

# AN ANALYSIS OF OUR PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORICAL PERSONALITIES

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by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society  
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: [swami-krishnananda.org](http://swami-krishnananda.org)

(Discourse given on the occasion of Dakshinamurthy Jayanti in 1966)

In the evaluation of things, we human beings look from the standpoint of our mental functions, and are perforce obliged to ignore certain aspects that are not covered by the functions of our mind. We have, for example, the historical way of looking at things and examining whether such and such personality was a historical person. You might have heard and read about discussions on whether great seers and Avatars are historical personalities - whether they really existed or whether they are concoctions or imaginations of the devout mind. There are people even today who are certain that Christ was not a historical person, that Krishna was not a historical figure, and so on.

Whether or not we gain anything by knowing if they are historical or not, this attitude of the human mind gives us a clue to the manner in which it works. To the physician, the patient is only a case. He takes the patient as an occasion to study certain incidences of physical and psychological phenomena; and there is often the complaint that doctors do not treat their patients as human beings, but as cases. This is also the case with the lawyers.

Looking at human circumstances with a dispassionate attitude, the conditions under which the human mind looks

upon things of the world as historical existences should give us an occasion to study the nature of the human situation itself. It is many a time imagined that the historical point of view is the correct one, and this is why we make such bifurcations between history, mythology, theology, Puranas, and so on. Taking for granted that our historical perspective is the complete perspective corresponding to facts, and the unknown personalities and incarnations did not exist, today I wish to make an investigation into this psychological situation which takes for granted the historical as the real and the other aspects as the figurative, or the unreal.

Whether a personality did exist, whether you exist or whether I exist or whether we are historical personalities, is a question to be answered; and when this question is answered properly to the satisfaction of logic and common sense, then, I believe, the general question as to the historicity of any person can be answered. If we can justifiably and intelligently answer this question whether you and I are historical persons at all, we can answer the question as to whether Christ was a historical personality, or whether Krishna or Buddha were historical personalities.

We have a very narrow view of things. Naturally, the imperfect existence cannot be the source of perfect consciousness. The imperfect perspective of the human mind cannot be expected to give a complete picture of things in their true state of affairs. It was during the last few discourses that I tried to point out the cosmic significance that things in the world have, in addition to the historical and the isolated significances that they seem to have in our social and national activities. There is a habit of the mind by which it looks at things in a linear fashion, in a line or a straight vision, as it were, as a series of objects, a line in space and time, and this is what may be succinctly called the three-dimensional perspective or the individualistic perception of the human mind - to look at things as bodies, as isolated existences, with the feeling that you and I are different, that things are isolated from one another in such a manner that there cannot be intrinsic or organic connections among them.

This is perhaps the historical way of things. There is no organic connection between events in history. They are mathematically or causally related, so that one follows the other. Studies of history reveal that history is a procession of events, one following the other and one bearing a connection with the other, and history is not a chaotic happening, as many wrong minds would be apt to think.

History is a study from two angles of vision. One vision is like that of a student in college. How does a student study history? Somebody does something and somebody else does something else after some time, and the connection of all this is history. But there is a philosophical significance in history which materialistic minds are not able to discover. This is the philosophy of history, wherein the causal connection of the events which constitute history are discovered, and history is not seen as a combination of bifurcated events. History is not that something happened somewhere, and something else happened somewhere else, and somebody wrote about it in books. History has a wider meaning, a profounder significance.

Now, both these ways of studying history are defective, because they consider personalities to be individual existences. It is a study of personalities appearing in different times and disappearing after the performance of certain deeds. So history is the record of personalities and their actions. But what are these personalities? What is their importance, and how do we evaluate the nature of their existence? We will find we are hard pressed, cornered, and we cannot answer the question. All questions can be answered only superficially, and not in completeness. When we try to completely answer whether a person existed historically, we will find that we are cornered; and we will realise that we are cornered when our mind cannot go deeper than the historical level.

It is futile to study the nature of a person without knowing his health, his social status, his mental condition, his acumen, and so on. There are many factors involved in the

existence of a person, and all these have to be taken into consideration in a study. And, a historical person is a citizen of existence as such. By 'historical' we mean really existent. That is the quarrel among learned ones: whether a person really existed or was merely imagined by devout minds in religion.

