

10/1/13  
Verse 33

Knowledge, to know its own nature here,  
has become earth and the other elements;  
spiraling up, back and turning round,  
like a glowing twig it is ever turning.

Free translation:

As when a burning ember is twirled in a figure-eight movement  
and produces endless patterns, knowledge, in order to know its  
own potentials, modifies itself into endless eidetic modes, like  
earth and all such, and creates the phenomenal flux.

Nataraja Guru's:

Awareness, in order to find its proper state,  
Itself the earth and other manifestations became;  
In inverted state thus, now mounting, now changing over  
Like a circulating fire-faggot it keeps turning round.

Verse 33 presents an achingly beautiful visual image, and one with deep roots in human history. Somewhere on Earth a group of humans sits around a campfire in the dark, with showers of sparks roaring up and flaming out. As they merge into a deeply meditative state, mesmerized by the play of light, one picks up a stick that has an end in the fire and begins to whirl it around. Everyone is entranced as the glowing tip creates patterns in the blackness that seem to take on a life of their own. Their attention is captured by the afterimages, rather than their cause, their source, that continuously and playfully emits shape after shape.

The burning ember leaves a memorable mark in the air—actually in our mind's eye—that lingers awhile before disappearing without a trace. Such is our hour upon the stage, a tale told by an

idiot indeed, the airy nothing that takes on a local habitation and a name, as the Bard would have it.

In Nitya's commentary he translates the burning ember to the tip of a pen, in which case the afterimages can last for a very long time, as in the great writings of humanity's treasury of wisdom. In any case, the meaning is derived from what we make of the afterimages, combined with the infinitesimal actuality of their cause.

Each moment bursts from a point source, expands into all this, and then gradually fades away. But the source is "ever turning," producing experience after experience. It is the fleeting eternal Now, pursued by the Merry Pranksters of the game of life, yet our entire structural constitution is aimed at analyzing its aftermath, so we may get close but then some notable aspect catches our attention and we are hurled into the past again, boats against the current. Remaining in the creativity of the Now turns out to be supremely challenging.

Mick talked about his work in martial arts to discover the "one-point" at the center of the torso, the point of balance of the body. When grounded in the one-point, a martial artist (or dancer, or athlete) acts effortlessly in balance, but when he allows himself to be drawn out of it by reacting fearfully or otherwise prejudicially, his actions will be chaotic and unharmonious. It's an apt metaphor, and everyone saw the relation to the present verse. Many people do physical posturing practices to help with their balance. Still, I couldn't help recalling a paragraph from Verse 29:

We say, "Close your eyes and look deep into yourself." What depth—the stomach? Is that all the depth there is in us? Physically we are not very profound—most of us anyway—but when we look deep into ourselves spiritually we see a real depth which has no end. When we say "sublime heights" we are not thinking of the sky. Within our own spirit we see a sublimity which soars high. You can spread out the wings of your imagination and soar like a lark into that unknown

realm. So we need symbols like these only to gain the new dimensions of mind that we seek. Once you catch on they are no longer necessary.

We have arrived at another of the peak moments sprinkled throughout the Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction. Verse 34 likens the moving ember to our whole life, and Verse 35 describes the experience of oneness with the present moment, if we can penetrate through the swirling phantom sparks to discern their cause: like ten-thousand suns flooding our dim consciousness with such light that we are unable to attend to anything else. Our normal persona melts in the intensity, and we are transfigured: free to start anew, to construct a much better cloak to wear. Some—the Ramana Maharshis and Narayana Gurus—even succeed in remaining clothed forever after in only the suns themselves. They are “sun-clad,” and what people see of them is merely their own projection. But most of us wind up constructing a new persona out of an amalgam of our history and the new awareness, which is both interesting and perilous.

