

BHAGAVADGITA

English translation of Sri Ramanuja's Sanskrit Commentary - Swami Adidevananda

Chapter 17

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17.1 Arjuna said -- Those who, 'filled with faith but laying aside the injunctions of the Sastras,' engage themselves in sacrifices etc., what is their 'position or basis'? It is Sattva, Rajas or Tamas? Nistha means Sthiti. What is called Sthiti is that state in which one abides, has one's position or basis. Do they abide in Sattva, in Rajas or in Tamas? Such is the meaning of the question. Thus questioned, the Lord, for affirming the futility of faith and of sacrifices not enjoined in the Sastras, and in order to show that the triple division in accordance with the Gunas refers only to sacrifices etc., enjoined in the Sastras --- expounds here the threefold nature of faith enjoined in the Sastras:

17.2 The Lord said -- 'Threefold is the faith among all' embodied beings. And it arises from their 'inborn nature.' What is called Svabhava is the state unique to one's own nature. It is the special taste or predilection caused by previous subtle impressions, 'Vasanas.' To whatever one's predilection is directed, there faith is born in respect of it. For 'faith' is zeal or eagerness about any means in the belief that it is the way of action to achieve one's own desired object. Vasana (subtle impression), Ruci (taste) and Sraddha (faith) are the qualities of the self born from its association with the Gunas. The Sattva and the other Gunas are the qualities of the body, the senses, the internal organs and

sense-objects. They bring about their qualities in the self associated with them. These are the Vasanas. These Gunas can be described only by their effects. These (i.e., Vasanas etc.) originate from experiences with the body etc., having origination in Sattva and other Gunas. Thus faith is threefold as marked by Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Listen about this faith.

17.3 'Sattva' means internal organ (i.e., mind). The faith of everyone is according to his internal organ. The meaning is that with whatever Guna his internal organ is conjoined, one's faith corresponds to that Guna (i.e., Guna as object). The term Sattva covers here body, senses etc., already mentioned. Man consists of faith, viz., is the product of his faith. Of whatever faith he is, viz., with whatever faith a man is possessed, that verily he is; he is a transformation of faith of that nature. The purport is this: If the person is associated with faith in auspicious acts he becomes associated with fruit of these auspicious acts. Consequently, attainment chiefly follows one's faith. Sri Krsna further explains the same subject:

17.4 'Those who have abundance of Sattva quality and are conjoined with Sattvika faith worship the gods. The meaning is this: The faith in the worship (sacrifice) of the gods which causes supreme joy unmixed with pain is of Sattvika nature. The Rajasika types worship Yaksas and Raksasas. And the others, i.e., the Tamasika types, worship the departed ancestors and hosts of Bhutas. The faith born of Rajas brings

about limited joy mixed with pain, while the faith born of Tamas gives rise to extremely limited joy which verges almost on pain. Therefore, there is difference in fruits according to the Gunas regarding sacrifices etc., which are enjoined in the Sastras and associated with faith. However, no happiness whatsoever will result from penances, sacrifices etc., not enjoined in the Sastras and therefore antagonistic to My commandment. On the contrary, calamity results from them. Sri Krsna proceeds to explain this more fully.

17.5 - 17.6 'Those men who perform terrible penances not enjoined by the Sastras' --- this is illustrative of sacrifices etc., of a similar nature. Those who perform sacrifices, etc., sacrifices which are not enjoined by the Sastras and demand much exertion, those who are possessed of 'ostentation and conceit and are goaded by sensual desire, attachment and passion' --- they torture the group of elements such as earth etc., in their bodies. They also torture the individual self which is a part of Myself and is within their bodies. Those who perform such sacrifices etc., know them to be demoniacal in their resolves. The resolve of demons is demoniac resolve. The demons are those who act contrary to My commandments. Since they act contrary to My commandments, they do not have even a iota of joy, but as stated earlier, they fall a prey to a multitude of calamities. 'They fall into a foul Naraka' (16.16). Now, Sri Krsna, resuming the subject, details the differences according to the Gunas with reference to sacrifice, etc., enjoined by the Sastras. To begin with, he describes three kinds of food, since the growth of Sattva etc.,

has its source in food, as Srutis declare thus: 'For my dear, the mind consists of food' (Cha. U., 6.5.4) and 'when the food is pure, the man becomes pure' (Cha. U., 7.26.2).