Now that we understand that history itself has a wider significance than the historical level would permit, we have also to study the historicity of a person from a different angle of vision. When we say that Christ did exist or Krishna did exist or Buddha was, what do we mean? Perhaps the child's answer, as our answer also, would be that such and such a person was visible to the physical eyes of such and such persons during the time he is supposed to have lived. We do not deny the historicity of Gandhi, because we have seen him or believe that people saw him. But if we have a doubt as to the very nature of his existence: I have not seen him, nor do I know if any people saw him - we begin to doubt his very existence. We do not know whether Christ was seen by certain existent people. So, it may mean that perhaps nobody has seen him and, in that case, his very existence may be doubted. That is the case with many others, such as Krishna, Buddha, etc.

However, the wider history of things - the history of philosophy and also the philosophy of history - has no such difficulties because, to it, existence cannot be separated into the historical or the religious or the theological or the mythological. It was the philosopher Kant who said, "We look at things in three manners: we look out and say there is a world in front of us; we look about and conjecture that there should be a God who is the ruler of this world; we look within and remember that we have a soul." We have no other way of looking at things. In other words, we have the theological, the cosmological and the psychological way of looking at things - or the stated points of God, world and individual.

Today, I want to touch upon the spiritual significance of the teaching of the great divine incarnation Dakshinamurthy. In one of the prayers to him we are told that Dakshinamurthy, the great divine sage, was supposed to have three faces which signified or symbolised God or Ishwara, the Guru and the Atman. Or, we are told he had three aspects: the Godly aspect, the aspect of Guru or spiritual preceptor, and the aspect in which he revealed the Atman.

Dakshinamurthy was not merely an incarnation of the Divine Being, he was not merely a Guru or teacher, he was not merely an impartor of spiritual knowledge, but he was an all-pervading existence, an omnipresent Being, as it were, like space. These four revelations of Dakshinamurthy also give us a philosophical teaching, the manner in which we have to study things, and the way in which things really exist.

As I mentioned, the theological or the divine aspect of things is one which we are forced to accept because of our very acceptance of the existence of the world and the admission that we exist. We may not have seen God, but we believe in God. We are compelled to believe He exists because there are certain demands of our nature. We see water rising in the Ganges, and we have not seen the cause, but we can imagine that either snow melted or it rained, or perhaps both happened. The sun is very hot and the ice must be melting, and so the water is rising slowly; and perhaps it is due to a little rain. We have not seen the rain and we have not seen the ice melting, but we know such phenomena do occur, and we cannot explain the water rising in the Ganges in any other way.

Likewise, the demand of the inner consciousness of the human being requires that God must exist. If we exist, God must exist; and if God does not exist, we also have no right to exist. That we see a world outside us is itself enough proof that God must exist. Why? How do we interpret the existence of God by mere perception of the world outside? The man in the street also sees the world, just as we see the world, but

he understands in a different manner. The child also sees the Ganges, but the child does not understand.

The very fact that we exist and the world is appearing before us as a tentative existence shows that there is also a connecting link, on account of which we are able to say that the world is. It also shows that there is a wider being than our own being. The world alone cannot be, and we alone cannot be. There is a third thing. What is that third thing, that thing by which we are able to see the world outside?

There is a table in front of me. I am not touching the table; there is no visible connection between me and the table, yet I am seeing the table. 'Seeing' is only a word, but it must have some meaning. What do we mean by seeing? What is the intention it conveys? What do we feel at that time when we make such a remark?

Unconsciously the feeling is that our knowledge is able to envelop the existence of objects outside of us and make it a part of our perception. Though the mountain is two furlongs away, our knowledge is able to envelop it in such a manner that we are able to take the object into our own being and make it a part and parcel of ourself. Where is our knowledge? It is in the brain, perhaps; and our brain is not able to travel to the mountain. There is a physical entity which is not space. This being aware of a thing outside of us is sufficient proof that our knowledge is able to go ahead and that it is not confined to our body. The knowledge that is contained within us, on account of which we are able to see the world, is not limited to our body. Due to it, we are able to know what is outside.