It’s interesting because we can begin to take in some of the richness of the universe, instead of simply viewing our retreaded imagery *about* it. The peril is that the ego is never far off, and loves nothing more than to conscript transcendent experiences to its personal glory. That’s why we have hitched our stars to a wise teacher who will help us avoid that all too familiar pitfall. Verses 36-41 teach how the ego can find its rightful place in spiritual life. Having an ego is fine, it just needs to be constrained to its proper role. Doing away with the ego (the #1 spiritual cliché) is fraught with grave danger. Narayana Guru says we should tame it, not kill it.

Synchronicity continues apace. Just by “accident” I was sent an article this week on a new geometry that radically simplifies quantum mechanics:

<https://www.simonsfoundation.org/quanta/20130917-a-jewel-at-the-heart-of-quantum-physics/> . One of its major implications is that time and space, among other things, are not real, but are

merely constructs we have devised to make sense of the welter of mystery in which we find ourselves. Nitya reminds us here that dedicated souls have known that all along:

In our study of *Atmopadesa Satakam*, we have learned how to go beyond time, space, names and forms. When considered from this perspective, the Self is beginningless and endless. It is not confined to any form or name. In spite of having no special attributes, every attribute that we can give to conscious life is part and parcel of it.

Nitya's commentary also anticipates the discovery, some fifteen years later, of mirror neurons, which seems to confirm the idea that the brain models its selected input in a kind of internal theater. Input per se is like a vast cloud of static, but the dear old brain converts the static into a coherent picture which makes sense to us. Nitya writes:

All our philosophy, history, poetry and even art have passed through the tip of a pen. Like that, this whole universe which we see, with all its vastness, is the composition and organization coming from our own individual consciousness. No one else sees for us or knows for us. Even what are considered to be the experiences of other people have to be recycled and made our own before we can truly know them.

It turns out that this is precisely how our brain works. It's not a metaphor. We really do model the world in our mind's eye, and that's what our conscious mind perceives, not the original. The keen insights of contemplative rishis are at long last being confirmed by the tool-assisted observations of neuroscientists. In case you've missed it, I'll add some background on mirror neurons in Part III.

The key implication of mirror neurons for a spiritual aspirant is that our prejudices and opinions pervert the purity of the model

we make of reality. We shape our imagery according to our learned limitations. Unless we subtract our personal obsessions from the models we construct, we are seeing what we believe rather than what actually is. The reason we perform self-examination is to root out these veiling tendencies so we can produce a more accurate model and thereby see more clearly. This is the opposite of religion, or any kind of dogmatism for that matter, where belief is the filter that is more or less intentionally erected to screen out anything that doesn't match our petty preferences. The ego wants very badly to believe its perversions are just the way things are, but Narayana Guru has convinced us (if we didn't suspect it before) that the ego is wrong about this, and we have to reform ourselves in order to recover some degree of honesty. And we can't do it alone. We need help.

The theory is that we increase our chances of a breakthrough when we pare away our psychological blindnesses, and even without a breakthrough we are still much better off.

Again, this is a preeminently important concept, and much will be made of it in the upcoming verses. We may believe we are simply screening out undesirable elements of the environment, but we are actually constraining ourself, condemning ourself to a limited and, yes! false interpretation of reality. This course is for those who won't permit themselves to accept falsehood for truth.

As the class quieted down and prepared for a closing meditation, there was universal agreement that this seemingly simple verse packed a tremendous impact. It implies that we can deconstruct our false self and rebuild it in a much healthier way. If we are the universe's way of seeing itself, shouldn't we dedicate ourselves to that high ideal? That turns out to be the best contribution we can make to the world we live in. It recalls my favorite quote from Teilhard de Chardin, "The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen." And despite the newfound fatalism of modern science,

we can evolve here and now—we are the agents of our own evolution. Let's bow out with Nitya's beautiful closing words:

This is one of the greatest miracles of life, that the very creator whom we praise for having made all this universe is still sitting here and creating the very nucleus of our own being. Your nucleus and the nucleus of the universe are not two. When you attain that identity in every moment of your daily life, you become the centerpiece of the universe; your actions, your ideas and your thoughts become the very thoughts, ideas and variegations in the composition of your universe. This brings you to an ultimate identity with the creating faculty. You are at once the Absolute and the very many relatives within it. You are the one unconditional Being who is also causing the many conditional states.

