



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*

4) THE ROOTS OF THE TREE OF LIFE: BHAKTI-SĀDHANA

In the tree of life retreat we learned the importance of taking care of the gifts (our bodies and minds) the Lord has presented us with for our self-realization. It is crucial that we always remain conscious of our over-arching goal in life, the reason we take care of the material body and mind – to be happily situated in devotional service. To serve this purpose, we need to take care of the roots of the tree of life – spiritual nourishment. Always make sure the roots of your tree of life are well taken care of. Just like the tree starts from the roots, a Kṛṣṇa-conscious life rests on the foundation of *bhakti-sādhana*. Also, just as the roots of a tree are beneath the ground, your spiritual roots are not cultivated or displayed in public. Your spiritual roots grow with the unfolding of a transcendental relationship that is invisible to the material eye. Spiritual nourishment of the roots is something that happens only between you and Kṛṣṇa. Be careful that your individual relationship to Kṛṣṇa is not lost during congregational worship – it is not enough to dance together with your devotee friends. Try to chant attentively and connect with Kṛṣṇa. Read about Kṛṣṇa every day. Your spiritual program should touch your heart. You have to leave your own mental world and enter the spirit of Kṛṣṇa's world.

Remember the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* verse (11.2.40) that is the essence of all Vedic scriptures: “By chanting the holy name of the Supreme Lord, one comes to the stage of love of Godhead. Then the devotee is fixed in his vow as an eternal servant of the Lord, and he gradually becomes very much attached to a particular name and form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As his heart melts with ecstatic love, he laughs very loudly or cries or shouts. Sometimes he sings and dances like a madman, for he is indifferent to public opinion.” This verse describes the essential practice that reconnects the soul with Kṛṣṇa: chanting. As you nourish your roots, try to come in contact with Kṛṣṇa by chanting. The Lord is as close as your heart or breath. And Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “As soon as we accept Kṛṣṇa, he is immediately there.” (Hamburg, 1969)



EXERCISE

MEDITATE ABOUT KṚṢṆA'S RECIPROCATION

Although we may not always be aware of it, devotional service is a two-way street – we approach Kṛṣṇa through our service and he takes note of what we do and reciprocates. When we chant (even inattentively) Kṛṣṇa thinks, “Because this man has chanted my holy name, my duty is to give him protection.” (SB 6.2.10) Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, “The Lord is more anxious to take us back into his kingdom than we can desire.” (SB 1.2.17, pp.) Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us, “Kṛṣṇa is so grateful that he allows himself to become controlled by one who performs even the slightest service. He is so forgiving and tolerant that he smiles patiently even if the greatest unforgivable offence is committed against him. He is so compassionate that his heart becomes tormented if he sees others suffering even slightly.” (Ujjvala-nīlamanī, chapter 10)

From these statements we can see how soft Kṛṣṇa's heart is. Remember and meditate on statements such as these that reveal the nature of the Lord to whom we offer service. Think about how he treats his devotees and feel encouraged in your devotional life. Feel encouraged to offer Kṛṣṇa more and more of your time and attention. Feel encouraged to “Kṛṣṇa-ize” whatever you do. Be mindful of Krishna as you chant. Take *prasadam* in a Kṛṣṇa-conscious way. Kṛṣṇa-ize whatever you do for your physical and mental well-being. Do your walk on the beach Kṛṣṇa-consciously. Be Kṛṣṇa-consciousness in your social life and in your dealings of compassion. As you Kṛṣṇa-ize the tree of your life you will enter into a sweet exchange and feel something of that treasure called *bhakti-rasa*, the feelings which are there in *bhakti*.