

# ***Samadhi: The Highest Stage of Human Development – Implications for African Societies***

by

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## **Abstract**

This research, based mainly on sources published over the past 70 years, examines the transcendental mental state known to the Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) priesthood of the Nwy (Nile) River Valley as “*hetep*”; the pious Yoruba of Nigeria as “*lai-lai*”; the illustrious Akan-speakers of Ghana as “*nana*”; the medieval European Christians as the “*mystic union*”; the enlightened Tibetan Buddhists as “*satori*”; and the saintly Hindus of India as “*samadhi*.” For the sake of simplicity, the term *samadhi* will be used exclusively throughout this essay primarily because most of the available literature describing this level of mental-spiritual functioning comes from the Dravidian and Aryan philosophical traditions of ancient India where the term is most often used to describe this exalted state.<sup>1</sup> I argue in the concluding section that until African societies are thoroughly organized and managed by Maatian Pan-African centered elites well-versed in the best of Western science and the science of consciousness elevation that lead to high-level mental states like *samadhi*, Africa will remain disunited, weak and powerless, serving no higher purpose than to enrich the coffers of her neocolonial masters and their unscrupulous supporters who are motivated by the hope of personal gain.

**Key Words:** African centered leadership, African religion, Pan Africanism, *samadhi*

“The weapon of the future is consciousness.”  
-Fidel Castro

## Introduction

Historically, *samadhi* – the goal of theocentric meditation – has been the exclusive reserve of sages, saints, seers, mystics and yogis: those rare souls who willfully renounce the world to practice spiritual disciplines (like yoga) in pursuit of the “heaven” that Jesus the Christ and others said is within. Over the past 600 years, only a few dozen European Christian mystics and a few hundred Hindu and Tibetan yogis are known to have attained advanced *samadhi* states. It is my contention that present-day African societies would benefit politically, economically, culturally and socially from having key members of their intelligentsia immersed in practices designed to usher in advanced mental-spiritual states like *samadhi*.

Sometimes described as the “fourth state” of consciousness, *samadhi* is not waking, dreaming or dreamless sleep.<sup>2</sup> Words unfortunately are inadequate to describe this state of being, for words best convey sensory experiences. *Samadhi* at its most profound levels is independent of sensory manifestation and verbal description. This confession is made at the outset to alert you the reader that we are venturing into realms beyond the reach of all but the most extraordinary human beings, so whatever is written (or spoken) about the *samadhi* experience is more shadow than substance.

We do know, however, that *samadhi* is the end product of long hours of meditation, intense discernment, total self-mastery and Divine grace. It is a word, “when spoken in the company of seers, mystics and ascetics alike, commands deep reverence and respect” (Biermann 2000: 7). Those who seek it as well as those who attain it proclaim it as the greatest of all human achievements, as *samadhi* alone confers enlightenment, transformation and immortality. The woman or man well-established in the highest *samadhi* is a super-being, a master of time and space who stands at the forefront of human evolution. The ancient Egyptians might have called such extraordinary souls *geru maa*, the ancient Ethiopians may have called them *jegnoch*, and the Mande people of West Africa, perhaps *jelimusos* (Karenga 2006: 239-240, 246; Hilliard 2002:18-21). American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1971: 258-286) calls them “transcenders.”

As the highest stage of human development, *samadhi* has far-reaching implications for African educators, psychologists, theologians and leaders at home and throughout the Aburokyrikyri Abibifo (African Diaspora) who surprisingly have failed to closely examine this phenomena, in part because: (1) *samadhi* lies far beyond the purview of imperialistic societies and their colonizing educational and religious institutions, and (2) until recently, few primary or secondary source materials about *samadhi* were available in African or African American college classrooms, libraries or archives. Consequently, this paper may be one of the few Africentric research-based discussions of this mysterious and virtually-unknown sphere of human functioning.

No single source of comprehensive information on the *samadhi* experience is readily available, but I.K. Taimni's *The Science of Yoga* (1975) contains much insightful research of an abstruse technical nature, as does Swami Nikhilananda's *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (1942). More valuable to this study were Christopher Isherwood's *Ramakrishna and his Disciples* (1980), Swami Prabhavananda's *How to Know God* (1969), and Paramahansa Yogananda's *The Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946). More recent works like Swami Rama's *Samadhi: The Highest State of Wisdom* (2002), David Biermann's *Samadhi: Personal Journeys to Spiritual Truth* (2000) and Robert Shankman's *The Experience of Samadhi: An In-depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation* (2008) supplements the older literature.