## Part II

A particularly excellent chapter of *Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:*

That which shines by itself in the dark is the Self. It is pure knowledge. To the seed lying asleep in the earth it whispers, "Wake up, there is water, salt and nitrogen in the earth, enjoy them. Stretch your roots, there is a feast of abundance around you. Oh, sprout, break the shell, pierce through the earth and come out into the open sky. Feel the warmth and glory of the sun that comes day after day, he is the nourisher of all life. You can breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. Cook your food in your leaves in the sunlight by processing the carbon dioxide. Like magic out of nowhere, you can increase your girth. You can even open energy banks in the chlorophyll of the leaves, both for you and for other living creatures. Thus, you can green the earth and be the handmaid of Mother Nature to feed everyone."

When two members of the human species, a male and a female, bring their love to consummation and millions of sperms

run helter-skelter, this knowledge stealthily opens the door of a single ovum and leads into it a chosen sperm to begin the magical growth of an organism. Even the man and the woman, blinded by their orgasmic ecstasy, have not the least idea of this grand manipulator who is causing the beginning of a new beginning in a dark cell, nurtured in a dark womb. Like a mathematical genius, the same knowledge computerizes the duplication and replication of the cell with such ingenuity and skill that out of an amorphous mucus emerges an ugly-looking fetus which will become a blue-eyed or dark-eyed child soon to be as dear to its parents as a priceless treasure.

The same knowledge causes a whirl in itself, turns with great speed and produces a vortex. Lo, it has become a galaxy of countless stars! Like restless eels, it swirls in the depth of the ocean as hot and cold currents and provides the earth with a temperate atmosphere that nurtures life.

The same knowledge causes strange irritations in the synapses of the brain so that a man picks up his pen and writes an epic like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of Homer or *The Mahabharata* of Vyasa. When it pleases it can create a Kalidasa or a Shakespeare without the “paraphernalia” of a university. It has its own time schedule to reveal scientific truths without making the error of bringing about an Einstein before a Galileo. This knowledge puts into the human brain mathematical equations which can guide the dexterity of human hands into creating devices that can go from the earth not only to the planets of the solar system, but also wander among the stars. It can take eternity to eternity and suddenly smash everything as if nothing had ever occurred.

Think of this vast universe with its starry heavens and the beautiful earth and no human eyes to see it with, no mind to appreciate its enormity and beauty; what a terrible waste it would be! A world without space and time, mass and energy, colour and sound, fragrance and taste, and without the coordination which makes chaos into cosmos!

In short, there is only knowledge. That is the Self. That is the Oversoul. That is God. That is Goodness. That is Truth. I am that. I am the eye of the world. Only *is* is.

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Nataraja Guru's commentary:

ALL things as seen manifested are phenomenological events in consciousness. The phenomena themselves have a double origin psychically or physically. In terms of unitive awareness the duality is reduced into vertical self-awareness instead of being conceived as two distinct functions in consciousness. Reflexive Self-knowledge is what, as neutral awareness which is neither subjective nor objective, witnesses from a central position both the events called perceptions as well as conceptions. The a priori and the a posteriori thinking processes are events or chains of events in pure contemplative consciousness which are capable of envisaging them both as part of one single process.

If two opposite forces act on a particle of which the negative one is considered as the cause of the positive one, we are able to imagine, under such conditions, a circulation of thoughts in consciousness made up of a chain of cause-effect links. The cause-effect links are monadic units of thought which could be spoken of as sparks of light. Pushing the analogy further, it would not be too far-fetched even to think of this fire as circulating inasmuch as there is actually, as experienced by the contemplative, a rising, a changing-over and a fall of thought-elements in keeping with a certain inner order or law of thought in a living being. The pulsations of thought are not static but dynamic and circulate within the amplitude of two poles, one belonging to 'matter' and the other belonging to 'mind'.



