


# *Secrets of Purifying the Mind*

*An Excerpt from The Art of Positive Feeling  
By Swami Jyotirmayananda*



*The majesty of the  
Divine Self shines through  
this universe like a million suns,  
and to experience this glory we have  
been given the gift of the medium of  
the mind. However, impurities such as desire,  
anger, greed, pride, delusion and jealousy exist  
in the mind like clouds, and with a clouded mind  
the sun of the Self is obscured. What, then, should  
one do to remove the clouds of mental impurity?*

### *Be Patient and You Will Succeed!*

In learning to handle any negative quality, do not struggle too ferociously with it or become overly worried that you are a failure whenever you notice its presence within your mind. Never sit down and cry, “I have been a Yogi for five years. And now look: I still have fear, I still have jealousy, I still have so many impurities in my mind. It will take too many years and births to attain perfection!”

You must realize that because you are alive you must feel many emotions. Spiritual movement is not for the dead. It is for the living. If you do not feel jealousy at all in your heart, then there is no spiritual movement for you. If you do not feel fear at all, you are already dead. If you are never awakened to anger because of provocation, you are already too feeble to move a finger!

If you tread the path and find that your mind is not as pure as you wish it to be, don't worry. You must realize that the movement is progressive. You should move on in spite of the negativity in the mind.

Learn to observe the mind and see what emotions are there. Feel you are an alert, objective witness, watching the clouds as they form and dissolve. Your negative emotions are all awakening your inner aspiration. They have a role; they have their purpose.

However, at the same time, be careful. You must move on without justifying those negative qualities within you. Although it is pointless to struggle viciously with mental impurities, meaningful self-effort must be employed to control and gradually eliminate them.

In this process, try to see that impure thoughts and feelings are not allowed to find expression in the realm of speech and action. When you observe the rising of anger, for example, in the plane of thought, try to contain it, to nip it in the bud. Once

you begin to express words out of anger, the situation gets out of hand. Words create their own problems. If you allow things to go further, and by your action try to hurt others, you have really initiated a potentially devastating chain reaction.

### *Promote Sattwa and Soften the “Lines” of Impurity*

As we have seen, the three *gunas*—*sattwa* (purity or harmony), *rajas* (restlessness or externalization), and *tamas* (negativity and dullness)—play a critical role in the matter of mental impurity. When *tamas* is there, impurities in the mind become demoniac and gross. The *tamasic* form of an impurity is like tar—you can't rub it off easily.

Or thought of in another way, *tamasic* impurities endure like lines chiseled in rock. Even after a hundred years they are still there. When the mind is *rajasic*, the impurities are like lines drawn on clay. You can mold them and change them easily. When the mind is *satwic*, the impurities are like lines drawn on water. They are there one moment like gentle ripples and then gone the next. Therefore, the *satwic* mind must be promoted with great patience so that impurities can be eliminated.

### *Accentuate the Positive to Eliminate the Negative*

In a world full of stress and tension, due to lack of *satsanga* (good association), the human mind clings to negative feelings. Out of all the feelings that are generated day by day, the negative feelings born of *rajas* and *tamas* become more abounding. But that should not be. The negative should not stay in your mind.

In Chapter 17 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna gives a powerful teaching about pro-

moting a joyous and *satwic* mind through the practice of a unique form of mental austerity that includes five powerful techniques: *manah prasadah*, *saumyatwam*, *maunam*, *atma-vinigraha*, and *bhava samshudhi*.



### *Manah Prasadah*

The first aspect of austerity of the mind is *manah prasadah*—allowing the mind to be joyous. People who have been accustomed to think of austerity as something harsh will be surprised. “How can austerity be joyous?” they might ask. In Yoga philosophy, austerity is not supposed to give you pain, but discipline you so that the spirit flows in a healthy, unobstructed way through your personality. Thus, the effort to maintain cheerfulness of the mind is a dynamic aspect of austerity.

Many people have developed the habit of allowing their minds to become negative. You must watch your own mind very carefully. Try to develop the philosophy that the world is an expression of Divine creation. There is intelligence and a guiding purpose behind the world; you have nothing to worry about. There should be no room for grief, dejection, and sorrow in your life.

Always think of the positive things that you have acquired and accomplished. By thinking of the blessings God has given you, you will have so many reasons for being serene and cheerful. More than anything else, understand that the Divine Hand is sustaining your personality at every moment. The awareness that Divinity is within you will fill your mind with joy.

By adopting this philosophy of loving God at all times, you allow your mind to be serene and joyous. Do not develop negative thoughts. When they do arise, simply be a witness to them.

When you keep your mind in a negative state, you will be steadily generating negative impressions, and your mind will be forced to stay negative by the weight of these impressions. Due to the weight of the impressions of sadness and sorrow, you will not be happy even when you find yourself in a wonderful situation—a situation for which you have been craving for a long time.

This is so because your experiences of joy and sorrow are intimately related to the impressions of your unconscious. Therefore, it is an important part of austerity not to let your mind be negative. Let your spirit soar high, and let your mind be joyous.



### *Saumyatwam*

The next aspect of mental austerity is *saumyatwam* (gentleness). When you confront a situation that provokes your mind into becoming agitated or negative, simply look at it without building up ill will towards anyone. Let your mind stay gentle, composed, and detached. You will discover a spiritual strength within yourself.