This shows that the element of knowledge in us is not identical with or a part of the body, but is something exceeding the body. This general consciousness, this general knowledge - knowledge in principle, which exceeds the body and objects - is the third element that is necessary in all human or animal perception. This third element is the existence of God. The seer and the seen are overcome, included and transcended by the existence of God.

If we fly in an aeroplane and look into space, we will not see the sunlight. But if there is an object suspended in space, we will see that the object is illuminated by sunlight. The light itself is not seen, but it is seen when it envelops an object. This element, the intrinsic consciousness in us, does not itself become a part and parcel of our perception, but through the knowledge we see an object. We are unable to see the element of the existence of God in things, but things are seen only on account of the light of God. The light that illumines things is not seen, but the objects are seen. We see the world, but the 'unseen' object is God, manifested as the world. It is the light seeing itself as the visible objects. Ishwara, Guru and objects are the three perspectives of the vision of one existence.

We may question whether Ishwara is a historical person, whether Christ or Buddha are historical persons. Is God a historical person? Is the world a historical entity? Are the contents in the world historical existences? We will find the question is inapt, and we will feel there is something funny about these questions; but equally so when it is about persons like Christ, Krishna or Buddha.

The existence of any particular object in the history of the cosmos is seen only when taken in its isolated aspect, and loses its historical meaning when taken in a general universal perspective. In other words, the very definition of existence is changeful. It is not a permanent viewpoint of the human mind, but a shifting viewpoint. We want Krishna and Buddha to be just like us, and only then we will say they were historical persons. If they had an existence that was slightly different from our own, we do not call them historical beings, and we want to deny even existence to them because we want existence to be the same as our own existence.

In Aesop's Fables we are told of a fox that was caught by a hunter and his tail cut off by the hunter's knife. The fox was very grieved. He thought, "How can I go and show my face to my friends with my tail cut off?" He thought of a way out. "I will somehow make the best of the bargain." So he went to

his friends and when they saw the fox without his tail, they said, "Oh, what has happened to your tail?" "It is a new fashion," he answered. "Then we also must have our tails cut off." They passed through some bushes and managed to tear off their tails in the bushes. "Now we are all up-to-date. We should not have long tails." Likewise, there was a Frenchman who had only a small moustache, and today we find people with small moustaches. Thus, it becomes a fashion, just as in the case of the fox they thought that was the fashion so they followed suit and also cut off their tails.

It does not mean that this imitation corresponds to facts. That we, as human beings, want other existences to also correspond to our own existence does not show that we see things in the true perspective or that we see things really. The history of a thing is not what happens to that thing in a particular country or in a village, but what happens to it in creation. That is the history of a thing. If the answer to the question "Did Christ exist?" is "Yes, he did exist," and we doubt whether this answer is correct, the doubt would have meaning only if the idea of Christ or Krishna or Buddha or some other person is from the point of view of his social or phenomenal existence.

We all exist in India, in Rishikesh, in this world, but we also exist in this cosmos. We do not only exist in this Bhajan Hall or in Muni-ki-Reti or Rishikesh, but we also exist elsewhere. Some of us are visitors, some are residents of this place, some are *yatris* on their way to Badri, and some have come from foreign countries. These are all descriptions of persons and are all true, but there is something more true. We belong to the creation of God. Now, what is our status from the point of view of creation? I think that is the real test of things, and that the study of a person can be complete and free from all doubts only when we study from this angle of vision and not any other way.

We criticise allopaths because they look at a person from the historical angle and take things bit by bit. However, the homeopath, the naturopath or even the *vaidya* of Ayurveda

do not see the patient as some kind of machine that can be dismantled, but as an organism; and, therefore, they feel that they should not meddle with the patient's soul, as the allopath would.

Studying one person as he is individually - whether Julius Caesar, Mark Anthony, Plato or Shankaracharya - and taking each person as associated with his given personal body alone, is called a biography. This is not the correct way to study people, because they have wider relations which we are not able to see with our limited vision. They have a greater relationship, more intense than we can see, and until that relationship is studied, the biography is not properly written; the history is not properly written.