Organized into seven parts (Definitions, Typology, Descriptions, Methods of Induction, Timelines, Value, and Implications for African Societies), this paper showcases the most descriptive and inspirational *samadhi* experiences of Ramakrishna, Indira Devi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Rama, Teresa de Avila and Jan van Ruysbroeck.<sup>3</sup>

## I. Definitions

As with most terms which attempt to define a subjective reality, there are as many definitions of *samadhi* as commentators who use the word. In *Yoga of Light* (1971: 144), Hans-Ulrich Rieker lists fifteen commonly-used synonyms for *samadhi*, among them: "immortality, purity, the primordial state, passivity of the intellect, and liberation in this lifetime." Below are four concise definitions of this ethereal concept; three are from confirmed *samadhi* practitioners.

First, *samadhi* ("to direct together") is a Sanskrit word used for a wide-range of mental states stretching from simple concentration to union with and absorption into the Universal Mind (God).<sup>4</sup> Most definitions, however, pertain only to the advanced "union-absorption" stages of *samadhi*; all other mental states are merely preludes. Second, *samadhi* practitioner *par excellence* Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952) defines *samadhi* as a "blissful superconscious state in which a yogi perceives the identity of the individualized soul and the Cosmic spirit."<sup>5</sup>

Third, in a similar vein, Swami Rama (1925-1996) in his autobiography, *Living with the Himalayan Masters*, defines *samadhi* as a “state of transcendent consciousness” characterized by the “expansion of individual consciousness and union with the transcendent consciousness” (Ajaya 1978: 350). And last, Braja Baba defines *samadhi* simply as “the knowledge of creation” (Biermann 2000: 74).

## II. Typology

Using the *Yoga Aphorisms of Pantanjali* as his chief reference, Swami Prabhavanada in his best-known work, *How to Know God* (1969: 54-61), identifies four major types or stages of *samadhi*. First is *savitarka samadhi*, which is induced by intense concentration on a physical object resulting in a fleeting identification with the object of concentration. At this stage, the concentrated mind maintains an awareness of its separateness from the object of concentration. Next is *nirvitarka samadhi*, which is experienced when the concentrated mind perceives “the-thing-in-itself,” located beyond sensory impressions. Better said, during *nirvitarka samadhi* the lines separating the perceiver, the object of perception, and the act of perception begin to blur revealing one reality masquerading as three.

The last two stages of *samadhi* are actually refinements of the first two. Once the yogi perfects his *savitarka samadhi* and *nirvitarka samadhi*, he will reach stage three, *sabikalpa samadhi*, which is the reward for what is often decades of daily meditation upon a specific expression of the Divine.<sup>6</sup> And while his body is in an immobile and breathless state, the mind of the yogi in *sabikalpa samadhi* is so deeply-engrossed in one all-consuming thought that he temporarily loses contact with the outside world. Beyond *sabikalpa samadhi* lies even a higher state of being called *nirbikalpa samadhi*<sup>7</sup>, considered by most commentators as the highest stage of *samadhi*,<sup>8</sup> which is attained when the one “thought-wave” generated in *sabikalpa samadhi* has been stilled and nothing remains in the mind but “pure undifferentiated consciousness void of phenomenal impressions”. The three lower stages of *samadhi* all contain “vestiges of duality”, i.e., a sense of separation between the mind and the object of concentration. In the *nirbikalpa* state, that separation is obliterated. *Nirbikalpa samadhi*, once refined and perfected, is called *sahaja samadhi*, which is the highest stage of human development. Once ensconced in *sahaja samadhi*, the yogi enjoys endless bliss, immeasurable joy and eternal life as a *jivan mukta*, one who is “free though living in the flesh.”<sup>9</sup>

And finally in this classification is Hans-Ulrich Reiker’s (1971:78) account that among Himalayan yogis of Tibet and Nepal, *samadhi* also means the various methods of conscious dying, called *mahasamadhi* (great *samadhi*). *Mahasamadhi* is a yogini’s final exit from her body usually through her crown chakra (fontanelle) located at the top of her head.

