



THREE ASPECTS OF NATURE (THREE GUNAS)

All that exists in nature is divided into three qualities (*Gunas*) - *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. The rajasic quality is in the centre with tamasic on one side and sattvic on the other side. *Rajas* means desire and *tamas* means laziness or stupor, absence of activity and lethargy. *Sattva* means wisdom, knowledge, brightness and light. Human beings are predominantly rajasic - something in the middle - and animals are predominantly tamasic. It is left to human beings - if they want to become tamasic, they can be. No one will stop them. If they want to be sattvic, they can be. This freedom is given to them. It is from the plank of the sattvic path that a jump into spiritual experience happens. Those who want to realise the aim of human life - enlightenment - have to evolve towards a sattvic principle of life. There is no other way out for them.



The mark of *sattva* is light; when *sattva* prevails one is light, happy and smiling; the mark of *rajas* is activity; and the mark of *tamas* is stupor, lethargy and laziness.



How can we say that the three *gunas* exist? You can see it in your own body and in your own life. You find that you are lethargic one day and for no reason unable to do anything. The next day you are fit and active again, ready to do anything. There comes a time when you are happy, just like that and you do not know why. These three things are always changing in life.



All this manifested nature is composed of three primary elements (*tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*) and according to their proportion in any human being, a man is known primarily as either tamasic, rajasic or sattvic. Everyone has traces of all these three elements, because these three constitute what is known as *Prakriti* or nature. But of the three, in each person one element predominates over the other two, and this is the quality by which that person is known.



We have to rise up from the *tamas* to the *rajas* and from the *rajas* to the *sattva*. When you become primarily sattvic, life becomes very easy with no conflicts and you start having an inexpressible joy.



The Lord says that all beings here on this Earth, in the middle region, in the higher regions and even among the gods, have the three qualities (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) and nobody is without them. And here is a point for understanding - a spiritual seeker needs to transcend all the three, even *sattva*. The tamasic quality is the lowest and better than tamasic is the rajasic quality - at least the person is active and working. *Tamas* denotes sleepiness and lethargy, and there is no discrimination in it. In *rajas* there is activity and reason - reason for the enjoyment of pleasures - how to become more wealthy - how to enjoy sex more and more - all those sorts of things - this is

rajas. Then sattvic joy one experiences through meditation, through service to others and through purification of the physical and astral body, etc. But Enlightenment is beyond even the sattvic quality! What happens then? Then Bliss happens. Bliss is even beyond joy - and Bliss and God are one. Once Bliss happens it never goes away. It cannot go away because these three modes of nature can never again dominate such a person.



The three *gunas* - the three modes of nature - *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*. On one side is the *tamas* and on the other side is the *sattva*. *Rajas* is in the middle. *Rajas* gives pleasure and, when one indulges in pleasure, *rajas* starts becoming *tamas*. Any indulgence will take the person into the tamasic mode, characterised by laziness, lethargy, weakness, sleepiness and indolence. From rajasic one will become tamasic, but when there is self-control in rajasic one starts becoming sattvic and one experiences sattvic joy. After sattvic joy there is Bliss of the Self.



All this is not only mental philosophy but here spirituality is a fact of life. All these three principles exist in our body, and anybody can recognise it. On some days without reason we feel lethargic and indolent, with no desire to work, and would prefer to stay in bed. This is a symptom of being tamasic on that day. On another day a person may be completely alert and want to be very active. Here there is a prevalence of the rajasic element. On another day one may be light and full of wisdom, giving sermons and teaching people. This is an indication of being sattvic. It happens in everyone's life.



Take for example this relationship between male and female. It starts from the rajasic nature, the desire to love physically, to have a relationship and to have sex. When the culmination of union between the male and female is there, and if and when there is orgasm, both the partners in a way become blind to everything, there is forgetfulness, complete forgetfulness and forgetfulness is tamasic - the absence of activity, lethargy. Forgetting everything. It is in that forgetfulness that they feel some sort of relief and comfort but it is all temporary. It is not happiness. It is a delusion. When we try to control a desire, to channel and purify it in various ways through self-discipline, then from that time onwards the sattvic wisdom, knowledge and clarity starts in life.



