SWAMI ADVAYANANDA

Introduction

Samsāra ends when the firm thought 'aham brahmāsmi' - termed 'brahmākāravṛtti' or 'akhaṇḍākāravṛtti' - destroys the veil of ignorance covering Brahman and the self-effulgent Brahman reveals Itself. The knowledge of the mahāvākyas like 'Tat tvaṁ asi' is the direct cause for the rise of 'brahmākāravṛtti'. This clear 'knowledge of the mahāvākyas' in turn arises through the practice of the 'four sādhanās' (means). There is thus a causal relationship between destruction of ignorance, brahmākāravṛtti, knowledge of the mahāvākyas¹ and the 'four sādhanās'.

Four Sādhanās

The four sādhanās are:

1. śravaṇa (listening)
2. manana (reflection)
3. nididhyāsana (contemplation) and
4. samādhi (meditation or absorption).

The word 'sādhanā' denotes the 'means' or 'method' for accomplishing a thing. Since the above four are the means for attaining the Knowledge of the Self, they are termed 'sādhanā'².

¹ Brahmākāravṛtti has been covered in three parts - refer to the essays from June to Aug 2005 issues of Tapovan Prasad. The mahāvākyas were covered in a series of ten essays - from July 2004 to May 2005 issues of Tapovan Prasad.
² We have a clear enumeration of these four as the means for Knowledge in Swami Sadananda's Vedānta-sūtra: "Śravaṇamananānānīdhyāsaṇasamādhi-anuṣṭhānasya apeksītatāvāt te'api pradaśayante - Till such Realisation of the Consciousness which is one's own Self, it is necessary to practise śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsaṇa and samādhi. Therefore these are being explained".
That these are the four means for Knowledge is evident from the following *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* passages (2.4.5 and 3.5.1):

अत्मा वा अरे दर्शनां: श्रोत्यः मन्तव्यो निदिष्ट्यास्तित्वमेत्रेऽथ
आत्मनो वा अरे दर्शनां अर्थवेण शर्या विज्ञानेन इदं सर्वं विदितम॥

ātma vā āre draṣṭāvyah śrūtāvyo mantavyo nīdīhyasitavya maitreyi ātmanc ca āre darśanena śrvanaṇena matyā vijñānena idam sarvam viditam.

The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realised – should be heard, reflected on and contemplated upon.³

The terms 'śravaṇa' (listening), 'mati' (reflection) and 'vijñāna' (contemplation) occurring in the above Upaniṣadic text are indicative of 'śravaṇa', 'manana' and 'nīdīhyāsana'.

Also note the following passage:

तत्साद बाह्य: पाणिद्वत्य निर्भिष्ट वाल्ये व निर्भिष्ट अत्थ मुनि:

tasnād brahmanaḥ pāṇḍityam nirvidya bālyena tiṣṭhāseta
bālyam ca pāṇḍityam ca nirvidya atha muniḥ...

Therefore the knower of Brahman, having known all about scholarship, should try to live upon that Knowledge; having known all that strength and scholarship, he becomes contemplative.

The words 'pāṇḍitya' (scholarship), 'bālyā' (strength) and 'muni' (contemplative) in the above passage are suggestive of 'śravaṇa', 'manana' and 'nīdīhyāsana'.

The importance of the practice of samādhi is evinced through Upaniṣadic passages such as this Svetāśvarata Upaniṣad (1.10) statement:

तत्त्वाभिमित्यानाद योजनात् तत्त्वभावात् भूयःशान्ते विश्वमायानिन्वति: ॥

tasyābhidhyānād yojanat tattvabhañvati bhūyāścānte
viśvamāyāniñvṛttiḥ.

³ A similar sentence also occurs in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.5.6: "ātma vā āre draṣṭāvyah śrūtāvyo mantavyo nīdīhyasitavya maitreyi ātmanc ca āre darśanena śravyaḥ stute śrutte śrute vijñāte idam sarvam veditam."

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When you meditate on Him again and again, from this union of the nature of becoming one with the Truth, the cosmic māyā ceases.

