

# ON THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

---

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society  
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

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

Philosophy is not a theory but a vision of life (*Darsana*). It is not merely 'love of wisdom' but signifies a real 'possession' of it. The philosophers are therefore not professors, academicians or doctrinaires, or even spectators, but true participants of life in its real meaning and relationship. To be a philosopher, thus, implies more substance than what is often taken to be its value in life. A philosopher is not concerned with human beings alone: his concern is with all creation, the universe in its completeness. His thought has to reflect the *total* import of existence in its togetherness.

A philosopher's task calls for a great strength of will and clarity of understanding, side by side with an exalted moral consciousness. The usual prerequisites for a student of philosophy have been stated to be (1) *Viveka* or discrimination of reality as distinguished from appearance; (2) *Vairagya* or disinterest in those appearances which are divested of reality; (3) *Sama* or tranquillity of mind, (4) *Dama* or self-restraint, meaning control over the clamours of sense; (5) *Uparati*, or freedom from the distractions characteristic of selfish activity; (6) *Titiksha* or power of fortitude in the midst of the vicissitudes of life, (7) *Sraddha* or faith and conviction in the meaningfulness of the pursuit of philosophy; (8) *Samadhana* or ability to concentrate the mind

on the subject of study; and (9) *Mumukshutvaor* a sincere longing to attain the practical realisation of the Absolute. Without the equipment of these necessary qualifications, a student under the scheme of philosophy will be a failure and cannot get at either its method or its purpose. Though the discipline needed is arduous indeed and no one, ordinarily, can be expected to be full with it to perfection, it has to be accepted that it is an inviolable condition of the pursuit of philosophy, at least in an appreciable measure. Else, philosophy would only shed as much light to the student as the sun to the blind.

Philosophy has often been identified with a life of contemplation, without action. That this is a misrepresentation based on ignorance would become obvious from the nature of philosophic wisdom, as has been stated above. Though wisdom is a state of consciousness and implies concentration and meditation, it does so not in any exclusive sense, for philosophic wisdom is all-inclusive. It synthesises the different sides of the psychological nature, e.g., the knowing, willing, feeling and active. Any lopsided emphasis is contrary to the requirements of a wisdom of life. The teaching of the Bhagavadgita, a monumental embodiment of the gospel of the philosophic life, is a standing refutation of the notion that philosophical knowledge is tantamount to actionlessness. A philosopher, in his heightened understanding, has also the power of sublime feeling and action for a universal cause.

Philosophy is not also opposed to religion; on the other hand it is the lamp which illumines the corners of religion both within and without. Philosophy supplies the *raison d'être* of religious practices, even of ritual, image and symbol. If religion is the body, philosophy is the life in it. Philosophy ennobles religion, sublimates art and stabilises the sciences, such as sociology, ethics and politics. It was the hope of Plato that the philosopher and the ruler be found in the same person, if the world is to have peace. Philosophy is also the remedy for the illnesses which psychoanalysis has been immaturely attempting to trace back to a supposed

irrationality of behaviour. Philosophy discovers the rationality behind the so-called irrational urges.

In India, philosophy as *Darsana* has always been associated with practice or *Sadhana*. What goes by the name of Yoga is the implementation of philosophy in practical life, with reference to the psychological functions predominating in an individual. Philosophy has therefore relation to one's *being* more than to one's intellectual grasping of outer situations. The philosophic truth is neither the inner nor the outer merely, for it is the *whole*. The cosmic gets mirrored in the consciousness of the philosopher who lives it more than anything else.

Philosophy is different from any kind of extreme, whether in thinking or living. The *golden mean* is its rule, which excludes nothing, but includes everything by way of transformation to suit the constitution of the whole which is its aim. To arrive at this finale of knowledge, it considers the cases of perception, inference and intuition; observation, implication and the testimony of experience. It neither denies nor affirms peremptorily. Philosophy is, thus, necessary for every stage and kind of life to make it a joy. There is no satisfaction where there is no meaning. Philosophy is the discovery of the meaning behind life.

Philosophy is impartial judgment without prejudice, underestimation or overestimation. It recognises the values accepted in the different fields of knowledge and iterated in the various viewpoints of observation and logic in order to construct an edifice of integral envisagement. From this it follows that philosophy does not take sides, has a place for every standpoint of thinking in its proper perspective, and its function is to so fit everything into its broad scheme that nothing is either ignored or made to strike a dissonant note in the harmony of its development. Its position is that of the chief judge in the government of the universe. It listens, understands, sifts, weighs and considers the status of any given circumstance not from the standpoint of the circumstance in its isolatedness but in its relation to the

whole of existence. No one can, therefore, afford to turn away from the divine gift called 'philosophy'.