

There is a wonderful story in the Ramayana that conveys in a most unforgettable manner the slippery nature of the ego, and the stubborn persistence of the seeds of the *kleshas* (afflictions) in the mind of even the most advanced aspirant. It is the story about Sage Narada and a powerful lesson taught to him by Lord Vishnu.



the flowers burst into beautiful blossoms and the soft breeze began to blow, and the *apsaras* (celestial nymphs) began to sing and dance. Kama Deva, along with his attendants, exercised all their powers of allurements against the mind of Narada, but the sage remained unperturbed. When

The Monkey Face

Once Sage Narada practiced deep meditation in a beautiful cave near the Ganges River. His austerity was so intense that Indra, the celestial Lord of Gods, became concerned that Narada might try to claim his throne by the force of his austerity. So Indra sent Kama Deva, the cupid god, with his whole army to present temptations before the sage and thus disturb his practice of austerity.

Accordingly, Kama Deva, with his retinue of celestial attendants, went to Narada's cave. Soon

Narada could not be shaken, Kama Deva became afraid of the sage, thinking that he might destroy him by his fierce look. When Kama Deva fell at Narada's feet seeking his forgiveness, Narada simply smiled and said that he held no grudge against him, for he was merely doing his duty.

As a result of this experience, however, Narada developed a subtle pride. He thought to himself, "I have conquered Kama. I have excelled many sages and saints who could not prevail against the celestial temptations." With that sense of pride

The Art of Positive Feeling *Part Eleven*



Exploring the Roots of Impurity



by Swami Jyotirmayananda

swelling within his heart, he went to Lord Shiva and related all that had happened.

Lord Shiva smiled and said, “Narada, you are a devotee of Lord Vishnu. By His grace nothing is impossible for you. However, please do not relate this experience of yours to Lord Vishnu.”

Sri Narada then went to Brahma, the creator, and told him how he had defeated Kama. Lord Brahma praised him and also advised him not to relate his experience to Lord Vishnu. However, Narada did not heed his advice, and hastened to Vaikuntha, where Lord Vishnu dwells.

Lord Vishnu welcomed the sage and asked, “Sage, I have not seen you for a long time. Where have you been?” Sri Narada then told everything about his confrontation with Kama, and concluded saying, “Lord, it was all by Your grace that I accomplished this most difficult task, a task in which even great sages of yore had failed.” Lord Vishnu smiled and said, “Nothing is impossible for you, sage. Kama is no match for you!” But realizing that Narada had developed pride and was falling prey to spiritual delusion, Lord Vishnu decided to cure him of his malady.

Departing from Lord Vishnu, the sage resumed his normal habits of travelling through the various *lokas* (worlds). Soon he passed through a kingdom which he had never seen before, a kingdom in which all men and women were exceedingly handsome.

The ruler of that kingdom was King Sheelanidhi, and he had a beautiful daughter named Shrimati. The time had arrived for the lovely princess to choose a suitable husband for herself, and for that purpose her father had arranged a *swayamvara*. According to this method of marriage, many eligible princes were invited to present themselves before the princess, who would then evaluate each suitor and place her garland on the one she chose to be her husband.

Curious to find out more about this kingdom, Sri Narada went to the palace and introduced

himself to King Sheelanidhi. The king was delighted to have the company of the sage, and asked him to give blessings to his daughter and foretell her future.

When Narada looked into the astrological conditions of the princess and examined her palm, he realized that whoever married her would become the greatest person in the world. He thought within himself, “Why shouldn’t I become the blessed suitor of this glorious princess and attain supreme greatness?” However, hiding his feelings, he simply told the king that his daughter was endowed with excellent qualities, and then gave his blessings to her.

After seeing the princess, Narada could not rest in peace. He thought to himself, “How am I to marry her? The rigors of austerities have left my body thin and emaciated, and the princess would not be attracted to me. “Soon an idea entered his mind, and Narada invoked the presence of Lord Vishnu, his best friend and benefactor, who would surely help him secure the hand of the princess.

