

## Guṇas - Sattva, Rajas, Tamas

Few verses from Tattvabodha  
Select Sanskrit verses and translation from  
Bhagavad Gita – Swami Dayananda Saraswati

ब्रह्माश्रया सत्त्व-रजस्-तमो-गुणात्मिका माया अस्ति ॥

Depending on Brahman for its existence is Maya  
which is of the nature of the three gunas, satva,  
rajas and tamas.

एवं पिण्ड-ब्रह्माण्डयोरैक्यं संभूतम् ॥

Thus (after discussion of panchikaranam) there is  
oneness between individual and the total.

मायोपाधिस्सन् (आत्मा) ईश्वर इत्युच्यते ॥

Atma associated with maya-upadhi is Ishvarah.

स्थूल-शरीराभिमानी जीव-नामकं ब्रह्म-प्रतिबिम्बं भवति । स एव

जीवः प्रकृत्या स्वस्माद् ईश्वरं भिन्नत्वेन जानाति ॥

The reflection (as it were) of Brahman (in subtle  
body) which identifies with the gross body is called  
jiva. The same jiva by nature (that is, ignorance)  
takes Ishvara to be different from oneself.

अविद्योपाधिस्सन् आत्मा जीव इत्युच्यते ॥

Atma associated with avidya-upadhi is called jivah.

त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदा निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन।  
निर्द्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान्॥2.45॥

The subject matter of the Vedas is related to the three variable qualities. Arjuna! Be one who is free from the old of these three-fold qualities, from (the sorrow of) the pairs of opposites; be one who is ever established in sattva-guṇa, who is free from the anxieties of acquiring and protecting, and who is a master of oneself.

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि सर्वाणीत्युपधारय।  
अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा॥7.6॥

Understand that all beings and elements have their cause in this two-fold prakriti. (Therefore) I am the one from whom this entire world comes; so too, I am the one into whom everything resolves.

ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये।  
मत् एवेति तान्विद्धि नत्वहं तेषु ते मयि॥7.12॥

Those beings and things which are indeed born of sattva, rajas and tamas, may you know them to born from Me alone. They are in Me but I am not in them.

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत्।  
मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम्॥7.13॥

This entire world deluded by these things, which are the modifications of the three qualities, does not know Me, who is changeless and distinct from these (modifications of the gunas)

द्यूतं छलयतामस्मि तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम्।  
जयोऽस्मि व्यवसायोऽस्मि सत्त्वं सत्त्ववतामहम्॥10.36॥

I am the game of dice among the things that deceive; of the brilliant I am the brilliance. I am the victory of the victorious. I am the clarity in thinking (of those who have that clarity). Of those whose nature is predominantly sattva, I am that sattva-guṇa (contemplative disposition).

यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा।  
तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोऽशसंभवम्॥10.41॥

Whatever existent thing there is, which has glory, which is endowed with any form of wealth, or that which is mighty, every one of that, may you know, is born of a fraction of My glory.

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसंभवाः।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम्॥14.5॥

Arjuna, the mighty armed! Sattva, rajas and tamas, the qualities existing in prakṛti, bind as though) the changeless indweller of the body, to the body.

HOW DO THE GUNAS BIND?

तत्र सत्त्वं निर्मलत्वात्प्रकाशकमनामयम्।

सुखसङ्गेन बध्नाति ज्ञानसङ्गेन चानघ॥14.6॥

Arjuna, sinless one! There (among these), sattva, because it is pure, is illuminating and is free from affliction. It binds (one) by connection to (subtle form of) pleasure and connection to knowledge.

रजो रागात्मकं विद्धि तृष्णासङ्गसमुद्भवम्।

तन्निबध्नाति कौन्तेय कर्मसङ्गेन देहिनम्॥14.7॥

Kaunteya (Arjuna)! Rajas, may you know, is in the form of a colouring (of the mind), causing longing and well-entrenched attachment. It totally binds the indweller of the body by connection with action.

