

XVII. The Yoga of the Division of the Threefold Faith

Summary of Seventeenth Discourse

This discourse is termed the “Yoga of the Division of the Three Kinds of Faith”. The theme of this discourse arises out of the question asked by Arjuna in Verse 1 with reference to the final and closing advice of Lord Krishna in the previous discourse, contained in the last two verses therein (Verses 23 and 24). Arjuna asks, “What about those who, even though setting aside scriptural injunctions yet perform worship with faith?”

The Lord replies and states that the faith of such men who ignore the injunctions of the scriptures could be either Sattwic, Rajasic or Tamasic. This would be in accordance with the basic nature of the person himself. And, conversely, as is the kind of faith, so develops the nature of the man.

Thus, in all things like sacrifice, worship, charity, penance, etc., these qualities become expressed in accordance with the kind of faith in which the person concerned is based. They produce results in accordance with the quality of the doer’s faith. These acts done with right faith lead to supreme blessedness. When done without any faith whatsoever, all these actions become barren and useless.

Arjuna Uvaacha:

*Ye shaastravidhimutsrijya yajante shraddhayaanvitaah;
Tesham nishthaa tu kaa krishna sattwamaaho rajastamah.*

Arjuna said:

1. Those who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures, perform sacrifice with faith, what is their condition, O Krishna? Is it that of Sattwa, Rajas or Tamas?

COMMENTARY: This discourse deals with the three kinds of faith, according to one’s inherent nature—Sattwic, Rajasic or Tamasic.

Sri Bhagavaan Uvaacha:

*Trividhaa bhavati shraddhaa dehinaam saa swabhaavajaa;
Saattwikee raajasee chaiva taamasee cheti taam shrinu.*

The Blessed Lord said:

2. Threefold is the faith of the embodied, which is inherent in their nature—the Sattwic (pure), the Rajasic (passionate), and the Tamasic (dark). Do thou hear of it.

*Sattwaanuroopaa sarvasya shraddhaa bhavati bhaarata;
Shraddhaamayo’yam purusho yo yacchraddhah sa eva sah.*

3. The faith of each is in accordance with his nature, O Arjuna! The man consists of his faith; as a man’s faith is, so is he.

*Yajante saattwikaa devaan yaksharakshaamsi raajasaah;
Pretaan bhootaganaamshchaanye yajante taamasaa janaah.*

4. The Sattwic or pure men worship the gods; the Rajasic or the passionate worship the Yakshas and the Rakshasas; the others (the Tamasic or the deluded) worship the ghosts and the hosts of nature-spirits.

*Ashaastravihitam ghoram tapyante ye tapo janaah;
Dambhaahamkaarasamyuktaah kaamaraagabalaanvitaah.*

5. Those men who practise terrific austerities not enjoined by the scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and attachment,

*Karshayantah shareerastham bhootagraamamachetasah;
Maam chaivaantahshareerastham taanvidhyaasuranishchayaan.*

6. Senseless, torturing all the elements in the body and Me also, who dwells in the body,— know thou these to be of demoniacal resolves.

*Aahaarastwapi sarvasya trividho bhavati priyah;
Yajnastapastathaa daanam teshaam bhedamimam shrinu.*

7. The food also which is dear to each is threefold, as also sacrifice, austerity and alms-giving. Hear thou the distinction of these.

COMMENTARY: A man's taste for a particular food is determined according to the Guna prevalent in him.

*Aayuh sattwabalaarogya sukha preetivi vardhanaah;
Rasyaah snigdhaah sthiraa hridyaa aahaaraah saattwikapriyaah.*

8. Foods which increase life, purity, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are oleaginous and savoury, substantial and agreeable, are dear to the Sattwic people.

*Katvamlalavanaatyushna teekshna rooksha vidaahinah;
Aahaaraah raajasasyeshtaa duhkhashokaamayapradaah.*

9. The foods that are bitter, sour, saline, excessively hot, dry, pungent and burning, are liked by the Rajasic and are productive of pain, grief and disease.

*Yaatayaamam gatarasam pooti paryushitam cha yat;
Ucchishtamapi chaamedhyam bhojanam taamasapriyam.*

10. That which is stale, tasteless, putrid, rotten and impure refuse, is the food liked by the Tamasic.

*Aphalaakaangkshibhiryajno vidhidrishto ya ijyate;
Yashtavyameveti manah samaadhaaya sa saattwikah.*

11. That sacrifice which is offered by men without desire for reward as enjoined by the ordinance (scripture), with a firm faith that to do so is a duty, is Sattwic (or pure).

*Abhisandhaaya tu phalam dambhaarthaamapi chaiva yat;
Ijyate bharatareshtha tam yajnam viddhi raajasam.*

12. The sacrifice which is offered, O Arjuna, seeking a reward and for ostentation, know thou that to be a Rajasic Yajna!

*Vidhiheenam asrishtaannam mantraheenam adakshinam;
Shraddhaavirahitam yajnam taamasam parichakshate.*

13. They declare that sacrifice to be Tamasic which is contrary to the ordinances of the scriptures, in which no food is distributed, which is devoid of Mantras and gifts, and which is devoid of faith.

