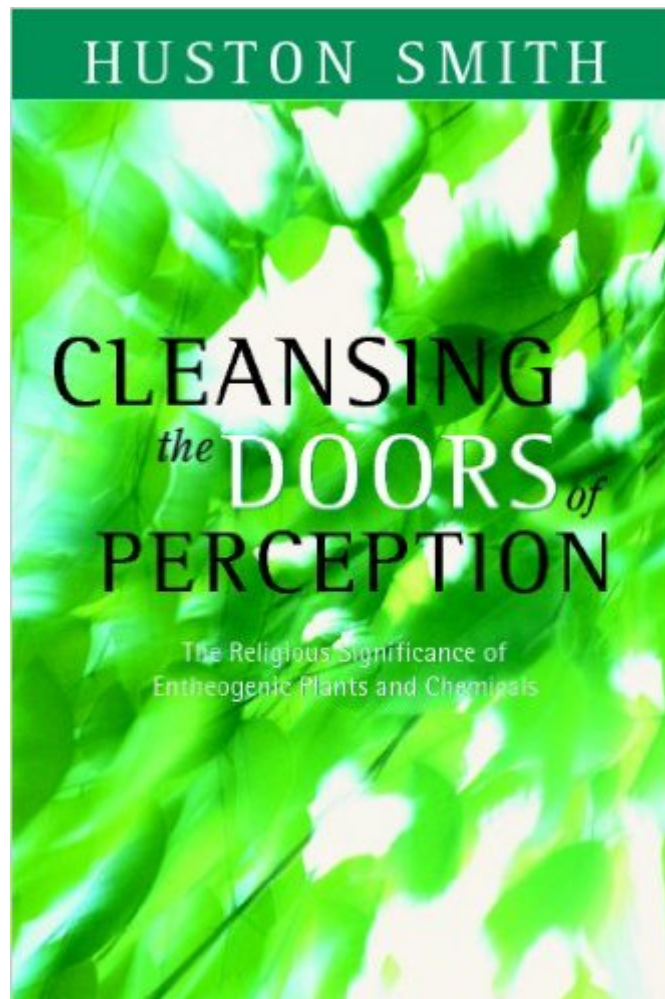


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Cleansing The Doors Of Perception: The Religious Significance Of Entheogenic Plants And Chemical



Synopsis

In this book, renowned philosopher and scholar of religion Huston Smith, takes a serious look at the use of psychedelic drugs as a means to achieve mystical union with the divine. In a unique blend of direct experience and academic depth, Smith examines this controversial subject and describes the historic and turbulent academic experiments of the sixties in which he was both a subject and an observer. Smith begins by telling the story of his own initiation into the world of psychedelic drugs in the company of Timothy Learyâa meeting arranged by Aldous Huxleyâand the profound effect it had on his understanding of reality. In wrestling with the questionâDo drugs have religious import?âhe draws on history, theology, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. He tells of fascinating experiments that attempted to shed light on this question, such as the one in which he participated as a guide, where twenty volunteersâmostly seminary studentsâwere given psilocybin before they attended a traditional Good Friday church service. He discusses as well the use of peyote in Native American sacred rituals and the hallucinogenic plant soma in ancient India. Throughout, he does not approach the question of drugs and religion from any fixed standpoint. Instead, he mines his own experiences and his relationships to pioneers in this field to come up with insights on this intriguing subject that are not available in any other book written for the general public.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an advocate of the use of entheogens (psychedelics) as a means of expanding consciousness, I

have to praise this book for several reasons. One, due to Dr. Huston's reputation, many people who would not have considered psychedelics as a spiritual path will now have to take the spiritual use of these substances seriously. Two for those of us who do use entheogens, Dr. Smith offers an interesting critique of the psychedelic movement of the 60s. He asks himself if the corollary of "tune in" and "turn on" has to be "drop out". He also underscores the importance of paying attention to "set" and "setting" (the attitude of the user and the physical environment in which the user takes the psychedelic). He rightly notes that a lot of people pay lip service to this idea without being rigorous in its application. There seems to be a kind of libertarianism, even philistinism, in the contemporary psychedelic scene. We're going to explore alone without paying attention to the lessons from other cultures who have used these substances for thousands of years. Understandably we do so under the banner of authenticity, but I think we lose out. We should not ape or follow the lessons of those cultures dogmatically, but we should investigate them and heed what is good...especially about set and setting. Third, he assigns psychedelics their proper place. They are tools. And like any tool, psychedelics work for some and not for others. Or they work for a time for us and then we need to leave them behind. Any way it goes, we are left with integrating the lessons learned from our psychedelic explorations into our everyday life. This is a sober treatment of the role of psychedelics, not an absolute glorification.

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