

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 155: Chapter 17, Verses 12-15

(April 21 – April 27, 2021)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

TRANSLITERATION

अभिसन्धाय तु फलं दम्भार्थमपि चैव यत् ।

*abhisandhāya tu phalam dambhārtham api chaiva
yat*

इज्यते भरतश्रेष्ठ तं यज्ञं विद्धि राजसम् ॥ १७-१२ ॥

ijyate bharata-śhreṣhṭha taṁ yajñam viddhi rājasam

विधिहीनमसृष्टान्नं मन्त्रहीनमदक्षिणम् ।

*vidhi-hīnam asṛiṣhṭānnaṁ mantra-hīnam
adakṣhiṇam*

श्रद्धाविरहितं यज्ञं तामसं परिचक्षते ॥ १७-१३ ॥

śhraddhā-virahitaṁ yajñam tāmasaṁ parichakṣhate

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।

*deva-dwija-guru-prājña- pūjanaṁ śhaucham
ārjavam*

ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥ १७-१४ ॥

brahmacharyam ahinsā cha śhārīraṁ tapa uchyate

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।

*anudvega-karaṁ vākyaṁ satyaṁ priya-hitaṁ cha
yat*

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥ १७-१५ ॥

*svādhyāyābhyasanaṁ chaiva vāṅ-mayaṁ tapa
uchyate*

TRANSLATION

- (12)** O Best of the Bharatas, know that the sacrifice, which is made for material benefits, or for the sake of pride, to be in the mode of passion.
- (13)** The sacrifice performed without following the ordinances of Vedic scriptures, where no food is offered, no mantras chanted, and no donation made, is to be considered in the mode of ignorance.
- (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.
- (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.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vWmZFY6kgoA-sLDATN3Zk1n9dtqX5cCC/view?usp=sharing>

Chapter 17

Verse 12

That *yajna* or propitiation and worship which may be superficially performed according to the Vedic scriptures but is factually plagued with desires to acquire the fruits of its rewards and is ostentatiously enacted out of pride and pompously carried out for honor and prestige is in the mode of *Raja Guna* or passion. Pure devotion is that where one seeks nothing in return. Shree Krishna says that sacrifice may indeed be done with great ceremony, but without expecting any rewards in return.

Verse 13

In this verse, Lord Krishna elaborates on activities in the mode of *Tama Guna* or ignorance. Any religious ritual or ceremony of any kind that is *vidhi-hinam* or devoid of following the ordinances and injunctions of the Vedic scriptures and without being conducted by those who are pre-eminent both in precept and in practice, such as the Brahmins, and where there is no charitable donation to the priests performing the religious ceremony, is recognizably known to be fully situated in *tama guna*, the mode of ignorance. The words *asrashtha-annam* means without the sanctified food and ingredients required to perform a bonafide *yagna* or propitiation and worship. The prohibition is that no ingredient may be acquired from those without faith in God; so it is a mandatory requirement that all

ingredients are to be received only from the devotees. Those situated in *tama guna* cannot fulfil this mandate.

Verse 14

In order to explain the three types of austerities incorporated in the three *gunas* or modes of material nature, Lord Krishna in this verse describes their character first as that of bodily austerity, that of verbal austerity and that of mental austerity from each of the three *gunas* from where the *tapas* or austerity manifests. The bodily austerity involves the worship of the Supreme Lord Krishna or any of His authorised incarnations and expansions in their installed deity forms after being duly initiated in the prescribed mantras by the spiritual master, worship of the brahmins, worship of the singular *diksa guru*, the initiating spiritual master, and the elevated *shiksha gurus* or the instructing spiritual masters. The word *shaucham* means internal and external cleanliness. The word *Arjjavam* means no duplicity, meaning the intention of the mind and the action are not different. *Brahmacharyam* is maintaining celibacy. *Ahimsa* is about not causing harm to any living entity by thought, word or deed. All these activities constitute austerity of the physical body in *sattva guna*, the mode of goodness.

Verse 15

Lord Krishna speaks of the austerity of speech as “swadhyaya” or the self study of the Vedic scriptures, such as the Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, Ramayan, Mahabharata and others along with the chanting of Vedic mantras. Also speaking words that are totally truthful, inoffensive, and beneficial to the ones addressed. All these are austerities of speech in *sattva guna* the mode of goodness.