beside” (upa + vāsa), to dwell in constant proximity to Bhagavān in consciousness. True fasting is not merely abstaining from food or drink; it is anchoring the mind and heart continuously in remembrance of Bhagavān, such that worldly concerns, hunger, and thirst do not distract the practitioner. This is the inner purpose of upavāsa, and anything else, overthinking about food, indulging in culinary preparations, or performing rituals for show, is devoid of spiritual efficacy.

Thus, while observing fasts or austerities, the focus must always remain on Bhagavān, not on bodily indulgences or social recognition. Bhagavān assures that He will provide clarity on all questions regarding proper practice, including seemingly minor points like whether specific foods, such as sābūdāne ki khichṛī, may be eaten during a fast. The practitioner needs only listen and imbibe the wisdom attentively.

17.7

āhārastvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ, yajñastapastathā dānaṃ(n), teṣāṃ(m) bhedamimaṃ(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.

Bhagavān explains: All food (āhāra) in the world is of three types. Likewise, yajña (sacrifice), dāna (charity), and tapas (austerity) also manifest in threefold ways. Bhagavān emphasizes: the distinctions among these arise according to the gunas, and their effects and orientations differ accordingly. He instructs Arjuna to listen carefully to the subtle distinctions in these threefold practices.

Bhagavān begins with āhāra, noting that even in scriptural actions, the guna-based inclination governs the manner in which they are performed. This chapter is remarkable in its practical wisdom, for Bhagavān addresses not merely abstract concepts but the very foundation of daily life.

Food, He says, is essential and foundational to life. In the Gītā, Bhagavān speaks about *yukta-āhāra*, *yukta-vihāra*, *yukta-śreṣṭha karma*, *yukta-svapna*, and *yukta-bodha*, all forms of balanced, integrated living. However, mere mention of “yukta-āhāra” is insufficient; Bhagavān carefully differentiates how one should approach food according to the three gunas. These three verses on āhāra are particularly significant.

He instructs: one should listen with attention, seated calmly, and with focused prāṇa in the ears, for the discussion concerns food, the most critical aspect of life. Understanding āhāra is vital because it directly influences the mind, body, and spiritual progress. Bhagavān then begins explaining: what constitutes sāttvika food, how it sustains both body and spirit, and the distinctions from rājasika and tāmasika food.

The teaching begins here with āhāra as the first practical pillar, followed by yajña, dāna, and tapas—all explained in the framework of the three gunas, offering a complete guide to daily living aligned with dharma and spiritual growth.

17.8

āyuh(s) sattvabalārogya, sukhapṛītivivardhanāḥ, 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.

Bhagavān explains the characteristics of sāttvika food: Sāttvika food is that which enhances āyu (longevity), satva (purity), bala (strength), ārogya (health), sukha (happiness), and pṛīti (love/affection). These six qualities, **āyu, satva, bala, ārogya, sukha, and pṛīti**, are nourished and increased by this type of food. Such food is rasa-rich (juicy), snigdha (unctuous), and sthira (easy to digest and sustaining). It is particularly pleasing to sāttvika individuals.

The freshness of food is crucial because fresh foods are full of rasa (essence). Stale food lacks this essence. Yet, some people strangely prefer stale food, even when freshly prepared options are available, sometimes mixing it in with dal or roti. Bhagavān’s teaching is clear: the quality of āhāra is determined not by taste alone but by its ability to nourish the body and mind correctly.

Bhagavān’s instruction is supported by everyday observation.

The speaker shares his experience:

During his childhood, he often visited his nani’s (maternal grandmother’s) home. There was always a large group of children, around 28 in total, playing and running around outside. Naturally, after all the

play, they would become thirsty and go to Nani for water.

Nani would tell them firmly, “You must not touch this water; it is meant as bhog for Bhagavān.” The children could not understand and thought, Are we untouchable? Why can’t we drink this water? They persisted, repeatedly asking for water every few minutes.

