

Introduction to Wicca

American Spiritual Alliance

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Table of Contents

Introduction



Chapter 1 ... A brief history of Wicca.

- Chapter 2 ... On Deity.**
Chapter 3 ... Holidays or Festivals, the Wheel of the Year.
Chapter 4 ... Separating Myth from Truth.



Introduction

This workshop course is designed to help you understand the history and ideals of the Wiccan belief. It is imperative that anyone wishing to pursue Clergy training be very well based in the historical aspects of the Path, as well as its basic tenants and philosophies. It is also the responsibility of anyone seeking a Clergy Path, to be quite knowledgeable of the philosophies of their chosen Tradition.

This work is not intended to replace the values and conceptions of any one Tradition, but rather to enlighten the reader to historical information regarding Wicca. Every Path has subtle differences and understandings of their belief. The goal of this book is to help create an environment of understanding, not a set of dogmatic rules.

If you are looking for a book about magick or spell casting, this is not the book for you.

Blessings and May deity guide you well in your journey.

Chapter 1

A brief history of Wicca.

Wicca is, by definition, a modern revitalization of an ancient belief system that far predates Christianity. By modern, we mean, less than a century. Much of the credit for the creation of Wicca has traditionally be given to Gerald Gardner, a practicing witch of the early 1900's. The Gardenarian Tradition became the benchmark for the many Traditions in existence today.

Gardener „came out of the closet“ in 1949 and assembled his system in 1951, shortly after England repealed the infamous witchcraft laws. He was known as quite the showman and somewhat eccentric, but his willingness to become public

did give rise to many others, who still remained in the shadows, to actively practice their beliefs. He was often referred to as the „first witch of England“. He claimed to have initiated into the New Forest Witches Coven, but nothing to substantiate that claim has ever been found.

What is known about him historically is the fact he was a follower and friend of Alistair Crowley. Crowley bestowed an honorary membership to Mr. Gardener in to O.T.O. (*Ordo Templi Orientis*, or *Order of the Temple of the East*) and he was an initiate to the Fellowship of Crotona (co-Masons).

He was credited with writing a number of documents for his newly founded Tradition (known as the Bricket Wood Coven) supposedly using the Book of Shadows of the New Forest Witches, it was discovered later, that a number of these writings were in fact plagiarized from authors like Waite, Kipling and even Crowley (his friend and mentor).

Many of his practices, in the beginning, were dark and very secretive due to his association with the occult philosophies of Crowley. This direction began to change dramatically when he initiated Doreen Valiente into his Coven in about 1953. Valiente was an extremely talented writer and she refined Gardener's start into the much more Earth-Based system it is today. After she recognized many of the writings, Valiente confronted Gardener, who admitted to the plagiarism. He told her the Book of Shadows he had used was incomplete. She summarily discarded much of Crowley's influence within the Tradition and created a new direction. She is credited with the »Charge of the Goddess« and the »Wiccan Rede«, which are universally used throughout the Wiccan path.

Because of his antics, his newly written „witches Laws“ and need to be „in the spotlight“, Valiente broke off from the Bricket Wood Coven and started her own Coven. She still followed the Gardenarian principles, but did away with Gardeners witches laws. Although she parted ways with the Coven, Valiente still maintained a friendship with Gardener until he passed away from a heart attack in 1959.

The word Wicca did not come into use until about 1957, around the time of the split between Gardener and Valiente. This fact coupled with the return to the older Earth-Based teachings instituted by Valiente demonstrates that the path, although new by name, is actually a resurrection of the old path. The vast majority of what has been practiced and is practiced today is steeped in the ancient ways.

Through the years, many of the original concepts have remained the same; while much has been added by the various paths. A great deal of the Eastern ideologies as well as Native American Spirituality and some of the so-called „New Age“ ideals have found their way into Wicca. This is not a bad thing. Growth and understanding are still among the primary ideals Wicca has continually taught. Almost all of those things that have been added have only served expand on the Earth-Based philosophy of Wicca.

In ancient times, these people were the healers, often referred to as the wise woman or cunning man, in fact, many of today's modern medicines were first used in practice by these ancient healers.

True Wiccans never attempt to push their beliefs on anyone else, but if someone asks about it, they are more than happy to explain what they believe in. They actually desire and expect their children to explore and learn about other Religions and then they are allowed to decide for themselves what they believe. Children of

Wiccan Families are cherished because they are the future of our world. The Wiccan faith holds Family values and honor at the highest point in their day to day lives.

Much has been done to change the perception of Wiccans as „Satan worshippers“ who make sacrifices to their God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Wiccans do not acknowledge the existence of Satan or Hell, believing that both good and evil are resident within all things, nor do they use blood sacrifice in their worship because that would be in violation of the singular law, „Harm None“. This is also the philosophy of a large number of other Religious Traditions throughout the world.

In 1965, the District Court in Virginia determined that Wicca was in fact a valid religion and was granted the same rights as any other recognized Church. This was followed by an action brought into the Wisconsin Courts by a group of Wiccan followers (among the leaders was Selina Fox of Circle Sanctuary) and the ACLU. After a hard fought four year battle, Wicca was acknowledged as a legitimate Religious belief and was also granted all the rights and privileges of any other recognized Church. Although the United States Government cannot acknowledge a Church or Religious group as such, after these Court actions, they did open the door for Wiccan groups to obtain 501(c)(3) Religious tax exempt status. This lent more credence to them being a legitimate Religious entity and allowed for others States to honor the validity of Wicca as a Religious belief.

In the American Religious Survey, it was discovered that Wicca was growing at an exponential rate. The survey showed a physical growth of 143% annually for the period of 1990 to 2001, jumping from about 8,000 to 134,000 in that time frame. An interesting note; the largest area of growth in the United States was the Southern region, in the heart of the so-called „Bible Belt“.

Pagans have been vilified throughout history, mainly by the reigning Religion of the time or simply through misinformation or misinterpretation. By and large, they are happy following their belief of nurturing the Earth and simple celebration of their chosen Deity. There is much in print, written by so-called experts who have never taken the time to do proper research, but chose to propagate the myths and horror stories created in the past.

Sadly, as in all Religious beliefs, there are a small number claiming to be Wiccan who think they can ignore the Harm none philosophy and simply do as they will. The actions of these few are the actions most noticed and therefore are the only ones really publicized. This only damages the appearance and reputations of those who truly believe in their path. The true followers of the path, never go out of their way to influence anyone or condone the use of violence in any form. Wiccans, for the most part, work very hard at being respectable members of society. They come from all walks of life, from the bagger at your local grocery store, to the C.E.O of a major Corporation. They are no different from anyone else and just wish to live peacefully and quietly.

Chapter 2

On Deity.

Deity, the Divine, God, Goddess. Regardless of your faith, we all place a name to that all powerful entity. Many outside of the Pagan belief look at those on the path and think that they worship a „whole army“ of Gods and Goddesses. Most Pagans view Deity in a slightly different way. Visualize a room full of mirrors, no wall space visible and each mirror positioned at a slightly different angle. While each view is of the same thing, each view is also just slightly changed from the next. Wiccans tend to give name to each perspective, but, they are simply personifications of the same entity, different aspects so to speak. They view Deity in two ways. Universal, that which is all encompassing and that no name or face can be given, and the personal. This depiction of Deity is one that the mind of the individual can accept and understand. It is here that people gain the misunderstanding that Pagans worship a complete Pantheon of separate Gods and Goddesses. Viewing Deity at a personal level allows each individual the chance to create a more personal and intimate relationship.

Wiccans frequently look upon Deity as threefold, Maiden, Mother and Crone. This is not to say they worship three different Goddesses, but three aspects of the same entity. This philosophy is also found in Christianity when you look at the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, these are not three separate Gods, but three personifications of the same entity. Pagans also acknowledge the masculine aspect of Deity. This „God“ is known by many names as is the Goddess but, essentially he is still a personification of the ultimate Godhead.

Most Wiccans follow the story of the decent of the Goddess as their story of creation. There are a few different versions of this story. One of the more common ones is the Vangelo Del Streghe, which is the story of Aradia. This story was supposedly passed on to Charles Leland from the Tuscan witch cult of the region on the premise that he would publish it. Based on a number of issues, such as the wording of the document, it does not fall into line with the culture of the time. It has however, never been discredited and as such is used by many Traditions. Another version is by far the oldest known story and that is the story of Innana from a set of ancient Sumerian Tablets. As is the case in many religions, both stories differ greatly, but are accepted by their believers. What differs here is the Sumerian tablets coincide with the relevant philosophy of the time while the Vangelo does not. This is left to the individual to interpret. All of this is to point out that each Tradition uses a slight variation of the story of the Goddess and the creation of mankind. You will find this true of almost any Religion in the world. Each denomination sees its own interpretation and utilizes it in their worship.

Chapter 3

Holidays or Festivals, the Wheel of the Year.

Most Wiccans mark the year by following the old tradition that is referred to as the Wheel of the Year. It is based first, by seasonal change, the Solstices and Equinox (the beginning of each season). These are called the quarters. It is then broken down further four more times, these are called the cross-quarters or Sabbats. These eight segments of the year are festival days or holidays, each signifying a specific event.

To someone on the path, every day is considered a Holy day, but a few are held in high regard and are celebrated as any other Religious system celebrates special event days.

Each Holiday or Festival marks an important point in the cycle of the year. You might notice a number of similarities in the names of these events found in other belief systems. The Wheel of the Year pre-dates the Religions that use these similar names and those beliefs have used both names and approximate dates for purpose. This is also true of the names of the Months and week. Many of these dates were created during the beginning of specific belief systems infancy and were used in an effort to more readily convert those following Pagan ideology. The days as used by modern Pagans remain unchanged from their origination. These days are days of Ritual, celebration, reflection and sometimes Magickal workings, but in many cases; Magick is not always a part of observance.