The 'alata' (faggot of fire circulated) analogy for the phenomenological chain of events in consciousness, is a very time-honoured one in Vedantic literature, and brings the pulsations of thought-processes to somewhat the same picture as is implicit in modern quantum mechanics. Poets have compared the pulsations of the mind to the fire-fly, but the circulating fire-faggot is better in that the successive positions of the luminous spark trace a continuous line instead of an intermittent one. The mind has what Bergson would call a 'cinematographic action' which makes discontinuous events seem continuous. The chain of events could be treated as 'kshanika' (momentary), repeated instant after instant, or, with the help of the mind, as a continuous unbroken process. The two ways are treated complementarily by the Guru here.

The reference to the 'inversion' here is nothing more than a corollary or consequence of the methodology which gives primacy to cause rather than effect. The subtle inversion is implicit in the 'sad-karana-vada' which is part of the correct methodology of Advaita Vedanta when understood as a science and not merely as speculative metaphysical lore. (16)

(16) Bergson's methodology envisages this 'double correction' principle, as we have explained at length in our later work, 'An Integrated Science of the Absolute'.

### Part III

John brought up an important dilemma:

But that's the hardest thing in the world - staying in the creative moment, the enlightened moment, the total loving moment. I just can't find the button in my head to push or a knob to turn like in a refrigerator to keep the setting where I want it. Alas, I'm not a machine. I suppose that the train my mind I have to commit to

being something like a machine where I can turn on and stay turned on or off, as the case may be?

My response:

Should you turn yourself into a programmed machine? Not at all! In fact, quite the reverse! Although we have unbelievably excellent machinery at our disposal, being is not a product of any machinery--the machinery is rather the outcome of being: being projected into actuality. We can repair and refine our machinery so as to disrupt beingness less, and it's a delightful ongoing creative project in its own right, but the real cure for being dissatisfied is to bathe in being, to relax and let go into it. When we do that it puts us in touch with our core creativity, which tends to be eminently satisfying. And the more we familiarize ourselves with it, the longer we can stay there. We only lament its transience when we're on the outside, cut off from our true being.

The course of That Alone is intended to awaken our innate enthusiasm, which acts as a natural and effortless "turn-on button" if you will. Unlike many spiritual paths with their repetitive techniques, it is not at all mechanical. The minute we try to force or manhandle our enthusiasm, it becomes something else entirely: essentially an albatross, an excess burden. Nitya succinctly summarizes our predicament here: "Being ceases precisely when a subject and its objects arise." He is presenting an excellent, dynamic conception of being so that we might dare to take a break from subject/object dualism for a moment. While only one in a billion enters permanently into being, the rest of us manage an occasional nibble, and incorporate the insights derived from it into our everyday lives. If what we experience doesn't quell the angst that permeates ordinary adult consciousness, it means we haven't really tasted anything. It's all too easy to *imagine* we've nibbled, and leave it at that. In fact, it's a quintessentially human trait. Narayana Guru is trying to disenchant us with our imaginary

experiences, with all their mechanical explanations, and return us into the heart of genuine aliveness.

We should keep in mind that many repetitive techniques are stupefying to the mind, but that in itself is seldom helpful, either. Self-hypnosis is yet another subject/object program. The aim is to shed all programs and simply be fully present.

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Here are some highlights from *Mirror, Mirror*, an article in Proto Magazine (Mass. General Hospital) Fall 2008, by Anita Slomski:

[It was discovered in 1992 that} one neuron [launches] electrochemical impulses for both perception and action. The existence of such a multipurpose brain cell, which came to be known as a mirror neuron, ultimately led to a hypothesis that would explain why, for example, watching a newscast of a sobbing woman walking through the rubble of her former home may move us to tears. Or how the sight of a spider crawling on someone's shoulder can cause an involuntary shudder, or why, perched on the edge of our seats at a soccer match, our adrenaline and emotions may surge as if we were the ones on the field...