### III. Descriptions

The literature is rich in vivid, detailed, first-hand descriptions of *sabikalpa* and *nirbikalpa samadhi* and the observations of those who have witnessed others in these states. Perhaps the most graphic personal account of the *sabikalpa samadhi* experience is recorded in the *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946: 142-143) written by Paramahansa Yogananda, who first had the experience conferred upon him by his guru (spiritual guide) Sri Yukteswar (1855-1936). His entire description is reprinted below:

*He struck gently on my chest above the heart. My body became immovably rooted; breath was drawn out of my lungs as if by some huge magnet. Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage and streamed out like a fluid-piercing light from every pore.*

*The flesh was as though dead; yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been more fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms.*

*People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery. The roots of plants and trees appeared through a dim transparency of the soil; I discerned the inward flow of their sap. The whole vicinity lay bare before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical sight, simultaneously all-perceptive. Through the back of my head I saw men strolling far down Rai Ghat Lane, and noticed also a white cow that was leisurely approaching. When she reached the open ashram gate, I observed her as though with my two physical eyes. After she had passed behind the brick wall of the courtyard, I saw her clearly still.*

*All objects within my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion pictures. My body, Master's, the courtyard, the furniture and floor, the trees and sunshine, occasionally became violently agitated, until all melted into a luminescent sea; even as sugar crystals, thrown into a glass of water, dissolve after being shaken. The unifying light alternated with materializations of form, the metamorphoses revealing the law of cause and effect in creation.*

*An oceanic joy broke upon the calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized is exhaustless Bliss; His body is countless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth, solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes. The entire cosmos, gently luminous, like a city seen afar at night, glimmered within the infinitude of my being. The dazzling light beyond the sharply etched global outlines faded slightly at the farthest edges; there I saw a mellow radiance, ever undiminished. It was indescribably subtle; the planetary pictures were formed of a grosser light.*

*The divine dispersion of rays poured from an Eternal Source, blazing into galaxies, transfigured with ineffable auras. Again and again I saw the creative beams condense into constellations, then resolve into sheets of transparent flame. By rhythmic reversion, sextillion worlds passed into diaphanous luster, then fire became firmament.*

*I cognized the center of the empyrean as a point of intuitive perception in my heart. Irradiating splendor issued from my nucleus to every part of the universal structure. Blissful amrita, nectar of immortality, pulsed through me with a quicksilver-like fluidity. The creative voice of God I heard resounding as Aum, the vibration of the Cosmic Motor.*

*Suddenly the breath returned to my lungs. With a disappointment almost unbearable, I realized that my infinite immensity was lost. Once more I was limited to the humiliating cage of a body, not easily accomodative to the Spirit. Like a prodigal child, I had run away from my macrocosmic home and had imprisoned myself in a narrow microcosm.*

*My guru was standing motionless before me. I started to prostrate myself at his holy feet in gratitude for his having bestowed on me the experience in cosmic consciousness that I had long passionately sought. He held me upright and said quietly, "Come, let us sweep the balcony floor; then we shall walk by the Ganges." I fetched a broom.*

In a less spectacular vein, Spanish Christian mystic St. Teresa de Avila (1515-1582) describes her "mystic union" (*sabikalpa samadhi*) in her autobiography *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus* (Stace, 1960: 178-179). She states:

*While seeking God in this way, the soul becomes conscious that it is fainting almost completely away, in a kind of swoon, with an exceeding great and sweet delight. It gradually ceases to breathe and all its bodily strength begins to fail it: it cannot even move its hands without great pain; its eyes involuntarily close, or if they remain open, they can hardly see. If a person in this state attempts to read, he is unable to spell out a single letter; it is as much as he can do to recognize one. He sees that letters are there, but, as the understanding gives him no help, he cannot read them even if he so wishes. He can hear, but he cannot understand what he hears. He can apprehend nothing with the senses, which only hinder the soul's joy and thus harms rather than helps him. It is futile for him to attempt to speak; his mind cannot manage to form a single word, nor, if it could, would he have the strength to pronounce it. For in this condition all outward strength vanishes, while the strength of the soul increases so that it may the better have fruition of its bliss. The outward joy experienced is great and most clearly recognized.*

Ramakrishna (1836-1886), one of India's most celebrated saints, recounts his first *sabikalpa samadhi*, which he says began with:

*. . . an unbearable pain in my heart, because I couldn't get a vision of Mother [God]. Just as a man wrings out a towel with all of his strength to get the water out of it, so I felt as if my heart and mind were being wrung out. I began to think I should never see Mother. I was dying of despair.*