Despite their insistence, Nani calmly rose each time and served them water. She never showed irritation or frustration, even though the children kept testing her patience. In retrospect, it became clear that everything she did was entirely shastric.

Much later, during the COVID-19 pandemic, he realized the scientific wisdom behind her actions. Hands from outside carry germs, and placing glasses directly into the pot could contaminate the water. Nani was unaware of germs or viruses, yet her practice perfectly aligned with health science.

Furthermore, the preparation of bhog or meals must exclude tamasika and rajasika elements such as excessive onions, garlic, meat, or eggs, which are considered impure or tamasika. The food we consume profoundly affects the mind and body:

- **Tamasika food** creates lethargy, dullness, and impurity.
- **Rajasika food**, typically very spicy, overly sweet, or excessively rich, stimulates the senses but destabilizes health, often causing obesity, acidity, diabetes, and fatigue. The speaker illustrates this with a practical example: a foreign visitor eating Kolhapuri misal, extremely spicy and rich, experiences severe acidity and digestive distress, highlighting how rajasic food can disrupt bodily balance.

Sāttvika food, on the other hand, supports health, longevity, clarity of mind, energy, and joy. It is wholesome, balanced, and naturally satisfying. Bhagavān emphasizes that the mind reflects the food: just as we consume tamasika or rajasic food, the mind and speech adopt tamas or rajas qualities. Food determines our vitality, clarity, and mental state.

Thus, for spiritual growth and bodily well-being, one must choose āhāra that nurtures āyu, satva, bala, ārogya, sukha, and prīti; this is truly sāttvika. Bhagavān then proceeds to explain rajasic food, which stimulates the senses and passion but does not promote sattva, highlighting the practical wisdom behind choosing food consciously according to the three gunas.

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.

Rājasika food is characterized by tastes that are bitter, sour, salty, excessively hot, or pungent. In Sanskrit terms, these are referred to as:

- **Kaṭu** – bitter
- **Tīkṣṇa** – sharp, pungent
- **Amla** – sour
- **Lavaṇa** – salty
- **Ati-uṣṇa** – excessively hot
- **Rukṣa** – dry or rough

Such food ignites the digestive fire and stimulates the palate, and it is naturally preferred by rājasika individuals. Bhagavān explains that the effect of consuming this food is the increase of duḥkha (sorrow) and śoka (grief). Unlike sātṭvika food, which nourishes body and mind, rājasika food heightens restlessness and emotional turbulence. Thus, restraint, particularly of the tongue, becomes essential, though it is often the most challenging form of self-discipline.

The speaker recalls an incident at his school, when a guest had come who required a wheelchair due to a foot operation caused by severe diabetes. Her meal had been arranged with a variety of dishes: desserts, vegetables, and a fresh fruit salad. Seeing the fruit salad, he was concerned, this was extremely high in sugar for someone with such a condition. He considered removing it but restrained himself, realizing that it would be inappropriate to interfere with a guest's choice. Despite her medical condition, she ate the fruit salad eagerly. Observing her indulgence, he felt an involuntary sense of disapproval arise within him. Recognizing the thought, he reflected and reminded himself that it was her nature and disposition, and there was no need for his mind to experience disturbance.

This illustrated a key principle: rājasika individuals are naturally drawn to rich, flavorful, or stimulating food, often leading to desires and emotional reactions. The challenge lies in disciplining the tongue and mind, which is difficult even for well-intentioned observers.

Bhagavān then proceeds to describe the nature of tāmasika food, which is consumed by those dominated by tamas.

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.

Tāmasika food is consumed by individuals dominated by tamas. It is characterized as:

- **Yāta-yāma-m pūṣita uṣṭa** - overcooked, stale, or putrid
- **gāta-rasa-m** - whose essence has been lost
- **Bāsī** - old or fermented
- **Durgandha-yukta** - having a foul smell
- **Apuṣṭa** - nutritionally depleted
- **Apachādita** - spoiled or inedible
- **Apavitra** - impure, unfit for offering to Bhagavān, such as meat, fish, and other items considered impure

No specific outcome is described for tāmasika food, unlike sātṭvika and rājasika food, whose effects were clearly stated: sātṭvika food enhances ānanda, prīti, and nourishment, while rājasika food results in duḥkha and śoka. Tāmasika food, however, is consumed by the ignorant, and it is deemed unnecessary to explain its consequence, such food naturally leads to deterioration without guidance.

