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Introduction

One of the most exciting things about writing about the Wiccan religion is that there is so much potential material to cover. Between the complementary topics of Wicca, Witchcraft, ecospirituality and responsible living, there is a lot of material for the new Wiccan to uncover. But it also means that designing a six-month course that covers all the basics adequately can be quite a challenge. This textbook does not in any way attempt to teach the necessary aspects of Wicca in depth, nor is this textbook an adequate substitute for in depth study or in person teaching. The Blessedways course is designed to teach what we feel are the fundamental lessons and values required to enter into this religion. This textbook was written specifically for students and teachers as a *supplement* to the material that you will be covering in class. Rather than present here a complete discourse on each subject and merely rehash the same material in class, we have provided you with reading that introduces you to the material that will be covered much more thoroughly in class. The chapter for each class in the 101 section is generally related to the lecture and discussion you will have in class, but might explore a different tangent or provide you with food for thought. (For example: The reading for week 5, the chapter entitled “Reclaiming Worship”, explores the nature of Wiccan worship, while in class you will be exploring the many ways in which to increase your awareness of Deity and therefore build a stronger relationship with it). This way, you will be acquainted with the material before entering class and can come prepared with questions, comments, and challenges without having to listen to the teacher merely regurgitate the material. This also allows the teacher to spend the two hour long class discussing the material more in depth, leaving the very basics for you to study on your own time. The chapters for the 102 class are divided by element. Each chapter contains reading that relates directly to what you will be doing and discussing in class, with additional reading intended to flesh out your understanding of the element and how it relates to Wiccan theology.

Most of the chapters presented here are written from the author’s unique point of view. The study of religion is deeply and intensely personal, and the relationships that you have and will have with your gods are your own—no one can tell you what those will be like, and no two people will therefore share identical philosophies. While the chapters in this textbook certainly represent valid points of view with the Wiccan tradition, they are not the only ways to approach the material. You are encouraged to read each chapter with an open mind and open heart, and decide for yourself what applies to your life and practice and what doesn’t. Similarly, you are encouraged to make note of anything in the reading that particularly moves you or that you particularly disagree with, and bring those notes to class to discuss with your classmates and teacher. The material presented in the textbook should be considered a starting point for in depth exploration and discussion, but should always be weighed against your own thoughts, ideas, and experiences. (And that goes for *any* religious material that you read. Wicca is not a “leave your brain at the door” religion.)

The first section of this textbook contains standard pieces of Wiccan liturgy, poetry, and prose. These are some of the seminal works of Wicca, and in reading and taking these writings to heart, you will gain a deeper and more robust appreciation for what it is to be Wiccan. These readings are not required for the course, though your teacher may recommend that you read them as supplemental material for a specific class. As always, what you get out of this class will be determined by how much you put into it. The liturgy section is included to help you form your own ideas about our theology, philosophy, and values.

It is important that you understand that the Blessedways 101/102 course may be different from other Wicca classes you may have taken. Because Wicca is a non-proselytizing religion and because every Wiccan and seeker are encouraged to think for themselves, many teachers are loathe to express personal opinions, or let their love and enthusiasm for their gods and their chosen religion infect their students. You won't find this the case with this course. This course is not meant to be merely a dispassionate, academic overview into Wicca, paganism, or witchcraft—rather, it is meant to be an introduction into a new way of thinking, living and serving your gods. While we present enough basic information that even someone who knows nothing about Wicca could enroll in this course and not be intimidated, this course is designed for the individual who has already chosen Wicca or is considering choosing Wicca as his/her religion. With that in mind, this course is designed to do more than introduce you to basic Wiccan concepts. It is designed to encourage you to invite the gods into your life, to live a faithful, ethical life, and to know yourself. This course is designed to be a personal challenge. How successful that challenge is is of course entirely up to you.

As a technical note, various chapters may refer to God, the gods, Deity, Goddess, etc. This is not meant in any way to dictate to you how you should envision the Divine—they are merely the author's choice of words to convey her own interpretation of the Divine. Please feel free to substitute any of these words with whatever word or phrase you feel comfortable with.

It is our sincere hope that this course will cause you to question the world around you, to challenge your fundamental assumptions, and to begin to develop a deeper appreciation for the gods and your community. May your gods shine on your path and shine through you as you live.

Brightest Blessings,

Amberlaine & Sylvan



Charge of the Goddess

*Traditional by Doreen Valiente
Adapted by Starhawk*

Listen to the words of the Great Mother, Who of old was called Artemis, Astarte, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Diana, Arionrhod, Brigid, and by many other names:

Whenever you have need of anything, once a month, and better it be when the moon is full, you shall assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of Me Who is Queen of all the Wise.

You shall be free from slavery, and as a sign that you be free you shall be naked in your rites.

Sing, feast, dance, make music and love, all in My Presence, for Mine is the ecstasy of the spirit and Mine also is joy on earth.

For My law is love is unto all beings. Mine is the secret that opens the door of youth, and Mine is the cup of wine of life that is the cauldron of Cerridwen, that is the holy grail of immortality.

I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal, and beyond death I give peace and freedom and reunion with those that have gone before.

Nor do I demand aught of sacrifice, for behold, I am the Mother of all things and My love is poured out upon the earth.

Hear the words of the Star Goddess, the dust of Whose feet are the hosts of Heaven, whose body encircles the universe:

I Who am the beauty of the green earth and the white moon among the stars and the mysteries of the waters,

I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me.

For I am the soul of nature that gives life to the universe.

From Me all things proceed and unto Me they must return.

Let My worship be in the heart that rejoices, for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are My rituals.

Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

And you who seek to know Me, know that the seeking and yearning will avail you not, unless you know the Mystery: for if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without.

For behold, I have been with you from the beginning, and I am That which is attained at the end of
of desire.



Charge of the God

By Dianne Sylvan

Hear the words of our Radiant Father, who in the many ages of humankind has been called Osiris, Pan, Cernunnos, Lugh, Shiva, Hades, Dionysus, and a thousand other names:

Wherever you gather in the love of Creation, you do so at My side, for I am Lord of all that Lives. My law is growth and ceaseless change; I am the Wheel of Life, and He who turns it, traveling westward with the setting Sun to rise again at dawn.

Let My adoration be in both the body and the soul, for My realm is that of things that move; all acts of devotion and ecstasy are My sacraments.

As grain falls and mountains go in time to dust, so too do I lay down My life that the leaf and vine might return come Spring. I am the curve of the white stag's throat and the teeth of the black wolf, the passion of Beltaine and the silence of Samhain. All that lives must die and be reborn—I am death, I am birth, and I draw the veil between.

I who am the towering oak and the shadow that follows the flame, Lord of the Wild Hunt and steward of the flocks, call to My children to stand, to walk, to dance, from moonlit grove to ivory citadel and ever onward, following the spiral path that ends where it began.

Let there be awe and inspiration, passion and balance, courage and wit, all within you. You who would seek to find Me, leave the world of walls and boundaries, and run unbound among the trees and wind—for I am Lord of all that is wild and free, and I have been waiting for you.



Descent of the Goddess

Traditional by Gerald Gardner

Now G. had never loved, but she would solve all mysteries, even the mystery of Death, and so she journeyed to the nether lands. The guardians of the portals challenged her, "Strip off thy garments, lay aside thy jewels, for nought may ye bring with you into this our land." So she laid down her garments and her jewels and was bound as are all who enter the realms of Death, the mighty one.

Such was her beauty that Death himself knelt and kissed her feet, saying: "Blessed be thy feet that have brought thee in these ways. Abide with me, but let me place my cold hand on thy heart." And she replied: "I love thee not. Why dost thou cause all things that I love and take delight in to fade and die?" "Lady," replied Death, "'tis age and fate, against which I am helpless. Age causes all things to wither; but when men die at the end of time, I give them rest and peace and strength so that they may return. But you, you are lovely. Return not; abide with me." But she answered: "I love thee not." Then said Death: "As you receive not my hand on your heart, you must receive Death's scourge." "It is fate, better so," she said, and she knelt. Death scourged her and she cried: "I know the pangs of love." And Death said: "Blessed be," and gave her the fivefold kiss, saying: "Thus only may you attain to joy and knowledge."

And he taught her all the mysteries, and they loved and were one; and he taught her all the magics. For there are three great events in the life of man -- love, death and resurrection in the new body -- and magic controls them all. To fulfill love you must return again at the same time and place as the loved ones, and you must remember and love her or him again. But to be reborn you must die and be ready for a new body; to die you must be born; without love you may not be born, and this is all the magic.



A History of Wicca

By Dianne Sylvan

Wicca is a modern religion, and not an unbroken tradition handed down in secret for hundreds of years, as many people still want to believe. Many of the ideas and practices we use are based on much older ones, and certainly the concept of worshiping a female Deity as well as a male is as old as humanity, but Wicca as we know it was synthesized from many diverse sources and is still evolving even today.

There is unfortunately great resistance to this reality, and many people cling to the fallacy that before the “Burning Times” when Wiccans were killed by Christians by the thousands, there was one great Goddess religion practiced all over Europe. What people forget is that *a religion’s validity is not based on its history, but on what it offers its adherents*. It does not matter whether Wicca is a thousand years old or was started yesterday afternoon in someone’s garage; what matters is that it fulfills our spiritual needs.

That in mind, the history of Wicca is a fascinating tapestry that shows just how appropriate Wicca is for the modern age. It draws on many diverse wisdom traditions to create something multicolored and adaptable—respecting what our ancestors understood about the natural world but also reflecting our own 21st century lives.

The timeline that follows this chapter shows the important events that shaped Wicca’s development, including the lives of its earliest champions and the people that influenced them. Rather than detail every item on the timeline, this chapter will look at the biggest influences and why they were vital to the birth and growth of our religion.

The Romantic Movement

As the seventeenth century came to a close and more and more people in Europe were moving to the cities, there was naturally a counter-movement in literature and the arts that decried the swiftly-changing face of society and technology. The Romantic Movement had its roots in Germany, as a response to nostalgia for a

“simpler” time that was fading away into the past. As the Victorians had a fascination with ancient Greek and Roman pagan culture, the Romantics pitted the pastoral ideas of those “uncivilized” eras (nature, creativity, and freedom) against the unnatural, stifled, authoritarian world of the modern age. Shelves of new books and poetry dedicated to the old gods of Greece began to appear; writers such as Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Keats, and Shelley all devoted their words to the Romantic ideals. Most of these writers considered the Greco/Roman gods to be only metaphors, and were more interested in the supposedly-idyllic pastoral society they represented than in their actual worship.

In this literature, one of the favored gods was Pan, who was a relatively minor deity in ancient times but who symbolized all the qualities that the Romantics sought to reclaim from the ugly world of the cities. He was, to the restrained attitudes of the Victorians, a subversive and hedonistic influence.

The “Ancient Goddess Cult”

While Pan and other Greek gods were finding a new home in Romantic literature, goddesses were enjoying attention as well. Eduard Gerhard, a writer of the time, was one of the first to propose that behind all of the goddesses of ancient Greece stood a single great Mother, venerated before history began. This idea caught fire among the Romantics; in 1848 Robert Graves developed the concept of the One Goddess through poetry; he also wrote of the three faces of the Goddess as Maiden, Mother, and Crone.

In 1866 Algernon Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* portrayed Christianity as a villain that suppressed the joy and beauty of the natural world. He chose Venus as a foil to this suppression, and spoke of Her as a single deity that lay beneath all others. His work was later quoted by ceremonial magicians and Wiccan founder Gerald Gardner.

Jules Michelet's *La Sorciere*, published in 1862, was based on his interest in the Inquisition and witch trials but not on very much factual evidence. He considered the witch an archetype of spiritual freedom and the power of women, and wrote that not only had witches existed throughout history, they were responsible for the Renaissance itself. He also proposed that Pan was transformed into Satan in order to make witches seem evil to the public.

In the rational age that followed the witch trials in Europe, the prevailing opinion was that witchcraft was scientifically impossible, which meant that thousands of people were put to death for nothing. This was hard for Europeans to accept, so they began to look for other explanations as to why the trials were so widespread; the ancient Goddess cult provided an alternative. Rather than being real witches with magical powers, those executed were practitioners of an ancient pagan religion.

In 1899, Charles Godfrey Leland's *Aradia* claimed to be a surviving holy text of this cult, based on the testimony of an Italian witch named Maddalena who claimed to be a priestess. From *Aradia* we get the very first version of the Charge of the Goddess.

It wasn't until 1901 that archaeology began to back up the Goddess concept. Sir Arthur Evans began excavating the island of Crete, and on it he found manifold symbols and imagery that convinced him there was a single mighty Goddess along with a single God who was her subordinate son and consort. He found images of vultures and bulls, as well as female figures throughout the island; though the evidence was far from conclusive, it fed the imaginations of many who would come later.

One such person was Margaret Murray, an Egyptologist who was the first to do systematic research (much of which has since been discredited) supporting the pagan-survival theory. She used trial records primarily from Scotland, combining them into a uniform religion that survived all across Europe; her religion was a fertility cult that worshiped a horned god in groups of 13. She used terms such as "Sabbat" and "Esbat" to describe the witches' gatherings, and claimed these gatherings involved dancing, feasting, ritual sex, and animal and human sacrifice. Though her research has been relentlessly picked apart by many modern

archaeologists, her ideas were influential to the ceremonial magical societies that had evolved in Europe since at least the eighteenth century.

(Note: at this time it is not possible to say definitively that Murray's ideas are totally false. The evidence points to many holes in the Great Goddess theory, but it is simply impossible to rule out the chance that there was indeed an ancient Goddess religion of some kind that survived to the present day. There are plenty of people who claim an unbroken line of witches in their families throughout history. Regardless, if such a religion did live through the witch trials and centuries of human hatred, it would probably be vastly different from the Wicca most modern Americans practice.)

Secret Societies

The 1700s in Europe saw the development of secret societies out of earlier craft guilds. Guilds were organizations that united those who practiced a certain trade, and these organizations often developed ceremonies (such as initiations into the guild and awards for levels of mastery) for their members. One of the largest and most complex of these societies was the Freemasons.

Medieval stonemasonry involved a good deal of mathematics and geometry, so the ceremonies the Masons created reflected their use of numbers and geometric figures. The Masons also developed their own mythology, linking their craft back to the Biblical King Solomon. It was the Masons who developed the three-degree system and the use of "so mote it be" during ceremonies, which Wiccans and ceremonial magicians still use today.

