1/13/15
Verse 89

Existing in knowledge, as the being of non-being,
countless sparks arise, causing the appearance of the world;
so, apart from knowledge there is not another thing;
thus one should know; this knowledge bestows the state of oneness.

Free translation:

From knowledge countless sparks emerge that are both real and unreal. The conglomeration of them appears as the universe. The understanding that nothing can be other than knowledge will give it homogeneity.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

As out of knowledge sparks innumerable arise,
Asserting the being of non-being to make the world appear,
Know that outside of knowledge not a thing exists;
Such knowledge global awareness shall yield.

Verse 89 continues and clarifies the assertions from the previous verse. Narayana Guru uses the analogy of a fire emitting thousands of sparks. While each spark has its own unique attraction, they all are more or less interrelated and follow similar but unique courses. In Nitya's description:

> Here Narayana Guru is giving us a vision of truth as he sees it. From knowledge innumerable offshoots spring forth, like sparks leaping from a campfire. They burst out, fly up and disappear. What he means by knowledge is identical with the Self, God, the Absolute or whatever name you prefer to give it. This is related by analogy to the fire, the one common source from which all sparks come. What we see here as the world is nothing more than the continuous rising up

of sparks from a common source. The sparks can be of different magnitude and brightness, and some may remain for a long time while others have but a brief existence, but ultimately they all disappear.

In the curious way that life and art are interrelated, Deb and I have been looking at old slides this past week. We discovered a group of experiments I did with Steve Weckel back in the early 1970s, time-lapse photos of a nighttime campfire he was sitting next to. He was stirring the fire with a stick that was out of sight in the darkness, so there are zillions of sparks as streaks in the picture, with his classical features almost like a vaguely seen deity barely visible to the side. I'm sorry I don't have a digital copy yet to show you. The shape of the streaks taken all together not only make a "world" of their own, they draw the connection of Verse 89 with 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.

Here too, "What [Narayana Guru] means by knowledge is identical with the Self, God, the Absolute or whatever name you prefer to give it." It is the knowledge that is the source of all.

In a way, this earlier verse gives the horizontal extrapolation of the sparks or burning embers, while in the present one they are vertical, shooting up to wink out in the sky, with only the laws of physics to manipulate their course. In Verse 33, a sentient agent is whirling the glowing lights around with conscious intent, more like the way we live our daily lives. Amazingly, among the old slides was another picture where I took a time-lapse photo of a flashlight (torch) beam and "drew" a picture with it. The result is a solid, fixed image.

Prabu wondered about the connection with the previous verse, how the gunas are related, for instance. The bright initial glow is the sattvic part of the continuum, the burning transition from bright to dark is rajasic, and the unburnable waste products that result are tamasic. The idea is that as contemplatives grounded in saccidananda, we are entranced by the complete rotation, whereas if we are stuck in the gunas we will be attracted to the glow and disappointed when it dies out. We are being taught to step back and see the entire ensemble in context, rather than being caught up in bits and pieces of it.

The essential point is that our interpretation of the meaning of the sparks lends them their significance. This can either be steady if we have a contemplative eye, or ever changing if we remain fixed on surface details. Nitya offered his own analogy that is especially helpful:

> What is the significance of the glow in this analogy?
>
> When we look at a book we see many tiny ink marks on the pages. If the book is in some language we can't read, like Chinese, all we see are beautiful forms and patterns. However, the so-called beautiful patterns are our projection. All that's really there is carbon molecules adhering to white paper. If the book is in a language we know we may never notice the ink at all. As soon as we look at it, each formation presents a familiar notion to articulate a sound. We start reading the instant we look at it. Each word flashes and bursts in our mind as a meaning. There are millions of sparks on the page which all come and burst into meaning in us. It is this meaning that bursts from the seemingly inert matter into the brilliance of significance that is being represented by the glow of sparks in the Guru's analogy.

This idea reminded me of the fictional character Tarzan, a feral English aristocrat baby raised by great apes in the African jungle. When he first encountered a book in an abandoned hut, he thought the ink marks were lots of little bugs squashed on the paper. And that's exactly right: in themselves the marks are meaningless.

When we learn to read, we bring the meaning with us, and transform the bugs into significant symbols. Without an advanced brain to bring them to life, they remain only carbon dust on dried tree pulp.