*In my agony, I said to myself: 'What's the use of living this life?' Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the temple. I decided to end my life with it, then and there. Like a madman, I ran to it and seized it. And then I had a marvelous vision of the Mother, and fell down unconscious. . . . It was as if houses, doors, temples and everything else had vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw as an infinite shoreless sea of light; a sea that was consciousness. However far and in whichever direction I looked. I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me. They were raging and storming toward me with great speed. Very soon they were upon me; they made me sink down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness.<sup>10</sup>*

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922), one of Ramakrishna's chief disciples, describes his guru's *sabikalpa samadhi* in these words:

*The Master used to experience many different kinds of samadhi. In some states his body would become stiff and motionless, like a log. It was easy for him to regain his normal consciousness from such a state, but at other times, when the samadhi was deeper, it would take him much longer to return to normal consciousness. At such times he would first draw a deep breath, like a drowning man coming up out of deep water. Then, for awhile, he would reel and act like a drunken man; even his speech would be thick and incoherent. Gradually, however, he would regain his natural state.*

Brahmananda continues:

*Most of the Master's nights were spent in samadhi or in chanting the Lord's name or in singing His praises. He seldom slept for more than an hour any night. Often I have seen him completely absorbed in samadhi for more than an hour at a time. Sometimes he would try to speak to us, but no words would come. Later he would say: "You see, I want to talk to you while I am in samadhi, but whenever I try to do so it seems as if the doors of my speech are locked." Many times as he was coming down to the normal plane he would be muttering, as though addressing his words to God whom he was still seeing.<sup>11</sup>*

Yogini Indira Devi graphically recounts her first experience of *sabikalpa samadhi* in her autobiography *Pilgrims of the Stars* (1985: 253) co-authored with her guru Dilip Kumar Roy (1897-1980):

*First she thought that she was falling asleep sitting cross-legged, but then one day as she sat down the electric current that shot up from the base of her spine did not stop as it usually did when it reached her head. Instead, as it touched her head, the latter opened, or so it seemed to her, and she found herself outside her body floating on velvety waves of bliss, expanding and moving about as freely as the air. There was no thought, no desire, no joy, but something that was entirely different. It was another rhythm altogether, another world. There were no barriers of time or space though she retained her separate entity. She could see her body seated on the floor. After a time, she felt a heaviness of the head and found herself back in her body. This was her first experience of savikalpa [or sabikalpa] samadhi.*

A fitting end to this section is Paramahansa Yogananda's moving description of his *sahaja samadhi* as recounted by his disciple Sri Daya Mata (1985: 17):

*Such joy I feel day and night. Day passes into night and I forget time entirely. I don't have to meditate now, because that which I meditated upon has become one with me. Sometimes I breathe, sometimes I don't breathe. Sometimes the heart beats, sometimes it doesn't. I see that I have dropped everything except that one consciousness. Whether this physical engine is running or not. I behold the great light of God. Such is my joy.*

#### **IV. Methods of Induction**

The literature suggests that a variety of methods employed in concert is the surest way to actuate *sabikalpa samadhi*. As a prerequisite, Yogananda (1946: 158) asserts that mastery of *padmasana* (lotus posture) is useful because it "holds the spine upright and locks the body securely against the danger of falling, backward or forward, during ... *sabikalpa samadhi*, it is therefore the yogi's favorite meditation posture." Even more essential than posture is the fact that no type of *samadhi* is possible until the mind has first acquired tremendous powers of concentration.

According to Prabhavananda (1969: 61):

*". . . [sabikalpa] samadhi is achieved by raising one object, one great wave of concentration, in the mind, by which all other thought-waves, all samskaras or past impressions, are swallowed up. But now even this one wave has to be stilled. When it has subsided, we enter that highest samadhi of all, which is called nirvikalpa [or nirbikalpa] in the Vedanta system of philosophy".*



If viewed from an energetic perspective, *samadhi* occurs, Maha Babaji teaches, “When the *kundalini* [divine energy] is liberated, it flows up the chakras [spinal centers] until it reaches the highest chakra, the Brahma [crown] chakra – that is where *samadhi* is realized” (Biermann 2000: 54), and Shree Saraswati concurs noting, “*Samadhi* links the Brahma [crown] chakra to the Almighty” (Biermann 2000: 110).

