

Samadhi

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Samādhi (Sanskrit: समाधि) in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and yogic schools is a higher level of concentrated meditation, or *dhyāna*, which transcends the realms of body, mind and intellect, and where the logical and analytical ability of the being becomes silent. Samadhi, being the ultimate stage of Yoga, symptomatically represents itself as the transcendental state, wherein even consciousness of the yogi might get detached from the body. According to Bhargava Dictionary^[1] Samadhi is the exercise of austerity of a Yogi whereby he acquires the power of suspending the connection between the body and soul as long as he likes. In the Ashtanga Yoga tradition, it is the eighth and final limb identified in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali.

In terms of Consciousness, it has been described as a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing subject becomes one with the experienced object,^[2] and in which the mind becomes still, one-pointed or concentrated^[3] while the person remains conscious. In Buddhism, it can also refer to an abiding in which mind becomes very still but does not merge with the object of attention, and is thus able to observe and gain insight into the changing flow of experience.^[4]

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Nomenclature, orthography and etymology

Samadhi (समाधि *samādhi*, Hindi pronunciation: [sə'maːd̪i]) is the state of consciousness induced by complete meditation. The term's etymology involves "*sam*" (together or integrated), "*ā*" (towards), and "*dhā*" (to get, to hold). Thus the result might be seen to be "to acquire integration or wholeness, or truth" (*samāpatti*). Another possible etymological analysis of "*samādhi*" is "*samā*" (even) and "*dhi*" (intellect), a state of total equilibrium ("*samā*") of a detached intellect ("*dhi*"). Also, "Samadhi" can be understood as "sam" (uniformly or fully) and "adhi" (to get established) i.e. a state wherein one establishes himself to the fullest extent in the Supreme consciousness.

In terms of usage, Rhys Davids^[5] holds that the first attested usage of the term *samādhi* in Sanskrit literature was in the *Maitri Upanishad*.^[6]

Hinduism

Samādhi is the main subject of the first part of the Yoga Sūtras called *Samādhi-pada*. Vyāsa, a major figure in Hinduism and one of the traditional authors of the *Mahābhārata*, says in his commentary on verse 1.1 of the *Yoga Sūtras* that "yoga is *samādhi*."^[7] This is generally interpreted to mean that *samādhi* is a state of complete control (*samadhana*) over the functions and distractions of consciousness.

Samādhi is described in different ways within Hinduism such as the state of being aware of one's existence without thinking, in a state of undifferentiated "beingness" or as an altered state of consciousness that is characterized by bliss (*ānanda*) and joy (*sukha*). Nisargadatta Maharaj describes the state in the following manner:

When you say you sit for meditation, the first thing to be done is understand that it is not this body identification that is sitting for meditation, but this knowledge "I am", this consciousness, which is sitting in meditation and is meditating on itself. When this is finally understood, then it becomes easy. When this consciousness, this conscious presence, merges in itself, the state of "Samadhi" ensues. It is the conceptual feeling that I exist that disappears and merges into the beingness itself. So this conscious presence also gets merged into that knowledge, that beingness – that is "Samadhi".

__^[8]

Martijn Truijens described it in these words for the non-Eastern individual: "Samadhi is an Eastern term for the state of equilibrium in the West. Equilibrium is the place behind or beneath the ever fluctuating emotional influences that are temporary of nature and therefor cannot be true. True calmness can be reached through divine surrender to the greater good in daily life, or that which brings spiritual pleasure to the individual. Honesty and love are a prerequisite (for the self is relentlessly perpetuating nonsense) in order to penetrate these layers of unconscious repetitious behaviour, until the sky (or mind) clears and the clouds (or thoughts) dissolve into nothing. It is in this state of nothing that I am.

