

Four Sadhanas - Part II - Manana



SWAMI ADVAYANANDA

Introduction

Brahmākāraṇavṛtti puts an end to *ajñāna* (ignorance) and bestows the Knowledge of *Brahman*. The four *sādhanās* for generating *brahmākāraṇavṛtti* (and thus the Knowledge of *Brahman*) are: (1) *śravaṇa* (listening), (2) *manana* (reflection), (3) *nididhyāsana* (contemplation) and (4) *samādhi* (meditation or absorption). In the last essay¹ we saw the nature and purpose of the first *sādhanā* - *śravaṇa* (listening). This essay is devoted to the second *sādhanā* - *manana* (reflection).

Definition

Manana, the second step, is a 'doubt resolving venture'. While *śravaṇa* produces an 'intellectual ascertainment' of the purport of *Vedānta* as '*jīva brahmaikya*', *manana* ensures an 'intellectual conviction' about what has been so ascertained through *śravaṇa*. To ascertain that the *Upaniṣads* have their purport as '*jīva brahmaikya*' is one thing and to be intellectually convinced about it is altogether another matter. After *śravaṇa* of the *Upaniṣadic* teaching, it is but natural for the seeker to have doubts such as - 'How can the limited individual be the infinite Self?', 'How can the perceived world be *mithyā*?' and so on - for, the subject of the 'non-dual Self' is indeed subtle. Unless these doubts are resolved, there can be no conviction whatsoever about the non-dual Self.

¹ Refer to the September 2005 issue of *Tapovan Prasad* - Four *Sādhanās*: Part I - *Śravaṇa*.

The term 'manana', usually translated as 'reflection', is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root - 'man' - 'to think', 'to reflect' or 'to ponder'. *Manana* is of the nature of 'self-reflection' or 'self-dialogue' (*sallāpa*) - a question and answer thought-series - that one invokes within the intellect with the aid of logical reasoning. Sri Swami Sadananda defines 'manana' in his work *Vedānta-sāra*:

मननं नाम श्रुतस्य अद्वितीयवस्तुनः वेदान्तानुगुणयुक्तिभिः
अनवरतम् अनुचिन्तनम् ॥

*mananam nāma śrutasya advitīyavastunah
vedāntānugūṇayuktibhiḥ anavaratam anucintanam.*

"Manana is the constant reflection on the non-dual Truth, that has already been ascertained by *śravaṇa*, through the aid of reasoning that is in accordance with the teaching of the *Upaniṣads*."

The Role of Logical Reasoning

Logical reasoning is indeed a potent rational exercise. It acts as a (1) Truth-verifying tool and (2) Conviction-creating tool.

Given certain specifics, logic helps us to infer and ascertain whether something deserves the label of fact or whether it is to be relegated as a mere figment of the imagination. When its veracity is ascertained, it is natural to develop an inner conviction about what has been so ascertained. To explain with an illustration, someone tells me that the distant mountain is on fire. I look in the direction of the mountain and see that there is smoke rising from it. Based on the prior knowledge of the invariable concomitance between smoke and fire, I am logically able to infer that the mountain is on fire. This logical inference does a two-fold job; firstly, it enables me to come to a decision about the statement that the 'mountain is on fire' - truth-verifying tool and secondly, it enhances my conviction about the heard statement that the mountain is on fire - conviction-creating tool.

In matters concerning Self-Knowledge, the role of logic as a truth-verifying tool is indeed limited, because the Self as such remains beyond the ken of intellectual knowledge or verification. It is because of this reason that the *Sruti* is accepted in *Vedānta* as the primary means for Self-Knowledge. However even if logic does not play its usual full-fledged role of a truth-verifying tool, it does clarify for the intellect that the non-dual Self expounded by *Vedānta* is cogent and consistent, within the boundaries of certain Scripture-based facts. This appreciation of the cogency of *Vedāntic* philosophy enables the enquiring seeker to conceive the possibility of the non-dual Self's existence and negates doubts about Its non-existence. This in turn engenders conviction in Self-knowledge and the seeker moves forward in his spiritual pursuit. Just as a stick given to a lame man helps him to get up and walk, so too does logic help the spiritually lame to take his first few confident steps towards Self-Knowledge.