When Lord Vishnu appeared before him shining in His Divine Glory, Sage Narada said, “Lord, You are the fulfiller of all desires. I desire to marry Shrimati, the daughter of King Sheelanidhi. For this purpose I want to have a body just like Yours, because it is only through such beauty that I could secure the princess for myself.” Lord Vishnu smiled at the power of His own *Maya* (cosmic illusion), which had degraded the mind of the sage to such an extent, and said, “Sage, I will do all that is good for you.” Thus saying, Lord Vishnu disappeared.

In a moment, Narada looked at himself and found his rugged body had been transformed into the body of Lord Vishnu! With eager anticipation, he hastened his steps to the *swayamvara* hall where kings and princes from many different lands had assembled, each desiring to win the hand of Princess Shrimati. Narada then took a

foremost seat so that the Princess was sure to behold his beauty.

At the proper time, the Princess entered the hall with a garland in her hands, her eyes moving eagerly in all directions in order to choose a husband. As she looked towards Narada she immediately recoiled from him and turned away. Thinking that perhaps she had missed seeing him, Narada moved to another seat closer to the princess. But the princess again roamed away from him. Narada eagerly moved from one seat to another, and the princess continued to avoid him.

At that time there were two messengers of Lord Shiva (Shiva-ganas) who were amused at the strange behavior of the sage. Giggling with amusement, they whispered into his ears, "Sage, why don't you go and look at your face in that nearby pool of water?" Out of curiosity, Narada went over to the pool and looked at himself. To his horror and frustration he saw that he had the hideous face of a monkey. Though his body was beautiful, this hideous face had created such a strange contrast that he had become a ridiculous figure.

All his dreams of glory and greatness were shattered to pieces. His mind became so filled with wrath that he turned to Shiva's attendants and pronounced a curse: "You wretched souls! You who have laughed at my distress, may you incarnate as demons and suffer untold miseries at the hands of monkeys!"

Then, all of a sudden, a dazzling figure entered the hall. It was Lord Vishnu Himself, and the Princess readily offered the garland to Him. As the couple was departing in a celestial chariot, Lord Vishnu stopped before the sage and asked, "Sage, why are you so troubled? May I be of some help to you?" At this Narada became doubly incensed and said, "You, Lord Hari, since there is no one greater than Yourself who can constrain You, You continue to play tricks on Your devotees and delight at their misery. Today I am going to teach You a lesson. I am pronouncing a curse on You: May You incarnate as a human being, and may

You pine for the princess for whom You gave me a monkey face. Further, because of my monkey face, it is the monkeys who will be Your friends in this miserable predicament."

Lord Vishnu said with humility, "Sage, I accept your curse. I will incarnate as Rama. The messengers of Shiva, according to your curse, will incarnate as demons. This princess, who is none other than Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity, will incarnate as Sita. As Rama, I will experience untold sufferings because of My separation from Sita. I will befriend monkeys, who will form an army to help Me destroy the demons, whose spirits then will be restored to their former status of being Shiva's messengers. Then, once again, I will be united with Sita. All this is the Divine Plan which will come to pass."

At these words of Lord Vishnu, the inner eye of Narada was opened. As if awakened from a dream, Narada fell at the feet of Lord Vishnu, pleading, "Lord, render my curse void. I know I was deluded by *avidya* (ignorance). Please do not let this aspect of Your *Maya* delude my mind again. Lord, I seek refuge in You."

Lord Vishnu lifted up the sage and confronted him. He told Sri Narada that he should not grieve, that the stream of devotion would ever flow in his heart, and that he would not be overpowered by delusion anymore!

On the spiritual path, in order to overcome the deep-rooted *kleshas* (mental afflictions), an aspirant must bring about the perfect integration of his entire personality, a total internal transformation, not just superficial changes. As this process unfolds, some parts of the personality more readily become Divine, yet others remain unchanged like the face of a monkey! As long as there is a monkey face, Liberation, like Goddess Lakshmi in this story, cannot be won, but will continue to turn its face away.

Clearly, Narada's proud assertion that he had conquered Kama (passionate desire) was premature. Lord Vishnu readily saw how desire, anger, greed and pride still lingered in Narada's

mind, and how readily he would fall prey to delusion. So He used His *Maya* to bring all this impurity to the surface. His Divine scheme was not an act of cruelty, but a profoundly compassionate way of teaching His devotee that more austerity was needed.