The initial experience of it is enlightenment and it is the beginning of the process of meditating to attain self-realization (*tapas*). "There is a difference between the enlightenment of *samādhi* and self-realization. When a person achieves enlightenment, that person starts doing *tapas* to realize the self."^[9]

Types of samadhi

According to Patañjali^[10] *samādhi* has three different categories:

1. *Savikalpa* - This is an interface of trans meditation and higher awareness state, *asamprajñata*. The state is so named because mind retains its consciousness, which is why in *savikalpa samādhi* one can experience guessing (*vitarka*), thought (*vicāra*), bliss (*ānanda*) and self-awareness (*asmita*).^[10] In Sanskrit, "*kalpa*" means "imagination". *Vikalpa* (an etymological derivation of which could be 'विशेषः कल्पः विकल्पः।') connotes imagination. Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtras* defines "*vikalpa*" saying: 'शब्द-ज्ञानानुपाति वस्तु-शून्यो-विकल्पः।'. "*Sa*" is a prefix which means "with". So "*savikalpa*" means "with *vikalpa*" or "with imagination". Ramana Maharshi defines "*savikalpa samādhi*" as, "holding on to reality with effort".^[11]
2. *Asamprajñata* is a step forward from *savikalpa*. According to Patañjali,^[10] *asamprajñata* is a higher awareness state with absence of gross awareness.^[12]
3. *Nirvikalpa* or *sanjeevan* - This is the highest transcendent state of consciousness. In this state there is no longer mind, duality, a subject-object relationship or experience.^[13] Upon entering *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the differences we saw before have faded and we can see everything as one. In this condition nothing but pure awareness remains and nothing detracts from wholeness and perfection.

Savikalpa vs. nirvikalpa samadhi

Savikalpa Samadhi can be compared to prana shakti ascending upto Brahm Randhra (or Sahasrara Chakra); a stage of Samadhi when the soul-element pulls all the vital-forces (i.e. the prana-shakti) till Brahm-Randhra, also known as 'Sahasradalkamal' or 'Antaraakaash' (inner cosmic space). Here the yogi remains consciously self- aware about Samadhi.

त्वत्समाधिविजयेतूयहपुनरमानक्षुमोक्षरसिकःक्रमेण वा

योगवशयमनिलम्षडाश्रयेरुनयात्याजसुषुमनायाशंयः।^[14]

Meaning, “when the state of Samadhi manifests in those desiring for either sadhyomukti (immediate happiness) or kramamukti (gradual liberation), they elevate their life-force, by disciplining their Prana, and moving up through sushumna , while crossing the six-chakras in subtle body.”

Nirvikalpa Samadhi is akin to prana shakti ascending beyond Brahm Randhra and merging into outer cosmic space; a stage of Samadhi when the soul-element along with all the vital-forces (i.e. the prana-shakti)transcends the physical plane of Yogi even beyond Brahm-randhra. This is the state in which absolute death-like stillness might envelop the frame of the Yogi in Samadhi.

लिंगदेहमपिसंत्यजेन्नाथोलिएतेतवईपरनिरग्रह।

उर्ध्वलोकाकुटुकितुमुर्धातासाराधमेहकरनेनिरियते।^[15]

Meaning, “when the state of Samadhi manifests in those desiring for either sadhyomukti (immediate happiness) or kramamukti (gradual liberation), they elevate their life-force, by disciplining their Prana, and moving up through sushumna , while crossing the six-chakras in subtle body”.

Entering and staying in samadhi

Entering *samādhi* initially takes great training and willpower, and maintaining it takes even more will. The beginning stages of *samādhi* (*laya* and *savikalpa samādhi*) are only temporary. By "effort" it is not meant that the mind has to work more. Instead, it means work to control the mind and release the self. Note that normal levels of meditation (mostly the lower levels) can be held automatically, as in "being in the state of being" rather than overtly "meditating." This can be compared with the attempts to learn to ride a bicycle as a young child, requiring tremendous efforts at first, followed by natural ease and balance in later years. The ability to obtain positive results from meditation is much more difficult than simply meditating. Before one can reach a more permanent state of equilibrium in the mind, one requires to overcome the inevitable distractions, such as thought and emotions. It is recommended to find a qualified spiritual master (guru or yogi) who can teach a meditator about the workings of the mind. As one self-realized yogi explained, "You can meditate but after some time you will get stuck at some point. That is the time you need a guru. Otherwise, without a Guru, chances are very slim."^[16]

Samādhi is the only stable unchanging reality; all else is ever-changing and does not bring everlasting peace or happiness.