There are three types of joy: tamasic, rajasic and sattvic. Sattvic is at the highest level and tamasic at the lowest. Rajasic joy is derived from the contact of the senses with the objects. An example is the experience of the greatest rajasic enjoyment - the meeting of the male and the female on the physical plain. It is very attractive in the beginning, like nectar, but what happens in the end? A feeling of remorse, unhappiness and frustration. The rajasic joy ends in discomfort and disliking. Tamasic joy begins with stupor and ends also in stupor. The tamasic joy is felt when the faculty of discrimination is overcome by a sort of stupor or loss of discrimination and reasoning. One example of this concerns drinking. Why do many people drink? They say that they want to forget their worries. They derive joy by forgetfulness. Sattvic joy comes through meditation and calmness of the mind. When one's thoughts have become calm and peaceful. Peace comes when there is harmony between the body, the mind and the emotions - this is sattvic joy.



Sattvic joy cannot be experienced without withdrawing oneself from tamasic and rajasic activities. This is necessary. As you withdraw from them, inner sattvic joy is experienced automatically. Nothing is required to be done. For true peace you are not required to do anything except to give up those useless and absurd activities which generate agitation in you. The more you give up the tamasic and the rajasic activities, the more you will be at peace.



In the body and the mind of an Enlightened person, the three *gunas* (qualities of nature) go on working. Nature does not stop its work even in the body and mind of the Enlightened person. It is not that, in the mind of the Enlightened person, thoughts and feelings do not come. The effects of the three *gunas* come and go, but the Enlightened person is not moved by them. The Enlightened person transcends the pull of the three *gunas* - that means that the attractions of nature do not affect such a person.



Those people who work for the fulfilment of worldly desires, are better than those who spend time sleeping most of the time, eating, drinking and being lazy. The best are those who are active and work not only to fulfil their desires but to help others and who are calm and peaceful.



There are two types of attitude: that of thinking that one can change one's circumstances and that of thinking that it is useless to make any efforts because circumstances cannot be changed. People in the first group are the victims of ego. Most people belong to the first group (rajasic people). They do not understand the subtlety of human life and this course never leads to happiness in life. People in the second group are the victims of laziness, indolence and inactivity, and they are also wrong. People in the second group, who give up efforts completely, having no activity, are the victims of *tamas*.



The quality of *tamas* gives stability. If *tamas* quality is predominant, one is drawn to sleep, lethargy and indolence. The quality of *rajas* produces movement. When we are agitated and disturbed inside, the quality of *rajas* is predominant. One is active physically and mentally. When the mind is active but unoccupied, that activity and the cross-currents of thoughts create the problem of uneasiness. The quality of *sattva* produces purity and illumination. When there is a predominance of the *sattvic* quality - the quality of knowledge, light and illumination - one feels peaceful and happy.



Gradually, by disciplining the totality of life, one has to go beyond *tamas* (the quality of laziness), and then beyond *rajas* (the quality of activity and desires). Then one becomes more *sattvic* (the quality of happiness, calmness and lightness).



Every day situations need you to take decisions. All decisions are guided by *tamas*, *rajas* or *sattva*, but those that are guided by *sattva* are the best.



One of the essential elements when you are on the path of spirituality is charity. The Lord says in the Bhagavad Gita that gifts are of three types. A sattvic gift is given with the sense that it is one's duty to give. But there are other conditions. It is your duty to give but to whom should you give? '*To one who is no benefactor*' (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter XVII, verse 20) – a person from whom you do not receive anything. When you make a donation, you may have the notion that the recipient may be useful to you in some manner and then it is not sattvic giving. Another criterions for a sattvic gift are that it should be done at a right place and it should be given to a deserving person.



The essential point of life lies in the *tamasic* person developing into a *rajasic* person and the *rajasic* person becoming a *sattvic* person. All this involves spiritual practice. What else is it but *sadhana* (practice)? And then having become *sattvic* you transcend even *sattva* and, by Self-realisation, you reach Enlightenment.



The *tamasic* person is a cruel sort of person, who has no consideration for others. He has no tenderness of heart, no good emotions for others, and lacks piety and self-control. All of a sudden he/she can do anything abruptly without reason because he/she has no self-control. With a *rajasic* person there is comparatively more self-control. Why is this? It is because the *rajasic* person wants good results and, therefore, he does not want things to go wrong. But the *tamasic* person forgets all that. He is completely uncultured, unpredictable, arrogant, deceitful, slothful, lazy and inclined to rob others of their livelihood.



A person with the predominance of *tamas* is downhearted and ready to quarrel at a moment's notice. The person is always depressed, pessimistic and has no enthusiasm for life. He also tends to procrastinate - prolonging every job and taking a long time over it. It is a sort of psychological disease. He will take much longer to do a job than other people would, or he may just keep the job pending. He does not care about his duty or the need to get the job finished.



