

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 154: Chapter 17, Verses 08-11

(April 14 – April 20, 2021)

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TRANSLITERATION

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।

āyuh-sattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥ १७-८ ॥

rasyāḥ snigdḥāḥ sthirā hṛidyā āhārāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ

कट्वम्ललवणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः ।

kaṭv-amla-lavaṇāty-uṣṇa-tīkṣṇa-rūkṣha-vidāhinaḥ

आहारा राजसस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः ॥ १७-९ ॥

āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duḥkha-śhokāmaya-pradāḥ

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।

yāta-yāmaṁ gata-rasaṁ pūti paryuṣhitam cha yat

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ १७-१० ॥

uchchhiṣṭam api chāmedhyam bhojanam tāmasa-priyam

अफलाङ्क्षभिर्यज्ञो विधिदृष्टो य इज्यते ।

aphalākāṅkṣhibhir yajño vidhi-dṛiṣṭo ya ijyate

यष्टव्यमेवेति मनः समाधाय स सात्त्विकः ॥ १७-११ ॥

yashṭavyam eveti manaḥ samādhāya sa sāttvikaḥ

TRANSLATION

- (08)** Persons in the mode of goodness (*Sattvic Guna*) prefer foods that promote the life span, vitality and virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, succulent, nourishing, pleasing to the heart and naturally tasteful.
- (09)** Foods that are very bitter, very sour, very salty, very hot, very pungent, very dry, and burning, causing pain, grief, and discomfort/disease, are palatable to persons in the mode of passion (*Rajasic Guna*).
- (10)** Foods that are stale, tasteless, putrid, decomposed, foul, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance (*Tamasic Guna*).
- (11)** Sacrifice that is performed according to the scriptural injunctions without expectation of rewards, with the firm conviction of the mind that it is a matter of duty is of the nature of goodness (*Sattvic Guna*).

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Chapter 17

Verses 08 + 09 + 10

In these three verses, Lord Krishna classifies food into three categories: (1) *Sattvic*--the food that is of the nature of *Sattva Guna* or the mode of goodness, and is eaten by *Sattvic* individuals, (2) *Rajasic*--the food that is of the nature of *Raja Guna* or the mode of passion, and is eaten by Rajasic individuals, and (3) *Tamasic*--the food that is of the nature of *Tama Guna* or the mode of ignorance. Lord Krishna commences his description of these three categories of food with the words *ayuh-sattva* meaning promoting longevity, invigorating the body and elevating the mind in its function of intelligence. Such foods include fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and milk products. As was confirmed earlier in chapter 14: verse 17, the *sattva guna* gives rise to knowledge, and in particular, facilitates the spiritual knowledge and spiritual intelligence, in addition to good health, strength, happiness and satisfaction. The word *sukha* meaning happiness refers to the pleasure experienced while ingesting the food and afterwards when it is digesting and assimilating within the body. The word *preeti* means satisfaction that is derived from the intake of pure foods, inspiring congenial interest in spiritual activities. The word *rasyaah* means succulent or delectable. *Snigdha* means oleaginous or unctuous. *Sthirah* means nourishing or sustaining. *Hrydhya* means agreeable or pleasing. These are the qualities of *sattva* foods which are very much appreciated by those in *sattva guna*.

Foods that are acidic, bitter, salty, sour, spicy, pungent, dry, hard or burning are the foods that those in *raja guna* are very much attracted to. The word *teekshna* refers to food of no

value because they are either too cold or too hot. *Rooksha* are foods which are too dry and hard. *Vidhahinah* are those foods that cause a burning sensation in the body. These foods produce pain, distress, discomfort, sickness and misery, and decrease longevity of life and increase desires for more and more passion. These are the foods of *Rajasic* nature.