This demonstrates the meaning of meaning, so to speak. Meaning is meaningful, and most of what we think about a situation is what we bring to it. This means we can have a hand in the meaning we make of anything and everything. Things don't carry meaning of their own accord: we add it. Pity the poor scientist who believes that meaning should therefore be stripped out of everything, as if that would reveal things in their true light. Not at all! Everything is a composite of existence, awareness and meaning, of sat, chit and ananda, taken together. Isolating existence from the rest kills the joy and darkens the awareness.

We can take the example of a musical piece that we particularly love, while knowing full well that for certain other people it is utterly repulsive. The music is the same; only the reaction varies. Yet we are easily capable of learning to love something we don't like if we have sufficient motivation. The reverse is also true.

That Alone is like that too. We in the class have all come to revere it as a beacon of liberation, but for most people it looks like a way-too-big book they would much rather leave on the shelf. How many sparks of joy do our own prejudices steer us away from, without even a twinge of regret?

Jan rightly felt this verse was a call to live in joy, to be in touch with our own best feelings and keep them alive to share with others as a seed of the Absolute. She told a story of when she was working as a lawyer and feeling stifled. One day after work when she went out to the lot to get her car, she exchanged a few words with the parking attendant. It was really nothing, and yet it touched her more than she could have imagined. It was only a small exchange, but it felt great! She realized that she could find joy in the most unlikely places. Her happiness wasn't dependent on special circumstances. Ever since then she has allowed herself to

be open to the possibility of joy wherever she was. Deb agreed that in every spark a measure of joy is present.

Since in the Gurukula we don't evangelize, I asked Jan how she thought we could share our joy with others. She answered without a moment's hesitation that we have to love ourself first, and if you're not seeing the spark of joy in your own life, work on that. Plus, we should honor the sparks that others cherish, and not maintain a narrow attitude about what is valuable.

That idea sparked Deb to think of Peter O., who is a master photographer in our midst. He has a knack for capturing his subjects with no trace of self-consciousness. Deb said how most of us have fixed ideas of what we want from a photo, and by trying to make it happen we disrupt it from ever happening. In consequence, all our pictures are slathered with self-consciousness. She mentioned a new series posted by Peter of Indian children, and those of you who are his Facebook friends can check them out. I can attest that all of Peter's photos (at least those he displays) are gems in which a spiritual magnificence radiates from the portrait. The most unprepossessing candidates are seen to be sparks of the Absolute exploding into meaning. As I understand it, Peter waits without expectation for the exact right moment to click the shutter. Some day perhaps he will elaborate how he does it, but even that might be disruptive of the purity of the process.

The idea of patiently waiting for just the right moment prompted me to bring out a favorite quote from Minor White, in his amazing book of pictures and wise epithets titled *Mirrors Messages Manifestations:* "No matter how slow the film, Spirit always stands still long enough for the photographer It has chosen."

Prabu added a humorous thought, that Napoleon always knew he was going to be depicted in history, so he invariably acted like a puppet, always working hard to choreograph his actions. This is not so unlike the rest of us, only more obvious. When we choreograph what we do we lose the spark of spontaneity. With That Alone we are learning to hold our intentions in abeyance so

the spirit of the moment can infuse us with its innate joy. Deb summed this up very nicely: “every experience helps get you outside the boundaries of yourself.” John added, “then you are more open to any experience that comes along.” Moni’s advice was to not try to possess the moment, but just let it come to you.

Scotty, with his artistic temperament, grew up in a tough part of town where fighting was the preferred form of group interaction. Yet he followed his heart’s call, and gradually his enemies became friends. He would rather paint than punch any day. The new friendships only happened when his enemies were away from their peers, else they wouldn’t have dared to vary the routine. He noted how his attitude was contagious and over time had a positive impact on his neighborhood.

Deb mused about how we often feel like we have to decide everything, and there is plenty of social and academic pressure to do so. The attitude is that everything is up to us. It produces a lot of anxiety. In 1974 she was with Nitya at Sonoma State College in California, and she was trying to make up her mind whether to live in the city or the country. She was a young adult and felt it was about time to choose her life’s trajectory. She asked Nitya about her dilemma: she was happy staying out in the country, but she was also happy whenever she went into the city. What should she do? Nitya eyed her with his piercing, puckish look. Then he laughed, and told her that it meant she was happy, so wherever she went would be okay. The happiness didn’t come from the place she was in, it was inside her. For Deb it was an aha! moment: we bring our state of mind along wherever we happen to be. The decision was really whether she should be happy or not. A lot of peer pressure exists to convince us that being happy is wrongheaded. Only unhappiness is legitimate. And we frequently fall for it.