For ease of understanding and description, we will arrange the days using the commonly used Gregorian calendar.

Imbolc, (021) This is also known as the Festival of Light or Brighids day. The Goddess Brigid was later Canonized by the Church and to this day holds Sainthood within the Catholic Church. The Church continued the celebratory day but moved it to the second of February and renamed it Candle mass. Imbolc is a Sabbat and is one of the Cross Quarter days. It is symbolic of growth, because the early signs of spring are beginning to appear, and many Traditions use it as an initiatory time.

Ostara, (on or around 031) The spring equinox, a time of new beginnings, planting and birth. It is considered a very powerful day Magickally. Named after the Goddess Oestre, this is a time of feasting and celebration. Oestre's symbols are the rabbit and the egg which represent birth and life., symbols still used today in celebration of the Christian holiday Easter; which coincides with the Pagan holiday.

Beltane, (040) A celebration of fertility, renewal of hopes and vitality; Beltane is a day of passion. It is often celebrated with twin Balefires and much dancing and music. It is also a Sabbat and considered one of the Cross quarters.

Midsummer, (on or about 061) Also known as Lammas or Litha, this holiday falls on the spring equinox and is known as the night of herbs. It also marks the Battle of the Holly King and Oak King for control of the reign of the year. Midsummer is a time of feasting, Maypole dancing and singing. In Christianity, it is associated with the nativity of John the Baptist.

Lughnasadh, (081) This is the time of the first harvest, in ancient days this was a very important day because it showed hope for the coming winter. Pagans use this day to show thanks for the gifts provided by the Goddess and God.

Mabon, (on or about 091) The Autumnal equinox, Mabon celebrates the completion of the harvest. It is also a time of mystery and a time for honoring the ancient Deities and spirits. Pagans use this time to enjoy the fruits of personal harvest.

Samhain, (111) In the Celtic language, Samhain means „summers end“ and marks the Pagan New Year. This is the time when the veil between our plane and the spirit plane is considered the thinnest. Even today, it is considered the best time to both honor and communicate with those past. It is known by many as Halloween. In the Christian world the day preceding is known as All Hallows Eve or All Saints Day.

Yule, (on or about 121) Falling in conjunction with the winter solstice, this is the time of renewed promise of life and represents the new birth of the God. Yule logs and greenery were traditionally brought into the home to show the promise of continuing life and prosperity. This practice originated in ancient Egypt honoring the birth of Horus, the man God. These traditions continue today at Christmas, the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ. As a note, it was not until 1836 in Alabama that Christmas was recognized as a legal holiday, until then it was considered nothing more than a „heathen“ ritual, and was actually illegal to celebrate in many places because of this.

Wiccans also have rituals that coincide with both the full moon and new moon; these are not as stringently followed as the eight primary festival days, but are considered to be quite important to many Traditions of Wicca.

Chapter 4

Separating Myth from Truth.

There are a great many myths attributed to the practice of Wicca. Most of these have been around for hundreds of years, most of these have been propagated by early Religious groups. In this chapter, I hope to dispel some of these ideas.

Pagans practice live sacrifice... All Pagans hold life in the highest regard, to sacrifice any living thing would not only be an affront to Deity; but would constitute breaking the one most important law of the path to harm none. The only „sacrificial“ offering given by Pagans would be a glass of wine, bread, a small cake, etc. placed upon the altar table. They do not even participate in any form of communion (the symbolic eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of a Deity).

They run around naked, chanting to the devil and casting spells... While there was a time that it was considered acceptable to perform Ritual while sky clad (wearing only that which the Goddess provided), this is rarely the case today. Most Rituals are attended by individuals of all ages and it is considered inappropriate to do this except on rare (adult only) occasions. Yes, chanting is common among Pagans, as it is in most Religions. However, they do not chant to the devil, in fact

Pagans do not acknowledge the existence of the devil or hell. To be honest, most religions do not acknowledge these two things, they are primarily a Mosaic belief.

Magick, the casting of spells. No, they do not always cast spells. Magick is not used to make them rich or curse their enemies, if they did, can you imagine the wealth they could accumulate and the pain they could cause? Pagans look at magick as a focusing of energy that is found in all things to achieve a positive goal, such as healing. If this description sounds kind of familiar, think about this, if Christ were to walk among us today... what would he be called.

Pagans worship trees and rocks and such. No. Simply put, they revere nature and all the things Deity has provided us with. Because of that, they nurture the land and care for all living things. They consider themselves stewards of these gifts, not having dominion over them.

These are just a few of the many myths associated with the practice of Wicca, but I think these should be enough to make you realize how many other tales about „witches“ are not even remotely close to reality.

There really is very little difference between Pagans and other beliefs, it is just quite misunderstood.

I hope this brief introduction brings to you a certain understanding of Wicca and that it gives you a desire to learn more about the many religious beliefs present in our world.

Blessings.