Otherwise, by reacting to external situations, you allow your mind to become agitated. An agitated mind creates negative impressions in your unconscious. Gradually a habit builds up. Your mind constantly reacts to situations, no matter how they unfold. If you are looking for absolute perfection according to the concepts of your ego, you will never find it; there will always be something to irritate your mind.

If you are vulnerable to negative influences, or if you have already created in your mind a habit of reacting to everything, then any little thing can cause distress. A leaf might fall on your head, and it would be enough to put you into a state of agitation!

*Saumyatwam* implies that the mind becomes serene, calm, and unaffected—just like the face of Buddha. When you watch a movie, you are always aware of the fact that all the happenings on the screen are mere appearances. Therefore, though you feel sorrow at the tragic developments, you are not deeply affected in your heart. Similarly, be a spectator to your mind and its changes, and know that faith in God will ultimately make you truly gentle.



### *Maunam*

The next practice relating to the mind is *maunam* (silence). If you watch your mind, you will notice that a great many thoughts enter it constantly—so many, in fact, that after a while, it is as if a lively discussion was going on deep in your mind. The world may be quiet around you, yet your mind might be as noisy as a marketplace. This should not be.

When you are engaged in various actions, watch your mind. Do not entertain conflicting thoughts and do not allow the mind to be agitated. You should be like a swan. A swan enters the lake and sports with the waters, but the moment the sport is over, the swan shakes off the water particles. Much in the same manner, perform your duties well in the world, but, the moment you retire, shake off all your tensions and worries and relax in the arms of God, in the arms of Divinity within.

The thoughts of the mind should be as still as a lake without waves. You can do this by turning your mind to God and practicing *japa* (repetition of Divine Name). Mentally repeat the Name as you allow the feeling of Divine Presence to enfold you. Gradually your mind will become calm and quiet. Observing silence of speech for an hour or two in daily life—called *mauna vrata*

(the vow of silence)—is also conducive to the mental austerity of *mauna*.



### *Atma-Vinigraha*

The next austerity of the mind is *atma-vinigraha*, which means mastery over the senses. It is the subtle desires of the mind that render the senses uncontrollable. Controlling the desires as they enter the mind becomes a fascinating austerity. Each time there is a mental whisper urging you to become a slave of the senses, try to brush that whisper aside. Assert your mastery over the senses, and, thereby, mastery over every situation in life.



### *Bhava Samshuddhi*

The next austerity of the mind is *bhava samshuddhi*. *Bhava* means feeling. *Samshuddhi* refers to purification. All human experiences are based upon the feelings that you have. Within families, within society, the feelings that exist between different people play a great role. The same human being that gives you great joy today can give you great sorrow tomorrow if the feeling changes. Therefore, you must learn to watch your feelings and observe the types of feelings you hold within your heart.

Develop the quality of grasping that which is positive in others so that your feeling is always magnanimous. Do not draw to yourself the negative qualities of others. If you have built up a bitter mind, each time you see other people, you will notice that everyone has a particular type of error or defect in their personality. And you will conclude, “This world is filled with useless people. What is going to happen to the world?”

You must understand how much you are hurting yourself when your mind continuously

focuses on the negative in others. As time goes by, you realize how much negativity you have stored in your unconscious. Why not change your attitude in such a way that you go on filtering out that which is the best? Look at any person and realize that God is shining through his eyes, that the Divine *prana* (life-force) is pulsating through him.

All people make mistakes. However, despite those mistakes there is always something in everyone that you can admire. If, at the moment, you can perceive no such admirable quality in the other person, then just keep your mind detached. But do not go on looking for defects and keeping your mind filled with negative feeling.

One who is practicing *bhava samshudhi* will enjoy reflecting on this parable based on the *Mahabharata* involving Duryodhana, who was the embodiment of all forms of impurity, and Yudhishtira, who was the embodiment of virtue. Once Guru Dronacharya created a special project for those two disciples. Duryodhana was asked to go out into the world and find the best person he could find, a person who was absolutely faultless. Yudhishtira was asked to find the worst person he could find, a person full of faults. After a while they both returned to present their findings.

Yudhishtira reported to Dronacharya that he could not find anyone other than himself who was so full of faults and had so many defects to overcome. Because he was introspective, he did not care about the faults of others; his mind was concerned with his own faults. His whole focus was on improving himself, and his righteousness did not allow him to judge others. Therefore, he brought that report to his Guru and Dronacharya was pleased.

Duryodhana, reporting the results of his research, said, "I could not find anyone, anywhere, who was absolutely perfect except myself. Even

in you, Guru, I find many faults!" Needless to say, Dronacharya was not pleased with his arrogant disciple.

As the story leads us to understand, one must be tolerant of others' defects, but never of his own. By the practice of persistent introspection, learn to see your weaknesses and strive to overcome them. Develop compassion towards the weaknesses of others, but never justify your own.

It is much more important in spiritual movement to focus your attention on your own shortcomings. If you do there is a concrete, tangible advantage. On the other hand, if you focus your attention on finding mistakes in others, you have accomplished nothing. You have done no good to others, and merely crowded your own mind with negativity. It is a much better policy to look at the good qualities of others and thereby be inspired by what you see.

If you are truly practicing austerity of the mind through the techniques of *manah prasadah*, *saumyatwam*, *maunam*, *atma-vinigraha*, and *bhava samshudhi*, the impurities of your personality will gradually be destroyed. The potentiality of your spirit will shine forth just as gold shines when it is melted. And that is the purpose of austerity—to purify the unconscious, which will then enable you to enter into higher levels of spiritual experience.

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