

You win even if you lose

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After having dealt with food in the 17th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna speaks of worship and the *Sattvik*, *Rajasic*, *Tamasic* attitudes to worship. In the 11th verse, he says that worship which is done with *karma yoga buddhi*, where you bring in *Ishvara arpanam* and *prasad buddhi* into worship is Sattvic worship. A *sankalpa* (a statement of intention) is usually made before any worship is begun, meaning the person states the reason for offering worship and asks specifically for whatever it is that he wants. Of course, he could also be worshipping only to receive the grace of the Lord. Along with the specific reason for worship, this sort of worshiper also says, 'Hey, I will accept your will'. The outcome of the worship, whatever it is, is regarded as a *prasada* from *Ishvara*. The worship also has to be in harmony with the scriptural instructions and done with a sense of commitment to *Ishvara* and to the worship itself. Any worship done in this manner is considered *Sattvic* worship.

Prasada buddhi, with respect to the result of worship, is when you acknowledge that this worship is an action you carry out to take care of grace, to take care your luck factor, and an acceptance that your worship may or may not be enough. Therefore, you prepare to accept the result, whatever it is....

Rajasic worship is purely desire-prompted worship. A *Sattvic* worship can be purely from a sense of duty, like a daily worship done for God's grace. In *Rajasic* worship, it is prompted purely by *kamyakarma* (out of desire). You must have seen long, winding queues of people outside temples, each asking the Lord to grant his desire or need. It's not wrong. Krishna only calls it *Rajasic* because it lacks *prasada buddhi* and/or is done only in times of need. An act of worship that is ostentatious and is done to impress people who will then regard you as a man of faith, as a religious person is also considered *Rajasic* worship.

Tamasic worship is one in which none of the rules and regulations are followed, no *prasada* is offered and shared, the *mantras* are not chanted correctly, and there is no faith in the worship being done. Then why is it done? It's done because some custom or society or your fear dictates it. To be God-fearing is actually *Tamasic*.

Swamiji, why is worship being discussed in this way for Vedanta knowledge?

Vedanta does not ignore *Ishvara* or *bhakti* as both are conducive to my growth and understanding the

truth. In the vision of Vedanta, *Sattvic* worship is considered the right way of worship for the simple reason that it contributes to your growth. Why do we worship at all? Because there is many a slip between the cup and the lip. We all know that to be successful in any action, you need to take appropriate and adequate action at the right time, you also have to factor in the time taken for the action to fructify and give results, and we also know that there is a third factor called luck. Luck may be an unscientific word, but there are very scientific methods for measuring it– the law of probability in the study of statistics, the theory of random chance in physics, etc. That’s why we have common expressions like ‘touch wood’, ‘keep your fingers crossed’, etc. But in addition to crossing one’s fingers, folding one’s hands in prayer to win the Lord’s grace can make a difference between success and failure.

When you worship in a *Sattvic* way, it’s done with *Ishvara arpanam* (offering it to the Lord) and *prasada buddhi* (accepting the outcome whatever it may be). *Prasada buddhi*, with respect to the result of worship, is when you acknowledge that this worship is an action you carry out to take care of grace, to take care your luck factor, and an acceptance that your worship may or may not be enough. Therefore, you prepare to accept the result, whatever it is, as God’s will, as *prasada* from the Lord. The first factor that aids your growth here is that you have an understanding of *Ishvara* and are letting *Ishvara* into your life. In a manner of speaking, you can say that you are acknowledging the role of *Ishvara* in your life. You have an altar of surrender; the highest thing a will can do is to surrender to the will of the Lord. The *prasada buddhi*, the attitude of acceptance converts every day-to-day activity into a growth issue for you. We have discussed this in detail in the *Karma yoga* chapter.

Please remember, there is nothing wrong in *Rajasic* worship. If it is something you desire and are willing to work for it, there is nothing wrong in asking for God’s grace in fulfilling that desire. After all, you are asking God and not the local Godfather or don. But you are using worship only for materialistic purposes and not for growth. Therefore, it’s not the ideal way. Again, in the *Tamasic* form of worship, the only good I can see in it is the fact that you are accepting the possibility of a higher power and no more. There is no growth or commitment in this way of worship.

That’s why, in Vedanta, we say whatever form of worship you do, do it in the *Sattvic* manner. Pray for what you want in a *Sattvic* way, it will increase the chances of getting what you want and will also help you grow spiritually. That’s the payoff here—you will grow whether you succeed or fail.

Swamiji, how can a person who does not know anything about worship start worshipping?

A person can start with a simple prayer by lighting a lamp and making a strong sankalpa. This will work depending on the purity and strength of the intention of the person praying. Or he can take a mantra from his guru and do a simple japa. If you don’t have a guru, think of the lord as your guru and do some simple pauranic mantra for japa like ‘om namah shivaya’. He could also find someone who could teach him how to do a simple pooja.

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