Ishwara, the Creator, God, the incarnations of God like Krishna, Buddha, Christ, etc., our own selves, individual *jivas* here, all exist from one point of view, but are non-existent from another point of view. We all have some existence. "Do we exist from the historical point of view?" is a question you may put to me. Now I will put a question to you: What is history? A student in high school has one conception of history, a professor in a university has a more profound conception, and a farmer in a field has some other conception of history. Therefore, one's concept of history is, to some extent, responsible for the nature of the answer.

There is no such thing as a non-existent person, because a person must exist in order to have any value. If we deny value to a person, then of course there is nothing, or no meaning, to it. We know how many people worship Buddha or Christ. So much value is attached to them. If they are non-existent, all religion falls to the ground in one second. Then there is no Christianity, no Buddhism, no Islam, because we cut at the root the value which we attach to their seers or the incarnations by saying they are not historical.

The historicity of a thing is the attaching of value to a thing from one angle of vision. The mind of the human being sees things only in space and time; but religion emphasises that God is not in space and time. If we say that anything that

is not in space and time cannot be, then we are denying God because He is not in space and time, even though we believe in the existence of God as trans-spatial or trans-temporal.

This especially applies to such divine beings like Dakshinamurthy. We do not know what these beings were. How can we say whether Dakshinamurthy really existed, whether he was a historical being? When we take the whole of creation in its total perspective, everything becomes historical. But if by history we understand only that which is localised in space and time, in this physical realm, then God and His incarnations in the other realms of being are not historical at all.

The world is not merely this Earth. We are told there are seven planes above and seven planes below. We are even told that we have worlds within us. The subconscious, the unconscious minds - do they really exist? They do not exist in space and time. We identify our existence with our experience, and anything we do not see or experience, we deny. This is a poor state of affairs, where we think that what we think is the complete truth and we deny everything else. We deny knowledge to our own perception.

The great Avataras, the incarnations of Ishwara, existed - some in the historical sense of our own present mind, and some in the historical sense of the cosmos. There is a difference between cosmic history and British or Indian history. The history of the cosmos is different altogether. Vyasa tried to take all things into consideration, and the Bhagavata is such an attempt of writing cosmic history where things are given significance from the spiritual perspective also.

A person exists not merely as a body, but as a spirit. We exist as historical beings. Now, what are we? Are we bodies? Maybe. When we write the biography of a person, we write about the activities of the body or the movements of the mind. When we write about Napoleon, we do not write about his spiritual existence, as if that is not important.

If the existence of the soul of the person is to be taken into consideration, as it must, then the history of a person, of a machine, of the Earth, would immediately assume a different significance. Our way of looking at things would change. We would not identify with what our eyes see, and we would know there are things our eyes are not able to see. We would not immediately make a remark. It is a hasty way of perceiving.

Before judging a thing we have to understand it completely, and before understanding a thing we have to take all factors into consideration - which is humanly impossible. And it is humanly impossible to say whether a person existed or not. We, as spiritual seekers, are expected to not have such a narrow way of looking at things, but to have more charitable views. There are more things than our philosophy dreams of. We should not think that our philosophy is complete and we can wind up things into our philosophy. Philosophy, after all, is a product of the brain. But there are more things than we dream of in our philosophy.

Existence is wider than we can see; and wisdom is deep only when it is associated with humility. The proud person is not a wise person. That is why in the Bhagavadgita, *vidya* and humility come together. The less we consider the personality shell as complete and the more we know there are things outside it, the more humble we become. It is the empty person that thinks he is complete. The profound person knows he has to be humble before the mighty universe.

We audaciously declare certain things - such as, that we can do this and that - because we do not know what is under our own skin. We are part of a wider existence, and our meaning is the meaning of that which is wider. To forget that is to forget the real meaning of human life. The existence of God, of His creation, of the Atman, are aspects of existence that we cannot see with our eyes. How much of the universe do we see? The cosmos is so deep! Even the physical

existence of this universe is so vast that it far outranges our mental horizon. Though it is in us, we cannot see it.

Thus, the human situation is neither really psychological, because the deepest psychological existence of the Atman cannot be seen, nor is it even theological, because God cannot be seen. We are nowhere. We are empty balloons that float in the air, imagining that we are much. The value of any of us is in our association with the really existent, with God, and minus that relation we are nothing.