Shivapuri Baba (18??-1963) taught his disciples that *samadhi* can be induced also by a “distaste for life, continuous practice of meditation on God, and Divine grace” (Bennett 1983: 114-116). While Dutch Christian mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) in his classic *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (Stace, 1960: 164) expresses his complete agreement with Shivapuri Baba, he offers three additional prerequisites, stating:

*Now if the spirit would see God with God in this Divine Light without means, there needs must be on the part of man three things. The first is that he must be perfectly ordered from without in all the virtues, and within must be unencumbered, and as empty of every outward work as if he did not work at all: for if his emptiness is troubled within by some work of virtue, he has an image; and as long as this endures within him, he cannot contemplate. Secondly, he must inwardly cleave to God, with adhering intention and love, even as a burning and glowing fire which can never be more quenched, As long as he feels himself to be in this state, he is able to contemplate. Thirdly, he must have lost himself in a Waylessness and in a Darkness, in which all contemplative men wander in fruition and wherein they never again can find themselves in a creaturely way. In the abyss of this darkness, in which the loving spirit has died to itself, there begin the manifestation of God and eternal life. For in this darkness there shines and is born an incomprehensible Light, which is the son of God, in whom we behold eternal life. And in this Light one becomes seeing; and this Divine Light is given to the simple sight of the spirit, where the spirit receives the brightness which is God.*

Ramakrishna employed the following method, described in Prabhavananda (1969: 63-64), to incite his first experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, stating:

*Every time I gathered my mind together, I came face to face with the blissful form of Divine Mother. However much I tried to free my mind from consciousness of Mother, I didn't have the will to go beyond. But at last, collecting all the strength of my will, I cut Mother's form to pieces with the sword of discrimination, and at once my mind became 'seedless' and I reached nirvikalpa. It was beyond all expression.*

I end this sections with the observations of Evans-Wentz (1967:219) and Ajaya (1978: 451-452) that in Tibet, *samadhi* is occasionally bestowed by a master yogi in a ceremony called “Conferring of Power,” but only upon disciples who have been “long on probation and found worthy of it.” And finally, Paramahansa Yogananda strongly suggests that memorizing his poem “Samadhi” will help the aspirant reach a sublime state.<sup>12</sup>

## V. Timelines

The amount of time needed by the aspirant to attain *samadhi* varies. For example, Yogananda states:

*“It is only the thought that we are not free that keeps us from actually being free. Merely to break that thought would suffice to put us into samadhi. Samadhi is not something we have to acquire. We have it already!”*<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Swami Prabhavanada (1969: 125) asserts that *sabikalpa samadhi* can be reached in twenty-eight minutes and *nirbikalpa samadhi* in five hours and forty-five minutes provided that the mind can be made “to flow uninterruptedly toward the same object of thought.” And Hans-Ulrich Rieker (1971: 181) adds “concentration on the space [chakra] between the eyebrows is the best way to reach *samadhi* in a short time”, while Swami Brahmananada believes that *samadhi* can be attained quickly, “If a man has lived an absolutely continent life.”<sup>14</sup>

Two timely observations: First, Swami Kriyananda’s recollection (1979: 181, 511) that his guru, Paramahansa Yogananda, achieved *samadhi* at the feet of his guru, Sri Yukteswar, in the amazingly short span of six months, and developed the ability to enter *nirbikalpa samadhi* in seconds. And second, Christopher Isherwood’s (1980: 63) assertion that of the few mystics and yogis who reach *nirbikalpa samadhi*, the majority do so towards the end of their lives or at the moment of death.<sup>15</sup>

The time practitioners actually spend in *samadhi* also varies. For example, both yogi Lahiri Mahasaya (1828-1895) and poet-saint Gauribai (1759-1809) are known to have spent seven consecutive days in *samadhi*; and on at least one occasion, the latter is said to have once spent fifteen days in the *samadhi* state.<sup>16</sup> Saint Teresa de Avila (Stace, 1960: 179), on the other hand, reported that her “*mystic unions*” seldom lasted more than a half-hour. Sarada Devi (1853-1920), Ramakrishna’s wife, lived in a near-permanent state of *nirbikalpa samadhi*, as did her husband, who habitually passed in and out of *samadhi* several times each day.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Swami Rama, in the following words, describes his experience with time during his first *sabikalpa samadhi* bestowed upon him by his guru:

*I sat down in my meditation posture and he came and touched me on the forehead. I remained in that position for nine hours, and did not have a single worldly thought. The experience was indescribable. When I returned to normal consciousness, I thought it was still nine o'clock in the morning, for samadhi annihilates time.*<sup>18</sup>

## VI. Value

As stated in the Introduction, attaining *samadhi* is the greatest and most difficult of all human achievements as only *samadhi* brings liberation from the cycles of birth and death which fetters most human souls to the limitations of bodily existence. In the words of Hans-Ulrich Reiker (1971:148), “Samadhi is the most prodigious, the most far-reaching achievement of a yogi. For, being free from time, as he is in this state, he is also beyond the bonds of death, beyond rebirth, beyond all karmas [desires] which hold in their clutches all the world’s pain.”