The phrase ‘abhidhyanād yojana tattvabhāvāt bhūyaḥ’ indicates the continuous practice of ‘meditation’ or ‘absorption’.

This essay focusses on ‘śravaṇa’, the first of the four sādhanās.

Śravaṇa - Definition

The word ‘śravaṇa’ is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root ‘śru’, which means ‘to hear’ or ‘to listen’. Thus ‘śravaṇa’ literally means ‘hearing’ or ‘listening’. But in the context of Vedānta, the term ‘śravaṇa’ has a deeper implication. It connotes the ‘tātparya-avadhāraṇam’ – ascertainment of the essential purport of the teaching as ‘jñābrahmāya – oneness of the individual with the supreme Self’. This ascertainment is accomplished through observing the six characteristic indications or signs in the teaching that are termed ‘liṅgas’. In Vedānta-sāra, Swami Sadananda gives the following definition of śravaṇa:

śravaṇanāma śadvidhaliṅgaiḥ aseṣavedāntānām
advittyavastuni tātparya-avadhāraṇam.

By śravaṇa is meant the ascertainment, aided by the six characteristic indications (or signs) that the final purport of all the Upaniṣads is the non-dual Brahman.4

The ascertainment produced by śravaṇa is just an intellectual awareness that ‘the core of the Upaniṣadic teaching points out the oneness of the inner Self with Brahman’. Śravaṇa becomes the means to remove ‘abhāvaṇā’ i.e., the notion that the oneness of the individual with Brahman cannot be true or possible (‘na asti’, ‘na sambhavati’ vā).

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4 The following definition of śravaṇa is given by Swami Vasudevabrahmendra in his Sanskrit translation of Vicāra Saṅgāraḥ: śravaṇaḥ namuṇa saṁsvitaḥ tattvavākṣyakṛtaḥ abhidhyanād uṣṭhānānām aṣṭa sādhanānām tattvair mayaḥ rāgyamānānām Saṅgāraḥ.
How does one clearly determine for oneself that ‘jivabrahmakya – oneness of the individual with the supreme Self’, which leads to Mokṣa (Liberation), is alone the central purport (tātparya) of the Upaniṣads, and not the attainment of dharma, artha or kāma through the performance of karma and upāsanā? In other words, how does one separate the essential from the non-essential, the core from the subsidiary, the grain from the husk? It is in this context that we find the knowledge of the six liñgas (characteristic indications or signs) invaluable.

Śadvidhaliṅga

The term ‘śadvidhaliṅga’ means ‘the six (śad) characteristic (vidha) indications/signs (liṅga)’. These six indications are enumerated by the following traditional verse:

उपक्रमोपसामहराव्यासोपुर्वत्ता फलम्।
अर्थावादोपपत्तिः न हिंद्र तत्पर्णिनियः॥

upakramopasamaharavaśo'pūrvaś tu phalam,
arthavādopapattī ca liṅgam tātparyanīrṇaye

5 In this first step of śravaṇa the seeker comes to realise that the Upaniṣads do not have their import in dualistic experiences and accomplishments, such as attaining heaven through various karmas and upāsanās, notwithstanding their explicit mention in the Upaniṣadic passages. He appreciates that their mention, not only in the karma-kāṇḍa (ritualic section) but also in the jñāna-kāṇḍa (Upaṇiṣads or philosophical section) of the Vedas is well justified because karma and upāsanā are bestowers of purity of mind (citta-suddhi) and single-pointedness of the intellect (citta-ekāgratā) – which becomes essential for the Realisation of the Self. Citta-suddhi and citta-ekāgratā engender sādhana-catuṣṭaya, which in turn propel the individual to reach the Guru – thus leading him to śravaṇa. Their importance continues till the very moment of Realisation, as the Self is known only to one with a pure heart and single-pointed intellect.
In ascertaining the purport, the six signs or indications are:

1. Upakrama-upasamhāra - the beginning and the conclusion
2. Abhyāsa - repeated declaration
3. Apūrvatā - uniqueness
4. Phalam – fruit (result or utility)
5. Arthavāda – eulogy (glorification)
6. Upapatti – reasoning

It is through these six indications that the central purport of all teachings - including that of the Upaniṣads - can be determined. The sixth chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, with the ‘Tat tvam asi’ upadesa (teaching), is commonly used by various Vedānta ācāryas to elucidate the ‘ṣadvidhaliṅga’.

1. Upakrama-upasamhāra - the beginning and the conclusion: By this is meant the mention of the subject of discussion in the beginning as well as the end of the section.

The sixth chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad has the following teaching in its beginning (upakrama): “ekam eva advitiyam – one only without a second” (6.2.1). The same teaching of the non-dual Ātman-Brahman is presented in the conclusion (upasamhāra) of the section: “aitadātmyam idam sarvam – all this has That alone as the Self” (6.8.7). Thus the same teaching of the non-dual Ātman-Brahman is presented in both the beginning and the concluding portions of the Upaniṣad. This reiteration of the topic both in the beginning (upakrama) as well as the end (upasamhāra) is the first characteristic indication of the central purport (tātparya) of the Upaniṣad. This ‘upakrama-upasamhāra-eka-rūpam – oneness of both the beginning and the conclusion’ is the first of the ṣadvidhaliṅga.

2. Abhyāsa – repeated declaration: This is the frequent presentation of the subject matter in the course of the section.

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6 Vedānta Sūtra: “prakaranapratipādayasya arthasya tadādyantayaḥ upapādanam upakramopasamhārau.”
7 Vedānta Sūtra: “prakaranapratipādayasya vastunāh tannadhye paunahpuruṣyena pratipādanam abhyāsoḥ.”
An individual wanting something would articulate frequently his need of that particular object during the course of his conversation in order to impress upon the listener the exact thing that he wants. Similarly, it is only natural that the Upaniśad will have its central purport (tātparya) being repeated frequently in various ways throughout the sections so that it becomes well-impressed in the student’s mind. Thus we find the central purport of jīvabrahmaikya being enunciated nine times through the mahāvākyā ‘Tat tvam asi – That thou art’ in the sixth chapter of Chandogya Upaniśad.

This ‘abhyāsa – repeated declaration’ becomes the second līnga (indication) for deciding the central purport (tātparya) of a text.

3. Apūrvatā – uniqueness: The primary intention of the Vedas is not to provide the knowledge of things which pertain to the world (laukika-visāya); for such things could be well comprehended through other means of valid cognition (pramāṇa) such as perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), postulation (arthāpatti) and so on. ‘What is the time now?’ – this can be known by using a clock. ‘How to earn more money?’ – is well answered even through means of knowledge other than the Vedas. Hence the central purport of the Vedas has to be something which is beyond the ‘jurisdiction of perception and the other means of worldly knowledge (alaukika-visāya)’.

The non-dual Brahman and its oneness with the inner Self cannot be known through any other means of knowledge apart from the Vedāntas (Upaniśads). The Chandogya Upaniśad (6.12.2) indicates this by “sraddhatvā saumya – Have faith (in this

Serve everyone with everything you have, everywhere, every time.

Swami Chinmayananda

Sri Krishna Sweets

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teaching), dear boy". This very fact, that the Knowledge of the identity of the Self with Brahman cannot be known through other means like perception and inference, stands affirmed when the Sruti (6.14.2) declares "ācāryavān puruṣo veda – one who has a Preceptor (to instruct him) knows".

'Apūrvata' - translated as 'novelty' or 'uniqueness' – is the unknowability of the subject matter through any other means of knowledge (pramāṇa) apart from the Sruti. Only such a subject can truly become the central purport of the Upaniṣads.

4. Phalam - fruit (result or utility): This is the mention of the result that accrues to the knower or practitioner of the knowledge spoken of in the Teaching. This mention of the fruit is a powerful pointer to decipher the central purport of the Teaching. For, it is to emphasise the importance of the subject matter that the result is always voiced. The fruit of 'Liberation - becoming one with Brahman', is made explicit in the following statement of Chāndogya Upaniṣad (6.14.2): "tasya tāvadeva cirāṁ yāvanna vimoksye atha sampatsye – He has to wait only till he is 'delivered' from the body, and then he becomes one with Brahman".

Identifying the object for which the fruit is pointed out invariably leads to the discovery of the central purport of the Teaching. This 'phalam' (fruit) is the fourth linga (indication) for deciding the central purport (tātparya).

5. Arthavāda – eulogy (glorification): This is the frequent praise of the subject matter in different sections. This is usually of the nature of stating the good arising from the Knowledge or the evil that could arise from not knowing It. For instance, in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad passage (6.1.3) we find Knowledge being extolled: "yena aśrutam śrutam bhavati amatam matam

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9 Vedānta Śāra: "prakaraṇapratipādasya advitiyevastunāh pramāṇāntara-aviśaytakaraṇam apūrvata."
10 Vedānta Śāra: "prakaraṇapratipādasya tatra tatra praśamsanaṁ arthavādaḥ"
avijnatam vijnatam – that by which the unheard becomes heard, the unthought of becomes thought of, and what is unknown becomes known”. Also we see that duality is condemned through Upanisadic accounts that outline creation such as “tadaikṣata bahu syāṁ prajāyeya tattejo’asṛjata – That Existence willed, ‘May I become many, may I grow forth’. It created fire”. Both these - praising non-duality and reproaching duality - aim at extolling non-duality, the central purport of the Teaching. This ‘arthavāda’ (eulogy) is the fifth liṅga (indication) for deciding the tātparya.

6. Upapatti – reasoning: This is the reasoning stated from time to time in the course of the Teaching to establish the truth of the matter taught12. Notice the following statement (6.1.4): “yathā saumya ekena mṛtpiṇḍena sarvam mṛṇmayam vijnatam syād vācārambhānāṁ vikāro nāmadheyāṁ mṛttikā iti eva satyam - Dear boy, just as through a single clod of clay all that is made of clay becomes known, for all modification is but name based upon words and clay alone is real.” Other similar reasoning using the illustrations of ‘gold and its ornaments’ (6.1.5) and ‘iron and the nail-cutter’ (6.1.6), and also the summary statement “all these beings have Existence as their root, abode and final place of merger” (6.8.4) show that the effects are illusory, the cause alone is real, and establish the oneness of the Self. This

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11 The section on creation finally goes on to show that the wise see oneness (refer 6.4.5). Thus plurality stands condemned by virtue of its being the experience of the ignorant alone.

12 Vide Vedānta Sāra: “prakaraṇapratipadyārthasādhané tatra tatra śrayaṃśa yuktih upapattiḥ”.

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Let spirituality open us up into fulfilment, as a bud opens itself into a flower. Hasten slowly.

Swami Chinmayananda
‘upapatti’ (reasoning) is the sixth liṅga (indication) for deciding the central purport (tātparya).

**Conclusion**

In śravaṇa, using the above-mentioned sādvidhaliṅga (six characteristic signs) one determines the central purport of the Vedāntic teaching to be the ‘identity of the Self with Brahman’. Once this is discovered, śravaṇa is accomplished. At this stage, knowledge being just an intellectual awareness about the purport, it is natural that there will be doubts regarding the real nature of the Self and Brahman, how the Self could be one with Brahman and so on. These doubts are removed by the next sādhuṇa – ‘manana’ (reflection).

The theory of ‘sādvidhaliṅga’ to determine the central purport of a text is a great contribution of the ancient Indian thinkers to world thought and a proof of their tremendous analytical capabilities. This technique of determining the central purport is useful, not just for the Upaniṣads but for teaching in any field, be it literature, physics or economics. Acharya Sankara and other stalwarts of Advaita Vedānta have used this methodology to establish that the entire Vedas have ‘jīvabrahmaikya’ as their essential purport (parama-tātparya).  

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13 In Taittirīya Upaniṣad:
