

## [One God, Many Functions](#)

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FROM THE VEDAS

## One God, Many Functions

The Svetasvatara Upanishad elucidates the nature of the Supreme Being

Reconciling the co-reality of a single Supreme Being and of a multitude of worshipful Gods continues to be a challenge. Imagery of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva performing the acts of creation, preservation and destruction as three separate beings has wrought confusion for elementary school children, all the way up to Internet forums where Western academics pontificate on Hindu polytheism-monotheism-henotheism, while missing the point altogether, which is: all of the above are true. There is only one Supreme Being, Who creates preserves and destroys. There are also many great Mahadevas who are not mere diverse mental projections of the Supreme, but who are real Purushas, Persons, living in the causal plane, as souls, as real as you or I. Let us refer to our Vedas on the matter:

The one who spreads the net, who rules with his ruling powers, who rules all the worlds with his ruling powers, who remains one (identical), while (things or works) arise and continue to exist, they who know that become immortal.

Truly Rudra is one, there is no place for a second, who rules all these worlds with his ruling powers. He stands opposite creatures. He, the protector, after creating all worlds, withdraws them at the end of time.

That one God, who has an eye on every side, a face on every side, an arm on every side, a foot on every side, creating Heaven and earth forges them together by his arms and his wings. He who is the source and origin of the gods, the ruler of all, Rudra, the great seer, who of old gave birth to the golden germ (Hiranya-garbha), may He endow us with clear understanding.

Rudra, your body which is auspicious, unterrifying, showing no evil--with that most benign body, O dweller in the mountains, look upon (manifest yourself to) us.

O Dweller among the mountains, make auspicious the arrow which thou holdest in thy hand to throw. O Protector of the mountain, injure not man or beast.

Higher than this is Brahman, the supreme, the great hidden in all creatures according to their bodies, the one who envelopes the universe, knowing Him, (men) become immortal.

I know the Supreme Person of sunlike color (luster) beyond the darkness. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death. There is no other path for going there.

Than whom there is naught else higher, than whom there is nought smaller, naught greater, (the) one stands like a tree established in Heaven, by Him, the Person, is this whole universe filled.

That which is beyond this world is without form and without suffering. Those who know that become immortal, but others go only to sorrow.

He who is in the faces, heads and necks of all, who dwells in the cave (of the heart) of all beings, who is all-pervading, He is the Lord and therefore the omnipresent Siva.

That person indeed is the great lord, the impeller of the highest being. Reaching the purest attainment, the ruler, the imperishable light.

A person of the measure of a thumb is the inner self, ever dwelling in the heart of men. He is the lord of the knowledge framed by the heart and the mind. They who know that become immortal.

The person has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He surrounds the earth on all sides and stands ten fingers' breadth beyond.

The person is truly this whole world, whatever has been and whatever will be. He is also the lord of immortality, and whatever grows by food.

On every side it has a hand and a foot, on every side an eye, a head and a face. It has an ear everywhere. It stands encompassing all in the world.

Reflecting the qualities of all the senses and yet devoid of all the senses, it is the lord and ruler, it is the great refuge of all.

Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great is the Self that is set in the cave of the (heart) of the creature. One beholds Him as being actionless and becomes freed from sorrow when, through the grace of the Creator, He sees the Lord and His majesty. Svetasvatara Upanishad III. 1-17; 20; Translation by S. Radhakrishnan

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), born in Tamil Nadu, world-renowned philosopher, statesman and President of India, was a gifted and prolific commentator on Hindu philosophy.

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The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.