Because *samadhi* makes it possible for the yogi to verify what is unverifiable by any other means, e.g., the deepest and most profound spiritual truths, it brings a “complete renewal of the mind and transformation of character.”<sup>19</sup> According to Christopher Isherwood (1980), it is only after experiencing *samadhi* that a yogini knows to the very core of her being that she and God are one, and then she becomes a saint.<sup>20</sup>

Avadh Baba identifies an additional benefit of *samadhi* – anti-aging support. He states: “Every healthy person takes around 21,000 breaths each day, but in *samadhi* the body requires no breath ... Without breath, the body will not change” (Biermann 2000: 127). Lastly, it is widely-believed that yogis who reach *sabikalpa* and *nirbikalpa samadhi* will develop *siddhis* (psychic abilities) such as clairvoyance, telepathy, levitation, telekinesis, therapeutic touch and the like, but rarely display them except upon command from God (Yogananda, 1946; Evans-Wentz, 1967; Reiker, 1971; Ajaya, 1978; Anna, 1981).

In conclusion, since *samadhi* is the ideal death state chosen by all great saints, I can now add that Sri Yukteswar in *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946: 400) reveals that after death, the highest astral worlds, like Hiranyaloka where he currently resides as a savior, are accessible only to those who have attained *nirbikalpa samadhi* while in their physical bodies. Implicit in Yukteswar’s revelation is the notion that *samadhi*, like Ifa, Vodun, Candomble, Santeria and any number of African religions, prepares its practitioners for encounters with inter-dimensional intelligences (spiritual beings). Communing with benign and malevolent human and non-human entities, much to the chagrin of doctrinaire Christians and orthodox Muslims, is a defining feature of traditional African and Hindu religious life and practice.<sup>21</sup>

## VII. Implications for African Societies

The two religions preeminent throughout the African World are Islam and Christianity. Both of these great faiths have buried within their esoteric traditions practices that would lead their followers to *samadhi* states. However, given their allegiance to the *status quo*, the mainline African and African American religious establishments – Christian and Islamic – would vigorously challenge the mass distribution to and practice of *samadhi* inducing methods by their followers believing this would lead to the diminution of their institutional power, prestige and authority. Therefore, we should not expect the present-day church or mosque to be in the vanguard of disseminating high-level spiritual practices calculated to induce the *samadhi* state. Rather, groups like the New York City-based Ausar-Auset Society and the Los Angeles, California-based Amen-Ra Theological Seminary are far more likely than mainstream Black religious institutions to introduce *samadhi* generating technologies to their students throughout the African World.

The attainment of advanced spiritual states like *samadhi* is not the exclusive domain of any one culture, race or religion. For Africancentric *samadhi* enthusiasts, however, the African-Dravidian societies of southwest India may be more conducive to the realization of high-level spiritual states than any other single location in today's African World. All continental African societies and those throughout the Aburokyrikyri Abibifo would benefit immensely from having the educational institutions in place to systematically produce *geru maa*: men and women whose every thought and deed are shaped by and grounded in our highest spiritual and ethical ideals. It is in their ranks that we would find our *samadhi* aspirants.

In present-day African societies, both continental and diasporic, *samadhi* seekers would not be considered unusual because most African communities have both the cultural knowledge of and the spiritual inclination to appreciate people who are deeply-committed to achieving oneness with God. The major stumbling block for African *samadhi* aspirants would be the scarcity of African teachers (gurus) equipped to serve as spiritual guides. As a result, *samadhi* states and those who strive to attain them are not likely to become a standard feature of African societies on the continent or in the Diaspora for some time yet to come.

We all know that the Nwy River Valley civilizations reached their fullest expressions in Kemet (ancient Egypt), Nubia and Kush, experienced more than 5,000 years of cultural development, and attained heights of splendor that still inspire the world. But what is not so well-known is that, to manage their lives and their societies, Kemetic, Nubian and Kushite leadership relied heavily upon divine mandate delivered via altered mental states like *samadhi*. This is a core principle of indigenous African leadership-followership science (Amen, 1992; West, 1993; Ashby, 1996; Hotep, 2010).

