



Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals

Luisah Teish

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A Marvelous Blend of Memoir, Folk Wisdom, and Afro-American Beliefs.

Actress, storyteller, and priestess Luisah Teish dramatically re-creates centuries-old African-American traditions with music, memoir, and folk wisdom.

Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals Details

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Author : Luisah Teish

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Paulo Flores Chico says

I really enjoy how Luisha talks about her first experiences with magic and how they are intertwined with her family history. Each chapter describes useful and easy step by step rituals. It is a rare gem discussing magic, spiritual journeys and being a woman of color. In the sea of white witches in the northwest, starhawk and irish wiccan books and the like, this one was really important to me.

Denise Alvarado says

This is one of my all time favorite books and the one I recommend to everyone who wants to learn about New Orleans Voodoo. If you want to know when it is okay to do a work against someone, or how to make a little soul doll, it's in this book. If you want to meet the orishas and learn to work the rainbow, it's in this book. Chief Luisah Teish provides an intimate look at her relationship with the mysteries and gives the reader some practical instruction on how to serve the Spirits without initiation. This book is a must have for anyone interested in learning from someone who lives and breathes what she writes. Its all real, so get your copy and read it now.

Donyae Coles says

I finally read this after it coming up in so many groups that I'm in. Many folk consider this to be THE go to book for getting into spiritualism as a Black woman. After reading it, I can agree that the book contains many of the basics needed to build a foundation for a fruitful and fulfilling spiritual practice.

However, while I was reading the book, it came to my attention that the author has spoken against trans people and therefore I am not recommending her book to anyone as her values do not align with mine.

This is not evident in this book as she wrote the text way back in the 80s and trans folk were, perhaps, not as "in the news" as they are today.

The book itself contains passages from her own life and struggles which is the majority of the each chapter. Towards the end, we are given a lesson and a magical ritual to help us solve our own, similar issue.

Reading this was. . . strange. Teish seems to be very concerned about nuclear war to the point of including rituals to help counter that threat. I know, in the 80s we were involved in the Cold War with Russia but it was still strange to see it so directly addressed in a spiritual text. Useful though because in 2018 that threat has returned.

The rituals are easy to follow but may not be everyone's cup of tea. They include using menstrual blood and bodily fluids in small amounts which is just not something that everyone is going to be into. Still, the rituals were clearly laid out and easy to follow.

Overall, this text is educational and easy to get into, even if you have no background and spirituality at all.

Lynn says

I have had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Teish at a Women's Spirituality conference. She led the opening ceremony and taught us some tricks of the trade. She spoke about Haiti and the magical women there. She spoke about ancient traditions and wisdoms. This is a text book of healing and empowerment. This book concentrates on the voudou powers in New Orleans. It employs the subconscious mind. It is a working woman's tradition and is easily used by working women.

This is a book to have on your reference shelf. Feminist spirituality allows women to call the Goddess by her many names, Kuan Yin, White Buffalo Woman, Oshun.

This is a book of spells and intentions.

Dimka says

One of the few books that's a mainstay in my library. The story of how she became a priestess & the life she lead is amazing & inspiring. The book itself is simple, easy read. Her explanations of the rituals are straight forward. She gives a general history of the God/Goddess of the Orisha traditions as well as other African traditions. Can't say how much I enjoyed the read.

wordLife says

nicely shows the connection between spiritual practice and personal evolution (& growth).

Mychole Price says

Definitely better than I expected and so much more applicable for anyone's life, not just women or females. Anyone looking at starting a path in afro-ancestry can start with this and feel good about practicing.

Kelly says

I had this dream about Oya recently and decided to read up on her; I started with the intertubes and then figured I'd read *Jambalaya*, since I'd had it sitting on my shelf for a few years and why not? My reaction is kind of meh; it feels very dated (80s Starhawkiness), and you get the sense Teish knows a lot more than this but that it's oathbound. I can respect that. I just don't feel like I learned a ton. *That said*, its time has to be factored in there too. There was not nearly as much info available to the general public when this was written, I think.

Rhea says

My new favorite source for rituals.

Sonia Sein says

This book is excellent. I read the book 3 times.. This book has lifted me up spiritually. Recommend this book.

Aubrey Coletti says

Be Thou Forewarned...I am incapable of being non-biased when it comes to this book. I'm simply too close to the material it explores, and after reading it, I feel a strong connection to Ms. Luisah Teish herself. And that, in short, is why I adore it.

"Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals" is part memoir, part folk-magic practices, and part tome of women's spirituality. Written in the eighties, it has some of the historical assumptions about women's spiritual traditions that have since proven shaky, but far less than the equally good "The Spiral Dance" by Starhawk (who addresses the discoveries of such scholarship in the prefaces of the later additions) because Ms. Teish is mostly addressing Afro-American and African/African Diaspora practices which have been in place for thousands of years, rather than reconstructionist ones.

Luisah Teish takes the reader through the world of New Orleans she knew growing up in the fifties, and through the riotous mix of L.A. and San Francisco in the sixties and seventies. She addresses race, class, ethnicity and gender issues with a simple, clear understanding that remains as relevant and true today as it was then. Ms. Teish writes with warmth, humor, intelligence, and wisdom. She has a keen sense of herself, and those around her, and we get loving but rounded portraits of her family and friends.

