

# Foodie's guide to spirituality

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Categories : [The description of three types of shraddha \(ch.17\)](#)

Date : February 13, 2015

The 17th chapter is called *Sraddhatraya vibhaga yogah*, *Topic of the description of the three types of Sraddha*. It starts with a question from Arjuna in the very first verse itself. He says, 'I have *shraddha*, faith, belief in the Lord, but when I worship I'm not following the *shastras*, I'm not following the scriptures, I'm doing it my own way...How will you classify it—as *Sattvic*, *Rajasic*, or *Tamasic*?' We have spoken about *Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas* earlier in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter. (Note: *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas* is a paradigm for fine-tuning the mind and not for judging oneself or others.) We've seen that *Sattva* is all that is bright and beautiful, knowledge-oriented etc., *Rajas* is energy, activity, desire-oriented... *Tamas* is inertia and indolence. So now Arjuna wants to know what his *shraddha* will be in terms of *Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*.

Krishna elaborates on this in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> chapters, and he doesn't limit it to this question. He says, 'An individual's faith can be *Sattvic*, *Rajasic*, *Tamasic*...' By way of example, he says, '*Sattvic* people will invoke God in various forms which are common and people know about, *Rajasic* people will worship demi-gods—*yakshasas*— who are part of the Indian tradition as well as the Greek and Roman tradition too. *Tamasic* people will worship ghosts, ghouls etc.' One may ask whether these things exist or not, but that is not our topic here and will have to be addressed separately.

Now we come to the next question which people, particularly in India, spend hours debating. It's related to eating. Here in India, every community has its own idea of what is *Sattvic* food, *Rajasic*, or *Tamasic* food. Some believe that garlic and onion are *Tamasic* foods and should not be eaten, the Jains believe that things grown underground should not be eaten because they are considered *Tamasic*. Vegetables with seeds, like brinjal, for example, are considered *Tamasic* by some and are to be avoided. There are many opinions on this topic, and if you ask people the source of these ideas, they point to the *Gita*.

If you look at the eighth, ninth and tenth verses which deal with this, Krishna doesn't say which foods are *Sattvic*, *Rajasic* or *Tamasic*. In fact, he looks at it from another direction and says that *Sattvic* people will like a certain kind of food, *Rajasic* people will like a certain kind, and so will *Tamasic* people. For example, he says, the foods that *Sattvic* people will like are those which are conducive to life, conducive to being energetic, to being healthy, to making one a joyful person, which means that food has to be tasty, filling, and agreeable to your constitution. When he refers to health and joy, he is pointing to the physical level. It should not be understood to mean that one should eat anything and everything that one likes. Someone once told me that we should eat what our body asks us for. If that is true, I replied, then I will turn into a blob because I will live on cheese and chocolates. Cheese and chocolates are not what the body is asking, that is what the mind is asking. Here, one needs to listen to the body and not the mind. If you listen to the mind in this case, it will be 'emotional eating', and that makes it *Tamasic*. If you're *Sattvic*, you will like that which is healthy and that which is tasty at the same time; he doesn't equate healthy food with food that doesn't taste good. He also says that it should have some fat content. Nowadays, the trend among some is to completely avoid fat. Little wonder then that you see too many dumb people around, because you need a certain amount of fat to keep your brain going.

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For the *Rajasic* person, the key word as far as food is concerned is 'excessive'. Excessively bitter,

excessively sour, excessively saline, hot, pungent, dry, food that burns your throat when it goes down and also gives you an after-burn is the preference of *Rajasic* people. This causes pain and grief and disease as far as your health is concerned.

You must have heard, 'Some like it hot, some like it cold, some like it in the pot nine days old.' *Tamasic* people like food that has started to become stale, tasteless.....There are actually people who like that kind of food. I'm not talking about frozen food here— that's a convenience— I'm talking about food which is kept not-frozen for weeks on end. Yes, you can keep chocolates for weeks on end, but there are people with a taste for stale food and contaminated food. Even people who claim to have some understanding of hygiene will let you know that *'my pani-puri-walla is safe !'*

So Krishna is not saying that food per se is *Sattvic* or *Rajasic* or *Tamasic*. He's saying that if you have a certain kind of disposition, you will like a certain type of food, and it's not the other way around. It's not the food that will make you *Sattvic*, *Rajasic*, or *Tamasic*. So where do you look for guidance in these matters, how does one choose? Well, either go by modern science which tells you what is healthy and not healthy. You could follow traditional ways of cooking which are quite healthy, or go by the ancient discipline—each country has its own ancient discipline of health. For example, in India it's Ayurveda, so it's safe to go by Ayurveda because it has maintained a civilization for 6000 years and can be counted upon. People often ask me if they should follow Naturopathy. I would recommend it as a form of treatment if people are following it for a maximum of a month, but not as a lifestyle. I have seen a lot of people follow Naturopathy as a lifestyle and they end up with a lot of deficiencies including protein deficiencies, B-complex deficiencies. It's good for treatment, for a detox programme, for example. That's my personal view on it.

Swamiji, it is desirable to eat Sattvic food. But how can a person who is Rajasic switch to Sattvic food?

That's simple. I, myself, used to eat a lot of pickles in my teens, I used to eat them like they were vegetables, and I used to get a lot of tummy-aches. So when I made the connection that this was harming me, I was motivated to change it. Now I've stopped. Once in a way, anything is fine, one should not be too rigid about it, spirituality is not a matter of the kitchen itself. This is only about fine-tuning your mind. If you're indulging yourself occasionally, there's no need to feel guilty about it. I will repeat here that there may be people who are eating *Rajasic* food but are very *Sattvic*. So understand what the *Gita* is saying, and if you need to fine-tune, do so.

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