Before we witness Maatian (balanced and just) economic and political development as the norm in African societies, living the highest spiritual truths – like *samadhi* – must become the life-style practice of African ruling elites and those they govern. Therefore, one key to future African Maatian development lies with supporting African leaders at home and abroad who embrace not only the best of Western science and technology, but also the best of our indigenous African and African Asian spiritual sciences and their supporting technologies.

The fact that our ancient African Dravidian ancestors created and then perfected an evolving science of human liberation replete with the tools and technology needed to expand our consciousness, deepen our self-awareness, strengthen our willpower, and then radically transform our character, should be common-knowledge throughout the Black World. And when it is, African societies will be well on their way to restoring their traditional greatness.

## Conclusion

“The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness.”  
-Lao-Tzu

This paper serves as a brief introduction to the theocentric mental state called *samadhi* in Vedanta philosophy, but known to saints, sages and seers of all ages the world over as “enlightenment,” which is our highest state of being. Experienced on at least four levels: savitarka, nirvitarka, sabikalpa and nirbikalpa, *samadhi* is a plane of transcendental consciousness beyond sensory perception attainable by mastering the science of meditation, practicing discernment, and receiving Divine grace.

Regarding its value, only *samadhi* has the power to confer control over the death process as it entails leaving the body at will. More important, only *samadhi* can free humanity from the birth-death cycle which securely chains the multitudes to the fleeting pleasures and searing pains of physical existence. And most important, only *samadhi* holds out the promise that perfection – our highest state of being – is attainable. Consequently, those forces throughout the African World who are busy with the great work of African Redemption would benefit immensely from Kemetic, Dravidian and other Afro-Asian technologies that promote high level mental-spiritual states like *samadhi*.

The literature suggests that the practice of meditation is key and the aid of a trained guide (guru) is essential to the attainment of *samadhi*. The fact that *samadhi* lies far beyond the scope of materially-focused human beings, and until recently references describing this state were largely unavailable,<sup>22</sup> has resulted in this area of human achievement being overlooked by African and African American educators, psychologists, theologians and leaders.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the *samadhi* experience is not unique to Hinduism, Buddhism, or medieval European Christianity; it is universal. Ramakrishna in his *Gospel* points out that Islam, along with the ancient systems of spiritual cultivation, if practiced with sincerity and devotion, will inevitably lead their practitioners to *samadhi* thereby conferring enlightenment, transformation and immortality.

## Glossary

*Aburokyrikyri Abibifo* (Twi) – Term for the African Diaspora coined in 1999 by Kwame and Akua Akoto and used in their book *The Sankofa Movement: ReAfrikanization and the Reality of War*.

*Maat* – Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) word for truth, justice, order, harmony and balance, all principles thought to undergird the universe and an enlightened society.

*Samadhi* – State of consciousness independent of waking, dreaming or dreamless sleep accessible through meditation, righteous conduct and Divine grace. There are at least four stages or states collectively-called *samadhi* in Vedanta philosophy: savitarka, nirvitarka, sabikalpa and nirbikalpa.

*Swami* – Hindu title meaning “Lord” given to holy men.

*Yogi* – Sanskrit word for a male yoga practitioner.

*Yogini* – Sanskrit word for a female yoga practitioner.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ra Un Nefer Amen, *Metu Neter Vol. 1: The Great Oracle of Tehuti and the Egyptian System of Spiritual Cultivation* (NY: Khamit Corp, 1990), pp. 97, 160, 212. Awo Falokun Fatunmbi, *IBASE Orisa: Ifa Proverbs, Folktales, Sacred History and Prayer* (New York: Original Pub., 1994), p. 101. Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997), p. 152. Walter Stace (Ed.), *Teaching of the Mystics* (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), pp. 27, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Both Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1980), pp. 62, 218 and Hans-Ulrich Reiker *Yoga of Light*, (Clearlake, CA: Dawn Horse Press, 1971), p. 144 define *samadhi* as the “fourth state of consciousness,” but Robert De Ropp, *The Master Game: Pathways to Higher Consciousness* (New York: Delta, 1968), p. 70 suggests that *samadhi* might be a “fifth state” of consciousness.

<sup>3</sup>Swami Ghananda (Ed.), *Women Saints: East and West* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1979) mentions fourteen Christian saints and chronicles the lives of nine, all who achieved advanced states of illumination. Walter T. Stace, *Teachings of the Mystics*, (New York: Mentor Books, 1960) excerpts important sections from the mystical writings of five Christian seers each said to have reached sublime state of divine awareness, and Swami Kriyananda *The Path* (Nevada City, CA: Ananda Publications, 1979), pp. 442-447, 270 mentions eight Christian saints who experienced *samadhi*.

