

Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights; Penguin Books India, 2008

In this unprecedented guide to the Vedas, Frits Staal, the celebrated author of *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar* and *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics* examines almost every aspect of these ancient sources of Indic civilisation. Staal extracts concrete information from the Oral Tradition and Archaeology about Vedic people and their language, what they thought and did, and where they went and when. He provides essential information about the Vedas and includes selections and translations. Staal sheds light on mantras and rituals, that contributed to what came to be known as Hinduism. Significant is a modern analysis of what we can learn from the Vedas today: the original forms of the Vedic sciences, as well as the perceptive wisdom of the composers of the Vedas. The author puts Vedic civilisation in a global perspective through a wide-ranging comparison with other Indic philosophies and religions, primarily Buddhism. For Staal, originally a logician, the voyage of discovering the Vedas is like unpeeling an onion but without the certainty of reaching an end. Even so, his book shows that the Vedas have a logic all their own. Accessible, finely-argued, and with a wealth of information and insight, *Discovering the Vedas* is for both the scholar and the interested lay reader.

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