तमस्त्वज्ञानजं विद्धि मोहनं सर्वदेहिनाम्।  
प्रमादालस्यनिद्राभिस्तन्निबध्नाति भारत॥14.8॥

Bhārata (Arjuna)! Tamas, may you know, is born of ignorance and causes delusion for all those who have bodies. It binds (the person) completely by indifference, slothfulness and sleep.

सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्मणि भारत।  
ज्ञानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत॥14.9॥

Bhārata (Arjuna)! Sattva binds in the form of pleasure and rajas in the form of action. Tamas, on the other hand, covering knowledge, binds indeed in the form of apathy.

रजस्तमश्चाभिभूय सत्त्वं भवति भारत।  
रजः सत्त्वं तमश्चैव तमः सत्त्वं रजस्तथा॥14.10॥

Bhārata (Arjuna)! Sattva arises overwhelming rajas and tamas. Rajas indeed (arises overwhelming) tamas and sattva. So too, tamas (arises overwhelming) rajas and sattva.

## INCREASE IN SATTVA, RAJAS, TAMAS

सर्वद्वारेषु देहेऽस्मिन्प्रकाश उपजायते।

ज्ञानं यदा तदा विद्याद्विवृद्धं सत्त्वमित्युत॥14.11॥

When illumination, that is knowledge, is born in all the sense organs, in this body, then may one know indeed that sattva is predominant.

लोभः प्रवृत्तिरारम्भः कर्मणामशमः स्पृहा।

रजस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे भरतर्षभ॥14.12॥

Arjuna, the foremost in the clan of Bharata! Greed, physical restlessness, undertaking of activities, mental restlessness, longing – these are born when rajas has increased.

अप्रकाशोऽप्रवृत्तिश्च प्रमादो मोह एव च।

तमस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे कुरुनन्दन॥14.13॥

Arjuna, the joy of the Kuru family! Dullness, absence of activity, indifference and indeed delusion – these are born, when tamas has increased.

अभयं सत्त्वसंशुद्धिः ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः।  
दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यायस्तप आर्जवम्॥16.1॥

Bhārata (Arjuna)! Freedom from fear, purity of mind, steadiness in contemplation, charity, judicious restraint (of sense organs), performing rituals, recitation of one's own branch of the Veda, religious discipline (austerity), alignment of thought, word and deed.

### ŚRADDHĀ ACCORDING TO GUNAS

त्रिविधा भवति श्रद्धा देहिनां सा स्वभावजा।  
सात्त्विकी राजसी चैव तामसी चेति तां शृणु॥17.2॥

The śraddhā of the embodied beings is born of the nature of the mind. It is three-fold as sāttvika, rājasika and tāmasika. Listen to that (three-fold śraddhā).

यजन्ते सात्त्विका देवान्यक्षरक्षांसि राजसाः।  
प्रेतान्भूतगणांश्चान्ये यजन्ते तामसा जनाः॥17.4॥

The sāttvika people worship the devas; the rājasika (people) worship the yakṣa-rakṣas, (and) the other, tāmasika (people), worship ghosts and bhūta-gaṇas.

## TYPE OF FOOD DESIRED

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः

सात्त्विकप्रियाः॥17.8॥

Succulent, creamy, fortifying and pleasing foods, which increase longevity, mental clarity, strength, health, pleasure in taste and aesthetic pleasure are loved by sāttvika people.

कट्वम्ललवणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः।

आहारा राजसस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः॥17.9॥

Foods that are bitter, sour, salty, excessively hot, pungent, astringent and burning, that give pain, sorrow and ill health are highly desired by rājasika people.

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत्।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम्॥17.10॥

Food, which is stale or inadequately cooked, from which the essence has gone, which is putrid, overnight, refuse and also unfit as an offering, is beloved to a tāmasika person.



