



Ask Rose Ariadne

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Review of the book "Meeting God" – Elements of Hindu Devotion" by Stephen Huyler

As one of the oldest magickal religions that never wavered from its traditional way of thinking, Hinduism has survived onslaughts from the rest of the world without swaying from its course over the millenniums of its existence and stands as a bright, shining beacon to the magickal people all over the world.

Stephen Huyler, a photographer and cultural anthropologist who has spent more than three decades traveling in India and documenting the contemporary spells and rituals of worship in Hinduism. The 260 plus pages in the book have fascinating pictures that allow the reader to imagine life as it was 4000 years ago because nothing much has changed in India with regards to the deep awareness of the sacred, spiritual component of all human activity, their daily rituals and their ways of meeting the Divine. I quote:

"Early in the morning, before the sun's first rays peek above the sandy horizon, some of the followers take three steps into waters of the Ganges, and pray to Goddess Ganga, while they visualize her magnificence, her nurturing presence as the purifier and Mother of All Existence. As the sun's rays appear, they begin chanting to the Sun God, Surya, the Source of All Energy, the Great Provider. In acknowledging the two (Water and Sun energy), they also acknowledge the One, for in Hinduism, the supreme deity is the absolute component of opposites, of feminine and masculine, of dark and light, of wrong and right, of good and evil. By beginning each day in this way, they attune themselves with the Universe and validate their place in it. They are essential part of a greater whole."

Although Hindus believe in worshipping many Gods and Goddesses, its important for anyone new to Hinduism to know that all Hindus believe in the





Unity of One great God: the Absolute, often known as Brahman. (Do not mistake the Brahman for "Brahmin", which is only a caste in India.)

The Brahman, also known as the One is believed to be a cosmic Force. The universe is relative, ever changing, whereas its source, the Absolute, is the only permanent thing that never changes but manifests itself through the deities.

Stephen takes the reader through many fascinating pictures of people in the process of Darshan (seeing God). The mantras (spells) and poojas (rituals) are described vividly along with the descriptions of Karma, Dharma and Vedic rituals that originated 4000 or more years ago.

Dharma is the supreme law of righteousness, while Karma is the law of cause and effect based on the fundamental belief that every action creates an equal reaction. It is also called the doctrine of absolute responsibility; everything we do or even think has its repercussions. This belief is also linked to reincarnation, which states that the soul is eternal, reborn continuously.

As the author takes us through the villages of India, we see the various ways by which the ancient Vedic rituals that are thousands of years old are still being practiced by billions of people everyday. To take part in a pooja or Hindu ritual is a life changing experience.

The book provides hundreds of pictures of temple Goddesses who are worshipped daily by cleaning, cleansing and mantra japa (chanting of spells). The people wake up to the rhythmic chanting (women and men can be priests) while they prepare their houses for early morning rituals in which they become the priests themselves.

The houses are decorated with large symbolic motifs hand crafted with brightly colored rice powder, The holy basil plant is watered and the leaves are used for the rituals. Brooms are used to clear away the debris from the front of the houses and water is splashed over the ground to cleanse it and prepare it for the day's rituals.

Men and women pray to the Sun God in the morning by circumambulation or standing in yoga postures. Then they go inside the house to a pooja room (the altar) where they chant mantras and decorate the deity with flowers and sweets.

Stephen also mentions the importance of conquering all the senses while doing daily rituals. Bells are used to drown out other sounds, incense is used to focus the smell and relax us while flowers are used in a ritualistic motion to keep our hands busy. Brightly lit lamps and the use of camphor are used to focus the eyes and keep our attention on the rituals and meditation practices.





The author also takes us through several chapters which explain Worship in the home, Honoring the spirit of the community, Embracing the Ephemeral, Healing, Sacred Vows and the final stages of Renunciation or Reincarnation.

Overall, a very captivating book for anyone interested in the origins and popularity of one of the oldest magickal religions in the world.

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