For those mostly interested in the 'practical magic' side of things, she offers charms, spells, and rituals in every chapter, some of her own making, many based upon traditional folk and religious practices. She gives a really wonderful, gritty look at the New Orleans of her time, and how it has changed. For those who enjoy memoirs of political activists of the sixties and seventies, this is definitely a gem, especially those interested in the women's spirituality or "alternative religious" movements.

Lots of ink has been spent on the economic, political, and social aspects of the civil rights movements of the sixties and seventies. Less has been written on the spiritual movements, and how they interacted and informed them. "Jambalaya" gives a beautiful look into how much *connection* can be made through mutually inclusive, tolerant spiritual practice and understanding - something we don't quite get enough of when it comes to religion.

"Sisterhood", I find, is rarely proffered as a term of much meaning among modern feminist circles. When it is, it is sometimes with an air of derision, as if those who used it were naive: how could there be sisterhood when there were so many racial and cultural differences, and prejudices, and privileges? And perhaps the feminists of the past were a bit naive. Certainly, they didn't have the same access to the more up-to-date scholarship about women's history and women's spiritual traditions we now possess.

But those feminists who connected through the women's spirituality movement like Starhawk (whose glowing praises adorn the back of the book) and Luisah also seemed able to make deep connections *because* they were working in the arena of women's rights through spirituality. If you're looking to find relatively unbroken traditions of goddess worship, you *must* include the orishas of the African diaspora religions, the goddess of Africa and Asia, the Amerindian spirits and folk saints so popular in New Orleans itself. When Luisah describes women as her "Altar-Sisters" it carries weight and meaning because deep personal connections through faith are not just a political statement, but a ritual reality. We're sadly very used to religion as a tool of division: it's a breath of fresh air to get a glimpse of just how much true respect and understanding and appreciation can be engendered (pun intended) when people feel that they have a divine reason to do so.

And it makes sense that a writer who can show this would grow up in and around New Orleans, a city where racial mixing, and in particular *religious* mixing took place despite official sanctioned race, gender, and class lines. Despite the attempt to prevent it, white women flocked to many of the Voodoo rituals held by 'Mam'zelle Marie LaVeau' as Ms. Teish calls her. When it comes to describing the delicious gumbo of beliefs, practices, charms, and spells that dwell in the Crescent City, Ms. Teish goes into a depth of personal detail that is very fulfilling if you're interested in the topic.

As a book on women's spirituality from a historical perspective, again, she is mostly in keeping with current scholarship because as an initiated priestess of Oshun in the Lucumi tradition, those practices have been alive and well for hundreds of years. It's good to keep in mind the book was written in the 1980s; you can tell it is if you know the style of those times, and so inaccuracies, if they bother you, aren't really a big worry. (In fact, her 'A "Generic" African Woman' section (based upon a Western African model, from the same areas where the Orisha traditions have their birth) manages to neither put her "generic" woman on a pedestal and sugarcoat reality in an attempt to "fix" current perceptions, nor to paint a pitiful portrait of a stereotypical oppressed woman in need of rescue - a pretty big accomplishment).

So, the important question: would *you* like this book as much as yours truly did? Well, if you're interested in memoirs from women active in the women's spirituality movement/the women's right movement/civil rights movements of the sixties; in Southern memoirs; in African/African Diaspora spirituality; in New Orleans; in Voodoo, Hoodoo, and things of that nature; or if you just plain want a book that describes some REALLY delicious food - I'd say check it out.

Oneka Samet says

Good information for beginners looking to start their spiritual journey.

Sarah says

I loved this book. I checked it out from the library, but wouldn't mind owning a copy since I took tons of notes. This book is full of magical exercises, spells, and information. Not to mention her bits of New Orleans' history, as well as useful personal history. I think that this book is a great introduction to the history and practice of American voodoo. It breaks away cultural stereotypes, teaches one a bit about religious tolerance.

I would recommend this book to anyone and everyone, even if they have zero interest in voodoo or magical practices, because people should be more accepting. I especially recommend it to Pagans who sometimes scapegoat on Voodoo without fully understanding that their ethics are modern. Where as voodoo doesn't have a doctrine about ethics. One serves the spirits (be them ancestors, deities or other spirits) and that's about all one answers to. There are so many modern books on magic(k) with the cliche statement "Now don't you go and cast a love spell on a specific person, that's a NO-NO." Where as voodoo practitioners would see that situation in a completely different light based on their cultural heritage, economic situations, and the amount of free will that both the spirits and the person in question has working against your spells & charms. Anyway, go read it.

Kelly says

This book was one that really started me on my personal journey.

Chelle says

I like it for what it is, however , I don't see myself using all the information in it. I like keeping things simple and the rituals, etc, take a lot. At least to me. and that's okay if you're completely I to one tradition. I am not. I also, again, like simplicity. Though I personally stopped reading the last section of the book, I believe those in the tradition will find it all a great help!
