

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 17: Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga-Yoga

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From Inner Faith to Daily Choice: The Three Guṇas and Food

The 17th Chapter of the Bhagavad-Gītā is **Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga Yoga — The Yoga of the Classification of the Threefold Faith.**

The discourse commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the Dīpam (lamp) at the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān, invoking divine grace and filling the gathering with a profound sense of Bhakti and reverence.

सदाशिव समारम्भाम् शंकराचार्य मध्यमाम्।

अस्मद् आचार्य पर्यन्ताम् वंदे गुरु परम्पराम्।।

Beginning with Sadashiva, through Ādi Śankarācārya in between and up to my own preceptor, I bow with reverence to the entire tradition of preceptors.

By the grace of Bhagavān, and through the accumulated puṇya of many lifetimes, past and present, this rare opportunity has arisen: to learn the Bhagavad Gītā, to teach the Bhagavad Gītā, and to help spread this sacred knowledge across the globe.

When this journey began, there was uncertainty. There was no confidence that it would truly be possible to walk this path steadily or complete it. Yet today, by His compassion alone, Level One stands completed, Level Two is nearing its close, and the seekers are now studying the Seventeenth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā.

Earlier, many would casually say: “This is written in the Bhagavad Gītā.” “That is written in the Bhagavad Gītā.”

Often, this was not said from direct knowledge. There was no certainty whether it was truly present in the text or not. It was largely based on belief, on hearsay, assuming that perhaps it might be written there. Over time, many absolute-sounding statements came to be attributed to the Bhagavad Gītā without verification.

But now, as systematic learning unfolds, a profound shift is taking place.

With study comes clarity. With clarity comes discernment. Gradually, it becomes evident what the Bhagavad Gītā actually teaches—and equally important, what it does not teach. After completing all eighteen chapters, one becomes confident enough to say with responsibility and humility: “Yes, this is indeed stated here,” or “No, this is not found in the Gītā.”

Such discernment is essential. One must truly know what is present in one’s own Śāstras.

Dṛḍha-mati : The Resolve to Complete the Path

While teaching devotion in the Twelfth Chapter, Bhagavān uses the term dṛḍha-matiḥ, firm and unwavering resolve. Dṛḍha-matiḥ means that once the path is chosen, the seeker remains steady, unshaken by doubt or difficulty.

With this very spirit, the study was undertaken: A firm inner resolve that all eighteen chapters would be completed.

That same firmness must now continue with the clear conviction that all eighteen chapters will be completed in their entirety by Level Four. This steadfastness itself is a form of sādhana.

The Seventeenth Chapter is titled Śraddhā-traya-vibhāga Yoga, the Yoga of the Threefold Division of Faith.

At first glance, this chapter may appear to be an additional or supplementary chapter. In a certain sense, it is indeed a pariśiṣṭa-viṣaya—an explanatory appendix. The core teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā is largely complete by the end of the Sixteenth Chapter.

In Chapter 16, Bhagavān clearly describes:

- Daivī Sampad — divine qualities
- Āsurī Sampad — demonic qualities

Toward the conclusion of that chapter, in verses 23 and 24, Bhagavān makes a decisive declaration about the authority of the Śāstras.

Bhagavad Gītā 16.23

यः शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः ।

न स सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुखं न परां गतिम् ॥

Bhagavān declares that one who abandons the injunctions of the Śāstras (śāstra-vidhim utsṛjya) and acts merely according to personal desire (kāma-kārataḥ) attains none of the following:

- **Na siddhim avāpnoti** — no spiritual perfection
- **Na sukham** — no true happiness
- **Na parāṁ gatim** — no supreme goal, no liberation

Here, avāpnoti means “to obtain” or “to attain.” Such a person does not obtain perfection, does not obtain happiness, and does not attain the ultimate destination—mokṣa.

Thus, a life driven solely by personal likes and dislikes, without reference to Śāstra, can never culminate in fulfillment—neither worldly nor transcendental.

Bhagavad Gītā 16.24

तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ ।

ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥

Therefore (tasmāt), Bhagavān declares that Śāstra alone is the valid authority (śāstram pramāṇam) in determining:

- What ought to be done (kārya)
- What ought not to be done (akārya)
- Śāstra provides kārya-akārya-vyavasthā, the clear framework of right and wrong action.

Having understood the ordinances laid down by the Śāstras (jñātvā śāstra-vidhāna-uktam), one becomes fit (arhasi) to perform action (karma kartum).

Bhagavān assures that by following Śāstra:

- Sukha (true happiness) is attained
- Siddhi (spiritual maturity) is attained
- Parā gati (the supreme goal) is attained

This establishes Śāstra as the guiding light for human conduct.