It’s been a long time since we studied Verse 20, so let me reprint a favorite bit from there. Nitya writes:

> When I was a student, I felt very miserable. The whole college situation seemed meaningless, so I wrote a letter to my principal

stating I was going away. He sent back a note asking me to come and see him before I left. When I went to his office, he invited me to lunch with his wife and him. He said "It's a fine thing that you want to leave on finding that this place is not meaningful to you anymore. That's very good. But tell me, when you go away, are you going to take your mind with you also, or are you going to leave that here?"

"Surely I take my mind with me wherever I go."

"That means you'll be taking the same sorrow, sadness, suspicion, doubts, misery, everything with you. It will be the same in the place where you go because you are taking all this with you. If you can leave your mind here and run away from it, fine."

This is so true. I get letters almost every day from people who say that they want to get away, to run away. Go away where? We think all the misery is because we are with certain people and certain situations. When we move away it will again be a wonderful world. If you can create a wonderful world in another place, you can create it where you are now, too.

Despite Nitya's eloquent teaching, some confusion remains over maya and reality versus unreality. In the Vedantic conception, whatever does not persist is unreal, no matter how real it seems sitting there in front of you. Temporary reality is considered an oxymoron. Keeping that in mind, Nitya's clarification here makes excellent sense:

Is there any difference between the tiny periods and commas on a sheet of paper and this great universe? The star up there is one mark; the period here is another mark. In both there is something that comes for a little while, reveals a certain idea, and then fades away. Each in its own way is a spark of the one fire. Narayana Guru qualifies the sparks as *asadasti,* unreal/real. The mode is unreal, yet the brightness they have is real. The whole world is like this.

So the whole world is nothing but an *asat,* an unreal medium which brings us meaning for the time being. The sparks may disappear, but our experience of their light is impressed on us first.

The meaning Nitya is indicating expands exponentially when we think of the mark not as a dot in the sky or on paper, but as our dear friend. What we know as our husband or wife is only a tiny bit the other person, and a vast amount of what we imagine those terms to mean. Mother and father have a narrow technical definition, padded out in all directions with our vast affection and deep awe of them. Our brother or sister are slightly who they are, but mostly made up of how well they satisfy our own expectations.

All of these images can be modified significantly by employing our intelligence. That's actually what we are about here in the Gurukula. We can give the other person lots more room to be themselves without offending us, and we can take much more joy in them when we give up our petty expectations and unilateral demands. Why shouldn't we? It makes life much more fun and interesting. On the other hand, why should we continue to honor our fantasies, if the other person isn't actually there behind them? Shouldn't we be trying to establish something more real? Of course we should, unless we are content to live in unreality.

John, new to Atmopadesa Satakam, gave a quickie estimate of what he thought the meaning of the study was: to have the guts to get out there and really love. That's about it all right. Somehow our joy is severely restrained, and our meanings have been reduced to nearly nothing. Narayana Guru is inviting us to make them big again. John talked about how when you see your fellow beings suffering, it breaks your heart open, and compassion pours out. That is true for some people, and if it works, great. But we can at least make the possibility more likely by rearranging our opinions, and that kind of course is open to all.

Since seeing the other as separate is the basis for callousness and injustice, the key understanding that opens the doors of the heart is to perceive the unity of all creation. Indications are everywhere. As Nitya puts it:

> The whole universe is like a book, in that everything in it is a symbolic expression of higher truth. We are getting educated in that truth day after day. That truth grows, sustaining the meaning and value of life. If you turn to it, you see there is nothing devoid of knowledge. Such knowledge brings you to *aikarupyam,* the oneness of everything.

We are beginning the wrap up of our extended study of the Self. Time to gather what we've learned and see how we can put it to use. Have we grown? Are we more resolved to upgrade our life to make it more fun and interesting? Are we looking within ourselves for the motivation to change, instead of waiting for an imaginary knight in shining armor to arrive in the mail? Or are we forcing ourself to put up with miserable conditions that we choose to regard as unchangeable? Who exactly would be the beneficiary of such an ideal?

In conclusion, I'll compress a few of Nitya's related points, by way of inspiration to "get out there and really love."