Gradually the guild system lost its power in Europe, and the less power it had, the more complicated and secretive the societies became. Many splinter groups appeared that had nothing to do with any sort of craft; a few even began to admit women by the early 20th century. By the 1890's about 20% of American adult males belonged to some sort of society based on the Masonic model. As the crafts were swiftly becoming obsolete thanks to technological advances, the societies looked for other areas to specialize in.

Some of the societies began to revive interest in ancient ritual magic. Top members of the Freemasons formed a society known as the

Rosicrucians, a group of professed Christians who gathered to study Kabbalah, hermetic texts, and other arcane works of the ancient world. There was very little practice involved; their work was primarily theoretical.

Another society that formed from this movement was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. One of its subgroups allowed the actual use, not just the study, of ritual magic. The Golden Dawn was not a religious society, but used a good deal of Christian imagery and ancient symbology; the focus of their magic was on personal power, not connection to the gods.

One of the founders of the Golden Dawn, Samuel Mathers, was more interested in the practical applications of Kabbalistic and hermetic magic, and produced definitive translations of old magical texts such as the Book of Abramelin and the Key of Solomon. He created the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, which is still in use today, and assigned the four Elements to specific compass directions based on the Tetragrammaton in order to call angelic guardians for Golden Dawn ceremonies. Mathers also began to incorporate imagery of Pan and the Great Goddess, which was becoming popular at the time, to assist in the practitioner's magical progress. Mathers also made another unwitting contribution to the eventual creation of Wicca by introducing a man named Aleister Crowley to the Golden Dawn and to Freemasonry.

Aleister Crowley was born to a considerable family fortune, which enabled him to be a flamboyant individual who flaunted social conventions without fear of losing home and livelihood. He was fascinated early on with ceremonial magic, and in fact coined the usage of magic(k) to differentiate between ceremonialism and stage illusion. Crowley rose in the ranks of the Golden Dawn and then set out on his own to create the Ordo Templi Orientis, a ceremonial order based on his experiences with the Masonic model.

Gerald Gardner

Crowley's work was very influential to many people, particularly to Gardner, who is credited with "inventing" Wicca. Gardner was a military man and a plantation owner who retired to London at the age of 52. He had a keen interest in the occult and in archaeology, and so joined a

Rosicrucian group and began to study ceremonial magic.

In this group he met a woman named Dorothy Clutterbuck, who claimed to be a member of the Old Religion. There are several theories as to who Clutterbuck was—some say she was real, some say Gardner invented her or synthesized her from several people. Gardner also wrote of a woman named Dafo, a priestess of the Old Religion; if the two people are combined into one, the story makes more sense historically. There definitely was a woman at the time named Dorothy Clutterbuck, but she was a Christian socialite and very respectable, so it is possible Gardner used her name to protect someone else. At any rate, Gardner was initiated into Dorothy's tradition in 1939, while he continued to pursue his interest in ceremonialism. He joined the OTO and at some point met Crowley, but eventually he decided that the Old Religion needed to be brought back and placed all of his focus on it.

In 1951, the Witchcraft and Vagrancy Act in England was repealed, leaving the way clear for Gardner to go public with his religion, which he called Wicca. Three years later he published *Witchcraft Today*; meanwhile he assumed priesthood of the group and began recording what he would eventually name the Book of Shadows.

Gardner claimed he was revealing a long-standing tradition called the Craft of the Wise. Based on the style, abbreviations, and material in the Book of Shadows, it can be deduced there are parts that were definitely copied from older sources, some of which may have been from the pre-existing tradition he spoke of. Much of the material, however, was Gardner's invention or borrowed from other sources such as the OTO. Earlier entries (from when he was still involved in the OTO) are highly ceremonial. The book underwent the first of many revisions in 1952, and was finally published after Gardner's death.

Regardless of whether Gardner inherited Wicca from Clutterbuck or pieced it together himself, he is more of a co-founder than an inventor; the coven, priestesses, and works of literature from the Romantics to the ceremonialists were all a part of what Wicca would become.

Gardner promoted Wicca as widely as he could, initiating people and starting covens all over

England. People who knew him called him “an old man in a hurry.” He was frequently ill (and age 67 when Wicca went public) and most likely worried that the religion would die at his death unless he made sure it lived on. He encouraged his initiates to take the Book of Shadows and not simply copy it, but add their own rites and adapt those already in it.

Doreen Valiente

One of the most well-known contributors was Doreen Valiente, who joined Gardner’s coven and quickly became indispensable for her poetic talent. One of her most important contributions was to rewrite an invocation based on Leland’s Aradia, the Charge of the Goddess. Eventually Valiente left Gardner’s coven and discovered another priest who was promoting his version of the Old Religion, Robert Cochrane.

Cochrane, 28 years old at the time, claimed that his tradition had been handed down through his family (though his story changed repeatedly as to who trained him). He only published a handful of articles on his tradition, but though it was similar to Gardnerian Wicca it had marked differences: Cochrane’s coven worked robed rather than naked, performed rituals outdoors rather than indoors, and their elemental/directional designations were different. Cochrane and Valiente had a falling-out, as she believed Gardner’s Wicca was equally valid and Cochrane refused to acknowledge it as “real Wicca.” Cochrane killed himself in 1966, so most of his tradition has been lost, but what survives is known as the 1734 Tradition.

Meanwhile, another tradition of Wicca was being born.

Alex Sanders

Sanders approached a Gardnerian group in 1962. The Crowthers, its high priest and priestess, took an immediate dislike to him and refused to initiate him, especially after he staged a public ritual that landed Wicca on the front page of the local paper. The stunt was labeled as “black magic” by the press and earned Sanders the lifelong antipathy of many Gardnerians. Sanders also lied to the paper, saying he was a Gardnerian initiate.

Somehow Sanders found a copy of the Book of Shadows and started a coven of his own with a woman named Maxine, whom he eventually married. Sanders changed his previous story and said publicly he had been initiated by his grandmother. Publicity brought them hundreds of young counter-culture British recruits.

Sanders’ publicity-grubbing was denounced by the Gardnerians, who called him an impostor; he countered saying they were the impostors and his was the real Wicca, and Gardner had imitated him. Sanders assumed the self-proclaimed title of Britain’s King of the Witches. No one is exactly sure which witches he was King of.

In 1969, a journalist named Stewart Farrar met Sanders and wrote *What Witches Do* on his behalf. Farrar was so impressed with Wicca that he initiated, and in the coven he met Janet, whom he married and started his own group with in 1970. The Farrars went on to become Wicca’s first genuinely prolific authors, and they named the tradition Alexandrian to hearken back to ancient times (and possibly because it sounded much better than Sandersian).

Eventually the Farrars and the Sanders parted ways, and the Farrars joined up with Valiente, who had published her own book geared toward solitary practitioners. Together, the Farrars and Valiente revised, analyzed, and got into print the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, which enabled people to start covens from scratch without an established lineage.

In his later years Sanders publicly apologized for his “many public stupidities” and worked to train people all over England; he also sought to make Wicca more accessible for homosexuals, as the Gardnerian tradition had a strict gender polarity that encouraged homophobia.

Wicca Invades America

In the 1960’s and 70’s Murray, Graves, and Gardner found a wide audience in the United States, especially in the growing feminist community. Feminist writers ran with the idea of a pre-Christian matriarchal society and declared the witch trials a “women’s holocaust.” In 1968 an organization called WITCH (Women’s International Conspiracy from Hell) penned a manifesto that stated nine million liberated women and witches had been put to death by the Church for practicing the ancient

Goddess religion. (WITCH disbanded in less than a year)

Meanwhile, in 1963 a Gardnerian named Raymond Buckland officially brought Wicca to the U.S., which spread like wildfire. Ten years later Buckland created his own tradition, Seax-Wicca, based on the Saxon practices of his homeland.

Starhawk and Margot Adler

Some of the most important events of Wiccan history happened in 1979. Miriam Simos, who was trained by Gardnerians and later initiated into Victor Anderson's home-grown Faery tradition, took up her pen and wrote a guide to the practice of modern witchcraft, under the name Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance* almost immediately outsold any of Gardner's books. Her style was moving and passionate, and showed Wicca as a new hope for society in which women could be liberated and men re-educated with all stereotypes destroyed. *The Spiral Dance* sparked the creation of hundreds of groups (and the practices of thousands of solitaires) all over the United States and Europe.

That same year, James Lovelock formulated the Gaia Hypothesis, which stated the Earth was a single gigantic organism, alive, with humans and other life forms as part of Her. The hypothesis was embraced by environmentalists and feminists alike, and Wicca took on more ecological overtones than ever before.

Across the country Margot Adler published a scholarly and in-depth look at modern paganism called *Drawing Down the Moon*. Adler recognized that Wicca was most likely built on a mythic history, but that this was normal for new religions, and therefore in no way invalidated it.

The 70's also saw the first large gatherings of NeoPagans (Wiccans as well as related traditions), which produced chants and songs that became part of Wiccan liturgy (ex. "We All Come from the Goddess," "She Changes Everything She Touches").

In the 1980s and 1990s there was an explosion of books about Wicca and modern magic. Solitary practice became its own sort of tradition thanks to the work of authors such as Scott Cunningham, Silver RavenWolf, and Rae Beth. American Wicca became increasingly eclectic, reflecting the diversity of American society.

At the same time, Pagans were beginning to accept the Murray thesis was part of a sacred history but not an empiric one; it was a foundational myth, vital to the growth of new tradition but not necessarily historical fact. Valiente, in her book *Phoenix from the Flame*, began calling Wicca a "rebirth" rather than a "survival." Scholastically viable works of history on Wicca and NeoPaganism in general have only recently found their way to print.

The image of the witch has evolved into the image of the priestess; modern Wiccans no longer identify strongly with the victims of the witch trials as persecuted victims, and have begun to create new traditions and find other sources of empowerment. Wicca is still finding its feet in the wider religious community, and changes and grows every year. 21st century Wiccans are fortunate in that our own actions and creativity can influence the direction of our religion—something that could not happen so easily in an unbroken, unchanged tradition. Every one of us is a part of the history of Wicca—and a part of its future.

Recommended Reading and Web Resources

The Triumph of the Moon by Ronald Hutton
The White Goddess by Robert Graves
Aradia by Charles Godfrey Leland
The Alphabet Versus the Goddess by Leonard Shlain
The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory by Cynthia Eller

<http://www.geraldgardner.com>
<http://www.starhawk.org>
<http://gofree.indigo.ie/~wicca> (Janet Farrar's site)

A Timeline of Wiccan History

- 1700s - Increased popularity of secret societies, such as Freemasonry
- 1800s - Romantic movement in Europe
- 1862 - Jules Michelet, *La Sorciere*
- 1875 - Birth of Aleister Crowley
- 1884 - Birth of Gerald Gardner
- 1888 - Formation of the Golden Dawn
- 1890 - William Butler Yeats Initiated into the Golden Dawn
- 1898 - Aleister Crowley Initiated into the Golden Dawn
- 1899 - Charles Godfrey Leland, *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*
- 1901 - Sir Arthur Evans begins excavating the Island of Crete
- 1921 - Margaret Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*
- 1929 - Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*
- 1939 - Gardner initiated into a coven in England
- 1951 - Witchcraft and Vagrancy Act of 1736 repealed (England)
- 1953 - Doreen Valiente initiated into Gardner's coven
- 1954 - Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*
- 1960s - Robert Cochrane publishes articles on his version of Wicca
- 1962 - Alex Sanders meets the Crowthers
- 1963 - Raymond Buckland introduces Wicca to America
- 1964 - Alex Sanders meets Maxine, and they start their own coven
- 1964 - Gardner dies
- 1964 - Valiente initiated into Cochrane's coven
- 1966 - Cochrane commits suicide
- 1968 - Church of All Worlds incorporates (first Wiccan church in America)
- 1968 - WITCH formed in America, disbands in less than a year
- 1969 - Stewart Farrar meets Sanders and writes *What Witches Do* on his behalf
- 1970 - Stewart Farrar meets Janet, and they form their own coven, calling it "Alexandrian"
- 1972 - Z. Budapest forms Susan B. Anthony Coven #1
- 1973 - Buckland forms the Seax-Wicca tradition
- 1973 - Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft*
- 1974 - Raymond Buckland, *The Tree: The Complete Book of Saxon Witchcraft*
- 1974 - Adoption of the Principles of Wiccan Belief
- 1974 - Circle Sanctuary founded
- 1974 - Marija Gimbutas, *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*
- 1975 - Covenant of the Goddess formed
- 1975 - Z. Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*
- 1976 - Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*
- 1979 - Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*
- 1979 - Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*
- 1979 - James Lovelock formulates the Gaia Hypothesis
- 1981 - Scott Cunningham initiated into the "Ancient Pictish Gaelic Way"
- 1982 - Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*

- 1988 - Scott Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*
- 1993 - Cunningham dies
- 1998 - Silver RavenWolf, *Teen Witch*
- 1999 - Valiente dies



Introduction to Wiccan Theology and Philosophy

by Dianne Sylvan

Wicca is unique among modern religions in that it has a common structure--the rituals and essential concepts that are used throughout most traditions--but it is left to each individual (or group of practitioners) to choose how those concepts are best expressed in his/her own practice. Phyllis Currott calls Wicca "the jazz of religion;" it has many of the same melodies as other faiths, and its goal is the same (creating harmony with Deity), but there is room for improvisation, evolution, and diversity.

Some Wiccans, the "extreme eclectics," play fast and loose with traditional ideas, claiming that whatever works for the individual is appropriate, and that Wiccans "steal from the best." However, much like music, before you can compose you must first learn how to play. There are several ideas and practices common to most Wiccan practitioners that form the basis of our religion--once you have explored these ideas you can begin to make them your own, and write a symphony of the sacred that brings you into communion with the Divine.

Deity

In Wicca, the sacred energy of the Universe is seen as both male and female. This is the central premise of our religion--Deity is God *and* Goddess, equal partners in the Dance of Creation. Some traditions place more emphasis on the Lady (and a few on the Lord), mostly out of a desire to welcome feminine divinity back into the world after Her long absence. For the most part, however, Wiccan practice places both on equal footing, assigning different aspects and roles depending on the tradition.