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17.7 Even the food which is dear to the host of all beings is of three kinds because of the association of the three Gunas consisting of Sattva etc. Similarly, sacrifices also are of three kinds. So too austerity and charity. Listen about this distinction, which is being described, about foods, sacrifices, austerities and gifts according to differences of Sattva etc.

17.8 To a man endowed with Sattva, foods preponderating in Sattva become dear. The foods preponderating in Sattva promote longevity. Again they promote intellectual alertness. 'Sattva', means internal organ, viz., knowledge which is the effect of the internal organ is here meant by the term Sattva. For the Sattva is the cause of growth of knowledge, as declared in: 'From Sattva arises knowledge' (14.17). Even as the food preponderant in Sattva is the cause of the growth of knowledge, likewise, they promote strength and health; they also promote pleasure and happiness. As the time of assimilation they, by themselves, promote happiness, viz, by the performance of actions which cause happiness. They are sweet, viz., abundant in sweet juices. They are mixed with oil, viz., wholly oily. They are substantial, viz., they originate substantial effects. They are agreeable viz., they appear to the eye in beautiful forms. Food of this kind, full of Sattva-guna, is dear to the person characterised by Sattva.

17.9 The foods that are bitter, sour, very salty, over-hot, very pungent, dry and burning, are those that they the taste (Rasa) of bitterness and

sourness, that are inordinately salty, hot, pungent, and that are dry and burning. Pungent foods are those which are unsuitable and difficult to be taken by others because of their being ver cold, ver hot etc. Dry things are those which cause the feeling of dryness in the eater. Burning foods are those which cause burning sensation. Foods of this kind are relished by men of Rajasik nature. They promote pain, sorrow and disease.

17.10 Stale (Yatayamam) means that food which has lost its original state, being kept for a long time. Tasteless (Gatarasam) means that which has lost its natural taste. Putrid (Puti) means emitting a bad smell. Decayed (Paryusitam) means acquiring a rancidity by lapse of time. Refuse (Ucchistam) means the food that has remained over after being partaken by persons other than Gurus, etc. Unclean (Amedhyam) is that which is not fit for offering in sacrifice or worship. The meaning is that, being unfit for offering in worship, they cannot become the sacrificial remainder. Foods of this kind which promote the growth of Tamas are dear to those who are characterised by Tamas. Food (Bhojana) means that which is eaten. Tamasik food promotes further increase of Tamas. Hence, those persons who care for their own welfare by the growth of Sattva, should eat food characterised by Sattva.

17.11 That sacrifice is marked by Sattva which is offered by those desiring no fruits, with the 'conviction', i.e., with the idea that it ought to be performed or that it should be offered for its own sake as worship of the Lord as enjoined in the injunctions of the Sastras, i.e., with hymns,

right materials and proper rituals.

17.12 That sacrifice, performed to gain fruits, full of ostentation and with fame as its aim, know that sacrifice to be characterised by Rajas.

17.13 They say that sacrifice is Tamasa, which is bereft of the authority of injunction of Brahmanas of learning and good conduct as 'Do this sacrifice,' which is 'Asrstanna' viz., which uses offerings (materials) not sanctioned by the Sastras; which is performed without recitation of hymns; and which is bereft of gifts and faith. Now, to explain the threefold division of austerities according to their source in the Gunas, Sri Krsna describes their differences in respect of the body, speech and mind:

17.14 The worship of the gods, the twice-born, preceptors and enlightened ones; purity, viz., by ablutions in sacred water; uprightness, viz., bodily action in accordance with the mind; continence, viz., absence of looking at women etc., considering them as objects of pleasure; non-injury, viz., not hurting any being --- these constitute the austerity of the body.

17.15 Verbal austerity consists in using words that do not hurt others, are true, are pleasing and are beneficial. It also involves studying scriptural texts.

17.16 Serenity of mind, viz., absence of wrath etc., practice of benevolence, viz., the direction of the mind for the good of others, silence, viz., control of speech by the mind; self-control, viz., focusing the activity of the mind on the object of contemplation; purity of mind, viz., absence of thought about subjects other than the self --- these constitute the austerity of the mind.

17.17 The threefold austerity practised with supreme faith through the body, speech and mind by men who have no thoughts of any reward and who are devoted, viz., are imbued with the thought that it is the worship of the Supreme Person, they call such austerity as Sattvika.