Staying in *nirvikalpa samādhi* is effortless but even from this condition one must eventually return to ego-consciousness. Otherwise this highest level of *samādhi* leads to *nirvāṇa*, which means total unity, the logical end of individual identity and also death of the body. However, it is entirely possible to stay in *nirvikalpa samādhi* and yet be fully functional in this world. This condition is known as *sahājā nirvikalpa samādhi* or *sahājā samādhi*. According to Ramana Maharshi, "Remaining in the primal, pure natural state without effort is *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*".^[11]

Attaining samadhi as per the Yoga Sutras

I. K. Taimni, in *The Science of Yoga*,^[17] Taimni's commentary on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, provides a lucid and precise understanding of samadhi. In simple terms, Taimni defines samadhi as "knowing by becoming". Samadhi, as pointed out above, is the eighth arm of Patanjali's Ashtanga (eight limbed) yoga. The last three of the eight limbs are called Antaranga, or Internal yoga, meaning they occur solely in the mind of the yogin. The three limbs are: dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Together, the three are collectively called samyama. Dharana, dhyana and samadhi are sometimes translated as concentration, contemplation, and meditation, respectively. These translations do not shed any light on the nature of dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Dharana, dhyana and samadhi are altered states of consciousness and have no direct counterpart in normal waking experience, according to Taimni's explanation of them.

According to Taimni, dharana, dhyana and samadhi form a graded series:

1. Dharana. In dharana, the mind learns to focus on a single object of thought. The object of focus is called a pratyaya. In dharana, the yogi learns to prevent other thoughts from intruding on focusing awareness on the pratyaya.

2. Dhyana. Over time and with practice, the yogin learns to sustain awareness of only the pratyaya, thereby dharana transforms into dhyana. In dhyana, the yogin comes to realize the triplicity of perceiver (the yogin), perceived (the pratyaya) and the act of perceiving. The new element added to the practice of dhyana, that distinguish it from dharana is the yogin learns to minimize the perceiver element of this triplicity. In this fashion, dhyana is the gradual minimization of the perceiver, or the fusion of the observer with the observed (the pratyaya).
3. Samadhi. When the yogin can: (1) sustain focus on the pratyaya for an extended period of time, and (2) minimize his or her self-consciousness during the practice, then dhyana transforms into samadhi. In this fashion then, the yogin becomes fused with the pratyaya. Patanjali compares this to placing a transparent jewel on a colored surface: the jewel takes on the color of the surface. Similarly, in samadhi, the consciousness of the yogin fuses with the object of thought, the pratyaya. The pratyaya is like the colored surface, and the yogin's consciousness is like the transparent jewel.

Samadhi can be compared to normal thought as a laser beam can be compared to normal light. Normal light is diffuse. A laser beam is highly concentrated light. The laser beam contains power that normal light does not. Similarly, samadhi is the mind in its most concentrated state. The mind in samadhi possess power that a normal mind does not. This power is used by the yogin to reveal the essence of the pratyaya. This essence is called the artha of the pratyaya. The release of the artha of the pratyaya is similar to cracking open the shell of a seed to discover the essential elements of the seed, the genetic material, protected by the shell.

Once perfected, samadhi is the main tool used by a yogin to penetrate into the deeper layers of consciousness and seek the center of the yogin's consciousness. Upon finding this center, the final act is using a variant form of samadhi, called dharma mega samadhi, to penetrate the center of consciousness and emerge through this center into Kaivalya. Kaivalya is the term used by Patanjali to designate the state of Absolute consciousness free from all fetters and limitations.

Final liberation

Yogis are said to attain the final liberation or *videha mukti* after leaving their bodies at the time of death. It is at this time that the soul knows a complete and unbroken union with the divine, and, being free from the limitations of the body, merges effortlessly into the transcendent Self. This final liberation is referred to as *mahasamadhi* (ultimate samadhi) and is a voluntary and controlled exit from the body by the fully liberated yogi.^[18]

Samadhi mandir

Samadhi mandir is also the Hindi name for a temple commemorating the dead (similar to a mausoleum), which may or may not contain the body of the deceased. *Samādhi* sites are often built in this way to honour people regarded as saints or gurus in Hindu religious traditions, wherein such souls are said to have passed into *mahāsamādhi*, (or were already in) *samādhi* at the time of death.