*Devadwijagurupraajna poojanam shauchamaarjavam;
Brahmacharyamahimsaa cha shaareeram tapa uchyate.*

14. Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the teachers and the wise, purity, straightforwardness, celibacy and non-injury—these are called the austerities of the body.

*Anudwegakaram vaakyam satyam priyahitam cha yat;
Swaadhyayaabhyasanam chaiva vaangmayam tapa uchyate.*

15. Speech which causes no excitement and is truthful, pleasant and beneficial, the practice of the study of the *Vedas*, are called austerity of speech.

COMMENTARY: It is said in the *Manu Smriti*: “One should speak what is true; one should speak what is pleasant; one should not speak what is true if it is not pleasant, nor what is pleasant if it is false. This is the ancient Dharma”. To be an austerity speech should combine all the attributes mentioned in the above verse.

*Manahprasaadah saumyatwam maunamaatmavinigrakah;
Bhaavasamshuddhityetat tapo maanasamuchyate.*

16. Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, purity of nature, self-control—this is called mental austerity.

*Shraddhayaa parayaa taptam tapastattrividham naraih;
Aphalaakaangkshibhiryuktaih saattwikam parichakshate.*

17. This threefold austerity practised by steadfast men with the utmost faith, desiring no reward, they call Sattwic.

*Satkaaramaanapoojaartham tapo dambhena chaiva yat;
Kriyate tadiha proktam raajasam chalamadhruvam.*

18. The austerity which is practised with the object of gaining good reception, honour and worship and with hypocrisy, is here said to be Rajasic, unstable and transitory.

*Moodhagraahenaatmano yat peedayaa kriyate tapah;
Parasyotsaadanaartham vaa tattaamasamudaahritam.*

19. The austerity which is practised out of a foolish notion, with self-torture, or for the purpose of destroying another, is declared to be Tamasic.

*Daatavyamiti yaddaanam deeyate'nupakaarine;
Deshe kaale cha paatre cha taddaanam saattwikam smritam.*

20. That gift which is given to one who does nothing in return, knowing it to be a duty to give in a fit place and time to a worthy person, that gift is held to be Sattwic.

*Yattu pratyupakaaraartham phalamuddishya vaa punah;
Deeyate cha pariklishtam taddaanam raajasam smritam.*

21. And, that gift which is made with a view to receive something in return, or looking for a reward, or given reluctantly, is said to be Rajasic.

*Adeshakaale yaddaanamapaatrebhyashcha deeyate;
Asatkritamavajnaatam tattaamasamudaahritam.*

22. The gift which is given at the wrong place and time to unworthy persons, without respect or with insult, is declared to be Tamasic.

COMMENTARY: At the wrong place and time—at a place which is not holy, where irreligious people and beggars assemble, where wealth acquired through illegal means such as gambling and theft, is distributed to gamblers, singers, fools, rogues, women of evil reputation; wealth that is distributed at an inauspicious time. This does not discourage the giving of alms to the poor.

*Om tatsaditi nirdesho brahmanas trividhah smritah;
Braahmanaastena vedaashchaya janyaashchavihitaah puraa.*

23. “Om Tat Sat”: this has been declared to be the triple designation of Brahman. By that were created formerly the Brahmaṇas, the *Vedas* and the sacrifices.

*Tasmaadomityudaahritya yajnadaanatapahkriyaah;
Pravartante vidhaanoktaah satatam brahmavaadinaam.*

24. Therefore, with the utterance of “Om” are the acts of gift, sacrifice and austerity as enjoined in the scriptures always begun by the students of Brahman.

*Tadityanabhisandhaaya phalam yajnatapah kriyaah;
Daanakriyaashchavividhaah kriyante mokshakaangkshibhih.*

25. Uttering Tat, without aiming at the fruits, are the acts of sacrifice and austerity and the various acts of gift performed by the seekers of liberation.

*Sadbhaave saadhubhaave cha sadityetprayujyate;
Prashaste karmani tathaa sacchabdah paartha yujyate.*

26. The word Sat is used in the sense of reality and of goodness; and so also, O Arjuna, it is used in the sense of an auspicious act!

*Yajne tapasi daane cha sthithi saditi chochyate;
Karma chaiva tadartheeyam sadityevaabhidheeyate.*

27. Steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity and gift, is also called Sat, and also action in connection with these (or for the sake of the Supreme) is called Sat.

*Ashraddhayaa hutam dattam tapastaptam kritam cha yat;
Asadityuchyate paartha na cha tatpretya no iha.*

28. Whatever is sacrificed, given or performed, and whatever austerity is practised without faith, it is called Asat, O Arjuna! It is naught here or hereafter (after death).

COMMENTARY: Whatever sacrifice, austerity or charity done without being dedicated to the Lord will be of no avail to the doer in this earthly life here or in the life beyond hereafter.

Hari Om Tat Sat
Iti Srimad Bhagavadgeetaasoopanishatsu Brahmavidyaayaam
Yogashaastre Sri Krishnaarjunasamvaade
Shraddhaatrayavibhaagayogo Naama Saptadasho'dhyaayah

Thus in the *Upanishads* of the glorious *Bhagavad Gita*, the science of the Eternal, the scripture of Yoga, the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the seventeenth discourse entitled:

“The Yoga of the Division of the Threefold Faith”