> Narayana Guru says if you don't do this, if you don't make life interesting, the world becomes a *narakam,* a hell. Find out your own interests. Keep life exciting. Let new sparks, new joy come. That's how you make it interesting.
>
> When you try to make everything uniform you create a hell world, but if you see the unity within the diversity it becomes instead a great wonder.
>
> When you take maya in this sense, it is not just illusory nothingness. One half is provoking the other half. One half is exacting from the other half its meaning. One half is a challenge to the other half. Truth is a challenge to falsehood. The possible is a challenge to the potential, whereby the probable is asked to actualize itself. All this is revealed when we apply this in our own lives, and through it life becomes vastly interesting.

That Alone is vastly interesting. It began in 1976 as a bright glow of sattvic attraction to Nitya's string of prophetic utterances.

Then many years of strenuous rajasic efforts by several people went into turning the captured words into a solid book. The physical book is the tamasic finale of the process. Yet it brims with the promise of potent release. Every time we open its pages we can reactivate the sattvic glow of supreme interest. We have once again made dedicated efforts to understand its brilliance, and hopefully have settled into a more sublime level of stasis. We no longer feel like emphasizing one aspect or one guna over another: all fit together to weave a magic carpet of transformation. As Deb said in closing, "Without the tamasic part (the actual book) we would have nothing." Our undying gratitude goes out to everyone involved in this very special rotation of the modalities of nature. Aum.

Part II

Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:

To examine truth and to arrive at certitudes scientists depend mainly on experimental verifications. In an experiment, a hypothesis is postulated and the scientist observes it under varying conditions, but until it is proved fruitful the postulate is a priori. In Vedanta philosophy, as in other fields of spiritual discipline, analogy plays the same role of experimental verification. In essence, both experiments and analogies are examples. In the present verse, Narayana Guru gives us a comprehensive example which contains various valuable suggestions. These suggestions are called *lakshanas* (marks) and each of these marks has its scope, which is called *vyapti*.

Narayana Guru analogically compares this world to an ensemble of sparks flying from the fire of consciousness or knowledge. Each spark has an origin, a period of existence, and an extinction. It moves continuously from the moment of its origin to that of its extinction and finally it turns to ashes. We are like these sparks.

The one fire is the common source of all sparks. It is hard to ascertain how and when the thermal principle of fire began, and it is difficult to decide the magnitude of its field. Fire has many aspects, and in this verse it is equated with consciousness, the consciousness that is asserting the individuality of the sparks by illuminating each bit of carbon. As a potential fire is not visible, yet without producing flames it can manifest to a large extent as the temperature of the atmosphere and of the living bodies of animals. It becomes visible only when it leaps into flames. Like that, consciousness also has a very wide and deep base buried in the unconscious. Every aspect of knowledge is a specific manifestation, like the flames of fire. The sparks symbolize the transient and individuated aspect of every autonomous unit in the world of physical manifestation.

On reading these pages one's eyes run over the written letters. A letter does not seem to be anything other than carbon dust sticking to white paper, yet something besides the impression of the ink can be seen. Each letter suggests the articulation of a certain sound, and groups of letters flash to the mind a word that has meaning. These letters are like glowing sparks. The ink as such connotes nothing, it is the form of the letter that suggests a meaning, and what is true of this letter is also true of everything we perceive. From a period or a comma marked on this page to the whole universe, nothing is other than a form suggesting a meaning. A form, however, cannot stand by itself, it should have a medium. This can be something concrete like the earth, or flowing like water, luminous like fire, gaseous as air, or it can give location like space, sequence like time, or ideation like consciousness.

Sparks are either burning pieces of carbon or molecules of matter. These tiny pieces, whether carbon or matter, do not have the quality of luminosity; it is the burning fire that glows, and we cannot separate the glow from the burning matter. When we read a written word the glow of meaning belongs to the ink-stain; they cannot be separated.

The real and the unreal thus belong together in making each unit of awareness. Each item of experience is an awareness of something. There is no way of postulating the existence of anything anywhere without making it an object of awareness. Although each spark has an individuality of its own, the glowing fire in each belongs to one and the same luminous principle. In the same way, everything that we experience should be unitively understood as belonging to the one consciousness, which is none other than the Self.

The ontologic richness of fire is meager in a spark, as even though it is fire in principle it does not promise a wholesale participation with the universal fire of which it is a part. In the same manner, the mere glow of consciousness experienced by our mind cannot secure an identification with the universal Self for us unless we know how to link the individual manifestation with its universal basis.