At the conclusion of Chapter 16, Bhagavān firmly emphasizes obedience to Śāstra. At this precise point, Arjuna raises a subtle and important question.

What about those who do not strictly follow scriptural injunctions, yet worship with faith? What is the nature of their śraddhā?

This question becomes the doorway to Chapter 17.

The Seventeenth Chapter begins with Arjuna's inquiry and unfolds as Bhagavān's compassionate response. The dialogue continues, not merely as a philosophical exchange, but as an act of divine grace. The very fact that questions arise and answers are received is itself Bhagavat-kṛpā.

Thus, Chapter 17 is not an interruption, it is a necessary clarification. It explains how faith itself is shaped by the three guṇas, and why even faith must be understood, examined, and purified through the lens of Śāstra.

With Arjuna's question, the chapter opens, and with Bhagavān's reply, a deeper layer of spiritual discernment begins.

The journey now moves forward into **Śraddhā-traya-vibhāga Yoga**.

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.

In the Sixteenth Chapter, Bhagavān used the expression:

“ये शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः”

one who abandons the injunctions of the Śāstras and acts according to personal desire.

Now Arjuna deliberately repeats the same phrase, śāstra-vidhim utsṛjya, but introduces a new and important dimension. Arjuna observes that there are people who do not follow the prescriptions of

Śāstra, yet they are not irreligious in the conventional sense. They do not live a life of complete disregard or denial. Instead:

- They worship with faith (śraddhayā anvitaḥ).
- They perform yajñas, homas, pūjā, and various forms of worship.
- They act with sincerity and inner belief, even though they do not know what is actually stated in the Śāstras.
- They may say, “I have faith,” even while remaining ignorant of or indifferent to scriptural injunctions.

Arjuna’s concern is not about those who neither know Śāstra nor perform any action. Such a case presents no complexity. The real question arises when: A person does not know Śāstra, or A person knows Śāstra but does not follow it, yet still performs acts of worship with faith and devotion. What is the spiritual status of such people?

The Core of Arjuna’s Inquiry

Arjuna asks: “O Krishna, what is the basis (niṣṭhā) of those who set aside the injunctions of the Śāstras but worship with faith? What is the nature of their faith?”

Is that faith:

- Sāttvika (born of clarity and purity)?
- Rājasika (born of passion and desire)?
- Tāmasika (born of ignorance and delusion)?

The phrase “teṣāṃ niṣṭhā tu kā” is crucial. Niṣṭhā means the inner grounding, the fundamental orientation of one’s belief and commitment. Arjuna is asking not about outward action alone, but about the inner quality of faith that motivates such worship.

Connection with the Doctrine of the Three Guṇas

By this stage, Arjuna has already understood from earlier teachings, especially from the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Chapters, that everything in this universe is governed by the three guṇas: Sattva-guṇa, Rajas-guṇa, Tamas-guṇa

Nothing in creation can exist with only one guṇa. Every individual, every action, every belief is a mixture of these three, though one may predominate. Therefore, Arjuna intuitively extends this understanding to faith itself. If actions and intellect are shaped by the guṇas, then faith too must be influenced by them. Thus, he asks whether the faith of such worshippers, those who do not follow Śāstra yet worship sincerely, is sāttvika, rājasika, or tāmasika.

Why This Question Is Profound and Universal

This is not merely Arjuna’s question; it is the question of every sincere seeker. After hearing this, anyone reflecting honestly is bound to wonder: “If faith alone is present, but scriptural discipline is absent, what is the spiritual value of such faith?”

Arjuna’s question arises from compassion, not criticism. It seeks clarity, not condemnation. And the very fact that this question is raised becomes the reason for the Seventeenth Chapter to unfold.

The Seventeenth Chapter opens with this inquiry, and Bhagavān now prepares to respond. His answer will reveal how faith itself is conditioned by the guṇas, and why understanding the quality of one’s faith is as important as faith itself. With this question, the dialogue moves forward, not as a debate, but as an act of divine instruction, guided entirely by the compassion of Bhagavān.

Now, let us see how Bhagavān responds.

17.2

śrībhagavānuvāca trividhā bhavati śraddhā, dehinām(m) sā svabhāvajā, sāttvikī rājasī caiva, tāmasī ceti tām(m) śrṇu. 17.2

Śrī Bhagavān said :That untutored innate faith of men is of three kinds- Sāttvika, Rājasika and Tāmasika. Hear of it from Me.

Bhagavān declares that faith (śraddhā) is of three kinds.

This statement immediately answers Arjuna’s question, yet it also opens a deeper doorway of understanding.

Bhagavān does not say that faith is of three kinds because of the will of the devatās, nor because of divine preference, nor because of any external command. Instead, He makes a precise and compassionate observation about human beings.