Many Wiccans see the Goddess as triplicate in nature--Maiden, Mother, Crone. While this set of archetypes does illustrate some of the major phases of life, it is limiting--as there are many milestones in a person's life, there are many more faces of the Goddess, a continuum rather than a triangle. The steps in that continuum must be discovered by the individual; some women, for example, may never feel at all connected to the Mother, and may relate very strongly to a Warrior or Poet Goddess instead. All shades and hues of life belong to the Divine, not just three.

Some groups will adhere to a single pantheon, from which their images of the God and Goddess emerge; others mix cultures, depending on the ritual or season. There are essentially two varieties of Wiccans: those who view all Deities as faces of a single God and Goddess (who are in turn faces of the One), and those who feel each individual Deity has a life of His/Her own. Hard polytheists (the latter category) are the decided minority in the Wiccan community. Even those who adhere to the facets-of-a-diamond approach are often opposed to mix-and-match ritual, considering it potentially insulting to the Deities as well as the cultures They originated from. Whatever view you have on the matter, it is important to have the utmost respect for the culture and pantheon you are working with.

Wicca is also a *panentheistic* religion. We consider Deity to be both immanent (residing within the natural world, walking among us) and transcendent (residing beyond the world). The universe itself is a manifestation of Deity--there is nothing that is not a part of the Lord and Lady. That includes us.

Energy

Wiccans, as well as many other spiritual people, understand that the universe is made up of energy; we see that energy as sacred, the very being of the God and Goddess, expressed both in physical and ethereal forms. Where we differ from some other paths is that we find ways to work with that energy actively to produce positive results. This "energy work" serves several purposes, the most common of which is changing the potential future and reshaping our lives--*magic*. We utilize sacred energy in ritualized ways, often involving the influences of natural substances and objects (herbs, candles, etc). Wiccans do not generally take the path of asceticism--we feel that our lives are meant to be full and rich, experienced as deeply as possible, and so changing our lives for the better is vital to our spiritual growth. Magic is one way of working with sacred energy to do just that.

Energy is also very important in celebratory rituals and other forms of communion with Deity--the being of the God and Goddess is

called upon to fill us, change us, or simply to be present in our lives. For example, in the traditional ritual of Drawing Down the Moon, the priestess invites the Goddess to reside in her body for the duration of the rite to share Her divine wisdom with those assembled.

A third use of energy is in casting Circle (see below). While not a magical act per se, the creation of sacred space taps into the sacred energy and alters mundane space and time, consecrating it.

The Wiccan Rede and the Law of Return

With power comes responsibility; as Wiccans recognize our ability to co-create reality and take an active part in the unfolding of the universe, we also recognize the vital role of an ethical basis for our actions, most often stated simply as:

An it harm none, do what you will.

The word *rede* means “counsel, advice.” It does not mean “law.” Detractors of the Rede, who say that it is impossible to both do your will and cause no harm, often ignore this fact. The Rede is an ethical precept, a goal for each of us to strive for--to balance the harm we do in our lives, through neglect or necessity, with our choices. We are not expected to be perfect--if we were, there would be no reason for us to incarnate. We are, however, expected to take responsibility for our own lives and for the betterment of the world we live in, and not stand idly by saying, “It’s not my fault. I’m a victim.” We may not have a choice in what others do to us, but we can choose what we do afterward. This is the essence of the “will” described in the Rede--to know your own will, your true purpose, and act accordingly.

The Law of Return, however, is just that. What you do will return to you--for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This idea has been expressed in many religions throughout history, from the Golden Rule to the laws of karma; our actions have repercussions, for good or ill.

The Law of Return is occasionally written as “what you send out comes back to you threefold,” but this seems to be a holdover from a punishment/reward mentality that is spiritually limiting. We do not avoid harm because we fear punishment--we avoid harm because acting in

harmony with the universe creates more harmony in the universe, helping to balance all of the damage human beings do out of ignorance and greed. Positive actions aren’t merely a way of dodging the karmic bullet; they bring us closer to the sacred. The Law of Return, as reflected in modern physics, illustrates our dynamic relationship with the world around us. We change the universe, and the universe changes us.

The Sanctity of Nature

Wiccans consider the Earth and all that dwell upon it to be holy, made up of the same energy that binds the universe together, the energy of Deity. Often the Earth is referred to as the body of the Goddess--Gaia, Demeter, the primal Mother on whose skin we live and in whose arms we are buried. As such, we are committed to caring for the natural world as well as celebrating it. Our calendar of festivals, the Wheel of the Year, reflects this commitment. We celebrate the turning of the seasons, as well as the cyclical nature of life--we are born, live, die, and are born again, as the Wheel turns back on itself every year.

We revere death as well as birth, for both are passages to new life. Most Wiccans believe in some form of reincarnation, and traditionally it is thought that the soul, after death, rests for a while (according to common belief, in a place of peace called the Summerland) before beginning a new lifetime. The precise “rules” of reincarnation differ from individual to individual; for the most part, Wiccans focus primarily on the here and now, preferring to put our energy into living the best lives we can and making the world a better place rather than worrying about the afterlife.

Sacred Space

The one practice that almost every tradition of Wicca has in common is the art of casting Circle, referred to briefly above. The Circle is our “portable church,” and its creation (as well as the tools used) is the major component of Wiccan orthopraxy. When Wiccans meet to celebrate, perform magic, or hold any other kind of ritual, we first create sacred space, setting ourselves aside from the mundane world temporarily so that our connection to the sacred can be explored and strengthened. While we say we “create” sacred space, in fact all space is already sacred;

really we are reconnecting, or renewing the connection we have.

(The various purposes of the Circle, as well as methods of casting, will be discussed in a later chapter)

Many Paths, one Mountain

Lastly, a very important part of Wiccan religion is an acceptance of other faiths as valid. Wicca is not a revealed religion for a chosen people, nor is it based on a need to convert as many souls as possible. We are primarily *henotheistic*--we believe in our own gods, but not at the expense of all others. If, as the majority of Wiccans believe, all Deities are faces of something too vast for human understanding, who are we to say which faces are valid and which are not?

That viewpoint is often the most difficult aspect of Wicca for followers of the major monotheisms to understand--we have no scripture that tells us only our God and Goddess are real. Though many of us have had negative experiences with other paths, eventually most come to an understanding that there is no One True Way, and that all religions essentially seek the same things: to promote the individual's spiritual growth, and to leave the world a little better than we found it.

Recommended Reading

There are many books that touch on the basic theology and philosophy of Wicca, but the following are especially recommended.

Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner,
Scott Cunningham

Philosophy of Wicca, Amber Laine Fisher

The Spiral Dance, Starhawk

Pagans and Christians, Gus diZerega



The Wheel of the Year

by Amber Laine Fisher

Awareness of the sacred is so intrinsic to Wiccan practice that the concept of a holiday or "holy day" is almost a bit silly. All of our days are holy. Nevertheless, most of us find ourselves trapped in nine-to-five days, bustling weekends, traffic jams, car payments and other necessary evils. It doesn't take much negligence to allow these aspects of life to take over. In order to keep the days sacred, in order to remind us to have a look around every so often, we honor several "time outs" during the year, time when we can sit back and enjoy that which the gods have blessed us with.

Most discussions of the Wheel of the Year begin and end with the eight Sabbats of Wicca. I would like to address those too, but I would like to begin on a smaller scale. It is worth reminding ourselves that the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm, and that the Wheel of the Year is reflected on smaller, and larger, scales as well.

The Cycling of the Moon

Although the moon cycles are somewhat more difficult to keep track of, it is worth taking a moment to talk about its waxing and waning cycle. The moon, as an entity that appears to constantly change (and yet whose change is always predictable), is a wonderful visual reminder of the Divine energies constantly at play in our lives. For spirited seekers and old hat practitioners alike, the experience of the Divine is seldom static. We are constantly presented with new information, new insights and changing attitudes that alter the way we see the Divine and thus the way that we honor and interact with the Divine. This is the nature of the spiritual quest; change is constant (and sometimes frightening!)

Every twenty eight days we can rely on the Moon to make its complete cycle from new to full back to new. Of course, we know that the moon doesn't actually change; it is only our perspective that changes. That in and of itself is a valuable lesson. We can look to the Moon as the face of the Divine, and though we never see the Divine as it is, we can always see it. Our perspective will change, true, and over time we

may experience different relationships with God, or possibly with different Gods. But the Divine is steadfast and steady, showing us what we are ready to see.

In common Wiccan theology, the phases of the moon are often associated with three faces of the Goddess-maiden (waxing), mother (full), crone (waning). As convenient as this image is, I don't think it's a good one. Femaleness, feminine energy, women, the Goddess etc are all concepts that transcend fertility and biology. While the concession is often made that the mother phase need not refer to biological motherhood, I find that these three phases refer too heavily on biology, relegating femaleness and femininity back to the realm of the body. This might not have been the original intent, but I think this is what happens. While I think envisioning the Moon as a visual reminder of the initiatory phases of life is very helpful, I find that it is more helpful to remember that all of our lives are unique, the cycles that we experience are therefore unique, and those cycles will probably not be linear. The Maiden/Mother/Crone paradigm often leaves people feeling like they must progress through life via that particular progression, and this doesn't usually happen. We may be maidens one moment and crones the next. Or perhaps we will be warriors and then return to a state of infancy. Regardless, our progression may not be as neat and today as the Maiden/Mother/Crone model may lead us to believe.

Even the if MMC model isn't necessarily a good one, using the moon as a focal point to remind us of the phases of our lives is reasonable and useful. It is an ever-ready link between this world and That, and staying in tune with the Moon's activities keeps us grounded in the mythologies of our chosen initiatory path.

The Eight Sabbats

The world around us changes; you don't need me to tell you that. The sun rises, the day grows warm, the winds blow, the sun sets, the moon hangs high, the stars twinkle, the night settles and a chill runs down your spine. The world slumbers and the cycle begins anew the next day.

In a manner then, each day bears shadows of that which follows and that which precedes, and yet, each day, each hour, is unique. Each moment of life is an opportunity to explore the depth of the surrounding holy.

Though the world changes, the changes of the seasons are predictable, just like the twenty eight day cycle of the moon. Seeds slumber beneath the ground giving life to buds of spring. Vegetation matures, animals give birth. The world ripens. Harvest comes, the leaves wither and fall from the trees, the days grow steadily shorter. Darkness prevails, cold descends, plants die, animals hibernate. The ground thaws, the buds bloom and the cycle begins again.

The cycling of the seasons is sacred; many of our myths are deeply rooted in these changing seasons. The eight Sabbats of Wicca are turning points; days which mark the coming together of two periods of time, two different paradigms. The day itself is not as important as the concepts it conveys: union, coming together, fusion, and the resulting creation of something different. Another way to look at the Sabbats is as a time of transition, when we look back on our journey thus far, notice the seeds that have been sown, and begin to plan for their harvest.

The approach to Wheel of the Year presented here is a mythic approach, exploring themes and archetypes that appear in mythologies worldwide. There is plenty of information on the Web and in books about the traditional Wiccan Sabbats, and we will be exploring those concepts in class. Here, we will endeavor to go one further, and explore the cross-religious significance of the changing of the seasons.

Water-Fall-Mabon-Samhain

The element of water is representative of the psyche, of dreams, of the deep self, the unexplored territory of our true nature. In autumn, we celebrate both the last harvest and the slipping away of nature into a time of darkness, a time of rest. And with physical rest there comes the opportunity to frolic in the world of dream, the world of the subconscious.

A strong image that prevails this season is the image of the sleeping babe in the womb. Seeds are at rest now. The earth is at rest, slumbering away in the living waters of the universal womb, awaiting its own rebirth. This is a time for our own contemplation as well.

As the world browns and turns silent, we reach inward and downward. We reflect; we look back over the year and see what we have done, and plot where want to head. Now is not a time of action; now is a time of remembering, reconsidering, understanding.

This is the perfect time of year to arm ourselves with the knowledge of our true selves. To protect Achilles from his fate, the Goddess Thetis dipped her son into the river Styx, rendering him invincible everywhere but the back of his heel. The imagery here can be read several ways: by dipping him into the water, he was baptized, reborn. Another way to read the myth is to see Thetis anointing her son with the gift of self knowledge and an understanding of his own strengths, rendering him invincible to the outer world.

Similar myths utilizing water and the concept of rebirth are the biblical account of Noah and the flood, where Yahweh sends a great flood to wash the earth clean and be made anew, and Cerridwen and her cauldron wherein Gwion tasted the contents of the cauldron, was pursued and eaten by Cerridwen, and reborn into the bard Taliesin.

All of these myths demonstrate the essence of this turn of the wheel : the dark, the silent, the inward reaching, dreamsleep, searching.

A note of caution: when we are taking a good look at who we are, it can be easy to become self involved and self-absorbed. As Narcissus fell in love with his reflection in the water, a very real danger of self exploration is the inability to take our knowledge of self and apply it to the world around us. We mustn't forget to acknowledge the world around us.

Earth-Winter-Yule-Imbolc

In the deep of the earth, in its cold, dry darkness, the great myths of the Underworld unfurl.

Many Samhain celebrations explore the Underworld—it is a powerful place and time for personal transformation. The descent can begin at Samhain, but the completion of the descent, the process of rising again, does not happen until Yule.

Armed with self knowledge, we descend into the Underworld to confront our demons, to seek the darkest recesses of ourselves. Kore descends into the Underworld and learns what happens to life

once it enters the Great Below. Inanna gives up the seven holy me in order to gain knowledge about the most secret, the most occult. Osiris, too, gives us his lesson--there is no such thing as true death, for death only gives unto new life. Though Osiris rules the Underworld, he is also the god of vegetation, the "benefactor of humanity".

Once we understand our own darkness, we can use it to enrich our lives, cultivate it to bring fruition to our plans and projects. In the Underworld, we begin to plant our seeds for ourselves. This is not the time to think larger than the self, not the time to plan for community action. That will come later. Before we can change the world we have to change the self.

Nestled in the earth, cloaked in knowledge of the self and with our seeds for self evolution newly planted, we are ready to be reborn into the world that we left behind. The night is still long, but the days are growing longer. As the sun struggles to overcome the dark, so do we struggle to break free of our egg, to burst into sunlight as the young sun god slides free of his mother's womb.

Air-Spring-Ostara-Beltaine

Newly born, one of our first lessons is to discover how we fit into our environment. We make plans to commit ourselves to a certain path of learning, for now that we are changed and reborn, our place in society and the local community may have changed. We take our first looks around, take in the surroundings, and reevaluate what we want to do with this world. We make promises to our gods and to ourselves to continue this process of evolution, and to grow into the new skins that we have been granted.

The element air and the concept of breath are linked with the concept of creation. Air is the element of intellect, creativity, and imagination. We take in our first breath and are filled with the essence of this world, and thus, begin to change it.

This is the time when we begin to set about creating our environment. Sure in who we are, and strong in our convictions, we begin to cultivate the world around us and mine it for possibilities. Our awareness extends out of ourselves and into the communities we belong to. We begin to forge relationships and commitments, both social and romantic. It is a

time of initiations and new beginnings. We begin to create something for ourselves in this world, whether it is a career, a creative venture, a family or a commitment to the Divine. Now is the time to begin taking actions. Our days of inward looking and downward reaching are done, and it is time to build ties with the community, and to place ourselves firmly within the world that has given us birth.

In the Old Testament, the god Yahweh speaks the world into creation; his breath is the causing force of all creation and life. Similarly, the Egyptian god Hu and "The One Thing" from the Hindu Rig Veda are said to have breathed the world into creation. (Hu was actually the creating breath himself.)

Fire-Summer-Litha-Lammas

Once we have established our place in our communities, we begin to transform the world around us. The nature of fire is transformative. Of all the elements, fire is the most brazenly destructive; even a single lick of flame has potential for danger. But with that great power comes great possibility for change.

Firmly planted in our communities, we begin to see the flaws, the places where our communities could stand a "fresh coat of paint". We begin the process of destruction so that we can make way for new growth, for the new life that we foresee. The Phoenix was destroyed by fire and born again of his own ashes; this is the vision that we have for our communities, and this is the reality that fire offers us.

But now we also look ahead toward the coming autumn and winter, and begin to wonder what kinds of changes are in store for us in the coming months and even years. We know that nothing is static; we've had a complete cycle to see this. Now, with a full understanding of how the wheel turns, we can begin to make long term plans, to look deeper into the future. And here the seeds for personal growth are sown, and the wheel begins to turn again.



Inspiration for this outlook came from Mike Nichol's essay, "The Ever Widening Circle", found at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/7280/widening.html>



Casting the Circle

by *Dianne Sylvan*

A circle is a three-dimensional enclosure of energy, ritually created by the practitioner and then taken down again after a ritual or magical working is finished. There are a variety of different methods for casting a circle, and a variety of reasons for doing so.

Functions of the Circle

Magical Protection - Ceremonialists consider this one of the two primary functions. A circle protects the practitioner from outside energy or the influence of the waking world.

Containment - The circle serves as a sort of energy cauldron, holding magical power until it is ready to be sent toward its goal.

Sanctity - from a spiritual standpoint, the circle is a "portable church," where we can set aside mundane concerns and focus on the sacred. It is where we hold celebrations, rites of passage, and communion with Deity. Being able to "hold church" anywhere through casting circle helps us remember that the temple is the world, as well as inside us; we discover the sacredness of all space.

Safety - inside the circle is a haven where "perfect love and perfect trust" are the watchwords, and where we can feel safe alone or with others. In ritual we make ourselves spiritually and emotionally vulnerable, and the circle is a place where we can do so without fear.

Symbolism - the circle is a microcosm, reflecting the cyclical nature of life and the universe, and its spherical shape reminds us that the sacred has many dimensions. As with ritual tools, the circle itself helps us achieve an altered state of consciousness whereby Younger Self can find expression.

Steps to Casting

Though there are many different casting methods, most Wiccans use the same basic steps, which can then be built upon to infinite

complexity. The steps of a fairly typical circle casting are as follows.

1. Preparation of the ritual area - be sure that the area is clear, with enough space for all participants. Smudge the area with incense smoke and/or sweep with a ritual broom to clear out any remaining stray energy. Set up the altar. (note: double check to be sure you have everything you will need, including lighters, incense charcoal, notes for the ritual itself, cakes and wine, and so on)

2. Preparation of the self - take a ritual bath or shower, with your mind on purification and readiness for the rite to come; then dress in whatever clothes and jewelry you wear for ritual. Ground and center. For a group ritual, smudge each individual before they enter the ritual area.

3. Salt and Water purification - add salt to a bowl of water, visualizing it being cleansed and purified, purifying all it touches. Sprinkle the altar and tools with it, and use some to anoint your third eye. (the bowl may be passed around so that each participant can do the same)

The following three steps can be performed one at a time by one person, or all at once with three people.

4. Casting the Circle - first pass - carry the salted water around the circle, sprinkling it as you walk. Pause at each Quarter, beginning in the North, and raise the bowl in salute to that Element. Say, "With Earth and Water, I cleanse the North." Then move on to the next.

5. Casting the Circle - second pass - do the same with incense smoke, saying at each Quarter, "With Fire and Air, I consecrate the ____."

6. Casting the Circle - third pass - take up the athame and draw a circle with it, pulling energy up from the Earth and down from the sky. The energy streams out of the blade, spreading out to form a sphere as you pass. Stop at each Quarter and draw an invoking pentagram with the blade, visualizing it as a line of energy. Invoke the Element of that Quarter, inviting it into the circle. Feel its energy adding to the circle's

strength. When you are sure the Element is present, say, "Hail and welcome."

For those in the circle who are not casting, when each Element is called, visualize that Element joining the circle. Your visualization will bolster that of the Priest/ess. The same holds true for the next step.

7. Calling Deity - stand at the center of the circle and invite the God and Goddess, either one by one or together. Traditionally this is done using the God and Goddess postures: God, standing with arms crossed over the chest; Goddess, standing with arms open to the heavens. When you feel the Divine presence, say, "Hail and welcome."

8. Declaration - an announcement that the ritual is ready to begin, usually starting with, "The circle is cast..." Make a statement of the purpose of the ritual as well to reaffirm your intent.

9. Ritual action or magical working - the point of the whole thing. Be sure to ground and center after raising energy.

10. Feasting - in most circles the Simple Feast is held during the ritual; some form of bread or cake is blessed, as well as some form of beverage. Then the two are passed around the circle, and each person feeds the next, saying, "May you never hunger/thirst." Some Wiccans keep the feast for after the ritual so that it can be more festive without disturbing the energy of the circle.

11. Releasing the Circle - the Priest/ess reverses the process of step 6, moving counterclockwise, making sure to bid farewell to the Elements and to Deity. The energy of the circle is grounded back into the Earth. Usually the end of the ritual is signaled with words such as, "The Circle is open but unbroken. Merry meet, and merry part, and merry meet again!"

Circle Etiquette

Wiccans do not command the gods or the Elements to attend our rites. We invite Them, as honored guests and family; our language during invocation is therefore grateful, respectful, and poetic. Remember that what you send out into the universe is what you will receive.

Do not leave circle once it is cast without consulting the Priestess of the rite; she will "cut a door," creating an opening in the energy for you to pass through and then sealing it behind you. Breaking the Circle will scatter the energy and undo all the work you have done. Some creatures, such as pets and small children, seem to do little harm to the circle by passing through it.

Always be respectful of the people who are putting on the ritual, as well as of the others attending with you. Leave cell phones and other noisy devices outside--also try to leave mundane concerns and arguments at home. If you have an issue with someone else attending the rite, or with the rite itself, take it up with the Priestess long before the ritual, not in the last five minutes. Also inform the Priestess if you have any physical limitations that will affect your participation in the ritual.

Suggested Invocations and Farewells

Some of the most beautiful invocations are spoken spontaneously from the heart, but this usually requires a comfort level with speaking before others in the presence of the Divine that takes a while to attain. It is valuable to have a selection of invocations memorized for when your imagination fails you. While it is always good to create your own, here are some simple examples that you may wish to use.

Earth:

*I call to the silent Earth
The ground of our being
Spirits of the North
Strength and abundance
Join us in our Circle
Hail and welcome.*

Air:

*I call to the wandering Air
The wind at our backs
Spirits of the East
Breath and song
Join us in our Circle
Hail and welcome.*

Fire:

I call to the dancing Fire

*The spark that ignites our souls
Spirits of the South
Passion and power
Join us in our Circle
Hail and welcome.*

Water:

*I call to the drifting Water
The river running through our veins
Spirits of the West
Healing and renewal
Join us in our Circle
Hail and welcome.*

The God:

*Hail to the Lord of the Earth
God of the ancient groves
Your children have gathered, and we call You
Lord of a thousand names
Ever living, ever dying,
Come if You will to our Circle
Hail and welcome.*

The Goddess:

*Hail to the Lady of the Moon
Goddess of the standing stones
Your children have gathered, and we call You
Lady of a thousand voices
Ever waxing, ever waning,
Come if You will to our Circle
Hail and welcome.*

Farewell to the Lord and Lady:

*Lord of the Earth, Lady of the Moon,
We give thanks for Your presence in our Circle
And in our lives
May we live each day in Your honor
By Your grace,
Hail and farewell.*

Farewell to the Elements:

*By the Earth of our bones
By the Air of our breath
By the Fire of our hearts
By the Water of our blood
Spirits of the North, East, South, and West
We thank you for your presence
And for your protection
Go if you must, stay if you will,
Hail and farewell.*

Keep in mind that, though releasing the Circle must involve the same steps and attention as casting it, the release usually does not take as much time or effort. When we invoke the Elements, for example, we are calling them to come to a specific place and time; when we bid them farewell, we do not tell them where they go afterward, only that we are grateful for their assistance. The energies that made up the Circle can find their way back to the Elements without our having to direct them. Therefore there is not as much energy work involved in the end of the ritual; the farewells are a matter of respect as well as closure, telling both the Elements and ourselves that the proceedings are coming to an end. The important thing to remember at the close of a ritual is to ground yourself, especially after a ritual involving magic or other intense work.

Recommended Reading

The Elements of Ritual by Deborah Lipp
Witch Crafting by Phyllis Currott
The Art of Ritual by Renee Beck and Sydney Metrick



Tools of the Craft

by Dianne Sylvan

Tools are the objects that we use during ritual, including components of magical work; they range from blades and staves to herbs, oils, and candles. Many of the tools commonly used in Wicca can be traced to our Ceremonial forbearers; others are more modern in origin, or are from diverse traditions including Native American spirituality and European folk magic.

The Purpose of Tools

Wiccan ritual moves us out of mundane reality and into a frame of mind in which Divine revelation and magic can occur more freely. That frame of mind, often called Younger Self, has a language of its own--symbols, pictures, rhymes, colors, anything that wakes the senses and looks past the intellectual and ordinary. Tools speak to the Younger Self. They give another layer of meaning to our ritual actions, and assist in altering consciousness. When you pick up a knife or wand, your waking mind automatically switches partway off, letting the deeper parts of yourself come out and play.

In addition, remember that Wicca is a religion of the Earth that celebrates the wisdom of the senses; we engage as many of our senses as possible to enhance our experience of Divinity. Tools are a way to ground ritual in the body, to make it "real" instead of a purely mental exercise. The same holds true for things not normally considered tools, such as clothing and music. As tools are primarily symbolic in nature, usually linked to one or more of the Elements, they also help reinforce our connection with the natural world.

The Care and Feeding of Ritual Tools

Before an object can be considered a ritual tool it must first be cleansed and consecrated, set aside from its former purpose and given a deeper meaning. Different Wiccans assign differing levels of sanctity to their tools; some consider tools to be absolutely separate from the everyday, and others do not draw a distinction between magical and mundane use. There are those who keep their tools in a special box or closet out of sight until time for ritual, and those who have a permanent altar where their tools are within easy reach. Neither is necessarily the "right" way. Circumstances (lack of space,

roommates, family interference) may dictate that your altar be set up and taken down every time you use it. Whatever your philosophy or situation, never *ever* touch someone else's tools or sacred objects without permission.

While tools are a vital (and fun) part of ritual, it is important to remember that the power is in the Witch, not the object itself. A \$400 athame has no more power than a \$2 blade found at a garage sale, if the owner of the expensive one is indifferent toward it. Though tools often have ancient or traditional associations, their energy is useless until it is fused with our intention to create change.

For example, you may have a white willow tree growing in your yard, but its mere presence will not cure a headache. The bark must be harvested and prepared before it becomes herbal medicine (or refined even further to become aspirin). The same holds true for a wand--unless your focus and intent are melded with the wand's consecrated purpose, it has no more power than a stick in a compost heap.

Again, the power is in the practitioner. It is possible, and sometimes preferable, to perform ritual with no tools at all. The only tools absolutely necessary are two hands and an open heart.

Common Tools

Any implement that you wish to use as a ritual tool can be consecrated, but there are a number of items that are traditionally used in Wiccan ritual (as well as a few not-so-traditional ones that have gained in popularity over the years).

The athame - a ritual dagger, used to conduct energy for casting circle and other purposes. Traditional Wicca mandates that the athame should have a black handle, but few Eclectics adhere strictly to the rule. The athame is never used to cut anything more substantial than air. Many believe that, if the athame should ever draw blood, it can no longer be used for ritual. The athame is a symbol of Fire (sometimes assigned to Air), a symbol of the will, and of the God.

The wand - most often a branch or wooden dowel decorated to the practitioner's taste, with a crystal or pinecone at the end. The wand is used almost interchangeably with the athame, and some Wiccans prefer one over the other. The wand is used instead of the athame in faery magic, as the Fae are said to abhor forged metal. Still others prefer the wand due to the athame's associations as a weapon. The wand is a symbol of Air and is also considered a God symbol, as it is phallic-shaped.

The pentacle - a disk or plate of clay, wood, or metal, inscribed with a pentagram, which symbolizes Earth on the altar. The pentacle is often used as a focal point for energy--an item to be charged, for example, is set upon it. It is also sometimes used as a plate during the ritual Feast.

(note--a pentagram is a five-pointed star in a circle, symbolizing the union of the Elements with Deity; a pentacle is a three-dimensional object with a pentagram on it)

The chalice - a symbol of Water, and of the Goddess; traditionally a stemmed cup of whatever material the practitioner prefers. Liquid to be imbibed during ritual can be poured into the chalice, as can salt water for cleansing the circle, et cetera. The athame is lowered into the full chalice during the symbolic Great Rite, illustrating the union of the masculine and feminine Divine.

The cauldron - also a symbol of Water, as well as one of rebirth (based on the myth of the Cauldron of Cerridwen). The cauldron is used for burning and brewing, depending on the ritual.

The censer - a fancy word for "incense burner," and a symbol of the combined powers of Air and Fire.

Salt and water - often kept in bowls on the altar, both as a representation of Earth/Water and for use in purification.

The besom - fancy word for "broom." The broom is kept by some practitioners for use in cleansing the ritual area.

The bolline - traditionally a white-handled knife, a companion to the athame. The bolline is used for actual cutting of herbs, cords, and so forth.

The mortar and pestle - used by magical herbalists to prepare and charge plant materials

for magical work. Also a symbol akin to the athame/chalice, the union of masculine and feminine to create motion in the universe.

Statues - on most altars you will find some representation of the God and Goddess, whether actual statuary, a painting, or natural objects. These representations are not the object of worship, but a symbol connecting us to something greater that resides within as well as beyond.

The Altar or Shrine

Any horizontal space can become a temporary altar, but many Wiccans keep a permanent altar set up as a focal point of the household. Most often an altar space is covered with a cloth whose color is up to the altar builder. The altar can be viewed as a symbol of the Earth, or of the Wiccan herself--the union of matter and spirit, the place where Deity enters the world of form.

There are as many kinds of altars as there are Wiccans, and there are no hard and fast rules for how to build one--the important thing is that the altar speaks to your Younger Self and brings you into a sacred mentality. If you do not wish to have a working altar set up all the time with all of your tools out on display, you might consider keeping a shrine, a simplified altar whose whole purpose is communion with Deity. A shrine can be as simple as a candle, an incense burner, a stone for the God and a seashell for the Goddess. An altar can be infinitely complex, or dedicated to a single purpose (such as prosperity, motherhood, or an individual Sabbat).

Whether you keep a full altar or a shrine, remember to keep your tools clean and out of reach of children, pets, or careless housemates. An altar is not a place to set one's keys or toss the daily mail, nor is it something to set up and ignore. It is an emblem of your spiritual life and should be treated accordingly.



Overview of Ritual

by Amber Laine Fisher

Ritual plays an important role in Wiccan practice. Our religion is what we call *orthopraxic*—we emphasize a common right way of doing things over a common right way to believe (which is what we would call *orthodox*). The Wiccan ritual in many ways provides the backbone for our religious structure; without it, Wicca would be a very different kind of religion. This chapter will focus on the technicalities of group ritual. In class, you will be discussing the specifics of solitary ritual, and discussing the general emotional and psychological impacts of a successful ritual.

A ritual is any collection of rites performed in an organized, prescribed manner. A rite is simply a ceremonial act or action. Anything can be made into a ritual, from something as mundane as getting ready for bed, or something more life changing like initiations. Rituals can be simple or elaborate, intricately planned or rather spontaneous, but religious rituals generally have a common core: a sacred intent. The intention of the practitioner lies at the core of ritual, differentiating it from merely a routine. Routines are performed merely out of habit or instruction; a ritual requires intent. It is one manner in which we mark the holy in the every day. When we enter into ritual space and acquire a ritual mindset, we open ourselves to the Divine current, and enter into a living myth. Ritual is a form of myth-in-action; it is the anchor that keeps us firmly in tune with the Divine around and within us. Through ritual, we are able to close our eyes to the commonplace, and surrender ourselves to creative forces, to the language of the gods, to the immediacy of the sacred. Joseph Campbell, premiere American mythologist writes, “A ritual is an organization of mythological symbols; and by participating in the drama of the rite one is brought directly in touch with these, not as verbal reports of historic events, either past, present or to be, but as revelations, here and now, of what is always forever.”¹

Generally speaking, there are four types of Wiccan ritual: Celebratory, Magic Work (both theurgical and thaumaturgical; also Divine supplication), Initiations/Transformations, and

Connection/Heightened experience of Deity. All of the reasons could stand alone as the center of any perfectly good ritual, but more often than not rituals combine two or more of the above purposes. Very often we come into circle to make a request of the gods, but also raise our voices and our hands in celebration, or sway in meditative trance to rhythm of the Earth and the beat of the gods. When we come into the circle for ritual, it usually a good idea to have an idea of how the ritual should run, but to also allow enough leeway for the gods to “do their thing”. When we come in ritual before the gods, to some extent we have to relinquish our power. We cannot be completely in control of a good ritual—they tend to take on a life of their own.

Nevertheless, a good priest or priestess will usually take the time to plan ritual in advance, especially if the ritual is not intended to be performed solitaire. But even rituals for the solitary practitioner are generally somewhat planned, though the extent of the planning process may not be as great as a ritual planned for more people.

Planning a Ritual

The first obstacle many of us face when designing a ritual is finding inspiration. We know we want to plan a ritual, but we have no idea what to do. Inspiration for rituals can come from any number of places, such as myth found in literature and art, meditation and dream work, rituals and rites of other religions and other communities, the elements (especially for esbats and Sabbats, elemental inspiration can be particularly appropriate), or the movement and change of the natural world and the Wheel of the Year.

Of course, gaining insight from any of these requires us to reconnect with the creative force. Therefore, when seeking inspiration for ritual, it’s a good idea to allow yourself time and space to be “moved by the spirit”, as it were. It can be very difficult to get inspired to plan a Beltane ritual, for example, while sitting in front of the television watching *The Simpsons*. (Believe me; I speak from experience!)

Sometimes it is easier to find inspiration for a ritual once you have established a clear purpose, which is the next step of planning a ritual. (Everyone works differently—some folks have better luck with brainstorming ritual ideas and then divining a purpose for the ritual, while others start out with a concrete purpose and then move from there. It varies from person to person and ritual to ritual.)

One of the first things you'll want to do is decide on what kind of ritual you want to plan. Do you want to be whimsical, serious, theatrical? Will you be celebrating, marking an initiation? Knowing what kind of ritual you want will help you determine what kind of tone you wish to set. It probably isn't altogether appropriate for your initiation ritual to be particularly funny or lighthearted. Rites of passage are generally a little bit more serious, because they mark a serious change of life. Of course, that isn't to say that the ritual must be overly dramatic or serious; part of the fun of planning ritual is letting your personality shine through. But keeping serious rituals fairly reverent is generally a good idea.

Once you decide what kind of ritual you wish to plan, you'll want to decide on two important things: what the participants should feel and/or experience throughout the ritual, and what the general goal of the ritual is to be. For example, in planning a celebratory Sabbat ritual, you might want your participants to feel joyous, to experience the transformation of the God and Goddess from one stage to another, and you might want the goal of the ritual to be the awakening of the senses to the changing seasons. Sometimes the goal and the experience of the ritual will be one and the same, but they don't have to be. Sometimes in order to produce a goal that is positive and life changing we have to force ourselves to do some dirty work—to confront personal demons or old fears. The main experience in the ritual should directly lead to a certain goal, though the means to the end might seem inappropriate. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to plan exactly what your ritual will do to yourself and to the others participating, but that doesn't mean that you should forego this step. It is an important part of the ritual planning process.

Writing a Ritual

Knowing your purpose and your goal is probably the easy part of the planning process. Once

you've got that figured it, you need to sit down and work out all the details.

There's really no correct order for designing a ritual. The following is simply a process that works, but you may have better luck switching things around.

Probably the best thing to decide first is where the ritual will be held. Knowing your physical location will not only give you some inspiration for what to do with your ritual, but it also sets up your limitations, which is very important. You can't very well plan a ritual requiring full body water submersion, for example, in the middle of someone's living room. Similarly, if the ground where your ritual will be held is filled with small rocks or biting insects, you probably don't want to make going barefoot a part of the ritual. If you are planning an outdoor ritual, it is always a good idea to take weather into consideration, and have a back-up location if at all possible. If you are planning a rather long ritual in either the dead of winter or summer, make sure to tell your guests what to prepare for so they can adequately protect themselves from the elements. (This sounds like common sense, but it can be an easy thing to overlook when you are in the thick of planning a ritual, especially if you aren't accustomed to hosting and/or leading a ritual).

The next thing to decide is how many actors you will need, and how many actors you have to work with. When you are designing a ritual with several people, you generally have more possibilities to work with. It is much easier to incorporate a drawing down, the Great Rite, etc when you have several people who can be involved with the ritual. However, when deciding on who will be part of your ritual, make sure you choose people who can be depended upon, and who have the experience to perform the role you are asking them to perform. You won't be doing anyone any favors if you ask someone completely inexperienced to be the High Priestess for your ritual. Everyone needs a chance to get used to doing ritual and to performing in front of people. It can be an uncomfortable task for many people, but with practice most people will become easier.

How many guests do you plan to invite? Consider whether or not your ritual area is large enough to hold all the people you wish to invite. Consider also whether or not you will want children at the ritual. Is the ritual appropriate

for children? Are they likely to become bored? Will you be providing childcare for your ritual for parents who do not wish for their children to participate? (You're not usually expected to, of course, but it's something you may want to consider if many of your guests have children.) Consider also whether you have fewer guests than major participants in the ritual. It can be very uncomfortable or intimidating for a guest to be the only one who does not have a major part in the ritual (especially if your ritual is a type of ritual theatre). You may want to consider either inviting more non-participants, or incorporating all your guests into the body of the ritual somehow. (This can often be done by asking them to smudge the area or the other participants, drum, lead a song or chant, call the elements, etc.)

Once all the big details are taken care of, you can start planning the body of the ritual.

Just like a book or a movie, your ritual should have a distinct beginning, middle, and end, and each segment of the ritual serves a specific purpose. While there is no "formula" to designing a Wiccan ritual, most rituals are expected to follow certain guidelines (It's that whole orthopraxic thing again.)

The beginning of your ritual establishes the mindset for your ritual. Ritual is a time to step outside of ordinary time and into a time outside of time where anything can happen. But in order for that to happen, the individual has to believe that the mundane world has melted away and that he or she is experiencing something extraordinary. This is often done with the use of triggers. Different people are triggered into ritual awareness by different methods, so when designing a ritual, you should try to incorporate several different triggering techniques in order to engage your participants as fully as possible.

The first trigger is the use of liturgy. While many creative Wiccans like to mix it up when doing things like casting the circle, using different verses or impromptu language when inviting the elements and the Lord and Lady, this can often be a disservice to the aurally stimulated congregants. When we use a constant liturgy in each and every ritual, the words and rhythms used to speak the words become a very potent aural trigger, allowing us to slip quickly and easily into a ritual mindset.

A second useful trigger is the use of incense. We know that the sense of smell is the most powerful sense for bringing back memories: smell brings back memories more than any other sense. Therefore, engaging the sense of smell in ritual is a surefire way of establishing a ritual mindset, especially if the incense is one that is consistently used.

In a similar vein, the use of costumes, drums and chanting can produce the proper trance-like state for ritual. The idea is engage the senses in a way that allows your logical, rational mind to sit and take a backseat and allow Younger Self to come out and play. Ritual is the perfect time to explore the boundaries of regular, mundane life. Even when ritual isn't centered on the use of magic, every ritual should be a magical experience in the sense that every ritual should draw the Divine out of the ethereal and into the present moment. Thus, stimulating all the senses in a way that we might not get to in regular life is a wonderful, easy, and entertaining way to encourage a ritual mindset.

The last element isn't really a trigger, but it's an easy way to get the participants into a ritual mindset, and that is the use of meditation and/or trance inductions. Even a simple grounding and centering can allow your participants to let down their guard, to ease out of the stresses and trials of everyday life and to become absorbed into the magical time that you have prepared.

All of these things can be done at the beginning of the ritual in order to both set the mood and prepare your participants for the ritual experience. Cleansing and smudging can incorporate incense, casting the circle can include liturgy, drumming, and chant, which can all be followed by a short grounding and centering. Not all of these triggers have to be implemented, of course, but trying to get some variation is generally a good idea.

The middle of your ritual is the meat and potatoes. This is where the bulk of the ritual should take place, where the goal is ultimately achieved. (Or at least where the seeds for a long-term goal are planted.) This is where you tell your story, explore a relationship, initiate transformation (depending on the kind of ritual you are writing). The middle of the ritual needs to keep your participants engaged, busy, and interested. You need to decide what they will be doing, how the ritual will be moved along, and

how the transition between beginning, middle, and end will take place.

A lot of new ritual planners have a very difficult time remembering that ritual is not a lecture. Many of us grew up attending church or temple where the congregants sit in the audience, observing or listening to a minister, priest, or rabbi deliver a sermon of sorts. The congregations is only expected a peripheral level of participation. Wicca, however, is a religion of action. We have to get down and dirty with our gods, and are therefore not granted the luxury of sitting idly by and letting someone else lead us through the motions. Your participants should be actively involved in your ritual. There should be some sort of activity that involves them. The one real exception is in the case of ritual theatre, in which case the participants should be so enthralled by the drama that they aren't aware that they aren't doing anything. Otherwise, however, your participants should contribute something to the ritual, whether it is in the format of call-and-response, small rites, or participating in invocation. In general, ritual should not be a "show". It should be an experience.

Along the same lines, you should consider how the ritual will be moved along and how the various rites will flow together. The more rituals you perform and write, the easier this aspect of ritual writing will become.

The end of the ritual is the time to begin the transition from magical space-time to regular space-time. If you've done any magical work, this is the time to do a thorough grounding and centering. This is also the appropriate place to offer cakes and ale if you choose to implement that into your ritual. (While performing the cakes and ale rite is traditional, many people prefer to save feasting for fellowship after the ritual. The decision is yours.) Releasing the circle can also implement liturgy that helps aid the transition between ritual-mind and mundane-mind.

Especially after particularly draining rituals, it can be very tempting to perform a "quick and dirty" releasing of the elements. However, try not to rush the opening of the circle. Even if you personally don't feel particularly out of sorts after ritual, some of your participants may require a more formal winding down time. If you rush them, you run the risk of having them

be disoriented, "spacey", or suffer a general malaise. If you have led the entire ritual and find yourself wanting to rush the opening of the circle, it might be a good idea to plan to ask someone else to lead the circle release in future rituals.

The Skeleton of the Wiccan Ritual

- Assemble the congregants and state a purpose for the gathering.
- Create sacred space. (cleanse, consecrate, and cast the circle)
- Invite the elements/watchtowers
- Invoke the Lord and Lady
- Perform the ritual body
- Perform the Great Rite (*This is most common in British Traditional circles. Most non-trad circles don't tend to perform the Great Rite as part of every ritual*)
- The Rite of Cakes and Ale
- Thank the Lord and Lady
- Release the elements
- Open the Circle.

Recommended Reading:

Elements of Ritual, Deborah Lipp

¹ Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By*



Reclaiming Worship

by Amber Laine Fisher

It has become very circumspect in many pagan circles to mention the word *worship*. To admit to worshipping the Gods earns raised eyebrows, head shaking, and nervous laughter. While we may admit to *celebrating* our Gods, to make any mention of praise or worship is to invite discomfort. After all, the concepts of praise and worship are owned by the Abrahamic¹ faiths, and certainly Wiccans can share *nothing* with their Abrahamic contemporaries, right?

The concept of worship has gotten a bad rap among many Wiccans, especially those who have come to Wicca from a background of fundamentalism. For many Wiccans, the notion of worship has become confused with the concepts of self-abnegation, groveling, humility at the expense of self-respect, and fear. Praise has become similarly disparaged; many Wiccans seem to think that the Gods are not needing of our praise, and therefore we should not give it. We tell ourselves that the Gods are above such petty ego-boosting, and therefore our praise is both unnecessary and unwanted.

In order to reclaim the concepts of both worship and praise, we first need to divorce ourselves from any old and debilitating concepts of Deity that we may still harbor. If we are taught to come before God fearful and quivering, we need to release ourselves of this notion. The concept of Deity in Wicca may be awesome, immense, and even unfathomable, but we are not asked to be fearful before it. We are not asked to humble ourselves into utter mindless submission. In some respects, this is comforting, but in other respects it can be somewhat uncomfortable, for what we are asked to do can be more challenging. When gifted with responsibility and self-determination, we are required to ask difficult questions, seek out meaningful answers, and reevaluate ourselves and our communities with some regularity. But what this means is that when we stand before Deity in whatever capacity, we do so proudly, standing tall. We may bend our knees if we so desire, but it not a requirement. We are not asked to show false humility or servitude, although we are expected to be ever mindful and respectful of the magnificence of Deity.

If we aren't asked to grovel or commit ourselves to a mindset of "I'm-not-worthy", then what does it

mean to worship within a Wiccan context? And if Deity is not in need of our flattery and sycophantic profusion, should we bother with offering up words of glory and praise? How is any of the congruent with the concept of an immanent Deity?

At its core, worship is simply reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power.² Alone, it does not mean to prostrate or pose. The word itself only takes on these overtones if we allow it to, if we allow another religion—and only a fraction of another religion, at that—to define for us one of the most central concepts of any theistic religion. The very fact that Wicca embraces the concept of a Deity with whom we can have a relationship implies the need for worship—unless, of course, we are not asked to revere our Deity. This brings us to the concept of reverence. Reverence, often mistaken for mere respect, is actually a profound adoring, a deep, awed respect;³ adoration is a loving admiration. At the core of the concept of worship, then, is not false humility or self-abasement but *love*.

The Charge of the Goddess states, "Let My worship be in the heart that rejoices, for all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you."⁴ The Charge of the Goddess is one of the most beloved pieces of Wiccan liturgy, and here in these two sentences we have a very direct look at the concept of Wiccan worship. The Goddess asks us to worship by rejoicing, by engaging in rituals of love and pleasure. She does not seem to be concerned with the details of the rituals, only that they are conducted in both love and pleasure.

In this context, worship is the *opposite* of self-abasement and prostration. Rather than groveling before a Deity, we are asked to worship by rejoicing, by finding love and pleasure within the world. And yet, taking pleasure in the world is not merely a frivolous pursuit. When we engage in joyous, rapturous activities, we are worshipping. We are adoring. We are loving Deity.

We have seen that the concept of worship cannot be separated from the concept of reverence. For many people, reverence is linked with solemnity. Religious rituals and functions are supposed to be

quiet, solemn, and for many—empty. Yet this is not what the Charge says to us. We are expected to worship with both reverence and mirth. We look to the world around us, at how beautiful and complex it is, and while this may move us to awe, it should simultaneously fill us with joy. When we are both filled with wonder and joy, we are in a prime place to celebrate Deity—to *worship*.

Wicca is an ecstatic religion. Our worship is not meant to be stagnant, stoic, or solemn. We are not asked to prostrate ourselves in order to glorify Deity. We are asked to seek out joy and love, to harness mirth and reverence and to give ourselves over to the rapture that overcomes us when we are engaged in the activities we love most. When we make love with a partner, swim in the waters of the ocean, or kiss and cuddle our children, we are worshiping Deity. The more love we spread and the more love we experience, the more we come into intimate contact with the Goddess who has charged us to rejoice, to seek out beauty, compassion, and mirth.

Many people, notably those belonging to religions with a heavily transcendent view of Deity, have scoffed at this concept of worship. They claim that we are commanded to worship God merely because God is worthy of our praise, and that we do it purely for the glory of God. They maintain that our happiness, our fulfillment and our spiritual evolution have nothing to do with worship—or rather, these things are not the reason for worship. Worship is, for these people, completely for God, and not for us.

At first glance, it could be very tempting to say that the exact opposite is true in Wicca. Wiccan theology has largely abandoned the concept that Deity needs our worship—at least by the colloquial definition of worship. Most Wiccans would contend that Wiccans worship because it brings us closer to Deity, and because it aids in our own spiritual evolution. In this view, worship is not for Deity but for us. Deity would be happy or complete with or without our praise and adoration.

However, there is something incongruent with the realities of immanence and manifest Deity in the above view. The universe is constantly changing, never remaining the same. Winds blow, stars die, galaxies are born. This changing universe is filled with the spirit of Deity—in fact, it is all part of the vast and awesome body of Deity. As the universe changes, and it ebbs and tides and fluctuates, so too does Deity. Deity is never stagnant or stoic.

Human beings contribute to the changing of Deity inasmuch as we contribute to the changing of our world. We do good; we do evil. All of our actions and thoughts influence changes in Deity, however minute. When we create good, when we heal our communities and spread joy and happiness, we change the essence of Deity for the better. If we are truly serious about the concept of Deity as immanent, then we cannot separate Deity from the ecology, from human interaction, from the natural processes moving everywhere around us. Therefore, when we reverently care for the ecology, or heal each other, or promote kindness, we are loving and adoring Deity. We are worshiping.

So is it accurate to say that worship is purely for the good of the Wiccan in our faith? Perhaps it would be more accurate to imply that worship is for the self and Deity, for they cannot be truly separated. What is good⁵ for humanity is good for Deity. What is joyous and pleasurable and conducted in love is worship to the Goddess. We worship on our knees in our gardens, on our feet while we spin under the stars, on our backs when we lay with our lovers. When we give ourselves over fully to the influence of Deity and are able to find the sacred in the mundane and open ourselves to awe, we are learning to live worshipful lives. Reclaiming the idea of worship means understanding that we worship in our joy, we worship in our communion with Deity in its many different forms. It is not shameful to admit that we revere or adore each other, and it is a blessing to be able to extend our love of each other to loving and worshiping Deity.

¹ The term *Abrahamic* is used to identify the faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

² *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth edition, 1995.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Charge of the Goddess*, Doreen Valiente

⁵ The idea of what is “good” is, of course, somewhat esoteric. Whether or not certain ideas, such as imperialism, space exploration, or population control, for example, are “good” is certainly up for debate. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that what is good for humanity is not damaging to either the ecology or the universe, as ultimately, anything otherwise would have long term negative effects on humanity.



Crafting Magic

by Dianne Sylvan

Some people feel magic is completely separate from any spiritual pursuit, and some consider it an integral part of Wiccan spirituality. Whatever their personal philosophy on how and why magic works and what its role is in Wicca, eventually most Wiccans find themselves wanting to work magic in one form or another.

Books on spells and magic abound in Pagan literature, most of which are grimoires (books of prewritten spells and incantations) or lists of correspondences of herbs, colors, symbols, and Deities. While prewritten spells and rituals can work quite well, creating your own will ultimately produce better results, as you have invested your energy and desire in every step of the process.

Magic isn't a rote practice made up of stale incantations and lighting the proper number of candles at the proper hour. It is a dynamic, organic process that can engage your creativity. Here, then, is a short primer in crafting magic, written from a Wiccan spiritual perspective.

Steps of Effective Spellcasting

1. Determine your goal
2. Choose symbols and actions
3. Gather and prepare components
4. Create sacred space
5. Perform the spell
6. Act in accord

1. Determine your goal. This is perhaps the most important step—how can you get what you want if you don't even know what that really is? It is vital before working any magic to consider not only what your goal is, but why you have that goal. Hidden motivations and self-defeating attitudes can negate even the strongest magic—disbelief is the only truly effective counterspell.

For example, many a love spell has been performed for the wrong reasons. Often people think that having a lover will solve all of their problems, when in fact what they really need is a better sense of self-worth or a more fulfilling career. When you decide to do magic, think about what would really improve your life, and as often as possible work toward the long term rather than a quick fix. (Some times short term goals are

unavoidable, and once they are dealt with you can work on the long term, but it is up to you to prioritize)

At this stage, divination is often very helpful. Using whatever oracle you prefer, ask if this is the best time for you to work for the goal you have in mind, as well as if there are any aspects of the situation you have overlooked. Divination is a way to communicate both with the gods and with hidden parts of ourselves, and can give you insight both toward your goals and how you might best achieve them. Any other means you use to talk with Deity is appropriate; if you would rather meditate or pray over your goal, do so.

In addition, you must decide how specific you want your spell to be. A balance must be found between too little detail (“Goddess please send me a boyfriend”) and too much (“Goddess please send me a 6’8” left-handed lawyer with blue eyes, brown hair, and dimples). If you leave too much open, what you attract may not be the healthiest thing for you: a boyfriend, say, who is controlling and has hygiene issues. If you are too specific, however, you can limit yourself and the universe in finding the right solution to your problem: the perfect man for you had green eyes or was an accountant. In this example, the happy medium could begin with, “I seek the love that is right for me at this time in my life” and go on to list the most important attributes you have in mind: kind, sense of humor, et cetera.

A final consideration is the ethics of your goal. Is what you want in keeping with your own ethical precepts and what your gods expect of you? Often we cannot see all of the possible consequences of our actions, but this is not an excuse for inaction. Many Wiccans add a sort of contingency clause to their magic, saying something along the lines of, “With harm to none, for the good of all” with the intention that the spell will only work if the practitioner’s intentions are true. Remember, there is no difference between “magical” and “mundane” ethics; if you could not in good conscience use mundane means to achieve a goal (running her boyfriend down with a Buick), then it is just as unethical to use magical means (a spell to break up a couple so you can make a play for the girl).

2. *Choose symbols and actions.* Magic works primarily by means of energy sent through symbols and through symbolic action. Deciding exactly what a spell will involve may seem complicated, but in fact it can be broken down into basic Elemental correspondences. Assign an Element to your goal, and then use the symbols of that Element in your magic.

For example, perhaps you are broke, and you have determined that in this case you need to work for the short-term goal of more money (since it is hard to find a rewarding career without electricity or food). Abundance and prosperity as well as material goods are traditionally associated with Earth. Consulting one of the myriad correspondence charts (one of which is included at the end of this chapter) you decide to create a money charm using Earth and prosperity-related herbs such as patchouli and nutmeg. You opt to use colors like green and brown, long linked to the Earth Element.

And so on. Considering magical goals in their Elemental contexts, it is easier to create spells and rituals that will speak to your inner self. If at this point you are still at a loss, look through any of the myriad books of spells available for ideas.

3. *Gather and prepare components.* This step is fairly self-explanatory; as in any ritual, be certain you have everything you need ready to use before beginning.

In addition, many people choose to work magic during specific hours and days that are celestially auspicious toward their goal. The most popular method of magical timing is, of course, by the Moon. Magic to bring new things and increase in one's life is performed during a waxing Moon, and magic to be rid of something is performed during the waning. The Full Moon is traditionally a time for very powerful magic of the waxing variety, and the Dark Moon is the most powerful time for the opposite. If you so choose you can also work according to what sign the Moon is in; even the hours of the day have planetary and astrological associations. How much emphasis you place on timing is a personal choice; many agree, however, that a great enough need transcends questions of timing.

4. *Create sacred space.* It is not always strictly necessary to perform magic in a cast Circle, but it is generally preferable, as the energy you raise for your magic needs to be contained until you send it

out into the universe. Again, this is a matter of personal preference; however, if you are treating your magic as a sacred act, it is deserving of as much ceremony as you are comfortable with. In particular, ask Deity to aid you in your quest, as it is sacred energy you are using. Changing your life for the better is holy work, and invoking Deity at this stage will help remind you of that.

5. *Perform the spell.* Another self-explanatory step. Usually spells involve empowering a magical object or otherwise raising energy to be directed toward your goal. From a spiritual perspective, the power you use in spellcasting comes directly from your connection to the Divine.

6. *Act in accord.* It isn't enough to simply do magic and then sit back on the couch and let the gods do the rest—be certain to take whatever mundane steps you can to help the magic along. There is an old saying: “Trust the gods, but lock your car.” The most powerful job spell in the world will do you no good if you never fill out an application.

To follow the employment metaphor, think of magic this way: when you need a job you polish up your resume, fill out applications, work on bettering your job skills, and so forth. A spell is like the one phone call to the “guy who knows a guy” that can put in a good word for you. You can still get a job without making that call, but the whole process will go faster, more smoothly, and have a more satisfying result if you take all the steps you can to ensure you find the right job.

All aspects of our lives are sacred, not just what we do in Circle; acting in accord with our magic is a way of affirming that our mundane and magical lives are in fact inseparable.

Whether you create your own from scratch or use prewritten material, spells are a tool, and as such need your involvement, your energy, and your commitment to changing your life in order to have any lasting effect on the world. A hammer by itself will not build a house.

A Few Additional Tips

- The Element you assign to a goal can be flexible. For example, romantic love (hearts and flowers) is more of a Water concept, but a more passionate or sexual variety (hot monkey love) falls under Fire.
- A candle spell can work for any goal, regardless of Element. Choose an appropriate color candle and carve it with symbols, roll it in herbs, rub it with intent-blended oils, et cetera. Candle magic is one of the oldest, and easiest, forms to practice.
- Be patient. We live in a world of instant gratification, but magic works through the natural world and is therefore rarely instantaneous. If a full cycle of the Moon goes by without any results, you might want to either rethink your goal or try a different spell.
- Doubt kills magic. What you expect is what you will get—up to and including nothing at all. For this reason, many people say not to talk or think about a spell for 24 hours after casting it, as your worries and fears could undermine the work you've done.
- It is usually thought of as unethical to perform magic for someone else without that person's permission. In some situations permission cannot be given (the recipient is a newborn or is in a coma, for instance); in these cases you must decide based on your own conscience if it is appropriate to work without consent.
- Once your magic has run its course and the results are in, remember to show your gratitude to the gods; make an offering of some kind, whether to Them directly in ritual or through some other action such as community service. Never take from the gods without giving.

Very Basic Magical Correspondences

Earth

Aspects: Money, prosperity, abundance, the physical body, security, protection, the home

Colors: Green, brown, gold, black

Symbolic actions: making charms; working with herbs; charging stones; planting seeds empowered with your goal; using poppets

Air

Aspects: Intelligence, communication, creativity, inspiration, the mind, justice, truth

Colors: White, yellow, light blue

Symbolic actions: blending incense; creating magical powders and casting them to the winds; Chanting and singing; pathworking

Fire

Aspects: Passion, sexuality, protection, banishing, strength, energy, courage

Colors: Red, orange, bright yellow, black (symbolizing what has already been burned)

Symbolic actions: Writing out your goal and burning the paper; candle magic; cooking magic; dancing

Water

Aspects: Love, healing, the heart, intuition, psychic ability

Colors: Blue, purple, silver

Symbolic actions: Ritual bathing, drinking empowered beverages, writing your goal in sidewalk chalk before a storm; blending oils

Recommended Reading:

Witch Crafting by Phyllis Currott

Real Magic, Isaac Bonewits

Earth, Air, Fire, and Water by Scott Cunningham

Spells and How They Work by Janet and Stewart Farrar

Embracing the Moon by Yasmine Galenor



Ethics and Faith

by Amber Laine Fisher

Each and every person intuitively understands the concept of faith. Each of us has a worldview, a personal mythology, an overarching storyline that shapes our personal theology, dictates how we should interact with people, and determines how we should ultimately live our lives. Even those individuals who are not religious have their own faith. It is a fact of human nature. Faith as we are concerned with it is “the relation of trust in and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts or propositions—beliefs—are fashioned.”¹ In other words, faith is a relationship. It is part myth and part how we respond to that myth. Whether the guiding myth is one of cosmology or basic human goodness, each of us holds some manner of belief as sacred or intrinsic to living, and in response to that belief we fashion for ourselves a way of living, and of being—a personal system of ethics.

As religious people, we already have some guidelines in place for us. The Rede advises us to consider others when we take action. The Charge of the Goddess advises us to be compassionate, to be honorable. But what does it mean for us to be honorable? How do we demonstrate the loyalty to our guiding mythology that shapes our lives? How are we supposed to live out our faith? These are not just thought questions, but rather issues central to truly serving the gods and living a sincerely Wiccan life. As Wiccan author and counselor Judy Harrow writes, “Faith is not what we believe or say, but how we act. Faith shines through a congruent life.”² Therefore, if we are to be faithful, if we are to serve the gods and manifest them in our lives, then we have to act in accord with our guiding paradigm. We have to *do* our Will. And yet so many of us are at a loss when it comes to determining how to do that. How shall we live?

In order to answer that question, we have to determine where our faith lies. On what do we rest our hearts? What is of ultimate concern to us? What kind of world do we expect to leave behind when we die? By identifying the largest and most grandiose of our concerns and desires, we can begin to filter that into the smaller values and priorities that go into shaping our faith and the

way we need to behave in order to uphold those values.

The Blessedways Temple has identified some core values that we try to uphold and by which we try to abide. The values of love, trust, self-knowledge and self-determination, for example, are all central to the religion of Wicca at large. We must love the gods and the Earth. We must trust ourselves and the gods we follow. We must seek to know ourselves and allow everyone around us to live out his own story, whatever that may be. But in addition to the set of core values and priorities that we have identified, each thoughtful Wiccan who seeks to live an ethical and faithful life will determine for him- or herself what values should be added to that list. We each have to know what we believe in, what is important to us—this is part of knowing ourselves, and part of being a self-determined priest/ess for our gods.

But as powerful as belief is, as honorable as it is to have a well-constructed system of ethics, it is not enough if we don’t know how to live our lives based on those ethics. Belief without action is hypocrisy, no matter how good your intentions are to “one day” become active, or how fervent we are in our viewpoints. If we do not act on our values, we contribute nothing, and are not serving our gods.

The subject of ethics is largely concerned with the concepts of “Right” and “Wrong” and what actions are “good” as opposed to “evil”. As Wicca does not have an extensive list of “thou shalt nots” and very little in the way of dogma, the concepts of good and evil are not explicitly defined for us—we are left to determine for ourselves what is therefore “right” and what is “wrong”. We are certainly given the tools for making these determinations—magic, prayer, meditation, and divination are all tools that we can readily employ when making major life decisions. These tools allow us to more consciously open up communication with the divine and with the inner self in order to guide us to our “right” courses of action.

But what about the multitude of instances in which we can’t implement these tools? With the exception of prayer, all these methods require

time, and perhaps solitude. They do not lend themselves well to the kind of moment-to-moment decision-making we all have to endure every single day of our lives. Even in prayer, though we may ask for the guidance of the gods to make the right move, we may not receive immediate, conscious insight—we may have to rely on our own mechanisms for making the right choices. So how do we go about making ethical decisions that support and contribute to our fundamental faith principles?

Ethical Decision-Making

Entire college courses are dedicated to the subject of ethical decision-making, so we obviously cannot present the expanse of knowledge and insight available on the subject. What we will attempt to do in this chapter is to outline the basic principles of ethical decision making and examining those principles against a backdrop of Wiccan philosophical precepts, values, and priorities, and begin to build a foundation for living a faithful life.

Before we can talk about the specifics of making sound ethical decisions, we have to take a brief look at the different schools of thought with regard to ethics. How you determine what you ought to do or how you ought to live will largely depend on which school of thought you most identify with.

Virtue Ethics

- Based on attitudes, character traits, and values that essentially make us “human”.
- Examples are: integrity, compassion, loyalty, honesty, courage, etc.
- “The right decision and the right way to live is the path that encourages and develops moral virtues in ourselves and our communities.”

Utilitarian Ethics

- Focuses on weighing the consequences of any given action and determining the overall level of harm involved versus the overall level of benefit (or “utility”) for those involved, either directly or indirectly.
- “Given the choice between any two actions, the ethical choice is the one that produces the greatest amount of benefits over ill.”

- The utilitarian approach is a direct contributor to the Wiccan Rede.

Rights-Based Ethics

- Identifies certain fundamentals of human existence that must be protected and respected, regardless of culture or community.
- Every individual has the fundamental right to be respected as an autonomous being capable of making decisions regarding his or her own life.
- Every individual has the right of both “freedom from” and “freedom to”. (for example, freedom to choose, freedom to act, freedom from oppression, freedom from authoritarianism)
- “An action is morally right only if all parties involved are treated as free, autonomous agents and act as such, and as long as they are willing and knowing participants in the action.
- The rights-based approach is a direct contributor the Wiccan concept of refusal to subvert the true Will of another.

Justice Ethics

- Focuses on how fairly (or unfairly) a given action distributes benefit and/or harm among the affected parties of a decision
- Justice requires consistency in the way people are treated.
- “All people should be considered and treated as equals unless there are morally relevant differences between them.” The question of what is “morally relevant” is, however, problematically side-stepped in this pithy statement.

Common Good

- Considers that any society or community is comprised of individuals that are joined in a shared pursuit of the values and goals they share in common. (Safety, stability, comfort, etc.)
- The good of any individual is inextricably bound to the good of the whole.
- “What is ethical is what advances the common good.”
- This ethic is directly related to the ideas of holism and networks—what is good for the individual is what is good for the network and vice versa.

All of the above approaches to ethical problems have both their good points and their drawbacks. For example, utilitarian ethics is a noble and workable ethic in that it allows for harm if the overall outcome of good outweighs the harms required to achieve it. However, it fails to take into consideration whether or not such actions are just or whether they violate certain fundamental human rights.

The utilitarian approach to ethics is the ethic most commonly expressed in popular Wiccan writings, largely because it ties in so very well to the Wiccan Rede. However, it does present us with some problems. Sometimes the action that will produce the greatest good might require us to go *against* another Wiccan ethic. For example, in an instance where the most immediate greatest good might require us to lie. According to the utilitarian ethic, a lie is ethical if it produces the greatest good. However, one of the primary tenets of magic within a Wiccan paradigm is the concept that our words are contracts, and that they are binding. Our words have the potential to create reality via our magic, and if we abuse our power of the word by repeatedly breaking promises or by lying, then we devalue our own power and credibility.

Another problem presented by the utilitarian ethic is that it assumes that every individual has a kind of far-reaching knowledge of the consequences of our actions that we simply do not have. We are not imbued with divine insight or vision, and we cannot know the many complications that may arise as the result of our actions. Therefore, relying solely on the ethic of the “greatest good” can leave us somewhat impotent, because we don’t usually have the faculties to weight the overall consequences of our actions. Even in common everyday life we have to make decisions and take actions without knowing the extent of the consequences of such actions. Sometimes we act to improve our overall quality of life (for example, taking a job with a pay raise even if we already have a perfectly acceptable job) that could theoretically adversely affect someone else’s life (The job that we took, for example, could have been filled by someone who hasn’t been able to find a job in a few months and who is having to live on unemployment). Surely, however, we aren’t expected to be able to determine these kinds of outcomes. So we need more than the utilitarian approach to ethics when making decisions. (And

yes, that often means we need more than the Wiccan Rede to guide our actions).

The ideal way, then, to go about making decisions about what we do and how we live would be to consider each of these different viewpoints when determining action. What are the facts? Who is involved? How can everyone be treated fairly and produce the greatest good? What actions would preserve or further the virtues held by me as an individual, and by the others involved? Which choices would promote the overall health of the community? Have I exhausted all my options? After our decisions are made, we should also reflect on our choices and their outcomes, and let life experiences themselves further influence how we make future choices.

Asking ourselves these questions is never going to automatically point to a correct action. Life is rarely a multiple choice question with one right answer. But when we keep these various questions in mind, and acknowledge that there are many factors to consider, at the very least we are not making uninformed, biased or arbitrary decisions.

Making sound decisions is only part of what it means to live ethically and faithfully, of course, but it is nonetheless an important part. What we do in our day to day lives should be a reflection of how we wish to live and how we wish to serve our gods. While there are certainly ethical precepts and values demonstrated within Wicca, these are not always stated explicitly, and they aren’t the only ideals that may be present in your personal *faith*. Your gods might impose ethics or values upon you, for example, that are not part of the larger Wiccan framework. Or you may have certain life experiences that influence what you value and what you consider to be of ultimate concern. Your personal system of ethics and values should certainly be considered when determining not only what to do in a certain situation, but how to live your life in general.

¹ Fowler, James. *Stages of Faith*, p 11.

² Harrow, Judy. *Spiritual Mentoring*, p. 125

Part Two: Wicca 102

Introducing the Elements



Introduction to Earth

by Amber Laine Fisher

I am Earth. I am your mother
I am the ground of your being
I am your bones, your feet, your hands
I am the distant, wild hills
I am the track of a wolf through the forest
I am a field of ripening grain
I am the patterns in the bark of an oak
In me you raise your food
On my skin you live your life
In my arms you are buried
I am silence
I am strength
I am Earth.¹

Look around you. Notice your surroundings—the ground or floor underneath you, the trees lining the street, the soil underfoot, the house you grew up in. Feel your body—the strength of your hands, the beating of your heart, the pumping of your lungs. These are all things of the element earth—aspects of the physical world in which we live. It is this element that gives us shape and form, substance and density.

Of all the alchemical elements, earth is perhaps the most basic, and the most native to our way of understanding the world around us. We are creatures of earth. We have physical bodies. We grow. We plant. We harvest. We live. We die. These are all characteristics of earth. It is the element we are most intimately aware of—it provides the very basis of our existence. We feel hunger from the moment we are born. We feel the need for security. We recognize fear as a survival instinct. All of these things are outgrowths of our need to survive physically, and all things related to the physical body, the physical earth, and the physical universe are all things of earth.

From a purely eco-spiritual standpoint, earth is perhaps the most easily revered of all the elements. Wicca and other nature-reverent religions recognize the immediacy of the Divine through nature. We worship outdoors underneath the expanse of sky, for all of creation is our temple. Every stone is an altar, every river a chalice. We call upon Mother Earth, Mother Nature, Gaia, and we rock and sway to the rhythm of the land that sustains and nurtures us.

And yet, in the workday world, earth is perhaps the most vilified, the most mundane and least sacred of the elements. Earth is yin—it is associated with the feminine, the secret, the cold, the dark. Earth is receptive, quiet, yielding. We live in a society that ravages nature and the earth for a potential profit. We also live in a society that subjugates women, breeds violence, and shuns passivity. Many people, notably ecofeminists and social ecologists, have asserted that all of these are related, and that it is our lack of respect for both the Earth and the element earth that has placed us in the precarious position we are in today.

Nevertheless, within Wicca earth plays a vital role. Earth is associated with the direction of north and the season of winter. It is associated with the challenge “To keep silent” of the Witch’s Pyramid. Its colors are brown and green, its scents pine, cedar, sage.² Its elementals are called gnomes, and the Archangel associated with it is .

To know the element earth, spend time outdoors. Let yourself smell the earth, feel it squish under your toes. Know your body and its cues. Have an understanding of the ecology where you live—what animals and

plants are native to the area? Are there fault lines? Where does your food come from? Get acquainted with the skills and talents you have. Perhaps you are talented at craftsmanship, or athletics, homemaking, or cooking. All of these things are of earth, and knowing them more intimately will help cement your understanding of earth.

¹ From “Call of the Elements” by Dianne Sylvan, originally published in *Philosophy of Wicca*

² As with most all correspondences, these are neither absolute nor definitive. As you explore the element of earth over the four weeks of class dedicated to it, you will come to your own conclusions about earth’s associations and properties.