According to the mirror neuron hypothesis, it's only when we mirror or imitate people's actions or expressions in our mind's eye that we can understand their intentions and recognize and respond to their feelings.

"This is a major shift in how we think about the human condition and the human brain," says neurologist Marco Iacoboni, director of the Transcranial Magnetic Simulation Laboratory at the Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center of the University of California, Los Angeles, and author of *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect With Others*. "Mirror neurons show that we are evolutionarily designed to be deeply connected with one another."

Even though, at this stage, it's difficult to envision where this research will lead, its ultimate impact could be huge. "I predict the mirror neurons will do for psychology what DNA did for biology," says Vilanayur S. Ramachandran, director of the Center for Brain and Cognition and professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of California, San Diego.

The Parma group's first human studies, in the mid-1990s, confirmed that both observing and making the action appeared to activate a single neural circuit, and by 1999, three years after the first human mirror neuron study was published, evidence supporting the reality of these multitasking brain cells in people had become compelling, and a wave of new research was launched.

[Later] researchers found that participants activated the same areas of the brain whether they were observing emotions or experiencing them.

Interestingly, the more emphatic an individual is, the more robustly mirror neurons discharge.

As this research unfolds, many scientists are excited to think they've found the neural mechanisms that explain such behaviors as empathy and social perspicacity. The implications could be profound. "Our survival today depends on whether we can cope effectively with our social environment and stay in good relationships," [one researcher] says. "And that requires accurately perceiving the behavior and intentions of others."

Learning how mirror neurons help us make those social connections could, in turn, change our image of ourselves as a species. "The discovery of mirror neurons shows we are wired for empathy, which turns upside down the idea that our biology makes us bad—that individualism and self-preservation are at our core and we only become social animals through our higher intellect,"

says Iacoboni. “Our biology, in fact, is what makes us good, caring individuals.”

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Here’s Jake’s take:

In this verse, the Guru and Nitya examine the notion of existential beginnings and endings. As Nitya opens his commentary, he presents the two principle theories that seem to occupy general awareness: a metaphoric description and a more literal one. For the former, Nitya cites *Genesis* in which Yahweh creates all manifestation in order to know himself and eliminate his loneliness. On other hand are present day materialists busily crafting a “scientific” description of the same process by way of the Big Bang Theory (using words that are always by definition metaphors for the thing.) The difference between these two views appears to be important in our culture today even though the similarities are far more basic. Both follow a linear trajectory. There is a beginning and an end in both illustrations, and each follows a story line that moves through time (our mind’s construction) and follows an evolutionary process along the way. The squabble between the two, it seems to me, is in the minutia. On the one side is a spiritual journey through manifestation while on the other is that same journey accounted for in terms of material “progress.” In either case, our physical incarnation is a one-time affair, the beginning and ending are recognizable events, and the rest is mystery.

American historiography offers a model of this general pattern. Cotton Mather’s 1702 *Magnalia Christi Americana (The Ecclesiastical History of New England)* constitutes the very first American history put to paper and placed the then-forming nation in the Christian God’s general design—from *Genesis* to *Revelation*. Later historians—such as Whigs (nation-building myths trumpeted), Progressives, or the Post-Moderns (gender,

class, etc.)—offered alternative models through the ensuing decades and centuries.

Whichever theme one chooses to follow or develop, narrative history contains a story line, either explicitly or implicitly presented that conforms to time as we have created it for our getting by in a world of becoming and maximizing our physical life spans. The Death's head smiles in at the banquet always, so the efforts to keep at bay all that will not conform to the "story" requires enormous energy and attention. Those to be won over are essentially on the same page, endeavoring to find ultimate meaning for beginning-less and endless manifestation—a fish searching for the water it lives in while simultaneously convinced it is a quality of the fish.

