

# Mystic Experience Is Not Necessary for Enlightenment: Nirvikalpa and Savikalpa Samadhi

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2010-11-29

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1494>

**Arun:** Hi, Ram. Two more questions for you about Vedanta:

1. As I understand, the process of self-enquiry involves the dismissal of false identification with perceived objects (with “name and form”) until the mind understands that the ultimate subject is formless/nameless consciousness itself (i.e. the self).

BUT... after reading Swami Dayananda’s booklet explaining “*purnamidam purnamadah*,” it dawned on me the the whole non-duality assertion is saying that I am the object AND the subject (NOT ONLY THE SUBJECT)... IF my understanding is correct (??), then what is the point of dismissing “OBJECTS” in the process of self-enquiry if I AM the object???

Is enlightenment in two stages whereby (1) you realise you are the nameless, formless subject (the *atman*?), (2) then identify this subject with all objects (*brahman*)??

**Ram:** Good thinking, Arun. Reality, the self, is non-dual, so the subject and the objects cannot be different. However, when you are caught in *maya*, i.e. you don’t know the self – you identify with objects – particularly the “I” thought, the emotions, the body, various situations, etc. and this causes suffering because the objects are inconstant and deliver both pleasure and pain.

So first you negate the objects, meaning you go through various experiences in your life until you realize that they are not fulfilling – money, sex, book-learning, career, etc. – it can be anything. Or using logic and reason you can negate the objects – as long as you accept the conclusion and live by it. Or you can take it on faith that there is no happiness in the world and let the *vasanas* burn out that way. The point is that you realize that your desire for and fear of things isn’t real and you quit taking your fears and desires to be real. You quit identifying with them.

This makes it possible to realize the self. The self – awareness – is the default. You can’t get rid of it. It’s what’s left over when the objects are negated. In the last stage you realize that insofar as the objects have any reality they borrow it from the self. So you take them back, but with the understanding that they are “*mithya*,” apparently real.

**Arun:** I’m still unclear on the repeatedly emphasised point (from your website) that EXPERIENCE is not necessary, only understanding (this is logical, to my mind), but then you talk about knowledge “backed up by experience” every now and again. What does that mean? This seems to contradict itself.

**Ram:** If you are fortunate enough to experience the reflection of the self in a *sattvic* mind (see below) and you realize that you are the self, then experience is very

useful. The reason I put so much emphasis on knowledge is to get people to think clearly about the impermanent nature of experience. Here's a quote from Nisargatta: "All experience is illusory, limited and temporal. Expect nothing from experience. Realisation by itself is not an experience, though it may lead to a new dimension of experiences. Yet the new experiences, however interesting, are not more real than the old. Definitely, realisation is not a new experience. It is the discovery of the timeless factor in every experience. It is awareness, which makes experience possible. Just like in all the colours light is the colourless factor, so in every experience awareness is present, yet it is not an experience."

There is this notion - it comes from our bias toward experience which Yoga has capitalized on - that self-realization is a particular experience. This is a tremendous impediment to self-realization. It allows anyone who has had a non-dual epiphany to claim enlightenment. But enlightenment is the knowledge "I am the self." The self is completely free of experience. If it had any connection with experience it wouldn't be free. In fact enlightenment is freedom from experience altogether. This is very hard to accept - considering the fact that as body-minds all we have is experience.

**Arun:** Are you really saying that there are enlightened masters who have NEVER had a dualistic experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi*? I find this hard to believe - surely such experiences (as long as the intellect is functioning) are essential in aiding the mind in understanding that reality is non-dual!!

**Ram:** Yes. It is completely possible to realize the self without a single experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. No experience is necessary for realization. It is one's evaluation of the relative importance of experience that is necessary for realization. And it is possible to experience *nirvikalpa samadhi*, although not as the person you think you are, because that person - let's call him Arun - is a *vikalpa*, a thought or concept. If you do inquiry into Arun you won't find anyone there - except awareness. But the realization that there is no Arun happens to someone, and that someone - which is not a someone - is awareness.

*Nirvikalpa* means a *samadhi* "without any thought." So there is no person there to experience it, because a person is just a thought. If there is no person to experience it and it happened, it must have been happening to you, awareness. But so what? It's of no interest to the self. All it proves is that the experiencer, the individual entity, is not necessary for you to exist. If you understand this it may lead to the realization "I am awareness, that to which experience - or in the case of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, non-experience - presents itself." Or "I am the knower of the experiencer."

