

## STRIKING SPARKS...MAKING FIRE

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Tejas, fire, is the root of Tapasya, which basically means to “burn away all that is not real, so that the real may emerge”. Fire is the ultimate purifier, the ultimate test of sincerity and purity. The term “trial by fire” is a common expression in English. In Sanskrit this is the exact meaning of the phrase “Agni Pariksha”. Sita had to “enter fire” to prove to Lord Rama that she was pure, undefiled by Ravana even though she lived as his captive for nearly three years. In Indian villages, people are often tested for their innocence of a crime or the veracity of their statements by burning a piece of cloth on their palm. If they can endure this, they have proved themselves.

Agni, the God of fire, was chief amongst the Vedic gods. He was worshipped and adorned, implored and invoked in so many hymns. Fire was also an important metaphor in Vedic lore.

One must cast one's mind back thousands of years to the time before “fire” could be summoned so easily and cheaply with matchstick. Fire was not easy to attain. Every household held to keep the fire (Homa) burning continuously, if it went out, it was a disaster fire was necessary not only for heat, warmth and light, but for cooking and ritualistic worship. (The word “home” has probably sprung from **Homa** – the fire keep burning to all household). If one traveled, one carried a very important item on one's person fire sticks. These were the “sticks” used to create fire. The fire sticks were a “life off” bestowed upon one either by Guru or father. The fire sticks are a pair, consisting of the flat lower stick, known as the Aranim Kritva. This has a small groove cut in the centre, into which the Cottara Aranim, the upper stick fits. To create the fire, the upper stick must literally be drilled into the lower stick with exactly the right speed and pressure. The upper stick moves a full circle to the left, stops for an instant, and then returns for a full circle to the right. The heat builds up.

The process must not stop, otherwise the point of friction will defuse and ignition will not occur.

Repetition (**Abhyasa**) constant action without stop is the key to creating fire. Incessant, unrelieved friction and intensity of unbroken effort alone will produce the sparks which create the fire. The wood begins to warm up. One must continue to rotate the upper stick. Suddenly, the ignition point is reached a fire erupts, the fire is taken with cotton and transferred to twigs and the fire is full blown, ready to obey the will of the Master who called it forth from the heavily resistant wood!

A beautiful passage from **Svetasvatara Upanishad** (1-14) makes this process a wonderful metaphor for the process of enlightenment. **Svadeham aranim kritva, pranavam cottara aranim Dhyana nirmathanaabhyasat, devam pashyen nigudhavat.** “Make your whole being the lower fire stick, and the Aum (the Pranava) the upper fire stick. Ignite the fire within by the power of the *Adhyaan*, your meditation, and touch the hidden source.”

As with so many Upanishads, the power of the Pranava AUM is extolled. In modern times this sacred syllable (or three syllable, depending on how it is used) has been vulgarized by cheap, ignorance usage. One sees “AUM” written on T-Shirts, commercial product or even muttered mindlessly by bond priests in the temple.

It is good to stop back and contemplate the power of the wonderful spiritual tool go used it properly, mindfully, skillfully. Consistently with focused mind. The AUM Pranava has the power to produce the inner time which will transform the dull, Tamasic, inert nature, and light up the darkness within.