

Study Questions #3

The Vedic-Upanishadic Concept of God

*Based on Sushanta Sen, "The Vedic-Upanishadic Concept of Brahman: The Highest God."

1. What text(s) form the foundation of the concept of God found in the Hindu religious traditions?
2. What seemingly contradictory ideas about God are found in the sacred texts of the Hindu religious traditions?
3. According to the Upanishads, what is Brahman and how is how Brahman related to the self? (According to Sen this involves the central spiritual insight of the Vedic seers and gives Hinduism its distinctive character).
4. In what ways do the philosophers of Vedanta differ in how they conceive of Brahman and the relation between Brahman and the universe?
5. Given that the Upanishads and the Rig Veda affirm that the ultimate reality is One, how should we understand the gods (devas) whose existence are also affirmed by the sacred texts of the Hindu religious traditions?
6. Are the gods of Hinduism similar to the gods of Greco-Roman religious traditions? Or are they significantly different?
7. Is it fair to interpret the gods of Hinduism as personifications of various forces of nature?
8. "What appears to be polytheism in the Samhita portion of the Vedas is really monotheism, only dressed in polytheistic language." - Sushanta Sen. Explain. Why should the Hindu traditions speak of many gods if God is really only one?
9. Are there relevant analogues to the polytheistic orientation of Hinduism in the western religious traditions?
10. What are the two aspects of the One God according to most Hindu religious traditions?
11. Explain the basic features of Hindu cosmology and how it differs from the cosmology of the western religious traditions?