



THE TREE OF LIFE



Amṛta Vāṇī 1 *The Trunk, part 1: Sattva as a Guiding Principle & Physical Well-Being*

Amṛta Vāṇī 2 *The Trunk, part 2: Mental Well-Being*

Amṛta Vāṇī 3 *The Crown: Compassion*

Amṛta Vāṇī 4 *The Roots: Bhakti-Sādhana*

1) The Trunk of the Tree of Life, part 1: SATTVA AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

WHY BOTHER?

Considering how short life is, why should we bother about taking care of the different aspects of health? In the Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāṁṛta (chapter 2.1, p. 67-68) Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains why: “If people do not follow these rules [regarding health of body and mind], they cannot pass through life smoothly. [...] One will not be able to take the mind from material thoughts and direct it to thoughts of God. As a result, sinful thoughts and an atheistic attitude will dominate the mind. Finally, a person will become no better than a beast. Therefore, these bodily and mental rules are very necessary for success in human life.” In other words, if you don’t take care of the needs of your body and mind in a way that is favorable for your spiritual development, you will not come very far.

Life can be compared to a tree. Just as a tree needs to have deep roots, a strong trunk and a flourishing crown, we all need to have roots in eternity, a supportive life style, in which physical, emotional and social needs are met, and the fruits of contributing to the lives of others.

The unique feature of the tree of life concept is that by applying the principle of *sattva* to all these areas of life it is uplifted onto the spiritual plane (in contrast to ordinary self-improvement). *Sat* means “eternal” and *tva* “truth”, so *sattva* is that force of nature which is open for spiritual truths. The *sattvic* way of practicing the principles of the tree of life will be different from *rajasic* or *tamasic* self-improvement. In this way the teachings of the tree of life open the doors to the spiritual dimension.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE: STRENGTHENING SATTVA

The workings of matter are orchestrated by three forces: *sattva* (goodness, illumination), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (ignorance). The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.2.24) teaches us that, “[...] passion [rajas] is better than ignorance [tamas], but goodness [sattva] is best because by goodness one can come to realize the absolute truth.” Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, “It is further comprehended herein that one has to rise to the platform of the mode of goodness (*sattva*) so that one can be eligible for the devotional service of the Lord.”

In other words, having a strong *sattva* means having access to the absolute truth. Strong *sattva* is a state in which we maintain balance in the four areas of our life: the health of body and mind, contributing to the lives of others and nourishing our spirituality. It is a force that brings you inside. *Rajas* is an energy that is directed to



the outside and when it is dominant you feel stressed. A state of dominant *tamas* is a state of exhaustion and depression. Ensuring that your *sattva* stays strong will make it easy for you to enter the sacred space in your heart – *sattva* is the force that brings you there and facilitates God realization.

The many details of leading a life of strong *sattva* are guided by the principle of associating with thoughts, food, recreation, people etc. that are *sattvic* (“*One can strengthen the mode of goodness by cultivation of those things that are already situated in goodness [...]*.” SB 11.13.2) (For more information, see handout “*The Modes and their Corresponding Attributes*” attached to this email.)

With practice you will eventually be able to remain *sattvic* even in situations that would usually bring you out of your steadiness. On the other hand, if you are ruled by *rajas* and *tamas*, you will feel anxious or downcast even when you are in paradisiacal surroundings. So, in essence, it is not difficult to become *sattvic*: you need to learn which behavior is *sattvic*, practice it and then the force of *sattva* will do everything for you. After some time behaving in a way that allows *sattva* to unfold itself will become natural to you, habitual, and you can go through life smoothly. You will be moved forward by an energy which brings you to happiness, composure, peace and spiritual realizations.

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

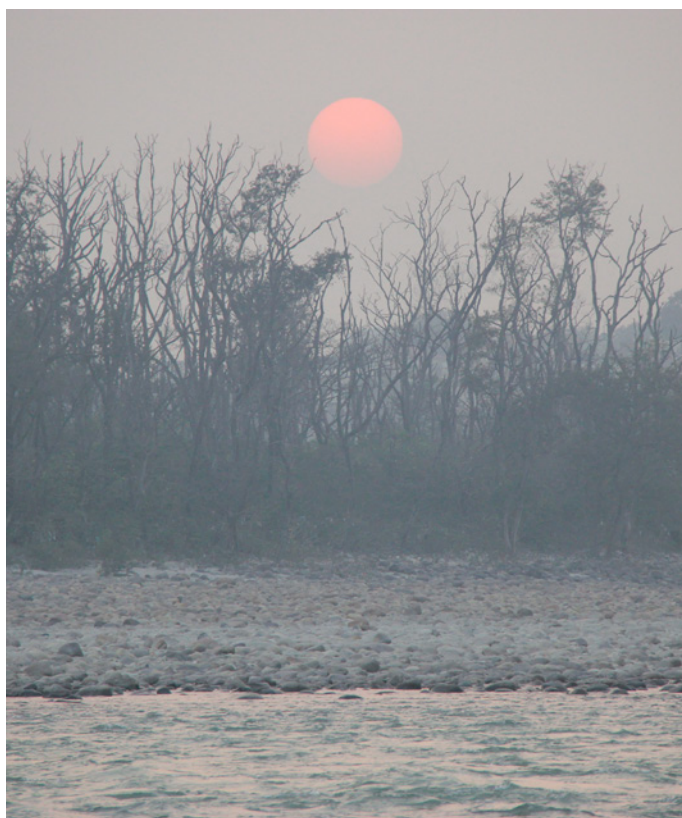
Much can be said about maintaining physical well-being. You might want to revisit the handout “*A Day in Sattva*” you received at the retreat (and which is attached to this email), specifically the tips on a *sattvic* diet.

Please remember to do regular physical exercise. The benefits of physical exercise are usually very underrated. Remember, exercise is not something that takes energy from you – it restores it to you. By burning excessive fat and sugar in your blood system, physical exercise clears up your cardiovascular system and prevents cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks. Physical exercise is a powerful antidepressant, reduces stress and makes your brain faster and larger. Studies have shown that physical exercise is also a strong booster for willpower – not only for the exercise itself but it is contagious to all aspects of life. So by increasing self-control, physical exercise supports you in achieving any other goal as well.

EXERCISE

EXPERIMENT WITH PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Maybe you have already implemented exercise into your life before or after our tree of life retreat. If not, give it a shot now – try to integrate physical exercise into your life. Don't ask yourself “*What kind of exercise or how much should I do?*” Studies have shown that even five minutes of physical exercise are beneficial. So better ask yourself: “*What is a physical exercise that I would actually do regularly?*” When you have found an answer – test if it stands firm in everyday life.



SIDEBAR: A First Step towards Sattva: Energy Management

At the core of a *sattvic* life is energy management, a balanced use of energy. If we allow *rajas* to dominate our life, we exert ourselves without relaxation phases and in the worst case even until we are burned out. If *tamas* rules our life, we are stuck in procrastination and an aversion to constructive action, eventually leading to stress when the next deadline arrives at our door. The key to *sattvic* energy use is to work with relaxation phases (work breaks during the day, resting after the day's work and on week-ends etc.) and to avoid postponing things until they become urgent. (For more information, see the handout “*Sattvic Energy Management*” attached to this email.)

Sattvic Energy Management