## TYPE OF YAJNA

अफलाकाङ्क्षिभिर्यज्ञो विधिदृष्टो य इज्यते।

यष्टव्यमेवेति मनः समाधाय स सात्त्विकः॥17.11॥

That ritual, which is known through the śāstra, which is performed by those who do not expect a result (other than antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi), by making up the mind, 'This ritual is just to be performed', is sāttvika.

अभिसंधाय तु फलं दम्भार्थमपि चैव यत्।

इज्यते भरतश्रेष्ठ तं यज्ञं विद्धि राजसम्॥17.12॥

On the other hand, may you know that ritual which is performed keeping a result in view, and also just to proclaim one's own religiosity, is rājasika, Arjuna, the greatest among the descendants of Bharata!

विधिहीनमसृष्टान्नं मन्त्रहीनमदक्षिणम्।

श्रद्धाविरहितं यज्ञं तामसं परिचक्षते॥17.13॥

They say that a ritual, which is bereft of the stipulations of Śāstra, without distribution of food, without proper recitation of mantras, without distribution of wealth and without śraddhā, is tāmasika.

## TYPE OF TAPAS

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम्।

ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते॥17.14॥

Worshipping deities, brāhmanas, teaches and wise people, external cleanliness, straightforwardness, self-discipline and not physically hurting are (collectively) called discipline of the physical body.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत्।

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते॥17.15॥

Speech, which does not cause agitation, which is true, pleasing and beneficial, and daily repetition of one's own Veda, are (collectively) called discipline of speech.

मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः।

भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते॥17.16॥

Mental cheerfulness, cheerfulness in expression, absence of pressure to talk, mastery over the mind, clean intent – this (these together) is called mental discipline.

श्रद्धया परया तप्तं तपस्तत्त्रिविधं नरैः।

अफलाकाङ्क्षिभिर्युक्तैः सात्त्विकं परिचक्षते॥17.17॥

That three-fold tapas, observed with total sraddha by people who have no expectation of results (other than mental purity) and who are composed is called sāttvika.

सत्कारमानपूजार्थं तपो दम्भेन चैव यत्।

क्रियते तदिह प्रोक्तं राजसं चलमध्रुवम्॥17.18॥

That tapas, which is done for the sake of (receiving) honour, respect and worship and with ostentation, which is unsteady and not lasting, is called rājasika.

मूढग्राहेणात्मनो यत्पीडया क्रियते तपः।

परस्योत्सादनार्थं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम्॥17.19॥

That tapas, which is done due to deluded understanding, by afflicting one's body or for the sake of destroying another, is called tāmasika.

## TYPE OF DAANAM

दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे।

देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम्॥17.20॥

That charity, which is given to one from whom one does not expect a return, in the proper place, at the proper time, and to a worthy recipient, thinking, 'It is to be given', is considered sāttvika.

यत्तु प्रत्युपकारार्थं फलमुद्दिश्य वा पुनः।

दीयते च परिक्लिष्टं तद्दानं राजसं स्मृतम्॥17.21॥

On the other hand, that charity, which is given for the sake of being helped in return, or keeping in view, a result (punya) to be gained later, and that which is fraught with pain, is considered rājasika.

अदेशकाले यद्दानमपात्रेभ्यश्च दीयते।

असत्कृतमवज्ञातं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम्॥17.22॥

That charity, which is given without respect (improperly), and contemptuously at the wrong place and wrong time, and to unworthy recipients, is called tāmasika.

## TYPE OF JNANAM

सर्वभूतेषु येनैकं भावमव्ययमीक्षते।

अविभक्तं विभक्तेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि सात्त्विकम्॥18.20॥

Know that to be sattvika knowledge by which one knows one changeless existence in all things (and beings) and the undivided among the divided.

पृथक्त्वेन तु यज्ज्ञानं नानाभावान्पृथग्विधान्।

वेत्ति सर्वेषु भूतेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि राजसम्॥18.21॥

On the other hand, may you know that knowledge by which one knows distinctly the manifold nature of different kinds of beings, as rājasa.

