



## 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 2: MENTAL WELL-BEING

How is it possible to stay emotionally balanced despite of the many *rajasica* and *tamasic* disturbances from outside (or even inside)? In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.14) Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna, “O son of Kuntī, the nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.”



What you have to know is how to create your inner weather so that you are not dependent on the outer weather. During the retreat we learned to apply the emotional traffic light technique which is based on the principle from our philosophy of taking on the perspective of the untouched, spiritual observer. As a spiritual being that is different from the body and mind, we always have the unique opportunity to take up the spiritual position from which we can see what is happening in life from a healthy distance and then influence our lives from that observer position. In this way we can stop being victims of circumstances and actually influence them from the spiritual position. By this exercise you invite the light of *sattva* to shine in your heart and it will help you maintain your emotional balance. This doesn't mean ignoring or suppressing emotions but dealing with them in a proper way.

You may remember the example of the psychologist Viktor Frankl who was held captive in a concentration camp by the Nazis and who discovered that although they may treat him in any way they desired, there was one thing they could not take away from him: how he chose to react to their treatment internally, his “*human freedom*”, as he called it. By practice and by using our human freedom we can increase it and react more and more in beneficial ways. This is the unique gift of having a human mind – to be able to remove oneself from impulse-driven reactions and choosing spiritually informed reactions.

Kṛṣṇa explained this to Arjuna, “A person in the divine consciousness, although engaged in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving about, sleeping and breathing, always knows within himself that he actually does nothing at all. Because while speaking, evacuating, receiving, or opening or closing his eyes, he always knows that only the material senses are engaged with their objects and that he is aloof from them.” (Bg 5.8-9)

During the retreat we practiced this principle of taking on the observer position, or using our human freedom with the help of the emotional traffic light technique. This is again how it works:

**Red:** If something happens that disturbs you, switch on red and pause for a moment – don't give in to your automatic response.

**Yellow:** Then switch to yellow, remind yourself of who you are: the eternal soul! Take on this observer position. Remind yourself: “*I am a part of the Lord, I am a soul within the body and I should act in a way which is favorable for my spiritual journey.*” Check how much your interpretation and appraisal of the situation corresponds to reality: Is it really like this? Is your perspective justifiable? Are there other explanations than your own interpretation? How would someone else see the situation? What are other perspectives? What does it look like from the perspective of the eternal soul? The moment you start challenging your perspectives you will see a shift of your emotional reaction. Ask yourself what a proper response to this situation could be.

**Green:** Then switch to green and act. Apply your realizations. (For more information see the handout “*Developing Sattvic Thinking Styles – Questioning One's Perspective*” attached to this email.)

### EXERCISE

#### PRACTICE THE EMOTIONAL TRAFFIC LIGHT TECHNIQUE

Think of a typical situation that disturbs your inner balance. What happens? What is your automatic internal and external response? How would you like to respond next time you are confronted with this situation (internally and externally)? Mentally switch to green and reenact the scene like this.