Following the discussion of food, Bhagavān explains the three types of yajña (sacrificial acts). Yajña is not merely the act of offering items into a fire, such as ghee or rice. While that is one form, Bhagavān describes several types of yajña in the Bhagavad Gītā:

द्रव्ययज्ञास्तपोयज्ञा योगयज्ञास्तथापरे ।

स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः ॥

- **Dṛavya-yajña** – offering through material gifts
- **Tapa-yajña** – performing austerities as an offering
- **Jnana-yajña** – performing acts of knowledge or study as an offering

Himself, Bhagavān clarifies what constitutes each type and the manner in which it is performed, providing a framework for the devotee to understand yajña beyond ritualistic acts.

17.11

aphalākāṅkṣibhiryajño, vidhidṛṣṭo ya ijjate, yaṣṭavyameveti 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.

Bhagavān explains that a yajña performed according to scriptural injunctions (śāstra-vidhi), with a mind fixed on duty rather than on reward, is considered sātṭvika.

Such a yajña is performed without expectation of fruit (aphalākāṅkṣī), with effort devoted solely to the act itself. This is the essence of a sātṭvika yajña, which naturally brings joy to the mind aligned with virtue.

In human life, many types of yajña are necessary:

- **Deva-ṛṇa liberation** – offerings to deities through havan or other rituals
- **Pitṛ-ṛṇa liberation** – serving parents and shaping the character of the next generation
- **Rṣi-ṛṇa liberation** – serving the guru and the path of dharma
- **Lok- or society-ṛṇa liberation** – contributing to social welfare through dharmashalas, schools, hospitals, or anna-chhatras
- **Bhūta-ṛṇa liberation** – showing compassion to all living beings, including cows, bees, trees, rivers, and nature itself

For example, tree planting as part of fulfilling bhūta-ṛṇa: for every tree used as fuel, one must plant another and witness it grow, thereby balancing the debt.

Similarly, swādhyāya and jñāna-yajña involve self-discipline and mastery over the senses. Every action, including speech, sensory engagement, and even breathing, can become a form of yajña when performed with mindfulness and restraint.

Even in acts of yajña that involve material offerings, aphaḷākāṅkṣī attitude is essential, performing without desire for personal gain. Historical examples include:

- King Dasharatha, who performed the Putra-Kamesthi Yajña
- The Pandavas, who performed Rajasuya Yajña during the founding of Indraprastha
- Rishi Udyālaka, who conducted the Vishwajit Yajña

In one remarkable incident during a Rajasuya Yajña, Bhagavān Himself was lifting ceremonial plates. A mongoose created a commotion among the participants. Observing this, someone remarked that the yajña was not truly sātṭvika. Bhagavān explained that the act, though grand, was a display of royal wealth and power, therefore rajasa in nature, not sātṭvika.

Bhagavān further explains: such Rajasuya yajñas are meant to display grandeur and self-importance. By contrast, true sātṭvika yajña is humble, effortful, and detached from reward, bringing inner joy

rather than external acclaim.

Through these examples, Bhagavān emphasizes the distinction between sāttvika, rajasa, and tāmasa yajñas, their purposes, and the mindset required to perform them properly. The discussion of errors, showmanship, and consequences in various yajñas is reserved for further reflection in the next session.

Let's Now Dive Into Some Questions & Answers!

QUESTION AND ANSWERS

Suman ji

Question: Which actions are prohibited for attaining Bhagavat-tattva?