यत्तु कृत्स्नवदेकस्मिन्कार्ये सक्तमहैतुकम्।

अतत्त्वार्थवदल्पं च ततामसमुदाहृतम्॥18.22॥

Whereas that (knowledge by) which (one is) committed to one object, as though it is everything (and) which is illogical, without truth, and very limited, that (knowledge) is called tāmasa.

## TYPE OF KARMA

नियतं सङ्गरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतम्।  
अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तत्सात्त्विकमुच्यते॥18.23॥

That action, which is enjoined and which is done without attachment, without being impelled by likes and dislikes, by a person without a (binding) desire for result, is called sāttvika.

यत्तु कामेप्सुना कर्म साहङ्कारेण वा पुनः।  
क्रियते बहुलायासं तद्राजसमुदाहृतम्॥18.24॥

But that karma which is done by one who has a (pronounced) desire for the result or again with arrogance (and) a lot of exertion is called rājasa.

अनुबन्धं क्षयं हिंसामनपेक्ष्य च पौरुषम्।  
मोहादारभ्यते कर्म यत्तत्तामसमुच्यते॥18.25॥

That action, which is begun not taking into account the natural consequence, loss, injury (to others), and one's own capacity because of delusion is called tāmasa.

## TYPE OF RENUNCIATION

नियतस्य तु संन्यासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते।  
मोहात्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तितः॥18.7॥

Renunciation of enjoined action is not proper,  
Renunciation of it (enjoined action), out of delusion,  
is called tamasika.

दुःखमित्येव यत्कर्म कायक्लेशभयात्त्यजेत्।  
स कृत्वा राजसं त्यागं नैव त्यागफलं लभेत्॥18.8॥

One may give up the karma as indeed painful out of  
fear of affliction to one's physical body. Having  
done that rajasika renunciation, one would certainly  
not gain the result of renunciation.

कार्यमित्येव यत्कर्म नियतं क्रियतेऽर्जुन।  
सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलं चैव स त्यागः सात्त्विको मतः॥18.9॥

'It is to be done', thinking thus when only the  
enjoined karma is done, giving up attachment and  
result, Arjuna! It is considered to be a sāttvika  
renunciation.

न द्वेष्ट्यकुशलं कर्म कुशले नानुषज्जते।  
त्यागी सत्त्वसमाविष्टो मेधावी छिन्नसंशयः॥18.10॥

The renunciate (of the results of actions), (being) the one who is endowed with a pure mind, (thereafter being) the one who has discriminative knowledge and whose doubts are gone, does not despise unpleasant (to be done) karma, nor does he cling to auspicious karma.

#### TYPE OF DOER

मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादी धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः।  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योर्निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते॥18.26॥

The one who is free from attachment, who has no egotism, who is endowed with resolve and enthusiasm and is unperturbed in success and failure, is called a sattvika doer.

रागी कर्मफलप्रेप्सुर्लुब्धो हिंसात्मकोऽशुचिः।  
हर्षशोकान्वितः कर्ता राजसः परिकीर्तितः॥18.27॥

The one who has a predominance of raga and a predominant desire for the result of action, who is greedy, whose nature is to hurt, who is not clean and who is subject to elation and depression is called rājasa doer.



अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः।  
विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते॥18.28॥

The one who is disturbed, immature, irreverent, deceptive, cruel, lazy, given to sadness, and a procrastinator is called tāmasa doer.

### TYPE OF MIND

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये।  
बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेत्ति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी॥18.30॥

The mind which knows the pursuit of karma and renunciation, what is to be done and what is not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, and bondage and freedom, that (mind), Partha (Arjuna) is sattviki.