He says: “**dehinām sā svabhāvajā**”, this threefold faith belongs to dehin, embodied beings, and it arises from their own inherent nature (svabhāva).

Dehinām — Faith Belongs to Embodied Beings

The word dehinām is extremely significant. It means: Those who possess a deha, a physical body. Human beings living in embodiment

Bhagavān is not speaking here about His own nature, nor about the nature of Paramātmā, nor about divine consciousness. This classification does not apply to the Absolute. It applies to human beings, to all embodied souls living in the world. Every person who has a body, a mind, and an intellect necessarily possesses faith of some kind. Faith is not optional; it is inevitable. The only question is what kind of faith one holds.

Svabhāvajā — Faith Arises from One’s Nature

Bhagavān further explains that this faith is svabhāvajā—born of one’s own nature.

This means:

- Faith is not artificially created
- Faith is not deliberately manufactured
- Faith is not something one consciously chooses at the surface level

Rather, it naturally arises from the inner constitution shaped by the guṇas accumulated through past actions, impressions, and tendencies. Thus, faith flows spontaneously from who a person is, not merely from what a person does.

The Three Types of Faith

Bhagavān then names the three forms of śraddhā:

- **Sāttvikī** — faith born of clarity, purity, harmony, and light
- **Rājasī** — faith born of passion, desire, restlessness, and attachment
- **Tāmasī** — faith born of darkness, ignorance, confusion, and delusion

These are not moral labels but psychological and spiritual descriptions. Every embodied being

expresses faith according to the dominance of these guṇas within.

17.3

sattvānurūpā sarvasya, śraddhā bhavati bhārata, śraddhāmayaḥ ayam(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.

Faith According to One's Inner Nature

Bhagavān addresses Arjuna here as Bhārata, reminding him of his lineage as a descendant of Bharata. The address itself carries gravity, indicating that what follows is not a casual remark, but a universal law governing all embodied beings.

Bhagavān declares: **“Sattvānurūpā sarvasya śraddhā bhavati”**

The faith of every person is in accordance with his or her inner nature (sattva here does not mean sāttvika-guṇa alone; it means one's mental constitution). Faith does not arise randomly. It does not arise independently of character. It arises in conformity with the structure of the mind shaped by past actions, habits, and tendencies.

Thus, śraddhā is not something separate from a person. It is an expression of who that person already is.

Śraddhāmayaḥ Ayam Puruṣaḥ — A Human Being Is Made of Faith

Bhagavān then makes a decisive declaration: **“Śraddhāmayaḥ ayam puruṣaḥ”**, This human being is entirely made of faith.

Just as one may say: Ānandamayaḥ — one who is full of bliss, here Bhagavān says: **Śraddhāmayaḥ**, one who is constituted of faith itself.

A human being does not merely possess faith; he is faith. From childhood onward, at every moment, whatever a person chooses, values, trusts, and prioritizes slowly shapes his inner being. Over time, the human personality becomes nothing other than the crystallization of those choices.

“Yo Yat Śraddhaḥ Sa Eva Saḥ” — One Becomes What One Believes

The final quarter of this verse is extraordinarily powerful: **“Yo yat śraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ”**, Whatever one's faith is, that alone one becomes.

If this single line is deeply understood, countless confusions dissolve.

- Faith is not merely intellectual belief. It is existential orientation.
- If a person believes something to be sacred, that object becomes sacred for that person.
- If a person perceives the presence of Bhagavān in a stone, that stone becomes a living form of the Divine for that person.

This is not imagination; it is grounded in the truth that Paramātmā is sarvatraga, omnipresent. When something is present everywhere, it can be consciously manifested at a particular place through a valid process.

Just as oxygen exists everywhere but becomes accessible through a specific process, the Divine, being all-pervasive, can become manifest where faith and proper orientation converge.

Illustrations from Bhakti Tradition

This truth is powerfully illustrated in sacred narratives.

- **Prahlāda and the Pillar**

When Hiraṇyakaśipu challenged Prahlāda, asking whether his Bhagavān existed in a pillar, Prahlāda replied without hesitation: Yes. When the pillar was struck, Bhagavān manifested. The manifestation followed faith, not arrogance.

- **Dhannā Jāt of Rajasthan**

When a simple-hearted devotee offered milk to a stone with pure faith, Bhagavān accepted that offering. The priest later realized that devotion, not external qualification, had invoked divine presence. Overcome with remorse, he renounced his position, recognizing the supremacy of sincere śraddhā.

These stories do not glorify superstition; they affirm the principle that faith aligned with purity invites divine response.

Faith and Daily Choices

Faith is not expressed only in temples or rituals. It is revealed every moment through choices.

- Choosing sleep over discipline repeatedly strengthens tamas.
- Choosing study of the Gītā over distraction strengthens sattva.
- Choosing satsanga over idle entertainment refines the mind.
- Choosing japa over indulgence elevates inner clarity.
- Choosing wholesome food over excess indulgence cultivates sattva rather than rajas.

