

Nirvikalpa, Sankalpa and Sahaja Samadhi

Ted Schmidt

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Nicholas: Hey, Ted, I have a question if you wouldn't mind answering. I have read *Dharma Combat*, with the "Mountain-Path Swami" and our beloved Ramji, a number of times, and now that "I" have assimilated the knowledge it becomes clearer and clearer with each read! But anyway, I digress. The Swami says that *nirvikalpa samadhi* is "the best" type of mind-state to assimilate self-knowledge, and James argues that it is *sankalpa samadhi*... and then we have Ramana Maharshi who says that it is *sahaja samadhi*! So I was wondering, what with your brilliant intellect (I know that it is all *Isvara*), whether or not you could explain what Vedanta's or indeed your thoughts (same thing, eh?) are on this subtle subject, as I have become very interested in these little details nowadays; after all, what else is there to be interested in, intellectually speaking? So, Ted, if you would do your best to answer this question, I would be really thankful, not to mention "interested," to know!

~ All the best, Nicholas

Ted: Hi, Nicholas. Self-knowledge cannot be assimilated during *nirvikalpa samadhi*, because the *buddhi*, or intellect, has basically resolved into a state of dormancy within the causal body, so to speak. That is, the *buddhi*, or intellect, which is the discriminating aspect of the *antahkarana* (i.e. the mind in general, which consists of *manas*, the function of indiscriminate perception and emotion; *buddhi*, the function of discriminative thinking and deciding; *ahamkara*, the I-thought that claims ownership of the body-mind-sense complex and its actions; and *chitta*, the memory) has ceased to perform its discriminatory function and abides in a state characterized by a single, subtle, unmodified thought. While this thought does offer a view of our limitless nature, the mind perceiving it is in a state that is essentially no different than the state of dreamless sleep, and therefore though the "experience" of limitlessness is had, the knowledge it "contains" is not consciously recognized, and therefore does not get assimilated. The intellect is the instrument of knowledge, and thus if the intellect is not functioning, knowledge does not take place.

Sankalpa samadhi differs from *nirvikalpa samadhi* in that while the mind is sufficiently still to register an accurate reflection of the limitless awareness illumining it, the intellect is still active enough to "see," or recognize, the generally unmodified character of the mind, and is therefore capable of retaining the knowledge afforded it by the "glimpse" it has caught of the limitless awareness that is its true nature. *Sankalpa samadhi* can occur while one is transacting "business" with the world, but it is more likely to occur during sessions of formal or "seated" meditation. *Sankalpa samadhi* is the ideal platform for self-inquiry, and it was in a state of *sankalpa samadhi* in fact that Ramana Maharshi had his famous near-death experience, the epiphany by means of which he realized the self.

Once the knowledge afforded through the experience of *sankalpa samadhi* has been assimilated, then one is able to recognize and appreciate the underlying *nirvikalpa* nature of awareness that is one's true identity even while engaged in one's daily activities. This is *sahaja samadhi*. This is the state that characterizes the *jiva's* life within the context of the apparent reality after the assimilation of self-knowledge.

~ All the best, Ted