Samadhi a state of physical transcendence

With modern science being skeptical about Samadhi and sometimes finds itself helpless to explain the physical state of a yogi in Samadhi, there is ample information available in the ancient scriptures which has been observed to be true in case of many saints in recent history. The modern Hindu saints/scholars have also written extensively to guide the modern scientific community on the phenomenon of Samadhi.

While talking about the Pranas, Swami Vivekananda says “There are persons who can train themselves in such a manner that the body will live on even when their lungs, the most obvious manifestation of Prana in the human body, have stopped and there are some persons who can bury themselves for days and yet live without breathing”.^[19] Throwing some more light on this, Swami Sivananda states "When the Kundalini is awakened, it takes the mind and Prana along with it upwards towards Sahasrara Chakra through Sushumna and the Yogi is shut out from the physical consciousness of the world and is practically dead to the world".^[20]

Scriptural references

Shiv Puran

Shiv Puran, one of the early and ancient Indian scriptures, clearly states that in state of Samadhi, the vital forces and the consciousness recede back from every iota of the Being to get confined in the inner or outer cosmic space where a Being seems to be standstill. It further states that at the time of Samadhi, one neither hears anything, nor smells any odour, nor does he taste or see anything; one is unable to identify any feeling of touch, neither can one determine anything in mind, and nor does he believe in anything. The person becomes stiff like a log of wood. In this manner, when the soul force of the person merges with the Brahm (the super cosmic force), one is said to be in the state of Samadhi.^[21]

Hath Yog Pradipika

It states that the one who is in Samadhi, his body transcends the sphere of experiences of smell, taste, touch, speech and consciousness”, implying that even the unconsciously regulated vital senses come to a state of hibernation. For a yogi in the state of Samadhi, his inner-self and outer-self nullifies to zero state, thus establishing in Absolute stillness. This zero-state or absolute stillness of Samadhi appears identical to that of a life-less body. The state wherein the life-force declines and the mind rests in it (divine element) - such a unification of the soul and the Supreme is known as Samadhi^[22]

Patanjali Yogdarshanam and Mahopanishad

Mahopanishad states that when the state of Samadhi arrives, all thoughts and ambitions come to peace, there is no effort of any form. The way a rock is motionless, likewise the state of yogi comes to rest. The yogi becomes independent of Waking state, Dream state and Deep Sleep state, and gets established in Supreme Self.^[23] According to Patanjali Yogdarshanam, where the entire Self or existence appears to be still, it is known as Samadhi.^[24]

Scientific case studies

Flat ECG during Samadhi: A Research on Yogi Satyamurti

A research paper documenting the ECG patterns of Yogi Satyamurti during his week long Samadhi demonstrated a flat line in ECG when the yogi was in state of Samdhi inside the pit. This research paper named - An Unusual Demonstration “The yogic claim of voluntary control over the heart beat - was published in 'A letter to the American Heart Journal – 1973,'^[25] and describes the finding in detail.

Yogi Satyamurti, a sparsely built man of about 60 years of age, remained confined to a small underground pit for 8 days. An ECG was continuously monitored during these 8 days and various other laboratory investigations were carried out before and after.

The 12-lead ECG increased progressively, reaching a heart rate of 250 per minute on the second day. At 5:15 pm on the second day, when the yogi had been inside for about 29 hours, a straight line replaced the ECG tracing. There was no electrical disturbance of any sort even at higher amplification and with different leads. There had been no slowing of the heart or signs of ischemia preceding this.

The straight line on the ECG persisted till the eighth morning. Electrical activity returned about half an hour before the pit was scheduled to be opened. After some initial disturbance, a normal configuration appeared. The Yogi had informed beforehand that he would begin to come out of his Samadhi after nearly 7 days. When the pit was opened on the eighth day, ECG repeated in the laboratory subsequently was found again within normal limits.