Every decision, small or large, is a declaration of faith. And over time, these choices shape personality.

Thus, a person does not accidentally become sāttvika, rājasika, or tāmasika. He becomes so by what he repeatedly trusts and chooses.

17.4

**yajante sāttvikā devān, yakṣarakṣāṃsi rājasāḥ,
pretānbhūtagaṇāṃścānye, yajante tāmasā janāḥ. 17.4**

Men of Sāttvika disposition worship gods; those of Rājasika temperament worship demigods and demons; while others, who are men of Tāmasika disposition, worship the spirits of dead and ghosts.

Worship According to the Guṇas

Bhagavān now explains how faith expresses itself through worship.

- Sāttvika persons worship devatās, luminous deities associated with order, harmony, and cosmic balance.
- Rājasika persons worship yakṣas and rākṣasas, beings associated with power, wealth, control, and worldly gain.
- Tāmasika persons worship pretas, bhūtas, and dark forces, expressions of fear, ignorance, and delusion.

Here, Bhagavān is not speaking of worship of the Supreme with niṣkāma bhakti. He is analyzing guṇic tendencies in religious expression.

The Supreme Reality, Paramātmā, Brahman, Bhagavān, is beyond these classifications. But when worship is motivated by desire, fear, or ignorance, it aligns with the corresponding guṇa.

Inner Witness and Moral Accountability

No external authority judges a person more accurately than one's own mind. The tradition symbolically speaks of Chitragupta, but this is not to be understood as a literal being writing ledgers for millions simultaneously. Chitragupta represents the mind itself.

The mind records every intention, every justification, every self-deception. A person may deceive others. A person may even attempt to deceive himself. But the mind knows. After leaving this world, the accumulated impressions (saṃskāras) unfold naturally, determining future destinations, higher realms, lower realms, or rebirth in this world.

Thus, Bhagavān reminds seekers that faith is not neutral. It shapes destiny.

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;

“Aśāstra-vihitam ghoram tapaḥ”, Terrible Austerities Not Sanctioned by Śāstra

Bhagavān describes a category of people who perform ghora tapas, severe, intense austerities.

Externally, their practices may appear impressive or frightening: Extreme fasting, Harsh bodily discipline, Prolonged denial of basic needs

Yet Bhagavān gives a decisive qualifier: **aśāstra-vihitam**, not sanctioned by Śāstra. This is the key point.

Such austerities are not prescribed anywhere in the scriptures. They are not rooted in Vedic injunctions, Smṛtis, or a valid spiritual lineage. They arise purely from personal will.

Often, one hears statements such as:

- “It is not written anywhere; I just felt like doing it.”
- “I decided to fast for ten or eleven days continuously.”
- “I eat only once a day; I call it upavāsa.”
- “I am not observing Ekādaśī, Mahāśivarātri, Janmāṣṭamī, or Navarātri—but I am fasting whenever I wish.”

Bhagavān is not condemning self-control. Self-discipline is good. Regulation of food, habits, and indulgence is beneficial for health and mental clarity. But giving a scriptural name like ‘upavāsa’ or ‘tapas’ and expecting spiritual merit (puṇya) without scriptural sanction is where the problem arises. Until an act is aligned with Śāstra (or at least with a valid, time-tested paramparā), it does not generate the spiritual results one may expect.

Intent Matters More Than Intensity

Bhagavān further explains the inner motivation behind such unscriptural austerities:

- **dambha** — hypocrisy, show, display
- **ahaṅkāra** — ego, self-importance
- **kāma** — desire
- **rāga** — attachment
- **bala** — forceful insistence driven by impulse

Such people may not necessarily be evil. This is important to understand. Bhagavān is not issuing a moral verdict here. He is classifying guṇas. When austerity is driven by display or ego → it becomes rājasika. When it is driven by stubborn impulse, delusion, or harmful extremes → it becomes tāmasika. Therefore, not everything that looks spiritual is sātṭvika.

Tradition (Paramparā) vs Blind Practice

Bhagavān does not reject paramparā. If a practice has been followed for generations, has scriptural or traditional grounding, causes no harm, supports discipline and remembrance of Bhagavān, then it has validity.

But if a practice is based purely on impulse, rooted in superstition, or harmful to body or mind. Completely disconnected from Śāstra and viveka, then it must be questioned. Bhagavān's teaching is clear: viveka-buddhi must always be applied. Spiritual life is not blind imitation. It is conscious alignment with truth.