The foods liked by those in *tama guna* or the mode of ignorance are *yata-yaman*, meaning stale, foods that are old from the previous day, foods cooked more than a *yama* which is literally three hours before. *Gata-rasam* means those foods which have lost their original flavor and have become tasteless. *Puti* means putrid, possessing a foul smell. *Paryusitam* means decomposed or unrecognizable. *Ucchishtam* means eating the remains of others' food after they have eaten. This does not apply to honoring the remnants of *mahaprasadam* or sanctified food first offered to the Lord and then eaten by the spiritual preceptors, who mercifully leave some food for their devotees, which is then glorified by them as *mahaprasadam*. *Amedhyam* means unsanctified foods due to not having been consecrated by first offering it to the Supreme Lord, and thus impure. Partaking of foods in *tama guna* such as meat, fish, fowl, eggs, wine, liquors, etc. breeds dark nescience or great ignorance. So, in conclusion those fortunate *jivas* or embodied beings with spiritual insight should absolve themselves from the intake of foods in *raja guna* and *tama guna* and resort exclusively to foods in *sattva guna*.

Here is the take-home lesson on FOOD from the Shrimad Bhagavadgita:

- Geeta does not classify food as either Vegetarian or Non-Vegetarian food.
- It classifies food as only 3 types: *Sattvic*, *Rajasic*, and *Tamasic*.
- One chooses the type of food based on one's *Guna's* (inherent qualities) that are also classified into 3 categories bearing the same names: *Sattvic*, *Rajasic*, and *Tamasic Guna's*.
- One's *Guna* is determined by one's overall *Karma* from this as well as from all previous births.
- The eminence of Bhagavadgita (and in turn, of Hinduism) lies in the fact that Lord Krishna never issues commands and threats of damnation for non-compliance – He gives plenty of advice and guidelines and it is up to each and every individual to make up his/her own mind on the matter.
- Therefore, if one accepts and follows the advice of God, one's *Guna's* can also be molded, for example, a Rajasic individual can become a Sattvic by changing his/her choice of food from Rajasic to Sattvic. After all, "You are what you eat". This statement is also supported by our Upanishads: "For your mind, my dear, is shaped by the food you eat" (Chandogya Upanishad 6.5.4), and "When the food is pure, the mind becomes pure" (Chandogya Upanishad, 7.26.2).
- a vegetarian diet is beneficial for cultivating the qualities of the mode of goodness that are conducive for spiritual life. Numerous *sāttvic* thinkers and philosophers in history have echoed this sentiment:

- *“It is necessary to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind, or passive or inert in action. I do not regard flesh-food as necessary at any stage.”*
-Mahatma Gandhi.
- *“I do not want to make my stomach a graveyard of dead animals.”*
-George Bernard Shaw
- *“Vegetarianism is a greater progress. From the greater clearness of head and quicker apprehension motivated him to become a vegetarian. Flesh-eating is an unprovoked murder.”*
-Benjamin Franklin
- *“O my fellow men, do not defile your bodies with sinful foods. We have corn and we have apples bending down the branches with their weight. There are vegetables that can be cooked and softened over the fire. The earth affords a lavish supply of riches, of innocent foods, and offers you banquets that involve no bloodshed or slaughter; only beasts satisfy their hunger with flesh, and not even all of those, because the strongest animals such as elephants and horses, as well as cattle and sheep live on leaves and grass.”*
-Pythagoras (The famous Greek Philosopher)

Verse 11

Here, Lord Krishna suddenly jumps from the topic of Food to *Yajna* or sacrifice. He explains the three-fold nature of *yajna* or performing rituals of propitiation and worship. He begins with *sattvic guna* or the mode of goodness. The words *aphala-akariksibhih* means performing yajna to the Supreme Lord without a desire for any reward. *Vidhi-dhrishtah* means performing it in accordance with the ordinances and injunctions of the Vedic scriptures. *Yashtavyam eveti* means performed as a matter of duty or as *bhakti* exclusive loving devotion unto the Supreme Lord Krishna or any of His authorized *avatars* or incarnations and expansions as revealed in Vedic scriptures. Such yajnas must be performed by duly initiated brahmanas chanting prescribed Vedic mantras for the exclusive satisfaction of the Supreme Lord. It is performed out of duty for its own sake or out of *bhakti* which is exclusive loving devotion to Lord Krishna or any of His authorized *avatars* or incarnations and expansions as revealed in Vedic scriptures. When such a resolve manifests a *yajna* into reality in this manner it is to be known as situated in *sattvic guna*.