The researchers conclusively stated that although it was obviously difficult to believe that the Yogi could have completely stopped his heart or decreased its electrical activity below a recordable level, there was still no satisfactory explanation for the ECG tracings

Instances of samadhi from recent history

There have been several instances of Samadhi documented in recent history (both biographical as well as autobiographical), in several books written by different saints, who lived in contemporary times or who came later but gathered concrete evidence and then have textually described their findings. Although the list can go endless but below are some specific instances that are distinct in nature and throw some light on the physical aspect of Samadhi.

Sri Ramakrishna Pararmhansa

It is a well-documented fact that Sri Ramakrishana Paramhansa went into Samadhi a number of times in his lifetime. During his trances, Ramakrishna seemed to become unconscious and may sit in a fixed position for a short time, or for hours, and would then slowly return to normal consciousness, with no trace of pulse or heart beat during the trance.^[26]

Nirvikalp Samadhi for three days

Sri Totapuri, was waiting outside a room where his disciple Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was sitting in samadhi. Even though Sri Totapuri awaited call from Ramakrishna to open the door hour after hour, and day after day, but even after 3 days, there was no call. Sri Totapuri was astonished and opened the door to find what was wrong, and found Ramakrishna in the same position where he had left him. There was no manifestation of life in Ramakrishna's body. With utmost care, Sri Totapuri tried to determine if heart was beating or there was

slightest trace of respiration. But even after repeated touching of his disciple's corpse like body, there was no sign of life or consciousness. And Sri Totapuri knew that it was undoubtedly a case of Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the culmination of Advaita practice.^[27]

Spontaneous samadhi during Durga Puja

In one of the Durga Puja occasions when Sri Ramakrishna stood up to bid goodbye to Mahendralal Sarkar, he fell into deep Samadhi. Dr Sarkar examined him along with another doctor, who was also present there, Dr Sarkar could not find any heart beat on stethoscopic examination, and also reported that corneal reflex was absent. Both the doctors confessed to each other that science was powerless to explain it. However, Ramakrishna returned from Samadhi into normal consciousness after half an hour and narrated his experience of Samadhi to all devotees present there.^[28]

Samadhi at a stretch for 6 months

Sometime in 1865, Ramakrishna merged in Nirvikalpa Samadhi for a period of 6 months. During this entire period, not a sign of life could be discerned in his body except at long and rare intervals, and that too of very short duration. A monk who chanced to come to Dakshineswar temple at that time realized from the serene glow of the face what was going on within the apparently dead physical frame of Ramakrishna. He appeared on the scene just at the right moment, almost like a divine messenger, and set about preserving Ramakrishna's inert body.^[29] In his own words, Ramakrishna describes: "For six months at a stretch, I remained in that state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls off, after three weeks, like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do to a dead body's, but I did not feel them. My hair became matted with dust." Ramakrishna further says; "There was no chance for the body to survive, and it would have perished, but for the kind ministrations of a monk. He realized the state of my mind and understood that the body must be preserved at any cost, and busily engaged himself in doing so".^[30]

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

While describing Samadhi states of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1485-1533), it is mentioned that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would go into Turyaga Samadhi frequently and used to come out of it easily. Once on the seashore, off the coast of Puri, he entered Turyaga Samadhi and losing consciousness fell into the sea. Many hours later fisherman retrieved Mahaprabhu's body from sea in their net. There were no outer signs of life in Mahaprabhu's body due to Turyaga Samadhi, but he gradually recovered full consciousness, much to the joy and happiness of his disciples.^[31]

Lahiri Mahasaya

Lahiri Mahasaya, who was the Guru of Yukteshwar Giri, would go into state of pulseless Samadhi even while talking to others as evident from the following conversation:

Once, Yogiraj (Lahiri Mahasaya) humorously chatting to his disciple, Dr Chandramohan De, asked him - "who is considered 'dead' in medical science".

Chandramohan replied - "One whose pulse stops."

Yogiraj while extending his hand said- "Examine my pulse and tell whether I'm dead or alive."

After examining his pulse, Chandramohan even checked for his heartbeat. On finding both missing, his face went pale. He said to Lahiri Mahashaya, "This is a miracle!"