17.6

karśayantaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(m), bhūtagrāmamacetasah, māṃ(ñ) caivāntaḥ(ś) śarīrasthaṃ(n), tānviddhyāsuraniścayān. 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 repeatedly and unmistakably confirms His indwelling presence within every living being. Earlier, in Bhagavad Gītā Chapter 15, Bhagavān declares:
sarvasya cāham hṛdi sanniviṣṭah, "I am seated in the heart of all."

Again, in Bhagavad Gītā 18.61, Bhagavān states:

**īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānām hṛd-deśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati
bhrāmayaṃ sarva-bhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā**

"The Supreme Paramātmā abides in the heart-region of all beings, O Arjuna, and by His Māyā causes all beings to revolve as if mounted on a machine."

Here, the expression "hṛd-deśe" is crucial, it clearly establishes that Paramātmā resides in the very heart of every being.

Now, in the verse under discussion (Bhagavad Gītā 17.6), Bhagavān says: **karśayantaḥ śarīrasthaṃ bhūta-grāmam acetasaḥ**, "They torture the aggregate of elements residing within the body, being devoid of discrimination."

Through this statement, Bhagavān conveys a profound and subtle truth. Paramātmā is seated within the body, within the heart. When a person performs extreme, unscriptural austerities, such as starving the body, inflicting pain upon it, or engaging in violent self-mortification, thinking it to be spiritual discipline, that person is not merely harming the body.

The body is described as **bhūta-grāma**, the collective structure formed of the five great elements. To torture this body senselessly is to torture the very dwelling place of Paramātmā.

Such actions are described as **acetasaḥ**, lacking discernment, awareness, and wisdom.

Bhagavān's implication is clear, since Paramātmā abides within the body, violence toward the body

becomes violence toward the Indweller Himself. The performer of such tapas fails to recognize this truth and remains blind to the inner presence of Bhagavān.

Therefore, Bhagavān categorically declares that such austerities are:

- ghora tapas — terrible and cruel austerities
- aśāstrīya — not sanctioned by śāstra or the Vedas
- born of āsurī niścaya — a demoniac resolve

Bhagavān emphasizes that this tendency arises from an āsurī svabhāva (demoniac disposition) and must never be glorified as spirituality.

Śraddhā as the Determining Principle

Having rejected misguided tapas, Bhagavān now establishes the central governing principle of human life, śraddhā. Earlier, Bhagavān stated: **yo yac-*chraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ***, “As one’s faith is, so one becomes.”

Because śraddhā determines thought, action, and direction in life, Bhagavān devotes an entire chapter, Chapter 17, Śraddhā-Traya-Vibhāga Yoga, to explaining how faith operates under the influence of the three guṇas: Sāttvika śraddhā, Rājasika śraddhā, Tāmasika śraddhā

The Four Essential Dimensions of Human Life

Bhagavān now turns to four fundamental aspects that shape everyday human existence and explains how each is influenced by the three guṇas:

- **Yajña - ritual sacrifice**
- **Dāna - charity**
- **Tapas - austerity**
- **Āhāra - food**

From Verse 7 onwards, Bhagavān begins with āhāra, explaining how food itself is classified as sāttvika, rājasika, or tāmasika. In the subsequent verses, Bhagavān elaborates systematically on the threefold nature of: Yajña, Dāna and Tapas

Through this structure, Bhagavān teaches that every sphere of life, what one eats, how one worships, how one gives, and how one practices discipline—must be guided by sāttvika śraddhā, rooted firmly in śāstra and right understanding. Only such a life becomes conducive to inner purity, clarity, and true spiritual progress.

17.7

āhārastvapi sarvasya, trividho bhavati priyaḥ, yajñastapastathā dānaṃ(n), teṣāṃ(m) bhedaṃ(m) śrṇu. 17.7

Food also, which is agreeable to different men according to their innate disposition is of three kinds. and likewise sacrifice, penance and charity too are of three kinds each; hear their distinction as follows.

Here, Bhagavān clearly states that the food consumed by every individual, without exception, is of three types. The phrase “sarvasya” is significant: it applies to everyone, regardless of background, culture, or spiritual inclination.

Along with āhāra, Bhagavān also names three other vital aspects of human life:

- Yajña – acts of sacrifice and worship
- Tapas – austerity and self-discipline
- Dāna – charity and giving

Bhagavān assures that all four, āhāra, yajña, tapas, and dāna, exist in three forms, corresponding to the three guṇas: sattva, rajas, and tamas. Their distinctions are not arbitrary; they are rooted in inner disposition and śraddhā.

Addressing Arjuna affectionately as “priya”, Bhagavān emphasizes that these explanations are authoritative and must be heard with attention and faith. The instruction is not speculative, it is a direct declaration of truth by Bhagavān Himself.

From verses 8 to 10, Bhagavān devotes three consecutive śloka exclusively to food. This itself reveals the importance of āhāra in spiritual life.

