Chapter 1.

THE CONCEPT OF SAMĀDHĪ

The term 'samādhi' is derived from the root 'dhā', which means to put, lay upon, fix upon, to support, or to sustain. There is another root 'samādhā' which means almost the same thing. In one of its applications this latter root means to concentrate, or to fix the eye or mind upon. The word 'samādhānam' is derived from this, which means fixing the mind in abstract contemplation upon the true nature of the soul, or deep meditation or contemplation. It is much used in Vedantic discourse. The word samādhi has been very commonly used in the Yoga texts. It means contemplation not on the nature of the soul alone, but rather an intense state of absorption of the mind into any object of concentration, which may be gross or subtle, material or abstract. Thus the word samādhi has a wider meaning and application as compared to the word samādhānam.

Apart from the usual sense of deep absorption in which it is used in Yoga, the word samādhi has also been used in other senses in Sanskrit literature. For instance, in the Ramayana of Valmiki and Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa, the word is used to indicate a combination or collection. In the former (Ramayana - IV. 33.50) it is used to mean a samādhi, i.e., combination of dharma and artha, while in the latter (Raghuvamsa - I. 29) it means a combination of the five elements, called mahābhūtas.
Samādhi also sometimes means a tomb of some holy person or a master of Yoga. In India one may find many such samādhis of great men of the past practically everywhere. At some places the word samādhi has been used to mean religious obligation or penance. This we find in the works of Kalidasa, for instance, in the Shakuntala (I.1.) and Kumarasambhava (III. 24.).

In Indian languages other than Sanskrit, the term samādhi has found a place in different contexts, conveying a variety of meanings. Thus bhoogarbha-samādhi means remaining underground in a pit without food or water (and as popular belief goes, without air also, although this belief is found to be completely false on scientific investigations), for days and weeks. Jala-samādhi usually means drowning or sinking, although it may also be translated as remaining alive under water. There is a legend in the epic Mahabharata that Suyodhana, the leader of the Kauravas, knew the art of remaining alive under water, and that when every one else on his side was killed in the great Mahabharata war, he escaped and kept hiding at the bottom of a lake. Demonstration of such a power by any Yogi has never been heard of, but there are many who can perform bhoogarbha-samādhi.

The word maha-samādhi is used to mean death (or rather liberation or emancipation) of pious persons, who are supposed to be enlightened, and thus free from the cycle of rebirths. The idea is that just as in
samādhi one gets absorbed for some time, in the great samādhi (maha meaning great) one is absorbed for infinite time.

There is another word, 'sanjeevana-samādhi', which indicates going into maha-samādhi at one's will, not as a result of any disease or any other fatal cause. It may be called one of the highest achievements a human being can ever have — to breathe one's last voluntarily, effortlessly, peacefully, and joyfully. Sanjeevanam means bringing to life. Hence sanjeevana - samādhi may be described as a state in which one is emancipated without meeting death. There has been a well known example of this, that of the great saint Jñanadeva, who lived in the twelfth century A.D. A detailed description of how he went into samādhi, is available. It is not a mere legend, but perhaps a historical fact. It may be called a real maha-samādhi, in the true sense of the word.

The word samādhi has so far been described in its various senses that are more common. There are other meanings sometimes ascribed to the word, which we may just mention without giving examples from literature. Such meanings are: 1) a particular position of the neck, 2) accomplishment, 3) silence, 4) a religious vow, 5) agreement, 6) perseverance, 7) recompense, and so on.

This shows clearly how samādhi is a complex notion. While we generally use it in the sense of a state of Yoga, which is a state of silence, deep absorption, and a sort of enlightenment, and very correctly so, technically,
it should also be remembered that this is not the only meaning conveyed by the word 'samādhi'.