17.18 'Respect' means recognition by others. 'Praise' means verbal adulation. 'Reverence' means corporeal actions such as prostration etc. That austerity, practised with expectation of rewards like respect, etc., mentioned above --- it is here said to be Rajasa. It is unsteady and impermanent, because of the temporary nature of its rewards like heaven etc.; 'unsteadiness' is the result of the fear of falling. 'Impermanent' means the tendency to perish.

17.19 Deluded persons are those who lack correct understanding. That austerity which is practised from deluded notion, viz., from the obstinate determination by deluded persons, by self-torture regardless of one's own capacity or which is performed for causing sufferings to others --- that is said to be Tamasika.

17.20 Gifts given without thought of return of favours and with the feelings, 'These gifts must be given,' at the proper places and time to a worthy person who makes no return --- such gifts are said to be Sattvika.

17.21 That gift which is given grudgingly, viz., gift of useless things with a sly expectation of something in return that is said to be gift of Rajasa nature.

17.22 That gift which is given to unworthy recipients at wrong place and time, without due respect, viz., without showing such signs of respect as cleansing the feet; with contempt, viz., with disdain and without courtesy --- that is said to be of Tamasa nature. So far, the divisions due to differences of Gunas in respect of sacrifices, austerities and gifts as enjoined by the Vedas have been portrayed. Now is given the definition of Vedic sacrifices etc., according to their association with Pranava (i.e., the syllable Om), and as signified by the terms Tat and Sat.

17.23 Here Brahman means the Veda. It is the secondary meaning of the expression, especially of the ritualistic portion of the Veda. The three-fold expression Om Tat Sat is connected with the Brahman or the Veda. Sacrifices and similar rituals are prescribed in the Vedas. These expressions Om Tat Sat are used in these Vedic rites. The connection of Om is that it should be invariably used at the commencement of the

recitation of Vedic hymns. The syllable Tat and Sat indicate that these rituals are worthy of honour. The Brahmanas are those who are to preserve Vedic study as also the Vedas and the sacrificial rites ordained in them. All these were created by Me in the past. Sri Krsna elaborates in the next verses the nature of the connection of these syllables with the Vedic rituals, beginning first with Om.

17.24 After pronouncing Om, the Vedas are recited. Thus the connection of the syllable Om with the Vedas and the rituals enjoined in the Vedas such as sacrifices has been described. As the Vedas are connected with the word Om, all belonging to the three stations of life who memorise the Vedas and perform the rituals inculcated in them, are included in the expression, 'expounders of the Vedas.' Now, He describes the manner by which the word Tat is connected with them:

17.25 Whatever acts such as the study of the Vedas, sacrifices, austerities and gifts are done without aiming at results by those of the first three stations, seeking only final release --- these are designated by the term Tat referring to the brahman, since they constitute the means for attainment of brahman. For it is well known that the term Tat signifies brahman, as in the following passage: He is Sah, Vah, Kah, Kim, Yat, Tat, Padam, Anuttamam.' (M.B., 13.254.91). Thus, the study of the Vedas, sacrifices etc., which are the means of attaining release, have been stated; the connection of Tat has been spoken of since the word Tat signifies them (i.e., the study of Vedas etc.). The connection of the

term Tat with the three stations is shown because of their practising the study of the Vedas etc., in the way stated. In order to show how the term Sat is connected with these, Sri Krsna shows the etymology of the term Sat, as it is prevalent in the world:

17.26 The word Sat is applied in Vedic and common usage, in respect of all contexts to express existence (Sadbhava) and auspiciousness (Sadhubhava). Similarly, in relation to any praiseworthy worldly act, viz., auspicious undertaking by someone, the word Sat is applied to express, 'This is a good act.'

17.27 Therefore, devotion of persons of the first three stations who follow the Vedas in respect of sacrifices, austerities and gifts is called Sat, since it is auspicious. So the Vedas, Vedic acts and the three stations, expressed by the term 'brahmana,' since they are characterised by their connection with the words 'Om Tat Sat,' are to be distinguished from what are not the Vedas and Vedic.

17.28 Offerings etc., when performed without faith, are Asat (i.e., unreal, bereft of efficiency), although they might be what has been enjoined by the Sastras. Why so? Because it is naught here or hereafter; it will not lead to release nor to any desirable result in Samsara.