*Savikalpa samadhi*, however, is excellent for self-realization because the experiencer is there, and the self, which is *nirvikalpa* - is there appearing as an object, so you can inquire into it and gain the knowledge of it as you. To be fair, you can't experience the self - it is the ultimate "experiencer" and as such it is beyond experience altogether. By that I mean that experience presents itself to awareness, but awareness doesn't chase or evaluate experience - as the subtle body, which is controlled by the *vasanas*, does. You can experience the reflection of it in a *sattvic* mind - which is adequate for the purposes of realization. *Yoga* is valuable because it can help you gain a *sattvic* mind.

It is the experiencer that thinks he or she isn't the self, so this apparent person needs the knowledge "I am awareness" to be freed of experience. How can such a

person gain this knowledge in *nirvikapla samadhi*?

Another problem with *nirvikapla samadhi* is that it is just an experience. Your wife calls you to dinner when the *samadhi* is happening and you, meaning the individual, come out of the *samadhi*, not that you were there in the first place. It would actually be more accurate to say that the *samadhi* ends. This is the important point.

Anything that begins and ends is not you. All *samadhies* begin and end because they are states of mind. It is possible to gain inferential knowledge from this *samadhi*, but only – as I said above, the knowledge that “the person I thought I was doesn’t exist.” The knowledge of the non-existence of the individual can lead to self-realization, but it is only “negative” knowledge. It negates the individual.

You can get depressed from this knowledge if you don’t take the next logical step and realize that even though Arun was not there he was there – as the self – or he couldn’t have survived the *samadhi*. But this knowledge is also available through an analysis of deep sleep, which is more or less equivalent to *nirvikapla samadhi*. It is also available through waking state inquiry. When you try to put a finger on Arun – to come up with something substantial – you can’t do it, because it is just a name used to refer to an endless stream of discrete, insubstantial experiences which appear in awareness and disappear out of awareness.

Any *samadhi* or non-dual epiphany – which almost everyone has experienced at some time – can be very useful, but is definitely not essential – as you suggest. Any person in a completely normal state of mind can, through Vedanta teaching, for example, or through a serious life trauma realize the self.

Any experience – including *samadhi* – is only as good as your ability to understand it. It is only valuable for the knowledge that it brings, since all *samadhies* are temporary. Knowledge transcends experience. It is always good, irrespective of what one is experiencing at the moment. When they shoot a rocket at Mars they don’t even aim it experientially at Mars. They send it off to a different planet in a different direction and use the gravitational field to increase its velocity and shoot it off where Mars isn’t, toward a third planet to further increase its speed, and even then it does not head straight toward the place where Mars is experientially, but at some future place where Mars will be in four years. It eventually gets there in spite of the fact that it always seems to be going to someplace else. If they went by experience they would never get to Mars. What worked was knowledge of the movement of the planets. If you stand on the equator, the sun experientially rises in the east and sets in the west. At the North Pole at a certain time the sun experientially goes in a circle around the earth. From the sun’s position the earth goes around it. Viewed from outer space the sun seems to be just one of billions of stars. Which is true? All are true and none are true. You can’t count on experience to deliver true knowledge. But it can be helpful if you have the big picture, which helps you evaluate it and lay it to rest – as I’ve said.

To understand what is meant by *samadhi* one needs to know the meaning of the words “*sama*” and “*dhi*.” *Sama* means “equal” and *dhi* means *buddhi*, or “intellect.” It is a *samadhi* that takes place in the intellect, or subtle body. So what is equal to what? It is a state of mind that values all things equally. “A *yogi* in *samadhi* sees no difference between a lump of gold and the excreta of a crow.” To be sure, you know that one is valuable in the world and the other isn’t, but you see that essentially they are the same. That is, they are only awareness in two apparently different forms.

The self is *nirvikalpa*. And as the self you don’t have to maintain a particular

experience to be *nirvikalpa* – thought-free. So if you realize the self through inquiry, which should be guided by scripture because it gives you the big picture, which in turn allows you to negate the *samadhi*, you get *nirvikalpa* without having to achieve it or “maintain” it.

**Arun:** Thanks for your help, Ram. I am going to meet Swamini Pramananda (Swami Dayananda’s disciple) in two weeks - exciting!

~ Arun