These verses explain: Sāttvika āhāra — Verse 8, Rājasika āhāra — Verse 9, Tāmasika āhāra — Verse 10

These śloka are among the most well-known and frequently quoted verses of the Bhagavad Gītā. Very often, when questions are asked from the Gītā, whether in study, teaching, examinations, or discourses, one is specifically asked: “Which śloka describes sāttvika food?” “Which verse explains rājasika food?” “Where is tāmasika food defined in the Gītā?”

Because of their clarity and practical relevance, these verses are considered ‘variant’ or high-priority śloka, meaning they are repeatedly referred to and expected to be known.

Therefore, anyone studying the Bhagavad Gītā seriously must be familiar with these three śloka. They form the foundation for understanding how daily habits influence inner purity, clarity of mind, and spiritual progress. With this preparation, Bhagavān now proceeds to describe, verse by verse, the nature of sāttvika, rājasika, and tāmasika food.

Let us now move to the next śloka.

17.8

āyuh(s) sattvabalārogya, sukhapṛītivivardhanāḥ, rasyāḥ(s) snigdhāḥ(s) sthirā hr̥dyā, āhārāḥ(s) sāttvikapriyāḥ. 17.8

Foods which promote longevity, intelligence, vigor, health, happiness and cheerfulness, and which are juicy, succulent, substantial and naturally agreeable, are liked by men of Sāttvika nature.

Bhagavān uses the word priyāḥ, dear, beloved. This indicates something subtle and profound.

There is an interdependence between what one is and what one chooses:

- If a person chooses sāttvika things, that person gradually becomes sāttvika.
- If a person is already sāttvika, their choices, food, schedule, decisions, places they visit, actions they perform, naturally remain sāttvika.

For example, if someone is predominantly rājasika but sincerely wishes to become sāttvika, the shift begins practically. By starting with sāttvika food, the mindset slowly transforms. Over time, thoughts become calmer, choices become purer, and the entire lifestyle begins to align with sattva.

On the other hand, a person who is already sāttvika does not need external enforcement. Their daily routine, preferences, discipline, and inclinations already include sāttvika elements. Thus, being sāttvika and choosing sāttvika reinforce one another continuously.

Effects of Sāttvika Food

Bhagavān lists the effects of sāttvika āhāra in a precise order:

- **Āyuh** – longevity
- **Sattva** – inner purity and clarity
- **Bala** – strength and vitality
- **Ārogya** – health and freedom from disease
- **Sukha** – happiness
- **Prīti** – loving joy and contentment

Such food does not merely sustain the body, it uplifts the mind and heart.

Nature of Sāttvika Food

Bhagavān then describes the qualities of such food:

1. Rasyāḥ – Juicy, Nourishing

Foods rich in rasa—natural vitality and essence.

Examples include: Fresh fruits like lemon, orange, grapes, Milk and milk products, Ghṛtam (clarified butter)

Earlier generations consumed ample milk, ghṛta, fruits, and wholesome foods. Because of this, even at the age of fifty or sixty, their knees, bones, and joints supported them well. Their bodies remained functional because nourishment was embedded in their daily food, not taken later as supplements.

Today, despite eating daily home food, many lack proper nutrition. Hence, calcium, iron, vitamin D, and other supplements become necessary, not because the body is weak by nature, but because nourishment has been removed from food itself.

People stop loving green vegetables. They stop loving milk. They stop loving cream and ghṛta. Everything is rejected in the name of “dieting”.

A Practical Insight on Dieting

True balance is not about not eating, but about burning what is eaten. Instead of avoiding ghṛta, oil, or nourishing foods, one should: Eat properly, Exercise, Walk one or two kilometers. Yet today, even for five hundred meters, people choose scooters or cars. Physical effort (pariśrama) is avoided, while comforts (sukha-sādhana) are embraced.

Calories are reduced from food, but not burned through activity. This imbalance is not a solution.

The wiser approach is:

- Consume nourishing food
- Burn energy through movement
- Avoiding food altogether destroys taste, joy, and long-term health.

The Lost Taste of Nourishment

Ghṛta is not merely nutrition, it is taste, warmth, and emotional fulfillment.

“माँ का खाना, गरम-गरम, ऊपर से घी पड़ा हुआ”

that feeling cannot be explained in words.

Yet many have lost that experience due to rigid dieting. Air fryers replace oil. Methods that remove nourishment replace traditional cooking. Slowly, taste is lost, not only on the tongue, but in life itself. Bhagavān uses the word rasyāḥ deliberately. Food must have rasa. Buttermilk, milk, gṛta, these must be part of daily meals.

2. Snigdhaḥ — Unctuous, Soft, Pleasant

Food should not be dry or harsh. It should be lovable, gently nourishing. Some sweetness is essential, not excess, but balance. Even after meals, many naturally desire a little sweetness. This is not indulgence; it is biological and psychological harmony.