There is another interesting point about the word samādhi, namely, that another word 'dhyāna' seems to have been much more in use initially, to indicate more or less the same meaning of reflection, contemplation, or meditation, especially at the time of the Vedas. This word 'dhyāna', is, in all probability, much older than the word 'samādhi'. For, we find it used in the Vedas at many places in the prayers of the vedic seers, while the word samādhi is hardly ever referred to. Thus in the Rigveda we find a seer praying to Lord Indra with intense dhyāna (I.16.9.), (V.33.1.). Similarly, there are references in the Rigveda to seers praying with intense dhyāna for the grace of Lord Brihaspati (IV.50.1.) and for protection by gods from evil effects (V.45.11.). Meditation, it seems, was a common routine with the vedic seers. They are described at one place in the Rigveda (VII.90.5.) as having three qualities, namely, a mind filled with truth, intense dhyāna, and the practice of sacrifice (yajña).

In the Yajurveda (36.3.) there is a reference to the famous Gayatri mantra in which the seers pray by saying that they are performing dhyāna on the most excellent radiance of Lord Savitā. This mantra has ever since become the most popular among the forms of prayer employed by the Hindus, especially the Brahmins, in their daily religious observances.
The word dhyāna is derived from the root 'dhyai', which means to think of, call to mind, ponder over, contemplate, or meditate upon. This root is slightly different in meaning from the roots 'dhā' or 'samādha', in as much as it may be said to indicate a state involving more of an intense activity of the mind and more dynamism. But all the three roots, it may be observed, indicate, generally speaking, the same activity of the mind. It was perhaps Patanjali, the well known author of the Yogasutra, who first drew a clear cut line between dhyāna and samādhi.

But even after Patanjali's days we sometimes find the words dhyāna and samādhi used by knowers of Yoga as interchangeable words. For instance, Patanjali's most acknowledged commentator Vyasa, while commenting on the definition of Yoga given by Patanjali (I.2.), uses the word dharmamegha-dhyāna for the highest kind of samādhi called dharmamegha-samādhi. We shall have occasion to discuss the state of this samādhi later.

In the Shvetashvatara upanishat (I.3.) there is a mention of how adepts of meditation realise the true nature of the soul or ātman by going into the state of dhyāna-yoga. It is clear here that the state of dhyāna mentioned in the upanishat is nothing short of samādhi, and that the upanishat is not differentiating between dhyāna and samādhi. This tendency of using the word dhyāna instead of samādhi is quite evident in Buddhist literature. Buddha has spoken of many varieties of dhyāna which,
we can very well consider as varieties of samādhi in terms of Patanjali's classification.

There is an interesting story in the Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa in which the guru Vasistha is said to have seen a past event in the life of king Dilipa in a state of dhyāna (I.73.). This was evidently a state of samādhi as Patanjali would have us believe. It is needless to give more examples of the words dhyāna and samādhi being used in an indiscriminating fashion in Sanskrit, although many such examples are available. To the modern students of Yoga, however, these two words definitely convey different meanings. We shall consider that difference at a later stage. In our discussion of samādhi in the following pages it will be one of our presuppositions that samādhi is a state different from dhyāna.

Such a presupposition does not, however, mean that our ancients who used the word dhyāna for samādhi did so out of any confusion about the two words. It is quite evident that they were well verse with the state which we now call samādhi. It may be said that they used the word dhyāna in a wider sense as compared to later writings. Their experiencing of the state was not discrepant; nor was their use of language faulty. Perhaps they did not have the choice of words which is available to us now. But if today somebody fails to differentiate between the two words, and uses the word dhyāna instead of the word samādhi, and vice versa, then
it will have to be regarded as confusion and discrepancy.

In our discussion of the word samādhi so far, we have not given any detailed answer to the question, What is samādhi? apart from giving the meaning of the word. In fact, the whole of the present work, it may be pointed out, constitutes an effort, in the main, to answer this important question. We are now in a position to begin our attempt stage by stage.

Descriptions of the state of samādhi in traditional works such as the Upanishads, Puranas, epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, Bhagavadgita, Yogasutra of Patanjali, texts called Yoga-Upanishads, texts of Hatha-yoga, and in the works of modern writers, are so varied in content and implications, that to give them all at one place one after the other would probably serve no purpose to begin with. So the plethora of these descriptions is classified under different heads, and presented in the next few chapters with a view to arrive at a compact and clear final picture.