This general condition, this way of knowing the world by turning outward, applying names to forms, following cause and effect, and so on, constitutes our natural procedure in dealing with the world of necessity. And it does work—ask anyone driving a car or using a computer. We begin life by immediately developing skills for this kind of knowing because our survival here depends on our level of expertise, and the education industry dedicates itself to developing those skills so vital for a functioning society. In a sense, we almost always become a victim of our own success by honing our skills so keenly in this *knowing*; but *being* is quite different: "When we look outward and perceive it is called *knowing*. When we turn inward, though, it is *not knowing*. As we are conditioned to knowing things we have a feeling that realization must be a similar kind of knowing, but it is not. . . . *Being* ceases precisely when a subject and its objects arise" (p. 232).

Our conscious awareness in a world of necessity represents one isolated domain of our totality of consciousness, which we change throughout the day from an absolute darkness in deep dreamless sleep to subjective dream fantasies to the subject-object "facts" of a manifest world. We continuously alternate, says Nitya, and at the core is our not knowing in the way we have so

carefully trained ourselves. It is the absolute darkness of being, not knowing, that bursts forth the Absolute in its discrete forms for our senses to notice. The knowing of the not knowing or being, so to speak, is made possible through this continuously creative process at work both within and without. The creator of myth and mystery is none other than the Absolute spark within us shared by all in the manifest world through the senses, which, as Nitya points out, are not the province of our isolated egos but mirror the process of beginning-less and endless creativity in which we and the Absolute are not two, a principle shared by at least one distinguished member of the scientific community:

Suppose you are sitting on a bench beside a path in high mountain country. . . . And facing you, soaring up from the depths of the valley, is the mighty, glacier-tipped peak, its smooth snowfields and hard-edged rock-faces touched at this moment with soft rose-colour [sic] by the last rays of the departing sun, all marvelously sharp against the clear, pale, transparent blue of the sky. . . .

What is it that called you suddenly out of nothingness to enjoy for a brief while a spectacle which remains quite indifferent to you? . . . A hundred years ago, perhaps another man sat on this spot; like you he gazed with awe and yearning in his heart at the dying light of the glaciers. Like you he was begotten of man and born of woman. He felt pain and brief joy as you do. Was he someone else? Was it not you yourself? What is this Self of yours? What was the necessary condition for making the thing conceived this time into *you*, just *you* and not someone else? What clearly intelligible *scientific* meaning can this “someone” really have? If she who is now your mother had cohabitated with someone else and had a son by him, and your father had done likewise, would *you* have come to be? Or were you living in them, and in your father’s father . . . thousands of years ago? And even if this is so, why

are you not your brother, why is your brother not you, and why are you not one of your distant cousins? What justifies you in obstinately discovering this difference—when objectively what is there is the same? (Erwin Schrodinger, *My View of the World*, pp. 20-21.

## Part IV

Sujit is working on some slide shows to present essential concepts of Vedanta (including Atmo) in a newer format. Here's the latest: <http://www.slideshare.net/NPHIL/the-what-of-vedanta> .

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Susan has been kind enough to compensate for her absence from class with a thoughtful report:

Last week, I had the fortunate experience of spending a few days in the wild and fast-paced world of New York City. I felt as though I was a plodding turtle in that city of hares. Along with the pace, I was awed by the vast diversity — skin color, culture, language, facial expressions, hair dos, and all the ways people present themselves in the world. How beautiful to see that we can all coexist and in such close quarters. As I walked around the city, I pondered the happiness and hardship that humans face and feel. Some have much opportunity and run with it, some have no opportunity and find the light in the darkest of places, some have no opportunity and can't find any light anywhere. And then there are also those who can't find any light, despite having vast opportunity. It is a wonder to see all the people and the possibilities and also sad to glimpse the hardships. Riding the subways, crowded with people I would sometimes close my eyes and find that glimmer of light that is the spark of my being and the light of all. it was a tiny meditation in the middle of a small sea of humanity. When my eyes were open, it appeared that the other



people and I were separate entities, each with our own lives, hopes, dreams, challenges. When I closed my eyes, I could feel how we were all one. It reminded me of that bliss of meditating before and after Gurukula class and how easy it is to feel the connection, the oneness by focusing inward.