3. Sthirāḥ — Substantial, Long-lasting

Foods that stay in the body, build strength, and sustain over time. When such nourishment is consumed consistently in youth and middle age, later years become effortless. People in their seventies, eighties, and even nineties remain active, walking independently, managing households, because the body was fortified early. Such stability comes from sthirā āhāra.

4. Hṛdyāḥ — Pleasing to the Heart

Food must be eaten with love. Not with resistance. Not with dislike. But with acceptance and joy. Some people eat a lot yet remain weak because they do not love food. They take hours to finish meals; nutrients are lost. Others eat very little but with joy, and even a single chapāti nourishes them deeply. Love allows nourishment to integrate.

Sāttvika People Love Sāttvika Food

Bhagavān concludes: Such food is beloved by sāttvika people.

Not pizza, pasta, or excess processed food, but nourishing, wholesome, traditional food that builds life, clarity, strength, and joy. When one is happy, happiness spreads.

When one is sad, sadness spreads. Sāttvika food increases sukha and prīti, and through that, harmony radiates outward.

Having understood what sāttvika people love, Bhagavān now moves forward to explain: What rājasika people are drawn to, and why?

Let us now proceed to the next śloka.

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.

Bhagavān uses precise terms to describe the preferences of the rājasika disposition:

Kaṭu — Bitter

This refers to bitterness, such as karela (bitter gourd). It must be clearly distinguished from tīkṣṇa (chili heat). Bitter and pungent are not the same.

Amla — Sour

Excessively sour foods that overstimulate the palate.

Lavaṇa — Salty

Some individuals feel that normal seasoning is not enough and require extra salt in their food. This craving for heightened saltiness is indicated here.

Aty-uṣṇa — Excessively Hot

Food consumed while still burning hot. Some people cannot wait for food to cool and prefer it at extreme temperatures. Examples include freshly prepared tea or food taken immediately from the pan. Certain dishes are even designed to be served sizzling hot, such as sizzlers. Though appealing, this habit reflects rājasika inclination.

Tikṣṇa — Excessively Pungent

This refers to intense spiciness, especially from chilies. Again, Bhagavān distinguishes:

- **Kaṭu** — bitterness
- **Tikṣṇa** — sharp, piercing heat from spices
- **Rūkṣa** — Dry

Food lacking oil, gṛṭa, or moisture, overly dry and dehydrating.

Vidāhinaḥ — Burning

Foods that create internal burning sensations. Even in winter, such foods can cause perspiration on the forehead due to internal heat.

Why Rājasika Food is Preferred

Bhagavān says: Such foods are beloved by rājasika people. Those dominated by rajas seek stimulation, intensity, and strong sensory experiences. Hence, they are drawn to food that excites the nerves and agitates the body.

Consequences of Rājasika Āhāra

Bhagavān clearly states the outcome:

- **Duḥkha** – physical and mental pain
- **Śoka** – grief and emotional disturbance
- **Āmāya** – disease

Such food may appear enjoyable in the moment, but its effects surface soon after. Excessive chilies, for example, often manifest discomfort the very next morning. What pleases the tongue temporarily disturbs the body and mind later.

Rājasika food does not produce lasting happiness or health. Instead, it increases restlessness, discomfort, and illness, preventing true well-being. Having explained rājasika food in detail, Bhagavān now prepares to speak about tāmasika āhāra.

17.10

**yātayāmaṃ(ñ) gatarasaṃ(m), pūti paryuṣitaṃ(ñ) ca yat,
ucchiṣṭamapī 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.

Bhagavān carefully selects words that point not only to physical impurity, but also to mental dullness and loss of vitality.

1. Yāta-yāmam — Stale (Beyond Its Time)

The word yāma refers to a period of approximately three hours. Yāta-yāmam thus means food that has crossed its proper time.

Traditionally, it is understood that:

- Food remains fresh for about three hours after preparation
- Beyond this, bacteria begin to develop, and the food gradually becomes tāmasika

Hence, whenever possible, freshly prepared food should be consumed within this span. In modern life, this is not always feasible, office tiffins, packed lunches, and long schedules make fresh meals difficult. Bhagavān's teaching here is not rigid moralism, but direction:

- As much as possible, fresh food should be preferred
- Even if not for every meal, at least one fresh meal a day should be ensured
- The aim is awareness, not anxiety.

2. Gata-rasam — Devoid of Essence or Taste

Food that has lost its rasa, its vitality, moisture, and nourishing quality. For example:

- Food prepared early in the morning and eaten much later
- Items that have dried up, lost freshness, or become lifeless
- Such food may fill the stomach, but it does not nourish life-force.

