



Svároopa® Vidya Ashram

September 2015 Contemplation:
Understanding Yoga — Understanding Life #9

Maintenance & Destruction

By Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

We Westerners are particularly good at creation and destruction, but overall we're not very good at maintenance. It is one thing to create a garden, but weeding and watering goes on and on and on... Maintenance is a big Western blind spot. Yet most of life is about maintenance.

Taking proper care of your tires can prolong tread life by as much as 50%. It takes only a few minutes per week to maintain proper inflation levels and check for unusual wear patterns. How often do you check your tires?

Maybe you have a burned out light bulb somewhere. If you were really good at maintenance you would have changed that light bulb. How many little things like that are there for you to maintain in your home?

We have proven statistically that we are really good at getting married (creation), and even good at ending a marriage (destruction), but we are not very good at staying married (maintenance).

How are you about maintaining your daily yoga practice? Do you do it every day? The dailyness is very important, to maintain the health of your body and mind, and more importantly to trigger profound experiences of your own Self.

All these examples point to the fact that creation is only the beginning of the process. In order to have the things that you've created continue to be in your life, you have to nurture, sustain, preserve, protect and maintain them. If you are not maintaining something, it is dissolving. For example, you have to actively do something to maintain your car. One of the worst things you do for a car is to let it sit for a long time. Even a city, if not maintained, will be overtaken by nature in 1-2 years.

Yoga says that everything that comes into existence will one day cease to exist; it has a life span just as you do. The things that you nurture, protect and sustain will continue to be in your life and the things that you don't, won't. This is about dharma (responsibility), but you can also understand that it also makes you really powerful. You are in charge of what is in your life by choosing what to keep in your life. If you want health you have to maintain your health. If you want pets you have to take care of them. If you want people in your life you have to maintain those relationships.

The math doesn't add up. It takes 9 months to produce a baby (creativity), but it takes 25 years to grow them up (maintenance). Then they leave you (destruction). It makes those 25 years become very precious. You know your average pet is only going to live 8-15 years and then they are gone. It is a very precious time.

Swami Nirmalananda describes it this way: "When I met Baba, I was very aware that he was older than me. I knew if I waited until my kids were grown and in college to go study with him, he might not be there anymore. So I went right away and I took my kids with me. I created that possibility in my life and I maintained it. Unfortunately I was right. After a few years he was gone. But I had those precious years with him and so did my kids."

The One Divine Reality is called by different names when performing different actions. You are, too. You might be called Mom by some people in your life, or Sis, Son, or even Mrs. Jones in your professional gig. You might have a Sanskrit name that you use only in yoga circles. You are still you, no matter what you are doing, but each action brings different qualities to the fore, so you have many names.

Vishnu is the name of the One Divine Reality in the act of maintaining. Vishnu is very popular in Western yoga because many chant leaders offering concerts and CDs focus on Vishnu chants. They practice bhakti yoga, the science of opening your heart to God. Most of their chants are to Ram or Krishna, ancient incarnations of Vishnu. These chants uplift and support your mood and your life because you are maintaining your relationship with Divine Consciousness, specifically the form of the Divine that is in charge of maintenance.

Shiva is the name of the One Divine Reality in the act of destruction. The name Shiva is ambiguous for it refers to Paramashiva, the whole Divine Reality, as well as that Reality as the destroyer — Shiva. Yogis turn to Shiva to destroy their limitations and set them free. Shiva is the one who grants liberation. While many yogis in the West are chanting to Vishnu for maintenance, most yogis in India are chanting to Shiva for freedom. This is one of the differences between the American and Indian practice.

You personally have the power to destroy things. Sometimes you are destroying things because their time has come to an end. Finished! Over! Done! Sometimes their time comes to an end but you still hang on; you are maintaining when you should be destroying. Sometimes you destroy things that weren't ready to be destroyed. You have the power of destruction.

You can create and maintain a garden and then decide you don't like it anymore, pull it out and replace it with a deck, a lawn or gravel. You can get rid of your car by totaling it, or maybe simply trade in an old car to get a new one.

Destruction comes about by many means. Destruction is hidden in all kinds of little corners in your life. Vidyadevi says, "I enjoy cleaning out my closet and throwing away or giving stuff away. It is destruction and it is tremendously freeing."

You even destroy relationships. Relationships do self-destruct if you don't maintain them or you can say, "I am done with this," and get out. You make choices in your life by what you maintain but also by what you destroy.

Are you are beginning to understand how powerful you are? You use these powers to shape your life and affect the world around you. Yet the Pratyabhj~nah.rdayam warns:

Tadparij~nyaane sva"saktibhir vyaamohitataa sa.msaritvam — sutra 12

To be an individual means being deluded by your own powers because of your ignorance of the true authorship of the five-fold actions.¹

Your delusion is that you consider your powers to be your own, but they are actually Shiva functioning as you. You are deluded by your own creativity, your own power of nurturance and your own power of destruction. You think you are the all-powerful one, but Shiva is the all-powerful one. When you are deluded by your own powers, you return to face the same situations for lifetime after lifetime.

The power you call "my creativity" is Divine Power flowing through you. The reason you love using it is because it tunes you into the Divine. For example, you say, "I have created this garden. I maintain and I nurture it. Now I am digging it up and destroying it." You are thinking, "I – I - I". "I" am the creator. "I" am the maintainer. "I" am the destroyer. But really you are a functionary of these Divine Powers. You have the ability to choose where to implement them, but as long as you think, "I" am doing this, you will be trapped in the doing. You will be trapped in the "I." Worst of all, you will be constantly and deeply unsatisfied because you are not experiencing the Divinity in your own impulses, decisions and actions.

When you recognize the inner source of these Divine Powers, you know that you are placing your hands, your heart, your mind and your time in service. Every action becomes a holy action. You lose the holiness when you think of it as "Me-me-me, mine-mine. I am doing this. I am such a creative person. I am such a caring person." No! God is caring and has become you in order to do His work.

When you recognize that Divine Powers are fueling your mundane actions the Pratyabhj~nah.rdayam says,

Tatparij~nyaane chittameva antarmukhee-bhaavena chetana padaa-dhyaarohaat chiti.h — sutra 13

Acquiring full knowledge of their true authorship, your mind turns within, rises to the plane of pure consciousness and becomes Consciousness.¹

Your own mind turns within and expands to the plane of pure consciousness — expanded mind, illumined mind. This is not only a promise, it is a practice. In the midst of life, while you experience and express your powers, simply recognize where they arise from. This propels you into expanded consciousness.

For example, when you recognize where that power is coming from while you are in the act of maintaining:

I am feeding myself I am watering this plant I am getting the oil changed in my car	=	This is a holy action, a divine action.
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Recognize where that power is coming from when you are in the act of destruction:

Interring the ashes of a departed family member Cutting down a tree Quitting a job	=	This is a sacred act, a way of serving in the world.
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When you recognize where these Divine Powers are arising from, what you choose do is not mundane any more. You used to think you were just washing the kitchen floor or sweeping the front steps, but your ability both to see the need and to take care of it is something more. It is truly liberating when you recognize the power of the Divine in the midst of every action you take. Swamiji means all of this when she says, "Do more yoga!"

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¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda