Four Sadhanas –
Part IV – Samadhi

SWAMI ADVAYANANDA

Introduction

"Jñanad eva tu kaivalyam - jñāna alone is the direct means for Liberation." Nevertheless, this brahmātmaikya-jñāna (Brahman-Atman-identity-Knowledge) that has been attained through the first two steps - śravaṇa (listening) and manana (reflection) - is incapable of putting an end to ignorance ( avidyā) as long as there are the habitual notions of kartṛtva (sense of doership) and bhokṛtva (sense of enjoyership) existing co-eval and contrary to the Knowledge. These habitual notions that are contrary to Self-Knowledge are collectively termed 'viparīta-bhāvanās'¹ or 'contrary notions' and they have their source in the deep-seated vāsanā called the 'anātma-vāsanā' (the 'seed' or 'causal form' of the notion 'I am the body-mind-intellect') - that exists in the kāraṇa-śarīra (causal body). As long as the anātma-vāsanā exists, viparīta-bhāvanās will keep sprouting and prevent the birth of brahmākāraṇvṛtti, which alone has the capacity to put an end to avidyā (ignorance). For seekers who have already completed the first two steps of śravaṇa (listening) and manana (reflection), it is this causal anātma-vāsanā and its effects of viparīta-bhāvanās that are the obstacles (pratibandha) to Realisation.

The third and fourth sādhanā-steps, nīdīhyāsana and samādhi, respectively, are aimed at completely rooting out the anātma-

¹ The term vāsanā indicates the causal-form, the seat of which is the causal body (kāraṇa-śarīra); while the term bhāvāna indicates the thought-form, the seat of which is the subtle body (sūkṣma-śarīra).
vāsanā and putting an end to the viparīta-bhāvanās. Nididhyāsana, i.e. the conscious uninterrupted devoted reiteration of the knowledge 'I am Brahman' (ahām brahmāsmi) is the beginning stage of the effort to break the shackles of 'viparīta-bhāvanās' and 'anātma-vāsanā'. Nididhyāsana, by weaning the mind of its 'viparīta-bhāvanās' to some extent, paves the way for the next step of samādhi, wherein the 'viparīta-bhāvanās' and their root, the 'anātma-vāsanā', are completely weeded out.

Samādhi

The term 'samādhi' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'dhā', which means 'to put' or 'to place'. To this root are added two prefixes – 'sam' (well) and 'ā' (fully). Thus, the word 'samādhi' literally means 'putting or placing the mind fully well'. The establishment of the mind in the brahmātmaikya-jñāna (Brahman-Atman-identity-Knowledge) of 'ahām brahmāsmi' is termed in Vedānta 'samādhi'. 'Samādhi' is commonly translated as 'absorption' or 'meditation'.

Since this last step of samādhi is a natural fulfilment (paripakva-avasthā) of the earlier stage of nididhyāsana, many Vedāntic texts do not point out samādhi as a step distinct from nididhyāsana. Nevertheless, there are qualitative differences between nididhyāsana and samādhi; nididhyāsana is tainted by the twin defects of duality and effort, while the final stage of samādhi is free of both these. It is keeping these differences in view that certain Vedāntic texts (like Vedānta Sūra of Swami Sadananda) speak of nididhyāsana and samādhi as different steps. In addition, by presenting samādhi as a distinct step, Achāryas seek to impress upon their students the importance of samādhi in Vedāntic sādhanā.

For many, the word 'samādhi' invokes feelings of alarm or awe. Compounding to our own misconception is its usage in vernacular parlance for death! When a saint dies, we say he

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2 In Chinmaya literature, the term 'contemplation' refers to nididhyāsana while 'meditation' refers to samādhi.

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has attained 'mahāsamādhi'. When his body is 'buried', we say he was given 'bhaū-samādhi' and when he voluntarily gives up his body in a river we say he has taken 'jala-samādhi'. We also hear of anecdotes of Yogis going into samādhi for many months at a time, all the while staying in some kind of 'hibernation', without eating food or drinking water!

This essay is aimed at dispelling the wrong notions about samādhi and explains in the context of Vedāntic sādhana the nature, purpose and importance of samādhi.

**Two Types of Samādhi**

Samādhi (absorption) is broadly divided into the following two categories:

1. Savikalpa-samādhi (absorption occasioned with division)
2. Nirvikalpa-samādhi (absorption free of division).

By long devoted practice of nīdīdhyāsana, which is the maintenance of the continuous flow of the thought of 'I am Brahman' (aḥam brahmaḥāsmi), one reaches the experience of savikalpa-samādhi. Unlike nīdīdhyāsana, wherein the seeker had to exert to maintain the thought of 'I am Brahman', in savikalpa-samādhi there is an effortless absorption in the thought 'I am Brahman'.

**Savikalpa-Samādhi**

The term 'vikalpa' means 'division'. The absorption (samādhi) that is characterised by the perception of the division (vikalpa) is called 'savikalpa-samādhi'. By 'vikalpa' or 'division' is meant

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3 Nīdīdhyāsana can be considered in two stages: (1) dhāraṇā and (2) dhyāna. The initial dhāraṇā stage involves greater effort than the latter dhyāna step wherein the effort is minimal. Nevertheless there is effort in both. Refer to the topic: 'Dhāraṇā and Dhyāna' in the essay on 'Nīdīdhyāsana'—November 2005 issue of Tāpovana Prasad.

4 The term 'vikalpa' is used to connote a wide range of meanings in Sanskrit literature. (1) Mind is defined as 'sankalpa-vikalpātmakam'—here 'vikalpa' means 'contrary thought'. (2) When an object is described as 'savikalpa' or 'nirvikalpa' then 'vikalpa' means attributes. Thus 'savikalpa' means 'with attributes' and 'nirvikalpa' means 'without attributes'. (3) In an argument the term 'vikalpa' means 'objection' or 'alternative proposition'. (4) In the context of samādhi, 'vikalpa' means 'distinction', 'difference' or 'division'.

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'tripuṭi' i.e., the triad of (1) the meditator (dhyātṛ), (2) the meditated (dhyeya) and (3) meditation (dhyāna). To explain: in savikalpa-samādhi, though the meditator has withdrawn his mind from all thoughts and maintains effortlessly a continuous flow of the single thought 'I am Brahman' (ahaṁ brahmāṁ), he still continues to perceive the threefold distinction of (1) the meditator 'I' (dhyātṛ), (2) the meditated 'I am Brahman' (dhyeya) and discerns that (3) he is engaged in the act of meditation (dhyāna). Nevertheless, because of the strength of the knowledge that he is meditating upon, i.e. the thought 'I am the all-pervading Brahman', the above-mentioned tripuṭi (triad) is falsified (bādhita) and all the three - the meditator (dhyātṛ), the meditated (dhyeya) and meditation (dhyāna) - are seen as the one Brahman alone. This falsification (bādha) of the tripuṭi (triad) can be easily understood with this analogy: in the ocean one would see varied forms such as waves, bubbles, foam and so on; yet, the knowledge that they are all nothing but water falsifies their individual 'names and forms' (nāma and rūpa) and one knows them as water alone, notwithstanding the perception of the varied forms of waves, bubbles and so on. In the same way, in spite of the perception of the 'tripuṭi' (triad) - the dhyātṛ (meditator), the dhyeya (object of meditation) and dhyāna (the act of meditation) - the meditator engaged in savikalpa-samādhi knows them all as Brahman alone, by the strength of the thought 'I am the all-pervading Brahman', the

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5 Another example for understanding falsification (bādha): a spoon kept in a glass-beaker containing water appears bent due to the refraction of light rays. Even while perceiving the bent spoon, we know that the spoon is not bent. Perception is falsified by knowledge.

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A single wrong act can sometimes wipe out a lifetime of honour.

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very Knowledge that he is meditating upon. In *Sarva-vedānta-siddhānta-sūra-saṅgraha* (verses 820-822), Sri Sankaracharya gives the following description of *savikalpa-samādhi*:

\[ \text{ज्ञात्रायविलयेतैव ज्ञेये ब्रह्मपूर्वे केवले।} \\
\text{तदाकारकारितवा विमित्रवत्तस्थितिः॥} \\
\text{सांवृष: स एव विज्ञेय: समाधिः सविकल्पकः॥} \\
\]

\[ jñātrādyavilayenaiva jñeye brahmani kevale, \\
tadakarkaritaya cittavṛttaravasthitih. \\
sadbhiḥ sa eva vijñeyah samādhiḥ savikalpakaḥ, \\
\]

The wise consider this type of absorption as ‘*savikalpa-samādhi*’, wherein without the cessation of differences such as knower etc., the thought, by taking the form of That (*Brahman*), is established in divisionless *Brahman*.

\[ \text{मृद एववभावनेःपि मृण्याद्विपब्धानवतु॥} \\
\text{सत्मात्रबस्तुभावनेःपि त्रिपुती भाति सत्मयिः।} \\
\text{समाधिरत्न एवाय सविकल्प इतियत॥} \\
\]

\[ mṛda evavabhane’pi mṛṇmayadvipabhanavat. \\
sanmātravastubhāne’pi tripūti bhāti sanmayi, \\
samādhirata evāyam savikalpa itīryate. \\
\]

The elephant-form (which is made of clay) does appear even though one knows it to be clay alone. In the same way, in spite of the Knowledge of the pure Existence Principle, the *tripūti* appears even though it is known to be of the nature of Existence (*Brahman*). Since this *samādhi* is occasioned with distinction (*vikalpa*), it is termed ‘*savikalpa*’.

**Nirvikalpa-Samādhi**

The Lord’s grace expressing as unbroken abidance in *savikalpa-samādhi*, detachment from the joy experienced in *savikalpa-samādhi* and *pūrvajanmasukṛta* (the merits accrued through good actions of many life-times) - conjoin to lead the meditator to the experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. It is in this
highest state of absorption that the *brahmākāravrtti* (firm thought of 'I am the all-pervading *Brahman*') puts an end to ignorance.

The term *nir-vikalpa* means 'no-division'. While *savikalpa-samādhi* is the absorption or meditation that is occasioned by the experience of the *tripuṭi* (triad) of (1) the meditator (*dhyātr*), (2) the meditated (*dhyeya*) and (3) meditation (*dhyāna*), *nirvikalpa-samādhi* has no such experience of *tripuṭi*. The meditator, meditated and meditation – all merge to become One.

**Is Nirvikalpa-Samādhi a 'Thoughtless State'?**

In *savikalpa-samādhi* the meditator experiences the thought 'I am the all-pervading *Brahman*'. In *nirvikalpa-samādhi* what happens to this thought? Does it exist or cease to be?

If we were to posit that the thought 'I am the all-pervading *Brahman*' does not exist in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, then does some other thought other than 'I am the all-pervading *Brahman*' exist or is it that no thought exists in that state? One cannot concede an extraneous thought, for all thoughts other than 'I am the all-pervading *Brahman*' have disappeared even in prior stages of *nidadhyāśana* and *savikalpa-samādhi*. Hence, to consider that the thought 'I am the all-pervading *Brahman*' has ceased is tantamount to presuming that there are no thoughts in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*.

What would be the fallacy in accepting that *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is a thoughtless stage? The fallacy is this: the only experience which is thoughtless is the state of deep-sleep, wherein there is the universal experience of 'Aham kimapi na jānāmi – I know...

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A noble motive behind an action returns as peace in your mind, whatever be the result of the action.

Swami Chinmayananda
nothing and to say that the meditator in nirvikalpa-samādhi stays in the thoughtless state is to unwittingly concede that he has gone to sleep! Further, his memory of the nirvikalpa-samādhi’s experience does not corroborate this assumption. For, after getting up from nirvikalpa-samādhi (utthāna-avasthā) the meditator recalls, ‘I was in deep meditation’; while the memory of a person who has woken up from deep-sleep is ‘I was in deep slumber’.

If we are to accept that in nirvikalpa-samādhi too there is the thought ‘I am the all pervading Brahman’, how does one understand therein the absence of the tripūṭi (triad) of the meditator (dhyātṛ), the meditated (dhyeya) and meditation (dhyāna)? Does not the existence of thought imply tripūṭi? Can a thought exist without the experience of tripūṭi?

**Brahmākāravṛtti sans tripūṭi**

There is a ocean of difference between knowing and being. In knowing alone the tripūṭi (triad) of the knower, known and knowledge exists. In being, there is no such tripūṭi.

When the meditator is focussed on the single thought ‘I am Brahman’ (aham brahmāsmi), to the exclusion of all other thoughts and as his absorption becomes effortless and complete, the meditator loses the distinction that he is the meditator (dhyātṛ) and ‘aham brahmāsmi’ is the object of meditation (dhyeya). The meditator, in his utter absorption, becomes, so to say, the very object of meditation (dhyeya) and exists as the object of meditation. This state of the meditator (dhyātṛ) being (i.e. not knowing) the meditated (dhyeya) is termed - ‘dhyeya-mātṛa-avasthiti’. In this state of being, the arrogation of the ego that

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9 The ‘meditator’ (dhyātṛ) transforming himself into the ‘meditated’ (dhyeya) is explained by the illustration of the ‘bhramara-kīta-nyāya’. The worm totally focuses its attention on the mother wasp. Lo! It is metamorphosed into the very wasp that it is meditating upon. Refer to verse 359 of Vivekacūḍāmāni: “sati sakto naro yāti sadbhūvāmi hyekaniṣṭhaya, kitāko bhramaram dhyayan bhramaratvāya kalpate”.

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'I am meditating' (dhyāna) vanishes and the tripuṭī comes to an end.

This can be well understood with an example. When a master artist paints, he very soon becomes absorbed in his art. He shuts off extraneous thoughts, and before long becomes, so to say, one with the painting. There is no more the triad of 'I am the painter', 'this is the painting' and 'I am engaged in the action of painting'. So, too, a music maestro becomes the very music that he renders. These examples can be multiplied. When these enthralling pursuits can lead to the destruction of tripuṭī (triad), there is no wonder if the meditator loses himself in his divine pursuit and becomes one with the object of his meditation, the knowledge 'I am the all-pervading Brahman' and just remains as the very object of meditation – 'dhyeyamātra-avasthīti'.

If an artist reaches heights of perfection when he becomes one with the art to the exclusion of everything else and the maestro's music reaches the pinnacles of excellence when he forgets himself in the very music he is rendering, what could be the objection to the declaration of the wise that the meditator reaches the prefecton of his meditation by becoming the very object of his meditation? All the three – the meditator (dhyātṛ), the meditated (dhyeya) and the meditation (dhyāna) - become the one meditāted (dhyeya) brahmākāravṛtti. Since the meditator has merged with the meditated, there is no experience of distinction between the knower and the known such as: 'I know the brahmākāravṛtti. With the death of knower-hood,
perception of *trīpuṭṭī* (triad) also ends. Thus, in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, what remains is the unperceived *brahmākāra vyṛtti*. It is this unperceived *brahmākāra vyṛtti* that is termed ‘*śīna-brahmākāra vyṛtti*’ (dissolved *brahmākāra vyṛtti*). Since the *brahmākāra vyṛtti* remains unperceived, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is described in simple terms as the state wherein even the *brahmākāra vyṛtti* has disappeared.

**Līna-Brahmākāra vyṛtti – an Analogy**

In *savikalpa-samādhi*, the thought ‘I am the all-pervading Brahman’ is available for perception, while in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the same thought is not available for perception. Vedānta Achāryas explain this with an analogy: consider a lump of salt floating on water – this is similar to the experience of *savikalpa-samādhi*; when the salt lump dissolves in water, even though the salt is present, one cannot objectify it – this is akin to *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, wherein the *brahmākāra vyṛtti* remains ‘unperceived’ because of the – ‘*dhyeya-mātra-avasthīti*’. A question: if the *brahmākāra vyṛtti* remains even in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, does it not run counter to the Advaitic stand of non-dual Brahman? Nay, the *brahmākāra vyṛtti* falsifies itself, for even while denying reality to all names and forms, it necessarily denies itself, since *brahmākāra vyṛtti* is also a thought – a mere name and form. A veritable hara-kiri.

**Difference between Nirvikalpa-samādhi and Suṣupti**

The difference between *nirvikalpa-samādhi* and *suṣupti* is this: in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the *brahmākāra vyṛtti* exists (in its unperceived or ‘dissolved’ state), while in *suṣupti* there is only nothingness perceived. Hence the obvious difference in the

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7 It is this *brahmākāra vyṛtti*-memory that surfaces in the meditator’s recalling after getting up from meditation: “I was in deep meditation”.

8 For further explanation of this concept, refer to the topic ‘End of *brahmākāra vyṛtti*’ in the essay ‘*Brahmākāra vyṛtti*-III’ in the August 2005 issue of *Tapovan Prasad*. 
recollected: the person who has risen from deep-sleep remembers his experience as ‘I was in deep sleep and I knew nothing’, while the meditator who has woken up from nirvikalpa-samādhi recalls his experience as ‘I was in deep-meditation and I remained therein as Brahman’.

Summary

We find a summary of the above-discussed thoughts on nirvikalpa-samādhi in Sri Sankaracharya’s composition Sarva-vedānta-siddhānta-sūra-saṅgraha (verses 823-827):

ज्ञात्रादिभासमुत्सृण्यं कैवमात्रकथितम्।
मनसो निरविकल्पं स्वत्समाधिकृणेत्रसंज्ञित॥

ज्ञात्रादिभासमुत्सृण्यं कैवमात्रकथितम्।
मनसो निरविकल्पं स्वत्समाधिकृणेत्रसंज्ञित॥

When the triad of the knower etc., is given up and the mind firmly abides as the known alone, it is termed nirvikalpa-samādhi in Yoga.

ज्ञेय निश्चितत्वं ज्ञेयात्मात्यत्वं स्थितं।
पृथ्वीं भाति किं त्वमेव एकमेववस्ते॥

When a lump of salt has been thrown in the water, it does not appear distinct from the water and only the water is seen. In the same way when

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Don't serve as if you are doing others a favour. Instead, be grateful to others for giving you a chance to serve.

Swami Chinmayananda
that thought of ‘I am Brahman’ remains as Brahman and does not appear
distinct from it, the non-dual Brahman alone shines.

ज्ञानादिकल्पनामान्यवाचनोऽध्रव्यः निर्विकल्पकः।
वृत्तः: सद्गृहावधाय-वामपरोणः इत्यथे॥

jnātrādikalpanābhāvānmmato’yaṁ nirvikalpakaḥ,
vṛtteḥ sadbhāvabādhābhābhūmabhīryobhēda iṣyate.

Since in this state one does not perceive the triad of the knower etc., this
state is termed ‘nirvikalpa’. The appearance of the thought and its absence
cause the difference between the two samādhis.

समाधिसुप्तोज्जांति चाहान्ति सुप्तन्त्र नेष्येत ।
samādhisuptyorjñānam cājñānaṁ suptyastra nesyaṁ.

In nirvikalpa-samādhi there is knowledge (I am Brahman), while in
deep-sleep there is no such knowledge. Hence nirvikalpa-samādhi is
distinct from deep-sleep.

Conclusion

Nirvikalpa-samādhi is the doorway to the sanctum sanctorum
of Truth. It is in this stage of absolute effortless absorption that
the ‘aham brahmaṇa’ thought gathers momentum to become
the brahmākāra-vṛtti. In the ‘white heat of meditation’\(^9\), the
brahmākāra-vṛtti percolates into the depths of one’s causal-body
to become the ‘brahmāsmiṁ vāsanā’ and puts an end to anātma-
vāsanā – the causal factor behind the viparīta bhāvanās such as
‘I am a limited individual (jīva)’, ‘I am the doer (kārya)’, ‘I am
the enjoyer (bhoktra)’ and so on. Avidya is destroyed and samsāra
comes to an end. Upto savikalpa-samādhi is the frontier of human
effort. From here, GRACE takes over. May the blessings of the
Lord and Guru guide us to this blessed Experience of the Self.

\(^9\) This is the powerful figurative phrase that Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji
used, while explaining the highest state of meditation.