

Aspects of Hindu Vedanta



Mapping The Cosmos:

An Introduction to God

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GIVEN THE TWO BIG WORDS IN THE title, "Cosmos" and "God", it comes as a surprise to open the slim book on only 46 pages. Karen Armstrong's *A History of God* covered 498 pages and Jack Miles' *God, The Biography* 431 pages without taking on the cosmos as well.

We find inside not a tightly argued descriptive introduction, nor a tightly argued anything. It is certainly not academic in its style nor is it devotional, but it lies somewhere in that gently declamatory pastel-coloured middle ground that is typical of the New Age approach to religion. There is a faintly anti-scholarly air as we learn, on page 8, that proof is "what people are asking for when too lazy to find out the truth themselves".

Metaphors abound — it is impossible to talk about religion or practice religion without them — but the inability to distinguish between a demonstration that a claim is true (am I really being lazy?) or is merely being restated and amplified in poetic language occurs again and again.

The story of the development of the cosmos is shown by a series of four Images by which "we hope to establish how creation emerged from the uncreated Great God Beyond ... (page 10). But nothing is "established", it is only asserted. The first Image is a page of only a background of dark blue. In the next, God appears — as a whitish ellipse. Matter shows up in Image III as a multi-coloured something within the God blob and IV shows the Dreamland wherein (page 12) we have an assurance that millions of souls can exist IBL ("In Between Lives") because "like the millions of different wave types ... souls don't take up much space". Without a by-your-leave we are assured (page 13) that "When our bodies die, our souls will not vanish but continue to exist". We wait out our IBL time in Dreamland.

What can one say positively? It is optimistic in outlook (page 27: "There is no 'hell'"); incarnations and IBL lives are evolving us "towards being one again with the great Source of all" (page 27); and "we have to go our individual ways. Its not possible to book a 'group charter flight to heaven'" (page 39).

But there's some unsatisfactory bits too: on page 26 we learn "that we ourselves ... are responsible for everything; yes, also for tsunami's [a wayward apostrophe intrudes], earthquakes etc.". We are warned that our prayers may get answered by IBL spirit entities who "may not necessarily be much wiser" than we are (page 31).

Who would like this book? Readers who like the 21st century versions of Vedantic Hinduism; those who take re-incarnation to be a fact and those who want a quick skim through a form of cosmic optimism that barely places a foot on the cold and grubby earth on which we live.

You can read more about these ideas at <http://spiritualityfordailylife.com/> where "Spirituality for Daily Life tries to help those with questions in their minds, in their hearts. We use a simple question and answer format with topics loosely gathered together in five inter-connected groups: 1. Practical questions ; 2. Ethical questions; 3. Religious questions; 4. Spiritual questions; 5. Ultimate questions

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