Related to all this and to our study of Atmo 33 is a wonderful passage from *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts:

“As is so often the way, what we have suppressed and overlooked is something startlingly obvious. The difficulty is that it is so obvious and basic that one can hardly find the words for it. The Germans call it a *Hintergedanke*, an apprehension lying tacitly in the back of our minds which we cannot easily admit, even to ourselves. The sensation of “I” as a lonely and isolated center of being is so powerful and commonsensical, and so fundamental to our modes of speech and thought, to our laws and social institutions, that we cannot experience selfhood except as something superficial in the scheme of the universe. I seem to be a brief light that flashes but once in all the aeons of time—a rare, complicated, and all-too-delicate organism on the fringe of biological evolution, where the wave of life bursts into individual, sparkling, and multicolored drops that gleam for a moment only to vanish forever. Under such conditioning it seems impossible and even absurd to realize that myself does not reside in the drop alone, but in the whole surge of energy which ranges from the galaxies to the nuclear fields in my body. At this level of existence “I” am immeasurably old; my forms are infinite and their comings and goings are simply the pulses or vibrations of a single and eternal flow of energy.

“The difficulty in realizing this to be so is that conceptual thinking cannot grasp it. It is as if the eyes were trying to look at themselves directly, or as if one were trying to describe the color of a mirror in

terms of colors reflected in the mirror. Just as sight is something more than all things seen, the foundation or “ground” of our existence and our awareness cannot be understood in terms of things that are known. We are forced, therefore, to speak of it through myth—that is, through special metaphors, analogies, and images which say what it is like as distinct from what it is. At one extreme of its meaning, “myth” is fable, falsehood, or superstition. But at another, “myth” is a useful and fruitful image by which we make sense of life in somewhat the same way that we can explain electrical forces by comparing them with the behavior of water or air. Yet “myth,” in this second sense, is not to be taken literally, just as electricity is not to be confused with air or water. Thus in using myth one must take care not to confuse image with fact, which would be like climbing up the signpost instead of following the road.”

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Perusing *Love and Blessings*, I came across Nitya’s moment of conversion that parallels the one of my own that I mentioned in class:

Nataraja Guru was waiting for his sixtieth birthday to officially adopt sannyasa even though he had been living as a sannyasi all his life. Around this time the high court of Kerala drew up a scheme for the Shivagiri Mutt to be managed by a trust. This, in effect, brought an end to the guru-disciple hierarchy there. Nataraja Guru considered the move contrary to Narayana Guru’s Will and Testament. It was to continue that spirit that the guru-disciple hierarchy was instituted in the Gurukula.

Guru deeply respected the lineages of teachers found in a number of the world’s religions. His intention was to institute a lineage of gurus with himself as the model disciple of Narayana Guru and with the line to be continued by John Spiers, Mangalananda Swami and me. He also wanted to make the

Gurukula more independent, with a clear-cut rejection of the other institutions named after Narayana Guru. Several such institutions seemed to him to be doing no justice to the Guru's name, only using it for some sort of reflected glory and sometimes taking advantage of it in a very inappropriate manner.

We started publishing an English newsletter called The Gurukula Bulletin, whose tone was highly critical of the other major organizations bearing Narayana Guru's name. Being young and egoistic, I took the criticism to another degree of exaggeration, and in all my speeches I was vehement in denouncing the lifestyle of the people connected with those organizations.

When Guru saw that I was transgressing all limits of dignified criticism, he corrected me. He told me whenever I was facing people, rather than hurling angry shouts at them I should visualize only the Guru or God in my heart, and all my speech should be like a supplication directed to this image within. In public I had always spoken like an angry Marxist. Now that style of speech was to be substituted with a more contemplative and lyrical tone. This new attitude led to a wholesale change in my behavior, and before long brought me more friends and fewer enemies. (164)