

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 159: Chapter 17, Summary of Chapter 17

(May 19 – May 25, 2021)



SHRADDHATRAYA VIBHAAGA YOGA

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- ENTIRE CHAPTER-17
- VERSES 1-28 OF
- SHRIMAD BHAGAVADGITA

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The Summary of

Chapter 17

Shraddhatrayavibhaaga Yoga

(Threefold Division of Faith)

(A) The Brief Summary of The Summary of Chapter 17:

In this Chapter, Lord Krishna elaborates on the three-fold division of Faith, and further describes how the matters of Faith (Śraddhā), Food (Āhāra), Sacrifice (Yajña), Charity (Dānam), and Austerity (Tapas) are related to Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic Gunas or Qualities of an Individual. Lord Krishna Concludes the Chapter by explaining the meaning and significance of uttering “Om Tat Sat” at every activity or function prescribed in the scriptures.

(B) The Most Important Verses of Chapter 17:

Verse 3: *The faith of all humans conforms to the nature of their mind. All people possess faith, and whatever the nature of their faith, that is verily what they are.*

Verse 7: *The food persons prefer is according to their Sattvic, Rajasic or Tamasic dispositions. The same is true for the sacrifice, austerity, and charity they incline toward.*

Verse 14: *Worship of the Supreme Lord, the Brahmins, the spiritual master, the wise, and the elders—when this is done with the observance of cleanliness, simplicity, celibacy, and non-violence—is declared as the austerity of the body.*

Verse 15: *Words that do not cause distress, are truthful, inoffensive, and beneficial, as well as the regular recitation of the Vedic scriptures—these are declared as the austerity of speech.*

Verse 16: *Serenity of thought, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of purpose—all these are declared as the austerity of the mind.*

Verse 28: *O Son of Pritha, whatever acts of sacrifice or penance are done without faith, are termed as “Asat”. They are useless both in this world and the next.*

(C) The Verse-By-Verse Summary of Chapter 17:

The contents of the 28 verses of this chapter can be divided into the following 8 sections:

<u>The Topic</u>	<u>Verses</u>
<u>1. Arjuna’s question and three types of śraddhā</u>	<u>1 to 6</u>
<u>2. Kṛiṣṇa introduces new topics</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>3. Three types of food</u>	<u>8 to 10</u>
<u>4. Three types of yajña</u>	<u>11 to 13</u>
<u>5. Three types of tapas (based on instrument)</u>	<u>14 to 16</u>
<u>6. Three types of tapas (based on guṇa)</u>	<u>17 to 19</u>
<u>7. Three types of charity</u>	<u>20 to 22</u>
<u>8. Significance of “om tat sat” and conclusion</u>	<u>23 to 28</u>

1. Arjuna’s Question and Three Types of Śraddhā (Verses 1-6):

In the previous chapter, Lord Krishna said that śāstra is the pramāṇa (measure) in determining what is right and wrong and that one should act according to what śāstra says. Based on this, Arjuna raises a question here — “To what category does a person belong if he

worships with faith without scriptural knowledge - *sattvic*, *rajasic*, or *tamasic*?” (V1). Lord Kṛiṣṇa answers that one may belong to any category according to one’s temperament. An ignorant person’s faith will depend on his nature since he has no scriptural knowledge to guide. (By observing various types of worship done by others, he develops his faith according to his character. On the other hand, a person who goes by the scriptural teaching will invariably have *sattvic* faith) (V2, V3). Lord Kṛiṣṇa differentiates three types of faith based upon the object of worship (V4). Even the nature of worship varies according to faith. People of *tamasic* faith take to severe practices involving torture of the body etc. (V5, V6).

2 - 7. The Matters of Śraddhā (Faith), Āhāra (Food), Yajña (Sacrifice), Dānam (Charity) and Tapas (Austerity), and How They Relate to Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic Gunas or Qualities of an Individual (Verses 2-22):

Having answered Arjuna’s question, Lord Kṛiṣṇa discusses a few more topics namely food, *yajña*, *tapas* and charity, differentiating them into three types based on the *guṇas* (V7 to V22). (Refer the chart below.) [A seeker has to choose the *sattvic* type i.e., *daivī-sampat* and avoid *rajasic* and *tamasic* types, i.e., *āsurī-sampat*.]

Topic	Sattvic	Rajasic	Tamasic
Śraddhā (Faith)	Worship of the gods. (V4)	Worship of the <i>yakṣh as</i> and <i>rākshasas</i> . (V4)	Worship of spirits and ghosts. (V4)
Āhāra (Food)	That which is delicious, which gives longevity, health, strength, and happiness. (V8)	That which is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent and which causes pain. (V9)	That which is improperly cooked, without nutrition, putrid, stale, left over, and impure. (V10)
Yajña (Sacrifice)	That which is sincerely done according to the scriptural injunctions, without expecting any result. (V11)	That which is done for the sake of show and for the sake of result. (V12)	That which is done without rules, faith, <i>mantra</i> , <i>dakṣhiṇā</i> , or food-distribution. (V13)
Dānam (Charity)	That which is sincerely given to a deserving person at the proper time and place without expecting any return. (V20)	That which is reluctantly given for the sake of return and result. (V21)	That which is given without respect to an undeserving person at an improper time and place. (V22)
Tapas (Austerity)	That which is practiced with faith and without expecting any result. (V17)	That which is practiced for the sake of show, name, and fame. (V18)	That which is practiced with false notions and bodily torture for harming self and others. (V19)

Significance of Uttering “Om Tat Sat” and Conclusion (Verses 23-28):

Lord Krishna concludes the teaching by describing the significance of the mantra “*Om tat sat*”. This originated from *Brahmā*’s mouth in the beginning of creation and has been traditionally chanted during auspicious scriptural activities like *yajña*, *tapas* and *dāna*. The word ‘*sat*’ has many meanings like existence, goodness, good action, steadfastness, and an action such as an offering to the Lord (V23 to V27). [In essence, the utterance of this *mantra* will sanctify scriptural actions and make them *sattvic*.] In the last verse, Lord Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the importance of *śraddhā* (faith). Without faith all scriptural activities become *asat*, *i.e.* fruitless (V28).