



NOURISHING ASSOCIATION

THE TREE OF LIFE

In the fertile ground of *sādhū saṅga* we not only get inspirations to develop our faith (*śraddhā*) and our spiritual inclinations (*matih*) but we also receive directions on how to lead our lives.

Life can be compared with a tree. If all the three areas of our life are well taken care of we can “stand tall and not fall” even in the midst of difficulties.

These three areas are: **individual nourishment, a supportive lifestyle, and our contribution to the lives of others.**

Just as a tree needs to have deep roots, a strong trunk and a healthy crown, each person needs to have roots in eternity and a supportive lifestyle where physical, emotional and social needs are met so that he/she can stand tall in the world. Additionally we need to contribute to the lives of others. Sad is the life of someone who is caught up in selfish self-reference. A good tree should bear fruits to share.

The tree of life is a clear and obvious model which explains how important spiritual cultivation is (the root) while at the same time emphasizing one’s mental and physical cultivation (lifestyle) and one’s contribution to the well-being of others.



Interestingly, the roots (spiritual cultivation) of the tree of life are not always visible to others. In the ancient Vedas these roots refer to one’s own relationship to God (*sambandha*) and the practices of spiritual life (*abhideya*), like reading and realizing sacred texts, chanting the holy names, visiting holy places and worshiping the Lord through prayer ceremonies and attending to him in various other ways.

Yet although the roots of a person often remain “under the earth” so to speak - they are the most important. The tree of life would dry up and fall to the ground if its roots were not deep.

One’s lifestyle is of similar importance – only if one lives properly, can one think and act properly. According to *Āyurveda*, a person’s mental and physical well-being stands on three pillars: a healthy diet, good sleep and a beneficial lifestyle. A beneficial lifestyle. Lifestyle is com-posed of mental and physical cultivation.

Mental cultivation includes truthfulness, refraining from theft, giving up bad association, simplicity (not taking more than you need), religiosity, celibacy, refraining from unnecessary talk, forgiveness and fearlessness, purification of the heart, an attitude of service...

Physical cultivation includes cleanliness, regular exercises, engaging the senses in service etc.... (from the conclusion of *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* by Śrīla Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura)

Finally, our contributions to the lives of others are those by which we enrich the lives of others. They are like the fruits from the crown of the tree, and may be small like giving inspiration to others or large like managing a project or even a country.

It is absolutely necessary to grow deep roots, so that the crown of the tree can be supported. Many people start big projects which demand a lot of action without taking care of their roots - and ultimately fail. A tree which only has a big crown but no deep roots can easily be uprooted.

Conclusion

The art of spiritual counseling, the wheel of needs and the tree of life are all interrelated practical concepts which help to form a meaningful *sat-saṅga* in which the divine *prema* can easily be felt.