



November 2011 Contemplation Theme

Pure, Purity, Purification

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

Everyone wants pure water, pure food and a pure air quality but not many want a pure mind. You may even be actively working on having a pure body, whether from eating a special diet or doing cleansing treatments, but are you working on purifying your mind and emotions? If you've been tracking through the yamas with me, they have set the stage for your next step, conscious and choice-full purification.

Yamas

So far, I've introduced the five lifestyle practices (yamas) that yogify the way you deal with the world, including:

Stop harming anyone or anything (*ahimsa*)

Speak only truth (*satya*)

Quit appropriating things that aren't rightfully yours (*asteya*)

Extricate yourself from sexually-based identities and actions (*brahmacharya*)

Eliminate greed (*aparigraha*).

If you have begun even one of these practices, you have noticed that you are already becoming quite pure. Some of your friends may find this laughable, for cultivating such purity is not highly prized in today's world. This can even jeopardize friendships, if they are based on shared activities that don't interest you anymore. Some special relationships stick with you, no matter how you grow, but these people are rare, whether friends or family.

Niyamas

Your next yogic step is to consciously embark on a practice of purity. *Shaucha*, Sanskrit for "pure," is the first of the niyamas, yoga's lifestyle practices that are radically different from the yamas listed above, in several ways.

- 1) Instead of restraining yourself, you motivate yourself to do things that are above-and-beyond the standards that society demands. You actively do these things, though they are not yoga poses and breathing practices (as wonderful as they are). You actively engage in yogic practices that change your lifestyle.
- 2) Niyamas are about how you deal with yourself, while yamas are about how you deal with others.

The payoff is high, according to Patanjali, for shaucha will give you cheerful-mindedness, ease of focus, control of the senses and readiness for the experience of Self. Imagine waking up in the morning with a cheerful mind. Every morning. Without having to pump yourself up, you're simply and easily cheerful. This is the new set-point for your mind; it rests in cheerfulness. That's truly a lifestyle change!

Not to mention ease of focus, regardless of what you apply your mind to. Patanjali also promises you will have control of the senses, not because you are forcibly restraining and controlling them, but because it is a natural and easy outcome of the practice of purity. Yet, from yoga's perspective, the most important benefit is your readiness to experience your own divinity. That's the whole purpose of yoga, that you know your own divine Self.

Physical Purity

All this comes from practicing purity. If it's so easy, then all those people doing colon cleanses are close to enlightenment, right? Unfortunately not, according to yoga. There are steps in the process, and physical purifications are the baby-steps.

Yoga assures you that you don't need to do special diets or cleanses, as the practices of yoga will create a physical cleanse. You may have been through this already, thinking it was the flu or that you were going through a series of headaches. In *Svaroopa*® yoga we utilize a set of powerful physical practices to hit the "Reset Button" for your body: *Ujjayi Pranayama* (Yoga's Ocean Sounding Breath), *Vajrasana* (Digestion Pose, Firm Pose), and *Uddhiyana Bandha* (Stomach Lifts). While there are other physical practices, *shatkarmas* (six actions), these three will create a natural and non-forceful process that eliminates toxins and waste products from your body.

You may also have already found that this physical purification can sneak up on you, beginning with dietary changes that spontaneously occur, especially the longer you've been doing yoga. While some of this is *ahimsa*, not causing the death of animals for your food, some of it is the natural purity that is emerging from within you. Once you've experienced core opening, whether it's a physical spaciousness or it's a deep immersion into consciousness, you cannot go back to junking it up the way you used to. Even when you try, you don't enjoy it any more.

When you choose to consciously cooperate with this purification, you choose to eat a pure diet, wash your bedsheets more often, clean out the inside of your car and purse, and polish your shoes. You notice that the phone is grimy, clean out the refrigerator, and begin emptying out the closets and basement of that stuff you didn't remember you owned. You may want to declutter, perhaps a major project with which you need help. I've sent many yogis to professional organizers, and had everyone who did it come back and thank me profusely.

The more you clean, the more you find that needs cleaning. If you clean the windows, you notice the windowsills. If you clean the windowsills, you notice the screens. If you clean the screens, you notice the debris in the garden. If you clean the garden, you notice the rotting woodwork or peeling paint.