3. Pūti — Foul-Smelling

Food that emits an unpleasant odor due to spoilage or decay. Even if visually acceptable, smell itself indicates degradation. Such food should be rejected outright.

4. Paryuṣitam — Decomposed / Over-kept / Slimy

This refers to food that has undergone internal change due to prolonged storage. Examples often cited include: Slimy or overly mushy vegetables such as brinjal, arbi, or similar foods when overcooked or over-kept. Many people instinctively avoid such foods, not out of fashion, but out of natural discrimination. This instinct aligns with Bhagavān's teaching.

5. Ucchiṣṭam — Left-over or Contaminated by Saliva

Ucchiṣṭa refers to food that has been:

- Partially eaten by someone else
- Left on another person's plate
- Contaminated through saliva in shared liquid food

There is an important nuance here:

- Sharing dry foods like roti or parāṭhā may not pose the same issue
- Sharing liquid foods like dal, rice, or curry increases the risk of contamination
- If food left on one's plate is eaten by another, it becomes ucchiṣṭa and should be avoided.

6. Amedhyam — Impure

Food that has become impure due to: Insects (flies falling into it), External contamination, Unclean preparation conditions

Justifying such food through logic. "there is no blood," "it looks fine", does not change its nature. Bhagavān categorically calls such food amedhya, unfit for consumption.

The Nature of Tāmasika Preference

Bhagavān concludes: Such food is loved by those of tāmasika disposition. Tāmasika food does not

merely cause discomfort, it clouds the intellect, weakens vitality, and accelerates degeneration. That is why Bhagavān does not elaborate extensively on its consequences. Its very description is sufficient as a warning.

Why Bhagavān Speaks Briefly About Tamas

Rājasika food was explained at length because most people live under rajas, activity, desire, movement, and ambition. Sāttvika food is cherished by a few. Deep tāmasika tendencies are also found in fewer individuals.

Thus, Bhagavān addresses what is most prevalent, while clearly marking what must be transcended.

Food as the Foundation of Personality

Indian wisdom has long affirmed:

“जैसा खाए अन्न, वैसा बने मन।”

“As the food, so the mind.”

The traditional understanding of nourishment explains this beautifully:

- Food becomes rasa (essence)
- Rasa becomes rakta (blood)
- Rakta becomes māṁsa (flesh)
- Māṁsa forms majjā (marrow)
- Majjā strengthens asthi (bones)
- Asthi supports vīrya
- Vīrya refines into ojas
- Ojas radiates as tejas

This is why saints and sāttvika individuals naturally radiate calm, clarity, and luminosity. Their food is pure, and that purity reflects in their face, presence, and personality.

The Call to Inner Ascent

Food is the most basic choice, made daily and repeatedly. From this foundation, every other choice arises. Move from tāmasika to rājasika. From rājasika to sāttvika

And from sāttvika, toward inner purity and devotion. Every moment, through every choice, śraddhā takes form. With this, the discussion on āhāra and now proceeds to explain the threefold nature of yajña, dāna, and tapas. That will be taken up in the next session.

In the next session, we will delve deeper into the upcoming verses of the Bhagavad Gītā, exploring their profound wisdom.

The session concluded with Harinām Sankīrtan, followed by an engaging Question and Answer segment, where thought-provoking queries were addressed with practical insights and deep spiritual wisdom.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Pravin ji

Q: You just explained a long sequence, from food (anna) all the way to bones and tejas. Could you kindly repeat the entire sequence once again, starting clearly from anna, so that it can be properly noted down?

Ans: This is a classical Ayurvedic sequence, explained in Āyurveda and also hinted at in our śāstric tradition. It describes how food gradually transforms into higher and subtler elements within the body. The sequence is as follows:

- Anna - Food: Whatever is eaten becomes anna, the gross input to the body.
- Rasa - Anna is digested and transformed into rasa, the nutritive essence.
- Rakta- Rasa further refines into rakta (blood).
- Māmsa - Rakta nourishes and forms māmsa (muscle and flesh).
- Majjā - Māmsa supports the formation of majjā (bone marrow and nervous tissue).
- Asthi- Majjā strengthens asthi (bones).
- Vīrya- Asthi contributes to vīrya, the vital reproductive essence.
- Ojas- From vīrya emerges ojas, the subtle essence responsible for immunity, stability, and inner vitality.
- Tejas- Finally, ojas gives rise to tejas, inner radiance, clarity, brilliance, and spiritual luminosity.

The discourse concluded with a prārthanā (prayer) at the padakamala (lotus feet) of Śrī Hari, followed by the recitation of the Hanumān Chalisa.



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Thank you-For reading the summary

You have enjoyed this vivechan writeup! In spite of intense editing and proofreading, errors of grammar, as also of omission and commission may have crept in. We appreciate your forbearance.

Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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