<sup>4</sup>I.K. Taimni, *The Science of Yoga* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Pub. House, 1975), pp. 1-125.

<sup>5</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: SRF, 1946), p. 106.

<sup>6</sup>Most commentators distinguish only between *sabikalpa* and *nirbikalpa* *samadhi*. See: Kriyananda, *The Path*, p. 427, Yogananda *Autobiography*, p. 238 and Prabhavananda *The Eternal Companion*, (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1970), p. 189 for concurring views.

<sup>7</sup>Sri Ramanasramam in *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (Boston: Shambhala Pub., 1972), pp. 54-55; identifies a lower form of *nirbikalpa samadhi* he calls *kevala samadhi*.

<sup>8</sup>Ramakrishna proclaimed the existence of a spiritual state even higher than *nirbikalpa samadhi*, but accessible only to *isvarakotis*, incarnations of God. See *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: R-V Center), pp. 502-3, 562.

<sup>9</sup>Ramana Maharshi is reputed to have lived continually in this exalted state. See D. K. Roy’s autobiography *Pilgrim of the Stars* (Porthill, ID: Timeless Books, 1985), p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> Isherwood, *Ramakrishna*, p.65.

<sup>11</sup>Prabhavananda, *Eternal Companion*, pp. 179,189.

<sup>12</sup> Kriyananda, *The Path*, pp. 432-442.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 430.

<sup>14</sup> Parabhavanada, *The Eternal Companion*, p. 69

<sup>15</sup> Ramakrishna taught that “only one or two in a 100,000 get liberation.” See *The Gospel* p. 614. Furthermore, yogis who attain *nirbikalpa samadhi* have no further need or desire to incarnate on Earth in a physical body or experience gross physical existence.

<sup>16</sup> Yogananda, *Autobiography*, p. 312. Ghanananda, *Women Saints*, pp. 75-78.

<sup>17</sup> Ghanananda, *Women Saints*, pp.107, 111. Anna, *Saints of India*, (Madras: R. Math, 1981), p. 75. Prabhavananda, *Eternal Companion*, p. 68, and Isherwood, *Ramakrishna*, p. 63 all concur.

<sup>18</sup> Ajaya, *Himalayan Masters*, p. 347.

<sup>19</sup> Prabhavananda, *How to Know God*, pp. 60-61. Also see G. Falk’s (2009) expose *Stripping the gurus: Sex, violence, abuse and enlightenment*, which chronicles the numerous allegations of greed, hypocrisy, deceit and predation leveled at 10 prominent Hindu yogis each with a substantial following in India, the United States, Europe and Australia. These reports of abuses demand that *samadhi* aspirants critically assess the character and thoroughly investigate the background of a “spiritual master” before embracing him or her as their spiritual guide.

<sup>20</sup> Isherwood, *Ramakrishna*, p. 16. Regarding sainthood, Paramahansa Yogananda (1946: 204) aptly points out that: “Numerous bewildered seekers in the West erroneously think that an eloquent speaker or writer on metaphysics must be a master. Proof that one is a master, however, is supplied only by the ability to enter at will the breathless state (*sabikalpa samadhi*) and by the attainment of immutable bliss (*nirbikalpa samadhi*)”.

<sup>21</sup> Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality*, p. 151 and Fatunmbi, *Ibase Orisa*, pp. 24-30. See Credo Mutwa’s (1996) *Song of the Stars: The Lore of a Zulu Shaman*, Malidoma Some’s (1997) *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*, and Paul Stoller’s (1989) *In Sorcery’s Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger* for in-depth discussions of the interactions between inter-dimensional beings and the Zulu, Dagara and Songhay peoples, respectively.



<sup>22</sup>A recent Internet search turned up 148,000 youtube videos with the word *samadhi* in their titles.

<sup>23</sup>One promising development noted by Dr. Linda Meyers and shared in a June 2010 interview published in *JPAS* is the work of a small community of mental health professionals affiliated with the Maryland-based Association of Black Psychologists who have adopted a definition of African centered psychology that compels them to focus their research and praxis on devising “a system of thought and action that examines the processes allowing for the illumination and liberation of Spirit.” This reformulation of organizational goals opens the door for discussions of *samadhi*-generating practices among African American psychologists.

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