To effect such union Shankara suggests a continuous meditation on the true nature of the Self, which he terms *svasvarupa anusandhana*. He takes it for granted that one's true nature is that of the Self, which is pure existence (*sat*), knowledge (*cit*) and peerless bliss (*ananda*). Ramanuja does not like to leave the quality of bliss vague and recommends meditating on the blissful state of the Self, which he calls *svarupananda.* Madhva takes it further, making constant comparison between the personal experience of happiness and the unbounded happiness of the Supreme Lord; this he terms *svarupananda taratamya.*

Although the three masters seem to be of different opinions, Narayana Guru effects an integration of their views in his analogy of the manifested world as an ensemble of sparks. In verse 33 the Guru made reference to knowledge changing and becoming all these things; he compared it to shapes caused by the brandishing of a burning torch in several figure of eight movements. In another work called Arivu, “The epistemology of gnosis” (verses 12-15), the Guru describes how knowledge sparks off:

Yourself is what is known as knowledge;
By putting down your own knowledge, it becomes the known.
The known is thus twofold: one conscious of knowing
And the other not conscious of the same.

Knowledge, too, likewise in its turn proceeding
Became reflected in the knower once again
And one spark of knowledge falling into this the known,
Into five shreds it became split up.

If one could still be cognizant of oneself
As the knower of knowledge, still knowing knowledge to be all,
The one that is knowledge and the one that is the knower
Within that which is known, six and eight, too, they become.

Corresponding likewise with this known
Knowledge, too, seven and one, makes eight;
Knowledge is thus superficially distinguished
As also the known, when separated one from one.

First the Guru divides consciousness into two, the knower and the known. He then splits the known into five sensory awarenesses and he subdivides the knower into mind, intellect and ego. In fact, each of these, when considered as a spark, can be further visualized as separate universes constituted of countless millions of sparks accounting for experiences of all sorts. The link between sparks of consciousness and their source, the Self, is the golden thread of a sense of endearment which connects all values that are recognized as a repeated illumination of the natural bliss of the Absolute mirrored by each spark-like occasion.

* * *

Nataraja Guru's commentary:

PHILOSOPHY aims at a finalized, unitive and satisfactory answer to the questions and problems that seriously face man. Truth must be one and has to be understood as a whole rather than in piecemeal fashion. When we say that Truth shall make us free or that knowledge is power, such wholesale knowledge is what is meant. Whether it is the knowledge of the self or the soul, or of the universe around us, or both together - a satisfactory degree of certainty has to be present in the truth thus gained or knowledge acquired.

We know that the Sun and its light are not two different entities. The Sun as the source of light might be richer in its content of luminosity, but both the Sun and its light are easily understood as consisting of the same stuff. Knowledge, which has been compared to light, has two aspects, an inner subjective aspect and the outer objective manifestation of the same.

Here in this verse, there is a further subtlety that has been brought out by a favourite analogy. We know that Maya, as the overall category of error or illusion which has been examined in the previous verse, is an elusive entity with a double epistemological reference. It is described as both ‘sat’ (existent) and ‘asat’ (not real). Further, we have seen that there is a negative principle of indeterminism which characterises the concept of Maya. How could there be a relation between such a double-sided concept of Maya and the unitive and globally understood Absolute? The relation between the two is perhaps the most subtle and has been the cause of differences between Vedantists, as we have seen.

Ramanuja has questioned the validity of the Maya theory most penetratingly with his seven *anupapattis* (refutations) - his own Visishta-advaita doctrine giving primacy to effect as much as to material cause. The Vedanta of Sankara, on the other hand, tends to put the stress on the cause as against the effect. The Guru here, by the choice of his example, bridges the gulf between these two

rival schools of Advaitins. The sparks of fire are the effect of the central fire from which they arise. While having the same fire implied in them, the sparks have inert coal too as their basis, and moreover the fire in each spark does not last. As sparks, treated collectively as always rising from the central source of fire, they could be called real; but on the other hand there is enough justification for us to treat each spark as both real and unreal.

The totality of sparks, however, by being as lasting as the fire from which they arise, must have the same status, in the same way as the Sun and its rays are both light. There is however an ontological poverty in the collection of sparks. In comparison to the richness of the source of light, the totality of sparks could only be given a secondary status. The sparks are more carbon than light and thus represent also the relative aspect of light in this analogy. By apt analogy the Guru is here able to bring to light the subtle relation that exists between the absolute and relative aspects of the same reality. If fire should burn more brightly, there may not be any sparks at all, as in incandescent light. This would represent the full or non-dual absolute status of Truth.