Vedāntānugūṇayukti

At the intellectual level, logic is the most powerful tool that man possesses. Yet the wise are quick to give a warning note: 'Logic is a trustworthy servant but an undependable master'. This is because in the tradition of *Vedāntic* teaching, logic is not regarded as the direct means to establish or know anything. This is especially true in matters concerning Self-Knowledge.

What can be proved by logic can be disproved equally well with logic. Hence the famous adage: 'Logic is a double edged sword' – it can cut both ways. The *Brahma-sūtra* (2.1.11) voices these concerns when it declares – '*tarka-apraṭiṣṭhānāt* – reasoning has no sure basis'. The *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* (1.2.9) warns about blind belief in reasoning (*tarka*) and emphasises its incapacity to bestow Self-Knowledge: '*naiṣā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā* – The conviction of the Self is not attained by mere reasoning.'

If logic has to benefit and not harm the seeker, it has to be a 'construction' on the foundation of fact and truth that has

been arrived at through *śruti* - the primary valid means for Self-Knowledge (*pramāṇa*)². It is of utmost importance to have the facts right before starting the process of logical reasoning. When the facts - the very foundation of logic - are shaky, the conclusion arrived at by logical reasoning will surely become undependable. When the facts go amiss - the logic turns fallacious.

The non-dual *Brahman* is the 'fact' that has to be ascertained by *śravaṇa* - listening to the Guru's exposition of *Vedānta*. Only when this foundation is secure does the function of logic begin. Hence the definition of *manana* in *Vedānta-sāra* rightly makes the mention of '*vedāntānugūṇayukti* - reasoning that is in accordance with the *Upaniṣads*'. Indeed for the one who uses logic without faith in the Scriptures, the very same logic would turn out to be his Achilles' heel.

Two Streams of Reasoning

Manana is a reason-based question-answer thought series (*sallāpa*). If one is ignorant, clumsy or unskilled in the art of reasoning, rather than engendering understanding, reason could endanger it. The unskilled find fresh doubts rising and the existing confusions becoming more confounding! Hence the need to first learn the art of reflection through a thorough study of *Vedāntic* texts³.

The ultimate Truth expounded by the *Upaniṣads* is the 'non-dual Self', which is bereft of all differences whatsoever. After this ascertainment, the seeker's attempt in *manana* is to reason out for himself this non-dual nature of *Brahman*. As long as the world is considered to be different from the Self, there is no possibility of arriving at the non-dual *Brahman*. The non-dual

² Logic cannot be built on the foundation of logic. Logic built on the foundation of logic is a veritable sand-palace built on the foundation of sand!

³ Lakṣmīdhara Kavi's *Advaitamakaraṇḍa* is a '*mananātmaka grantha*' (text that embodies the principles of reflection). A study of this text will help a seeker perfect the art of reflection.

nature of *Brahman* can be established by either of the following two streams of reasoning:

(1) **Reasoning that the world is *Brahman*:** In this method the world of names and forms is logically reasoned to be *Brahman* alone. This oneness (*abheda*) in turn establishes the non-dual nature of *Brahman* for what remains is *Brahman* alone without the world being distinct from It.

(2) **Reasoning that the world is false:** In this method reason is used to show that the world is false (*bheda-bādhā*). When the world is negated, the non-dual *Brahman* alone remains.

The former stream of reasoning is termed by *Vedānta Acāryas* as '*abheda-sādhaka-yukti* – reasoning that engenders oneness' (*abheda* = non-difference; *sādhaka-yukti* = reasoning that enables) while the latter one '*bheda-bādhaka-yukti* – logic that negates difference' (*bheda* = difference; *bādhaka-yukti* = reasoning that negates). Both these streams of reasoning are but two ways to understand the non-dual nature of *Brahman*. Even though they differ in their approach and methodology, their goal is to establish the non-dual *Brahman* alone. The difference in methodology between '*abheda-sādhaka-yukti*' and '*bheda-bādhaka-yukti*' as well as their oneness in establishing the non-dual *Brahman* will become clearer when we analyse these two streams of reasoning with their respective illustrations.

