

**IV.13**

**Whether individual and universal laws manifest or not depends on the three constituent qualities of nature.**

*Depending on the needs of the day, am I easily influenced by inertia (tamas), overactivity (rajas), or clarity (sattva)?*

*Is one of these qualities predominant in me? If so, which one?*

*Is it more a help or a hindrance?*

*What quality helps prevent a relapse into past insomnia, by favoring maintenance of present stability?*

*What are the connections between this aphorism and aphorisms II.18 and II.19 with regard to qualities (śilam) and their manifestation?*

The main systems of Hindu thought all say that nature manifests itself through three qualities: inertia (*tamas*), overactivity (*rajas*), clarity (*sattva*). Our mental coloring is what results, at a given moment, from these three primary qualities (see commentary on I.16).

Depending on how open or clear the mind is, how understanding (*sattva*), how active or changeable (*rajas*), how limited or obtuse (*tamas*)—these characteristics show more or less. The same word, the same sentence, can bring the past back to the reader or lead him or her toward new realities, depending on his or her characteristics.

This notion of constituent qualities of nature is difficult, even impossible, to understand. In thinking we have understood, certainly we understood nothing as we seek to grasp the intrinsic nature of the instrument of perception by using it. That is why it has been stated in the *Śāstras*: “The ultimate nature of the *guṇas* is never visible; what is seen is extremely ephemeral, like an illusion,” (*Vyāsa*).

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*te vyaktasūkṣmā guṇātmānah  
te vyakta-sūkṣmāḥ guṇa-ātmānah*

*Te:* they (the laws). *Vyakta:* manifested, of the realm of effect. *Sūkṣmāḥ:* subtle, unmanifested, causal. *Guṇa:* the constituent qualities of nature. *Ātmānah:* have the value, the nature, the qualities of.