“So write me a death certificate!” demanded Lahiri Mahashaya.

“I’ve no objections in writing it; but you are speaking to me sitting alive!”, said Chandramohan and started laughing.^[32]

Buddhism

Samādhi, or concentration of the mind, is the 3rd division of the eightfold path of the Buddha's threefold training: wisdom (*pañña*), conduct (*sīla*), *Samādhi* (Buddhism) (*samādhi*) - within which it is developed by *samatha* meditation. Some Buddhist schools teach of 40 different object meditations, according to the *Visuddhimagga*, a medieval commentarial text. These objects include meditations on the breath (*anapanasati*), loving kindness (*metta*) and various colours, earth, fire, etc. (*kasīṇa*).

Important components of Buddhist meditation, frequently discussed by the Buddha, are the successively higher meditative states known as the four *jhānas* which in the language of the eight-fold path, are "right concentration". Right concentration has also been characterised in the *Maha-cattarisaka Sutta* as concentration arising due to the previous seven steps of the noble eightfold path.^[33]

Four developments of *samādhi* are mentioned in the Pāli Canon:

1. *Jhāna*
2. Increased alertness
3. Insight into the true nature of phenomena (knowledge and vision)
4. Final liberation

Post-canonical Pali literature identifies three different types of *samādhi*:

1. momentary *samādhi* (*khaṇikasamādhi*)^[34]
2. access concentration (*upacārasamādhi*)
3. fixed concentration (*appaṇāsamādhi*)

Not all types of *samādhi* are recommended either. Those which focus and multiply the five hindrances are not suitable for development.^[35]

The Buddhist suttas also mention that *samādhi* practitioners may develop supernormal powers (*abhijñā*, also see *siddhis*) and list several that the Buddha developed, but warn that these should not be allowed to distract the practitioner from the larger goal of complete freedom from suffering.

The bliss of *samādhi* is not the goal of Buddhism; but it remains an important tool in reaching the goal of enlightenment. Later Buddhist schools would eventually teach entirely different meditation methods for cultivating *Samatha* - the quality of tranquility - than for developing *vipassana* - the quality of insight. However, the earliest Buddhist Canons make it clear that these two qualities are developed by the same practice, namely *Jhāna* via the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.^[36]

Sikhism

In Sikhism the word is used to refer to an action that one uses to remember and fix one's mind and soul on Waheguru.

The Sri Guru Granth Sahib informs "Remember in meditation the Almighty Lord, every moment and every instant; meditate on God in the celestial peace of Samadhi." (p 508). So to meditate and remember the Almighty at all times in one's mind takes the person into a state of Samadhi. Also "I am attached to God in celestial Samadhi." (p 865) tells us that by carrying out the correct practices, the mind reaches a higher plane of awareness or Samadhi. The Sikh Scriptures advises the Sikh to keep the mind aware and the consciousness focused on the Lord at all times thus: "The most worthy Samadhi is to keep the consciousness stable and focused on Him." (p 932)

The term *Samadhi* refers to a state of mind rather than a physical position of the body. Although, it has to be said that you can sit in meditation and also be in a state of Samadhi. The Scriptures explain: "I am absorbed in celestial Samadhi, lovingly attached to the Lord forever. I live by singing the Glorious Praises of the Lord" (p 1232) and also "Night and day, they ravish and enjoy the Lord within their hearts; they are intuitively absorbed in Samadhi. ||2||" (p 1259). Further, the Sikh Gurus inform their followers: "Some remain absorbed in Samadhi, their minds fixed lovingly on the One Lord; they reflect only on the Word of the Shabad." (p503)

See also

- Baqaa, fana
- Bhakti Yoga
- Dhyana in Hinduism
- Dhyāna in Buddhism
- Egolessness
- Fanaa
- Jangama dhyana
- Jnana Yoga
- Kriya Yoga
- Mantra
- Meditation
- Rāja yoga
- Stoicism
- Sahaja Yoga
- Turiya

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7. ^ This has widely been misstated in many places, including previous versions of this web page, as coming from the *Mahābharata* instead of Yoga Sutras 1.1
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