

# Managing *Tamoguna*

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**Nina:** Hi, Ted.

I am writing again with a question that is related to my work as an executive/leadership coach.

My goal is to help people perform better by understanding themselves better, changing some inefficient habits and getting some basics on leadership that can guide them in their daily work. My goal is not freedom or liberation for them, or *moksa*, but feeling better in their lives.

I can see the *gunas* influencing people. Many leaders are predominantly *rajasic* but some have a lot of *tamas*. They don't see things clearly, they delude themselves and they have a hard time getting things done; many procrastinate. Or they are stuck in old behaviors.

I have been looking to Vedanta and James' teaching for guidance. How can I help them to change the *guna* mix, increase *sattva* and *rajas* and lower *tamas*?

When I listened to James teaching the *Bhakti Sutras*, there is something written about *tamasic* people that had you better leave them out, but from a leadership point of view, that feels wrong. If I understand the system, the way would be to get some more *rajas* through igniting their passion for something.

Do you have any ideas about this? To help a person break a procrastinating pattern would be a great success but indeed hard to achieve.

And, yes, I understand that I am not the doer. Events play out without any need from my side to do anything. I have noticed that. My question is in the apparent reality; it doesn't really matter. But I follow my *svadharma* and that is to work with leadership development, and I want to do my work well and just wanted to see if Vedanta could give me some new ideas in this area. I am not deeply attached to the outcome for my clients and at the same time I am because that is part of this person's programming, to react that way.

~ Warm regards, Nina

**Ted:** Hi, Nina.

Sorry for the delayed response. I have been busy, but have also been mulling over your question and how to best respond to it.

The best advice I can offer is to explain the idea of the three *gunas* to them. I would perhaps avoid using the Sanskrit terms. Since the people you work with are not *jijnasus* (i.e. seekers of self-knowledge), they may get turned off by such terms. You can, however, describe the three basic qualities of energy that color our experience. Everybody can see how these qualities are at play in every object, event, emotion and thought.

Once the person with whom you are working understands the basic concept of the three *gunas*,

then you can help them explore how the *gunas* color various aspects of his or her life. You want to examine the post-digestive, or long-term, effects of the food they eat, their work, recreational activities, relationships (both platonic and romantic), sex life, relationship with and management of money, possessions and living environment. These are the main categories, but basically you are helping them examine how their choices and behaviors and indulgences or restrictions in these areas affect their mood and mental state.

Having zeroed in on the energetic consequences of the person's lifestyle choices, you can then start proposing some adjustments. If you want to get rid of *tamas*, you have to stir up some *rajas*. So as you say, you might explore ways that the person could approach his or her work in a more intellectually stimulating or creative manner, that type of thing.

It is important to understand that there is no "one size fits all" solution to this issue, nor even a solution that remains static for a particular individual. For instance, a person might find that by eating chicken, he or she feels a lot lighter than when he or she eats beef. Once the body has adjusted to this new practice, however, it might be that chicken feels quite *tamasic* in comparison to fish. On so on it goes. For this reason, managing the *gunas* requires constant vigilance. Observe and adjust are the operative concepts.

Once the person understands the basic concepts and starts to see results in his or her life, they are quite likely to feel empowered to make productive changes. This itself might be enough to snap them out of their *tamasic* habits.

As for what kinds of foods and activities promote *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, there are some basic guidelines. For instance, fresh fruits and vegetables are *sattvic*; coffee and chocolate and chili peppers are *rajasic*; and steak and fried foods and dishes laden with cheese are *tamasic*. As for activities, we might say that, generally speaking, *yoga* or other forms of invigorating exercise and creative projects through by which one feels inspired and through which one feels uplifted are *sattvic*; intensely competitive activities or simply activities that require a lot of physical effort or mental processing are *rajasic*; and activities such as sitting around watching TV and napping, and drinking or doing drugs are *tamasic*. Beyond such basic guidelines, it is a matter of trial and error, observation and adjustment.

I hope that helps give you some ideas for how you might approach the issue effectively.

~ All the best, Ted