Answer: For attaining Bhagavat-tattva, all actions that increase tāmasic tendencies are obstructive. These include laziness (ālasyā), negligence (pramāda), stubbornness (haṭha), falsehood (asatya), violence (hiṃsā), cruelty (kṛūrata), unrighteousness (adharma), and actions that cause harm to others. Therefore, the practitioner should abandon these tāmasic tendencies and adopt the sāttvika means described by Śrī Bhagavān in this chapter: sāttvika yajña, sāttvika dāna, and sāttvika tapa. Through these, the mind becomes pure, and the practitioner becomes qualified for attaining Bhagavat-prāpti.

Question: In the contemplation “The world exists and the world does not exist,” where should one establish their own position?

Answer: This is a profound topic for contemplation. In brief, the scriptures aim to give the perspective that this 80-100 year human life is only a small part of the soul's thousands of lifetimes in its endless journey. Compared to the soul's anādi-ananta travel, one human life is very short, even though it seems long to us.

When the lifespan is short, time management becomes extremely important. One's "expiry date" is unknown, and often time is wasted in pleasure and negligence. Only later do we realize how quickly it has passed.

Hence Śrī Bhagavān says: "Do not run, but awaken!" The moment one awakens, sādhana begins.

Sādhana refers to following the principles of yama and niyama, knowing what is to be renounced and what is to be accepted, as described in the scriptures. This is the essence of spiritual practice.

Munmun ji

Question: If a Bhagavān's vigraha is installed at home and we need to go somewhere, how can we leave it unattended?

Answer: Vigrahas installed at home do not have prāṇapratishṭhā. In such cases, scriptures describe the method of mānas pūjā (mental worship). The household Bhagavān can be established in the heart, and wherever one goes, He is carried internally. Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya has detailed the method of mānas pūjā.

Sloka describing pūjā setup:

रत्नैः कल्पितमासनं हिमजलैः स्नानं च दिव्याम्बरं

नानारत्नविभूषितं मृगमदामोदाङ्कितं चन्दनम्।

जातीचम्पक-बिल्वपत्र-रचितं पुष्पं च धूपं तथा

दीपं देव दयानिधे पशुपते हृत्कल्पितं गृह्यताम् ॥ 1 ॥

सौवर्णे नवरत्नखण्डरचिते पात्रे घृतं पायसं
भक्ष्यं पञ्चविधं पयोदधियुतं रम्भाफलं पानकम्।
शाकानामयुतं जलं रुचिकरं कर्पूरखण्डोज्ज्वलं
ताम्बूलं मनसा मया विरचितम्।

Ratnaiḥ kalpitam āsanam himajalaih snānam ca divyāmbaram
Nānā-ratna-vibhūṣitam mṛgamadāmoda-āṅkitam candanam
Jāti-campaka-bilvapatra-racitam puṣpam ca dhūpam tathā
Dīpam deva-dayānidhe paśupati hṛtkalpitaṃ gṛhyatām (1)

Sauvarṇe navaratna-khaṇḍa-racite pātre ghṛtam pāyasaṃ
Bhakṣyam pañcavidhaṃ payodadhi-yutaṃ rambhāphalaṃ pānakam
Śākānāmayutaṃ jalaṃ rucikaraṃ karpūra-khaṇḍo-jjvalaṃ
Tāmbūlaṃ manasā mayā viracitam

Urmila ji

Question: Which prāṇāyāmas should we practice, and for how long?

Answer: In the initial stage, 5–7 minutes of prāṇāyāma are sufficient. Gradually, the duration may be increased. Kapalabhāti prāṇāyāma should be done first, as it is a purification practice. Forty (40) strokes should be performed, learning proper technique. Then Anuloma-Viloma, Bhastrikā, Prāṇāyāma, and Bhrāmārī may be practiced. Finally, Ujjayi and Om (Ōṃ) prāṇāyāma can be performed.

The session concluded with a heartfelt prayer and the recitation of the **Hanumān Chālīsā**, marking the end of a spiritually enriching discourse.



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