I. *Abheda-sādhaka-yukti*

By reasoning that the world is nothing but *Brahman* alone, '*abheda-sādhaka-yukti*' establishes the non-dual nature of *Brahman*. Note the question-answer thought-build-up (*sallāpa*) involved in this type of reasoning:

Q: What is the true nature of the world (*jagat*), which is perceived as being constituted of both the inert and the sentient?

A: The world (*jagat*) is of the nature of Consciousness. For without the presence of Consciousness (i.e., *Brahman*), the world is never perceived.

Q: Even if it be true that the world is never seen without the presence of Consciousness, yet the world is seen along with Consciousness – thus there are two different entities – (1) world and (2) Consciousness! Where then is the question of a non-dual *Brahman*?

A: The world is perceived as: (1) 'existing' (*asti*), (2) 'revealing' (*bhāti*) and (3) 'giving happiness' (*priyam*). These three aspects are respectively the 'sat', 'cit' and 'ānanda' aspects of *Brahman*. Since the world exhibits these three aspects - '*asti*', '*bhāti*' and '*priyam*' - the world is *Brahman* alone.

Q: Even if the world be in part *sat-cit-ānanda Brahman*, yet it is part names and forms also. Would this not imply that *sat-cit-ānanda Brahman* co-exists with the names and forms (*nāma* and *rūpa*)? Thus there is still duality – (1) *Brahman* and (2) names and forms!

A: Names and forms (*nāma* and *rūpa*) have no existence apart from their substratum, in other words, they do not have independent existence. Gold ornaments - bangle, necklace and so on - have no independent existence apart from their substratum gold. In the same way the world of names and forms has no existence apart from their substratum *Sat-Cit-Ananda Brahman*. Hence notwithstanding the fact of their being perceived, names and forms do not have an independent reality and hence cannot be considered as being distinct from *Brahman*.

Since the world is thus *Brahman* alone, *Brahman* is verily non-dual (*advaita*).

II. *Bheda-bādhaka-yukti*

By reasoning that the world is false, '*bheda-bādhaka-yukti*' establishes the non-dual nature of *Brahman*. Note the question-answer thought-build-up (*sallāpa*) involved in this type of reasoning:

Q: How can *Brahman* be non-dual when the world is perceived?

A: Because the world is false and hence does not truly exist.

Q: How is the falsity of the world established?

A: The world neither exists before its creation nor after its dissolution. It only appears in the time-segment between its creation and dissolution. Logic advocates: 'that which does not exist in the beginning nor in the end does not exist in the middle also'. By applying the above logic it becomes clear that the world has no true existence.

Q: If the world is thus unreal (i.e., does not have any true existence) then it should not be perceived at all!

A: Perception is no testimony of reality. Even though the illusory misapprehended snake is perceived, or a dream is perceived, they do not have any reality. They exist when ignorance reigns and disappear the very moment Knowledge rises. In the same way, the world also appears during the time-span of ignorance alone and gets negated at the dawn of Self-Knowledge. Since the world is just an appearance and has no reality whatsoever, *Brahman* is certainly non-dual.

While in '*abheda-sādhaka-yukti*' the methodology was to show that the 'perceived world is *Brahman* alone' (*abheda-sādhaka*) and thereby establish non-duality, the methodology in '*bheda-bādhaka-yukti*' is to reason the 'falsity of the world' (*bheda-bādhaka*) and thus establish non-duality. It is evident that even though they differ in their methodology, they converge in their aspiration to establish the non-dual nature of *Brahman*.

Bhakti is the attitude of the mind and
jñāna is the attitude of the intellect.
Both flow towards the Lord.

Swami Chinmayananda

There are many forms of such logical reasoning for both the *abheda-sādhaka-yukti* and the *bheda-bādhaka-yukti* logic streams⁴. Please note that both the above logical thought movements - *abheda-sādhaka-yukti* and *bheda-bādhaka-yukti* - are in consonance with Scriptural assertions. Truly speaking, they are based on *Upaniṣadic* declarations, and hence in no way contradict them.

Complementary role of *śravaṇa* and *manana*

'*Pramāṇa*' is the term used in Indian philosophy (*darśanas*) for describing a 'means of knowledge'; and that which is known through a '*pramāṇa*' is termed '*prameya*'. To explain: '*pratyakṣa*' (perception) is the means of Knowledge for knowing 'forms and colours'. '*Pratyakṣa*' (perception) is hence termed '*pramāṇa*' and 'forms and colours' are given the appellation '*prameya*'. Since the *Upaniṣads* are the means of knowledge as far as the non-dual *Brahman* is concerned, the *Upaniṣads* are called '*pramāṇa*' and the non-dual *Brahman* is designated '*prameya*'.

'What is the final purport of the *Upaniṣads*?' - this is a doubt pertaining to the means of Knowledge (*pramāṇa*) i.e. the *Upaniṣads*. By *śravaṇa* one ascertains the purport to be '*brahmasatyam jagannmithyā jīvaḥ brahma eva na aparāḥ - Brahman alone is real and the world false; the individual Self is identical with Brahman*'. Hence *śravaṇa* is described in certain *Vedānta* text books as removing '*pramāṇa-gata-sandeha*' or doubts pertaining to the means of Knowledge'.

Doubts such as 'How can *Brahman* alone be real?', 'Why is the world false?', 'How can the individual Self be one with

⁴ What does the term '*yukti*' (reasoning) mean? What does it encompass? The six means of valid cognition recognised by *Advaita Vedānta* are: (1) *pratyakṣa* (perception), (2) *anumāna* (inference), (3) *upamāna* (comparison), (4) *arthāpatti* (postulation), (5) *anupalabdhi* (non-cognition) and (6) *śruti* (verbal testimony).

Apart from *pratyakṣa* (perception) and *śruti* (verbal testimony) all the rest - *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison), *arthāpatti* (postulation), *anupalabdhi* (non-cognition) - fall under the category of '*yukti*' or 'reasoning'. A detailed analysis of all these reasoning forms for both *abheda-sādhaka-yukti* and *bheda-bādhaka-yukti* is seen in the commentaries on Sant Nīśaladāsa's *Vicārasāgara* and Śriśeṣādriśiva's *Nānājīvavādakaṭṭalai*.

Brahman?' – are all 'prameya-gata-sandehas' i.e.. doubts that pertain to the very subject matter (*prameya*). *Manana* removes these 'prameya-gata-sandehas'.

Thus *śravaṇa* and *manana* play complimentary roles in removing doubts (*sandeha*). The former removes 'pramāṇa-gata-sandeha', while the latter puts an end to 'prameya-gata-sandeha'⁵.

Conclusion

Conviction arises from clarity alone. Clarity results from understanding and understanding is a product of Knowledge that is free of doubt. *Manana* (reflection) helps a seeker attain this clear Knowledge and thereby facilitates conviction. Hence the paramount importance of *manana* in *Vedānta sādhanā*.

But even after doubts have been weeded out and the seeker is intellectually convinced that he is indeed the supreme non-dual *Brahman*, he still experiences *saṁsāra*. Forced by the powerful legacy of past tendencies that he has accumulated through many *janmas* (births) of identification with the non-Self, the seeker still continues to identify with the body, mind etc. These past tendencies - termed *vāsanās* - are extremely strong and possess the power to hold in abeyance all the intellectual Knowledge which one has gained through *śravaṇa* and *manana* and prevent abidance in Self-Knowledge. These *vāsanās* are challenged by '*nididhyāsana*' (contemplation) – the third *sādhanā*. We shall take up *nididhyāsana* for study in the next essay.

May the Lord's grace and the Guru's blessings flow in our hearts as consistent self-effort and enable us to become established in Self-Knowledge.

⁵ The terms '*saṁśaya*' and '*asambhāvanā*' are used synonymously with '*sandeha*'. Hence '*pramāṇa-gata-sandeha*' can also be termed '*pramāṇa-gata-saṁśaya*' or '*pramāṇa-gata-asambhāvanā*'; and '*prameya-gata-sandeha*' can be termed '*prameya-gata-saṁśaya*' or '*prameya-gata-asambhāvanā*'.