The phenomenal world, as the result of two-sided Maya, is the secondary aspect of this full Absolute and it is because of its plus and minus aspects meeting that the emergence of the universe that we can see or experience comes into view or looms into our consciousness. It is due to the indigence of the sparks that are both real and unreal, lasting and transient, that the phenomenal world emerges into view or enters our experience as something cognisable.

The fire and the sparks treated together comprise all that should be taken account of to give a total, global or unitive vision of reality; and such a view can leave nothing else as residue or remainder. When we recognize this we come upon a wholesale philosophic answer to the main problem that philosophy sets before itself. The

satisfactory certitude that such a vision carries with it is in itself the recompense for the enquiry undertaken.

Part III

Scotty contributed a Rumi poem, Shadow and Light Both:

How does a part of the world leave the world?
How does wetness leave water?

Don’t try to put out fire by throwing on
more fire! Don't wash a wound with blood.

No matter how fast you run, your shadow
keeps up. Sometimes it's in front!

Only full overhead sun diminishes your shadow.
But that shadow has been serving you.

What hurts you, blesses you. Darkness is
your candle. Your boundaries are your quest.

I could explain this, but it will break the
glass cover on your heart, and there's no
fixing that.

You must have shadow and light source both.
Listen, and lay your head under the tree of awe.

When from that tree feathers and wings sprout on you,
be quieter than a dove. Don't even open your mouth for
even a coo.

* * *

Jake's commentary:

A well known Buddha aphorism makes a statement so at odds with the American sensibility that it is rarely repeated in our culture and almost never explored: "Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your common sense." The Buddha's advice speaks to knowing and not, strictly speaking, to feeling or thinking. In this maxim, he distinguishes truth as that which is always so and quite distinct from our efforts to navigate our continuously shifting condition. In his teaching, Buddha offers observations that in general square with what we know as truth, but as visions alone cannot resonate with anyone else, they must become lived truth until they finally are incorporated into our experience, into our knowing—our knowledge.

In verse 89, the Guru once again presents a vision of his direct perception of truth that he couches in terms of analogy in order to communicate to those of us having yet to have had such an experience. This use of figures of speech as a method of illustrating is common throughout the verses (and Vedanta thought generally as Nitya points out in his commentary). In this case, the Guru uses sparks thrown off by a fire as a metaphor for the Absolute continuously manufacturing itself as those sparks that burst out and fade in an infinite number of durations. Like our existences, as a spark oxidizes it cannot remain in any fixed state, but this analogy also functions on a moral level. As they "oxidize," our lives are embedded in an ocean of people but constituted of all our experiences. Nitya points to our act of reading as an example. If we comprehend the marks on the page, they release in us all kinds of meanings that, in turn, like sparks, proliferate and open new meanings, new sparks. This model he then applies to the entire cosmos that, he writes, "is nothing but an . . . unreal medium which brings us meaning for the time being" constructed of our memory of those sparks (p. 630). The

complexity of this process indicates its infinite character as knowledge.

Both real and unreal—so understood—no spark is stationary. Everything is in constant motion, a principle fundamental to our lives generally: "Flux-motion-movement: that is the one reality of the unreal" (p. 631). All things—people, events, thoughts, and so on—come and go, sparks that all burn at their own velocity (including us), "and that is the intrinsic game of life" (p.631). It is when we attach to a spark rather than enjoy it or marvel in it as a temporary manifestation of the Absolute that all the trouble begins as we spin in Maya becoming either "cynical" or "frustrated," writes Nitya. Mistaking transience for permanence, we then jump frantically from spark to spark seeking that which is not there.

Through beholding this transience we come to know that which is not. (Given our intellectual penchant for duality in thinking, this "route" to waking up "makes sense.") The key to our assuming this centered condition is in knowing our true form, knowing thyself. That constant Self—observing your ego in childhood, young adulthood, and into your physical decrepitude of old age—does not change, and the marvel of this fact is its ontological validity. Even the most cursory efforts at self-reflection uncover this truth that we *know* and cannot rationalize, feel, or argue. It is of that domain from which the sparks emanate, the Absolute, that we spend our lives searching for—and is always just out of reach because of our own detours into Maya which, as Nitya points out by citing Betty Heiman, is routinely mis-defined in Western circles. Often labeled as *illusion*, she writes, the term gets associated with the notions of deception or delusion. In its Latin form (the more accurate translation) however, *illusion* or *Maya* denotes "a relative or transitory display of forms" or *Lila* in Sanskrit: "play and display of the creative urge. . . '"(635). In other words, transient existence is a sport of the Absolute, a game we can choose to play well or badly once we become aware of it.