The same thing happens with your body. Patanjali promises the fruit of practicing physical purity, more like a warning, that you realize the body is disgusting, and you don't want to touch other people's bodies. I recognize this sounds strange at first, but I can help you understand it.

I remember the first time I changed a baby's diaper. It was disgusting! The first time I had to clean up my own vomit made me vomit again. If you've ever been enthusiastically hugged by someone who was dripping with sweat, you probably felt it was a mixed blessing. Every nurse I know tells about moving from the classroom to the sickroom and being disgusted. The media paints a pretty picture of the human body, especially when it's partly naked, but the reality is an entirely different story.

A classical teaching story explains it clearly. The teacher, nearing the end of his life, decided to test his three disciples, telling them to bring back the most disgusting thing they can find. The first yogi returns in a few minutes, bringing a dead rat. He's pleased with himself as he was the first to return, and his gift was even partially eaten and decomposing. The second disciple is gone all day, returning in the evening with a bucket of blood and intestines, which he collected at the butcher's shop. The smell was rank and the flies he brought with him buzzed around the room.

The third disciple returned midday on the next day, empty handed. He explained to his Guru, "I searched everywhere, but each time I saw something disgusting, I walked on and found something even more disgusting. Finally I ended up outside the city, so I slept under a tree. In the morning, I went to a secluded corner in the woods for my morning ablutions. I turned to look at the feces I left on the ground and thought – this is the most disgusting thing! But then it spoke to me, saying, 'I used to be beautiful wheat, golden corn, vibrant veggies and smooth creamy milk. Your body has made me into this.' So I have brought you my body, as it is the most disgusting thing I can find." Fortunately, disgust is only a step in the process of purification, but it is a real and necessary step. It frees you from the heady intoxication of worshipping the body, a dangerous direction that modern yoga world flirts with far too often. It frees you from the need to get hugs to feel better, or to be dependent on a massage or sexual encounter in order to relieve the ever-building inner tensions. More importantly, it makes you able to see even the disgusting as divine, for the one Reality, which we call Shiva, has become everything that exists, even the disgusting things. And it prepares you for the next step – mental purification. Unfortunately, this is even less popular.

You can begin the process of physical purification with the goal of increasing your beauty, improving your health or maintaining your vitality regardless of your age. Many yogis begin classes for these important reasons, yet they discover that yoga offers them more the deeper they go. However much you currently imagine yoga can give you, it promises more. And delivers on the promise!

Mental Purity

Yet, cheerful-mindedness is quite a promise. The millions of people who are working on becoming happier are not taking the yogic approach — most of them are trying to fulfill their greedy impulses, doing whatever it takes to get ahead of their competition (in business or in love), by maximizing their sexuality and possessions. They haven't considered purification because they haven't even started on the yamas.

I confess that I never liked the word "purification." To me, it implied that I was impure, which echoed with overtones familiar from religious training that labeled me as a sinner, impure from birth. Only after decades of yogic purification practices, which I didn't even realize I was doing as they were built into the practices my Guru gave me, did I realize how much I'd cleaned up my act. Only then did I understand how much I had needed purification.

Your essence is pure. You are holy, divine and real. You are a unique and individualized form of consciousness, only you don't live in that experience constantly. No matter what you do, or what you say or even think, nothing can diminish your essential purity, infinity and divinity. This is what yoga calls your Self. But your soul carries the weight of your karmas, even unto lifetimes. It isn't just your body and mind that need a clean-up program. Every *Svaroop*[®] yoga class is a soul level purification, due to the core opening effect. Your karmas are carried in your spine, so every time you open your spine, you clear karmas at all levels of your being.

Even more importantly, your experience of your own inner Self, which happens every time you open your spine, leaves an imprint on your mind and emotions. You probably know this already, because you notice that you're in a better mood after yoga, whether you come to a class or do your own home practice. Your mind and emotions carry the transformational imprint of your own Self, which is Consciousness-Itself.

Thus your mind becomes clear, which allows the light of your divinity to shine through. You shine with an inner radiance, and your mind bubbles over with a contagious cheerfulness that makes every moment in your life de-light-full. Your mind focuses easily because it isn't full of distracting and deadening thought. Your senses follow your direction, helping you experience and accomplish whatever you choose, and they serve you in your inward-turning perspective, that you may see, and know, and be — you. You are Shiva. Do more yoga.

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