People of a predominantly *tamasic* nature do not develop in spirituality. They do not evolve much because they have not reached the stage of understanding these matters. Their nature leads them to sleep, stupor, indolence and wasting their time on useless things – that is in their nature.



A person who does not give up his drinking habit cannot have *sattvic* thoughts. The quality of his brain centres is affected by drinking. In the same way, there can be no progress for the one who is not honest in earning his livelihood.



Attachment is of the *rajasic* quality. A *rajasic* person is always filled with attachment. He can be for example so attached to cleanliness that he cares more about his room than he cares about his child! He has no love for the child. This type of person seeks the fruit of his actions, is greedy and must always achieve some result. He is oppressive by nature and always complaining that people have not come up to his standards.



One who has more of the element of *rajas* finds a sort of peace by indulging in pleasures. However, that peace is already disturbed. Indulgence never gives you real peace. It is only an illusion of peace that comes by forgetting yourself for some time. You forget yourself even in things like drink. You forget your true nature, and with that you forget your painful memories also. So, one feels a sort of relief. In sex also it is the same. A sort of relief is felt for some time, but it does not stay.



The rajasic person is in a constant whirlpool of sorrow and joy. His mood will fluctuate between the two extremes in a short space of time. He will smile if something meets with his approval and be angry if something does not. This constant fluctuation is the main characteristic of the rajasic doer, always perturbed like the tides of the ocean.



When *rajas* predominates, there is a lot of activity and a desire for enjoyment of the pleasures of the world, but it is all temporary. When one keeps indulging in objects which are pleasurable to the senses, one suffers pain, regret, remorse and repentance, and one comes to the conclusion that they are totally useless. For example, one may be very fond of eating delicious food, but generally delicious food is heavy and one gets constipated and suffers. Thus one comes to the conclusion that it is not good. However, the tendency develops, and again one repeats the same mistake and again regrets. One day one realises that one should not do it anymore! In this way repentance and regret also purify one. One is purified under compulsion.



People, who are primarily rajasic may become tired of the problems in life and start looking for peace. *Rajas* means having desires and activity. Desires do not always get fulfilled and then people are disappointed and unhappy. They start thinking: "What kind of life is this? Why have we come into this world? Why can we not have permanent peace and happiness?" The answer is that they should try to become sattvic. This is the spiritual science.



When one is more sattvic, one experiences stability, happiness and fewer conflicts of thoughts and emotions.



Step by step a greater element of *sattva* - sattvic love - comes in life, and then you have some glimpses of real peace. But the aim of the seeker should be to transcend even this sattvic quality. It is also bondage but it is very difficult to transcend *sattva*. It is easy to be free from shackles made of iron, but if the shackles binding us are made of gold, then it is difficult to give them up. So when one is predominately a sattvic person, then one starts getting into bondage through identification with joy and wisdom.



The very essence of spirituality is to try, at every moment, to evolve from tamasic to rajasic, and from rajasic to sattvic. It is your duty to evolve like this in human life. You are given a birth as a human being, and you should not waste the chance for transformation.



For a better understanding of spiritual development, please study in depth any good commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. Particularly study those chapters where the Lord has described the three qualities – *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva* (Chapters 14,15,16,17,18). Read how these qualities can hinder one's spiritual evolution.



Nature, is composed of three components, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, these are always changing and so the mind as part of nature will also change. One day one may feel tired and lethargic and tempted to do nothing and on other days one will feel ready for activity. These changes are natural and need to be accepted and used as an opportunity to train the mind. It is important not to feel disgraced or disheartened by this activity. This will be so until one attains equanimity in life or develops the ability to discriminate between the conscious element, called *Purusha* or *Atman* and unconscious element called *Prakriti* or nature which includes the body, senses, mind and intellect.



As long as one is in the grip of the three *gunas*, one does not identify one's existence with God. One is with the three qualities and therefore one is with nature (*Prakriti*). When we identify ourselves with the Spirit, we are with God, but if we identify ourselves with any of the three qualities (*rajas*, *tamas* or *sattva*), then we separate ourselves from God.



After the transcendence of all three qualities, there is Truth and there is the Self. Beyond the three *gunas* is our true and pure Existence. Then there comes into life what is known as 'equanimity' - serenity. One is not plagued by feelings of gloom, pleasure, liking or disliking. One remains the same, always, a Self-realised person.