Dakshinamurthy was one of the incarnations of God. He was supposed to be the manifestation of Lord Siva, and his very body was supposed to be made up of the top of Knowledge. The word 'dakshinamurthy' is defined as Knowledge. Dakshina means south. Some say that he sat under a banyan tree, facing south, and taught wisdom by silence, and that he was the very incarnation, or embodiment, of Knowledge - the incarnation of spiritual Realisation, radiating wisdom all over. People had only to sit in front of him. Just as the light of the sun sustains us, the spiritual existence of Dakshinamurthy was a radiating presence of spiritual knowledge.

It is said that Dakshinamurthy especially came to initiate the Kumaras, the first-born sons of Brahma, into the mystery of Self-realisation, and that he taught in silence by a symbol. Gyana Mudra was the symbol with which he taught Knowledge to the Kumaras. The Guru taught in silence, and the disciples understood everything correctly and had no doubts. Dakshinamurthy did not deliver discourses to the Kumaras. He showed them the Gyana Mudra, and they understood.

What is this Gyana Mudra? There are various interpretations, but the common one is that it is that which is other than the three states: waking, dreaming and deep sleep. It is identical with the Supreme Being. There is something in us other than the three states, and that something is not seen by us. There is something in us other than what we experience in the three states. What do we see

in the three states? We see persons, the world, problems, etc. In deep sleep we know nothing. There is something other than these three things, and that is the existence of the person. That is the real existent being. Other things are not really existent. That really existent thing in us is the fourth. It is the Supreme Being. This is what Dakshinamurthy taught the Kumaras, and they understood it. There was no need for further elaboration or expansion of the subject. In this way, the whole philosophy of our land is given: Ishwara, the God of the cosmos; Guru, the incarnation of Ishwara in the form of the spiritual teacher; and the Atman which receives this knowledge are the three aspects of this Being which is all-pervading.

But again we come back to where we began while discussing the historicity of things. Ishwara and His creation, which includes the *jivas*, are not two or three existences; they are one existence. When we take all these three together and study them from this point of view, we are living a spiritual life. But when we take these three things isolatedly, then come the various schools of philosophy and the different religions. Why are there different religions? Because we take these three existences as isolated values.

We do not know where God is; and each one has his own idea of God, and each person or groups of persons have their ideas. We do not connect God with our existence; and when we take only our own individual existence independently, we study only psychology. And when we see only the world, and see neither God nor the Atman, we are materialists. We see only the apparent things of the world. Hence, all these are only limited ways of studying things.

We should not consider God to be some distant person, nor should we think we are isolated beings, nor should we think that the world is existent by itself. All these are defective philosophies, and they have landed us in this condition of the twentieth century. From the phenomenal point of view, it is history; from the individual point of view, it is psychology; from the point of view of the Creator of the

world, it is theology; and when we take all three together, it is called philosophy. But, unfortunately, the three are taken together in various manners, and so we have many schools of thought.

Spiritual mystics have the same experience, though philosophers may disagree. Spiritual realisation is One, because existence is One. We should not argue whether such and such a person existed or not. Whenever we attach value to things, to that extent we are historical. From the point of view of Ishwara, the Creator of the world, everything is real or everything is unreal. Everything is real to God, because this is His creation. All these many heads and legs are the heads and legs of Ishwara. So, in that sense, everything is real. But, in another sense, everything is unreal, because nothing exists outside of Him and, therefore, God's existence is complete existence. If we say the world exists outside God, it is not correct. The world's and the individual's existences have a meaning only when they are taken in relation to God's existence. There is no psychology, no theology, no history, for Ishwara. "I Am": That is the feeling of Ishwara. He Is: That is the feeling of the *bhakta*. God alone is, and to serve Him is to serve the whole creation. To render service to God with prayer, meditation, is the real service. Without the consciousness of the omnipresence of God, all our social activities have no meaning. Our way of thinking is not correct because we isolate things. We bifurcate existence. That is not the Truth.

The Truth is that everything exists where it is and where it ought to be, and is integrally related to God and comprehends history, cosmology, theology, etc., and in the one assertion 'God Is', we have said everything. No other assertion is necessary.