It is essential at the very outset to overcome a sort of confusion about samādhi that is found prevalent among the modern writers on samādhi. Actually, the word samādhi as used in the traditional works, indicates two different states and not always one and the same state. This may appear rather strange, but it is an inevitable conclusion which every student of samādhi must always bear in mind. Samādhi in one sense means a state of concentration of the mind on a single object to the exclusion of thought about everything else. This state of concentration may last for
some time after which one comes back to the usual state of world consciousness. This state is a means, not an end. It may be said that such a samādhi is characterised by effort, concentration, exclusion, temporariness, and a come-back.

In another sense samādhi means a state which involves no concentration on any particular object. There is no process of elimination or exclusion of thought in it. It is effortless and timeless. And it is once for all. This samādhi marks an end of all effort. It is here that the end of spiritual discipline is achieved, and so there is no come-back from it. This samādhi is devoid of all the characteristics of the former kind of samādhi mentioned above.

It is most crucial to be aware of the world of difference that lies between these two states, which are indicated by the same word samādhi. To ignore the difference is to commit a fatal error. And this error has been committed by many writers in modern times. We shall cite one very conspicuous example in an effort to remove the confusion. For the sake of clarity let us call the two types of samādhi 'samādhi of return' and 'samādhi of no return', respectively. We shall be describing these in detail in a later chapter.

A.C. Das, who has challenged the possibility of the return of a sādhaka attaining nirvikalpa samādhi back to our normal wakeful consciousness, has concluded in an article that, "liberation in bodily existence is a

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standing reproach to illusionism". By the words 'liberation in bodily existence' and 'nirvikālapa samādhi', Das has expressed what we have called above the 'samādhi of no return'. Das argues that a return of the sādhaka who attains to Brahman back to the mundane world is not possible without violating the basic position of Advaita Vedanta.

"The sādhaka", says Das, "either returns to the mundane world from the nirvikālapa samānih or he does not. If he returns, he violates the basic principle of advaitism, namely, that when Brahman is realised, the world which is unreal is cancelled. If he does not return, then there is nobody to report. The difficulty is that the sādhaka still perceives the world. If the world is, in fact unreal, how can it exist to be presented to one who has realised Brahman?"

Das, it seems, has misunderstood the state of samādhi of no return in so far as the cancellation or unreality of our usual experience is concerned. He seems to think that in that state of samādhi the world should totally cease to exist for that person. As we shall explain later, in the state of samādhi of no return the world does cease to exist, but not in the sense in which Das would expect it. The 'concept' of the world undergoes a change in that state, not the 'percept'. Das is demanding, it may be pointed out, that both the concept and the percept should change in the state of nirvikālapa samādhi. And this demand is born of confusion.
Malkani has made an attempt in an article to meet the objection raised by Das. But in his endeavour to save the state of samādhi from being called an illusion, he has actually added to the confusion. He declares that nirvikalpa samādhi is a state of the mind only -- it is not an eternal state, and that it is also illusory in the end. Let us quote his own words to clear the confusion.

He says, "the mind can only temporarily dissociate itself from the body and its contacts, and concentrate upon a higher and transcendent reality. It cannot do this always. It must relax. It is not in the way of nature to be always in samādhi. It is like going up into a rarefied atmosphere, staying there for a while and then coming back to rest in the natural element of the body".

The qualities of samādhi brought out by Malkani here are quite correct if applied to what we have called the 'samādhi of return'. His only fault is that he has applied them to nirvikalpa samādhi, which really is a very different state. The difference between the two is very vast, and it should never be ignored. People seem to ignore it simply because of the fact that both the states are called samādhi. Ancient writers have avoided the possibility of confusion by giving different

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names to the samādhi of no return, such as, nirbiṣaja or asampraṇajñata samādhi, jīvanmukti, sahaja, unmani, and so on. Each of this name indicates some special quality of that state.

Thus remembering the fact that while using the term 'samādhi' one should always be aware of whether the concept is being used to mean a state of concentration of the mind, or a state which involves no concentration, let us now devote ourselves to describe the two states themselves in all possible details. In the chapter that follows immediately we shall discuss 'samādhi' as a part of the tradition of Yoga, especially as brought out by Patanjali, the author of the Yogasūtra.