यया धर्ममधर्मं च कार्यं चाकार्यमेव च।  
अयथावत्प्रजानाति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ राजसी॥18.31॥

That mind, with which one wrongly knows what is proper and improper, what is to be done and what is not to be done, Pārtha (Arjuna)! is rājasi.

अधर्मं धर्ममिति या मन्यते तमसाऽऽवृता।  
सर्वार्थान्विपरीतांश्च बुद्धिः सा पार्थ तामसी॥18.32॥

That mind, which covered with ignorance considers what is improper as proper, and all things the reverse (of what they are), that (mind), Pārtha (Arjuna)! is tāmasi.

### TYPE OF HAPPINESS

यत्तदग्रे विषमिव परिणामेऽमृतोपमम्।  
तत्सुखं सात्त्विकं प्रोक्तमात्मबुद्धिप्रसादजम्॥18.37॥

In the beginning it is like poison ( and) when there is transformation, is like nectar, that happiness is called sattvika, born of the clarity of self-knowledge.

विषयेन्द्रियसंयोगाद्यत्तदग्रेऽमृतोपमम्।  
परिणामे विषमिव तत्सुखं राजसं स्मृतम्॥18.38॥

That happiness (arising) from the contact of a sense organ with its object, which in the beginning is like nectar and when it changes is like poison, is considered rājasa.

यदग्रे चानुबन्धे च सुखं मोहनमात्मनः।

निद्रालस्यप्रमादोत्थं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम्॥18.39॥

That happiness, which in the beginning and at the end, is self deluding, (and) born of sleep, laziness, and indifference, is called tāmāsa.

### TYPE OF RESOLVE

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः।

योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी॥18.33॥

The unflinching resolve, with which one sustains, by practice, the activities of the mind, prana, organs of action and knowledge (that resolve) is sattviki, Partha (Arjuna)

यया तु धर्मकामार्थान् धृत्या धारयतेऽर्जुन।

प्रसङ्गेन फलाकाङ्क्षी धृतिः सा पार्थ राजसी॥18.34॥

Whereas, the resolve, with which the one who has a longing for result as the occasion arises, sustains (activities for) religious merit, pleasure, and security, (that resolve) is rājasi, Pārtha (Arjuna)!

यया स्वप्नं भयं शोकं विषादं मदमेव च।  
न विमुञ्चति दुर्मेधा धृतिः सा पार्थ तामसी॥18.35॥

That resolve, by which the one whose thinking is improper, does not give up (excess) sleep, fear, sorrow, depression and intoxication, is tāmasi, Pārtha (Arjuna)!

### WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

यदा सत्त्वे प्रवृद्धे तु प्रलयं याति देहभृत्।  
तदोत्तमविदां लोकानमलान्प्रतिपद्यते॥14.14॥

When the embodied one dies, when sattva has increased, then he gains the worlds of those who know the highest, that are free from impurity.

रजसि प्रलयं गत्वा कर्मसङ्गिषु जायते।  
तथा प्रलीनस्तमसि मूढयोनिषु जायते॥14.15॥

Having died with the predominance of rajas, he is born among those committed to karma; so too, the one who died with the predominance of tamas is born in the wombs of those who have no discriminative faculty.

ऊर्ध्वं गच्छन्ति सत्त्वस्था मध्ये तिष्ठन्ति राजसाः।

जघन्यगुणवृत्तिस्था अधो गच्छन्ति तामसाः॥14.18॥

Those abiding in sattva go (to the worlds) higher up, those belonging to rajas remain in the middle and those belonging to tamas, having the nature of the lowest guṇa, go down.

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः।

सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात् ित्रभिर्गुणैः॥18.40॥

There is no existent being either on the earth or, furthermore, in heaven among the Gods, who is free from these three guṇas born of prakṛti (nature).

तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः।

गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते॥3.28॥

Whereas, Arjuna, the mighty armed! The knower of the truth of guṇas and action is not bound, knowing that the guṇas express themselves in guṇas (body-mind-sense complex).