

BOOK REVIEW

Chopra, Deepak. *God. A Story of Revelation.* Harper One. New York. 2013. ISBN 978-0-06-202069-7. p.278. \$19.99

The book is actually about ten people: Job, St. Paul, Shankara, Rumi, Julian of Norwich, Giordano Bruno, Anne Hutchinson, Baal Shem Tov and Rabindranath Tagore. The argument is that it is not faith which binds the ten together, but consciousness. That is controversial, but it contains a fascinating contrast of cultures. The great surprise of the book is that Bishop Berkeley, who in the West is regarded as a philosophical curio, has a position which is mainstream in Hinduism. Berkeley argued that what we see around us is internal to our minds, just as a dream is. Physical reality is an illusion.

Similarly, Shankara[788-820] held that consciousness creates the world, just as the mind creates a dream. Shankara became seminal in Hinduism. Tagore put Shankara's position to Einstein in a three day meeting they had at Einstein's home in Potsdam. Einstein did not accept it. 'I cannot prove that my conception is right', he said, 'but it is my religion.'

Chopra believes that Einstein is out of date. Chopra argues that quantum physics implies Berkeley. Be that as it may, Shankara's objectives were more directly religious than Berkeley's, who was trying to prove that matter does not exist, in order to undermine Newtonian physics, thereby nullifying science as an ideological threat.

Shankara believed that we are all of the same essence as God, and so is everything else. Similarly, Tagore maintained that human nature is infinite and part of the divine. Later in India, an opponent of Shankara, Ramanuja [1017-1137], argued that being one with the universe is not the same as becoming one with God in the unity of love. Shankara's God is

impersonal, Ramanuja's God is profoundly and warmly personal. We are having a similar debate now.

At the end of the book, Chopra remarks that now that the age of faith is well and truly over, modern people make a reasonable demand: If God exists, we should be able to verify him. How do we do that? Here, ancient Hinduism has something to offer viz., the four paths to God. The first path the way of devotion, involves prayer. The devotee sends out love and gets Love back. "The great advantage of the devotional path is its joy", writes Chopra.

The second path is the way of understanding or thinking. Its greatest exponent in our day is probably Richard Swinburne, lately Nolloth Professor of natural philosophy at Oxford. "Thinking brings its own joys", writes Chopra aptly, "but no one would say that this way is blissful"[p.273,]though there are people who find that knowing the truth about higher reality satisfies them more than devotional bliss can. The path of service is the third way. It involves doing good for others, in the myriad ways that is done. This way could do with further investigation. Do people working in West Africa to combat ebola, find that their work brings them closer to God? Perhaps further conditions are needed.

The fourth way is meditation. The claim is that it can open a window onto other spiritual realities. Only the way of thinking is conceptual. On the other three, enlightenment takes place on the non-conceptual level. The closest analogy would be listening to great music.

Hinduism, with its hundreds of God's, has provided an enormous target for western critics. Chopra does not hit back. This is a wise and delightful book.

—Reg Naulty