Whenever there is suppressed evil in a person, the Divine plan works in mysterious ways to reveal what is hidden and remove it. When a surgeon learns that his patient has a tumor, he quickly applies his knife and cuts it out. Similarly, when God finds a spiritual tumor within your soul, it must be removed—no matter what it takes. Initially, as a result of this Divine surgery, you may feel humiliated. However, as you tide over your apparent adversity and see your weaknesses disappear, you will find yourself much stronger and more enriched than before. Whenever God seems to frustrate the desires of a devotee, behind the scenes is His loving hand, ever intent upon leading the devotee from darkness to light.

Destroying the Seeds of Afflictions

When a Yogi truly succeeds in freeing his mind from the burden of all afflictions, his intellect becomes intuitive. The intuitive intellect tears the veil of ignorance. All the seeds of afflictions are burned up. They can no longer envenom the mind. They can no longer obscure life's innermost expansion. They can no longer restrict and pervert the universal harmony that vibrates through all life. This is the burned-up state (*dagdha*) of afflictions which is to be acquired as the goal of all Yogic practices.

When this state has been reached, the Yogi enjoys life in its fullness. He expresses this fullness of experience through a mind pulsating with dynamic and creative thoughts towards the promotion of harmony and peace in the world. He manifests this abundant experience through actions that waft the fragrance of Enlightenment, and through external circumstances which exist to express the beauty and majesty of life.

Secrets of Purifying the Mind

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 for 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 convinced 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 will feel many emotions. The spiritual path 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 transformation. 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 continue to advance 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. Although it is pointless to struggle

viciously with mental impurities, meaningful self-effort should be employed to control and gradually eliminate them.

In this process, 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 escalates. 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* predominates, impurities in the mind become demoniac and gross. The *tamasic* form of an impurity is like tar that you cannot easily remove.

Or thought of in another way, *tamasic* impurities endure like lines chiselled 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 should 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 remain in your mind.

In Chapter 17 of Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna offers a deep insight into a Divine form of mental “austerity”—the promotion of a joyous and *satwic* mind by the practice of four powerful technique: “*manahprasadah, saumyatwam, maunam, atma-vinigraha*, and *bhava samshudhi*.”

Manah Prasadah (Joyousness)

The first aspect of austerity of the mind is *manahprasadah*—nurturing a joyful state of mind. People who have been accustomed to considering austerity as something harsh will be surprised to know that promoting joyousness can be thought of as austerity. In Yoga philosophy, austerity should not promote suffering, 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. Carefully watch your own mind. Develop the philosophy that the world is an expression of Divine creation. There is intelligence and a guiding purpose behind the world. There is no cause for worry, grief, dejection, and sorrow in your life.

Continuously focus on the positive things that you have acquired and accomplished. By remembering all the blessings God has given you, you will have so many reasons for being serene and cheerful. Most importantly, 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 maintain a negative state of mind, this generates negative impressions, and your mind will continue to be weighed down by those impressions. Due to the impressions of sadness

and sorrow, you will not be happy even when you find yourself in a wonderful situation, a situation you have been craving for a long time.

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 allow your mind to be negative. Let your spirit soar high and embrace joy.

Saumyatwam (Gentleness)

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. Allow your thoughts to remain gentle, composed, and detached. You will discover an amazing spiritual strength within yourself.

By reacting to external situations, you allow your mind to become agitated. An agitated mind creates negative impressions within your unconscious. Gradually a habit builds up. Your mind constantly reacts to things no matter how they are. 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 a mental habit of reacting to everything, then even the smallest pretense will do. 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 remains 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, your heart is not deeply affected. Similarly, be a spectator to your mind and its changes, knowing that faith in God will ultimately awaken true gentleness.

Maunam (Silence)

The next practice relating to the mind is *maunam* (silence). By observing your mind, you will notice that there is a constant influx of thoughts, so many in fact, that after a while it is as if a lively discussion is 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 so.

When you are engaged in various actions, watch your mind. Do not entertain conflicting thoughts or allow the mind to be agitated. Be like a swan. A swan settles on a lake, sports in the water, but the moment the sport is over, the swan shakes off the water particles and flies away. Much in the same manner, carry out your worldly responsibilities diligently, 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 (Mastery over the Senses)

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, brush that whisper aside. Assert your mastery over the senses and, thereby, mastery over every situation in life.