Introduction to Magical Herbalism

by Dianne Sylvan

Herbalism is one of the oldest and most practical partnerships between humans and the natural world. From the earliest days of our species humans have discovered the powers within plants, and modern scientific and medical research has lent supporting evidence to the knowledge of ancient herbalists, cunning women, and midwives. Plants have been the source of some of our most potent medicines, and also the source of potent magic.

Buying Herbs

Herbs used for medicinal purposes generally have about a one-year shelf life; for magical purposes as long as the herb smells and looks like it is supposed to it can still be used, but the life energy of the plant fades eventually so a good rule of thumb is to replace herbs after two years.

That in mind, try to shop for herbs at smaller stores who buy in smaller quantities, meaning they have a higher turnover rate and don't keep the same jar of lavender forever. Buy in small amounts when possible for the same reasons. When buying herbs, beware of the following:

1. The herb doesn't look as if it was ever part of a plant
2. You turn the jar over and shake it, and the whole mass stays in a big clump
3. All the herbs or oils have the same price per ounce, which means some of them are probably fake; lemon oil should be extremely inexpensive compared to, say, sandalwood oil, which may require you to sell a limb or firstborn child
4. The herb smells moldy or mildewed (not smells bad—there are many herbs, such as valerian, that stink no matter how old they are) or has something growing in it

Gathering Fresh Herbs

I do not recommend wild crafting (gathering herbs from out in nature) unless you know without a doubt what kind of plant you are harvesting from, and even then avoid doing so in the city;

pesticides and pollution have soaked most of the plants in urban areas, and unless the herb was grown at a farm or in your own garden you cannot be sure where it has been or that it is safe to consume.

Never take more than 1/3 of a plant's adult growth at a time; more than that could cause permanent damage to the plant, and is greedy besides. When you harvest from a living plant be sure to offer it your gratitude. Unlike animals, herbs cannot get up and run away if they don't want to be picked on.

Storing Herbs

Store dried herbs in airtight containers out of heat or direct sunlight. Dark glass is best. Label your jars with the name of the herb and the date you bought it so you can keep track of its age. If you are feeling industrious you might add where you bought it and the magical associations it has. That way you don't have to whip out your Encyclopedia of Neat Witchiness every time you can't remember the difference between Skanky Skunk Fern and Smelly Bastard's Wort (yes, I made those up).

Some Practical Hints

Write down your recipes. Better yet, keep them in a card file near your herbs for quick reference. Don't depend on books to give you everything you need—there's never a recipe that is exactly right as written, and you will find yourself tweaking them. Write down your changes. You'll kick yourself later if you don't.

Don't be afraid to make substitutions in a recipe; learning which herbs can be exchanged for which is part of magical herbalism. It's best to keep a supply of herbs that have several uses each so that you don't have to spend exorbitant amounts of money on rare resins when plain old frankincense would do. A good rule of thumb is that if you need to substitute, look for another herb with a same appearance, smell, and taste, such as clove or ginger for cinnamon. Flowery-smelling herbs often have similar properties (lavender and rose,

for example, can both be used for love magic). It is highly unlikely that the charm-makers of days gone by kept jars of asafetida and goat's rue on hand; they used what could be found where they lived.

Remember that by themselves, the energy of herbs is only held in potential; a willow tree standing in your yard can't do anything for a headache. It is only when we combine the energies of the plant with our own intentions and efforts that they can be helpful to us. It is vitally important to charge things you make with herbs—that is, raise energy in whatever way you are comfortable and fuse it with the latent energy of the herbs, strongly visualizing the desired effect of your magic. Then let the energy out into the universe, or into the item you have made, to do its work on your behalf.

A Warning that Should be Obvious

Not all herbs are good for you. A lot of people these days will buy any herb in capsule form, thinking that “since it's natural it must be okay.” Well, e.coli is natural too. Some of the deadlier poisons known in history are parts of plants. While in many cases you would have to consume a lot of an herb for it to be toxic, it isn't usually worth the risk. Generally speaking, if it doesn't come in a tea bag, *don't drink it*. If it isn't covered in chocolate, didn't come from your spice rack or the produce section, or isn't labeled “snack,” *don't eat it*. Perhaps this sounds extreme, but it is mostly a reminder to do your homework and never assume an herb is safe to consume.

This goes doubly for essential oils, which are super-concentrated and easily absorbed through the skin. Never add more than five drops of an essential oil to a bath; ginger oil, for example, can lower your body temperature dangerously, and most spice oils such as cinnamon are highly irritating to the skin.

Tools of the Magical Herbalist

There are some basic items it is handy to have around if you plan to work regularly with herbs.

A mortar and pestle – a very powerful magical tool as well as a practical one. When you grind herbs you can get into a good rhythm and charge them with your intent. Grind clockwise to bring something into your life, counterclockwise to

banish. If you plan to eat or drink anything you make, have a second mortar and pestle for edible concoctions to avoid the risk of residue from toxic substances.

A knife or scissors – not your athame, thank you, unless you are a die-hard Kitchen Witch. Scissors are probably your best bet, as you will find yourself cutting stems, leaves, string, fabric, and all manner of other things.

Candles – candle magic and herbal magic work beautifully together. Candles can be rolled in herbal powders or anointed with oil blends; if nothing else you will need light, and electricity is offensive to most people's sense of the mystical.

Incense burner and charcoal tablets – Making your own incense is not only fun, it enables you to have control over exactly what influences you bring to your rituals. Be very careful what you inhale—the time to figure out you are allergic to something isn't when you are breathing great billowing clouds of it in a darkened room. Try out new incenses outdoors if at all possible.

Base oil – if you blend oils to anoint yourself or magical objects, you will need a neutral carrier oil to dilute them in, both to minimize cost and to keep the essential oils from irritating your skin. Sweet almond and jojoba are very popular and have little scent of their own, whereas olive oil is inexpensive but has a powerful smell that could detract from the blend. Even canola will do in a pinch.

Containers – jars for incenses and powders, bottles for oil blends, fabric for charms, and so on.

A good reference book (or more than one) and a *recipe file*

Basic Magical Herbal Preparations

There are a wide variety of techniques used in herbalism of all kinds, but there are some that work especially well for magic.

Charms – a selection of herbs blended together, sometimes with stones or other talismanic objects, then bound up in cloth and carried or placed in a strategic location. When the desired effect has been achieved untie the charm and cast its contents into running water or the wind.

Floorwash – an infusion of herbs added to mop water or sprayed from a bottle, most often used to purify or banish unwanted spirits or energies from the home. (borrowed from the Voudon)

Anointing Oil – an oil blend rubbed on objects and/or people, usually based on aroma, to consecrate or purify.

Incense – a blend of herbs you can burn

Infusion – a fancy word for tea. Herbs soaked in hot water, then strained. For ingestive purposes premade teas are a really good idea, as the proportions are already figured out and the flavor will most likely be better. You are less likely to get good magical results from forcing yourself to drink something disgusting. For non-ingestive purposes such as an infusion added to a bath or floorwash, steep a handful of mixed herbs in water just under a boil for 8-10 minutes. Strain, then store in the fridge for up to five days.

Tincture – an infusion made in alcohol instead of water. These often take several weeks to achieve full potency, and are often used medicinally.

Poppets – an old standby, a little cloth doll or other image stuffed with herbs, which symbolizes a person. Usually there is a ‘link’ to the person in the doll: hair, a fingernail clipping, a picture. Poppets are used for healing and sometimes for banishing. Don’t let me catch you sticking pins in one. Ethics aside, it’s cheesy.

Powder – Finely ground herbs can be sprinkled around your home, car, bed, desk at work, and so on to bring about desired outcomes.

Signature powder – a blend that symbolized you; it’s a way of magically marking your territory. A pinch can be added to charms, incenses, et cetera to help ensure the results find their way back to you; it sets a seal on your work, like signing a letter.

Bath sachet – a tea bag for the bath. Tossing loose herbs in bathwater is wonderfully evocative and mystical, but it will clog your drain and leave you with bits of lavender in odd places.

Magical Beauty Products – essential oils and herbs can be added to shampoo, soap, perfume, and all manner of personal care formulas.

Cooking magic – a whole subset of herbal magic involving charging food with magical intent. Not recommended on those who are unaware of what you are doing, except in the case of fairly benign intentions such as the general well-being of your family.

Spell bottles – a charm under glass. Can be buried at the edge of your property for protection, or left in plain sight as an odd knick-knack. Good for long-term spells and protective magic.

Dream Pillows – a little cloth pillow stuffed with herbs to bring good sleep, prophetic dreams, or healing.

My Top Fifteen Herbs and Oils List

In class we will discuss the specific uses of each of these and why I consider them the foundation of a basic magical herbalist’s pantry.

1. Rosemary
2. Lavender
3. Bay
4. Dragon’s Blood
5. Patchouly
6. Mint
7. Chamomile
8. Lemon, orange, or other citrus
9. Cinnamon
10. Sandalwood
11. Frankincense
12. Angelica
13. Nettle
14. Basil
15. Nutmeg

A Miscellany of Recipes

These are culled from a variety of sources (listed at the end of this chapter) and from my own recipe box.

Come See Me Incense

Based on a Voudon recipe, this incense will draw sexual energy to you. Be sure you really want the attention before you use it; this recipe does not play around.

- 3 parts patchouli
- 1 part cinnamon
- 1 part rose petals
- 1 part sandalwood
- 1 part jasmine

Crush into a fine powder and burn on charcoal tablets. This same recipe can be used as a powder, or in a charm.

Abramelin Incense

Use for tool, altar, and space consecration.

2 parts myrrh
1 part wood aloe
a few drops of cinnamon oil

Forest Lord Incense

Burn to honor the God and to welcome His influences.

1 part patchouli
1 part cedar
1 part sandalwood
1 part pine
1 part oakmoss
1 part sage
1 part juniper
1 part sunflower petals
a pinch of cinnamon

Anointing Oil

This is a general-purpose oil to prepare you for ritual and open the psychic centers. Blend in a dram of sweet almond oil.

6 drops carnation oil
4 drops sandalwood
4 drops frankincense
2 drops rosemary
2 drops rose
1 drop lavender

Full Moon Oil

Good for rubbing on candles used in Esbat rituals or before performing any Goddess-related ritual, prayer, or devotion.

3 drops sandalwood
2 drops lemon
1 drop rose

Uncrossing Powder

To scatter around the house when something nasty has happened or you fear something might. It's

fiercely protective, and good to have on hand if you live in a bad part of town.

The proportions on powders are up to you, but a 1:1 ratio works well. Mix the ingredients together and then grind up as finely as possible.

Black pepper
Dragon's blood
Rosemary
Patchouly
Nettle
Angelica

Healing Bath

Blend the herbs together in a cheesecloth or muslin bag and hang from the faucet while the water is running, or drop in the water and let it bob about.

3 parts rosemary
2 parts lavender
2 parts rose
1 part mint
½ part cinnamon

You can add specific herbs to enhance the mixture, as follows:

For anxiety, add chamomile
For colds and flu, eucalyptus
For menstrual or other feminine issues, red raspberry leaf
For aching muscles, Bay leaf
For depression, juniper

Grounding Bath

1 part comfrey
1 part sandalwood
1 part patchouli
1 part chamomile
1 part cedar
2 parts sea salt

Money Charm

Gather one part each of these ingredients and place them in green or gold cloth tied with similar ribbon. Carry with you to attract money.

Rosemary
Patchouli

Oakmoss
Nutmeg
A folded dollar or dollar coin

All-purpose Protection Charm

Tie up one part each in red cloth and hang near the doors and windows of your home, or tuck behind the hubcaps of your car.

Rosemary
Basil
Dill

A Witch Bottle

Here's an old one from the Pennsylvania Dutch used to ward off evil. Seal the following in jar with red wax and bury it at the far corner of your property, where it will destroy negative energy for a year and a day.

Needles, pins, broken glass, razor blades, nails, other pointy things, rosemary, pine needles; a handful of salt and a handful of ashes; top off with your urine or, if you are squeamish, vinegar.

For a garage witch bottle to protect your vehicles, fill a jar with screws, bolts, washers, and nails. Scatter salt over the garage floor, then sweep up and add to the jar. Fill the rest of the way with new motor oil.

Floorwash, general instructions

Take any infusion recipe and steep the ingredients in a pint of water, just under the boil, for 20 minutes. Store in a dark place for three days; shake each day while visualizing your purpose strongly. On the fourth day, strain the mixture. Create an appropriate chant or a sentence that evokes the purpose you have in mind, and say it while using the wash. Add a half-cup or so to your mop bucket or spray or sprinkle around the room.

Sugar and Spice Bath Mix

In addition to making your skin feel yummy (and smell like cookies), this blend attracts love and friendship.

½ cup baking soda
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon ginger

¼ teaspoon ground cloves

Shake together in a jar until well blended. Add 2 tablespoons to a tub of warm water and soak.

Bitch-Be-Gone Blend

I created this as aromatherapy for use at a job I hated, to keep me from being snappish and rude to coworkers that didn't deserve my enmity. Mix all ingredients and grind into a mush, then carry in a jar and inhale the scent to alleviate bad mood, surliness, and other I-hate-my-species feelings.

Lavender and lavender oil
Mint and mint oil
Pinch catnip
Chamomile
Sandalwood
2-3 drops honeysuckle oil
Rosemary
Cinnamon
A pinch of my signature powder
A rose quartz stone

Dream Pillow

Stuff a small pouch of blue cloth with lavender, chamomile, rose, lemon balm, mint, and hops. Sleep with it under your pillow to ward off nightmares and bring sound rest. If you wish to have prophetic dreams add mugwort, but be forewarned—a night of psychic dreams may not be restful and may in fact be horribly unpleasant.

Faery Milk

Drink to bring peace and happiness, or make as an offering to the spirits of Faery.

Very cold milk
Vanilla or almond extract
2-4 tsp sugar to taste
2 drops food coloring, blue or green

Alternately just use vanilla or almond syrup instead of extract and sugar.

Happy House Charm, suggested Ingredients

Any charm for a long-term purpose can be created in a jar or bottle, its ingredients layered for a pretty effect. Choose several (or all) off this list to bring desired energies into your home; dump out

and empty once a year or after a major disaster or move.

Potting soil – abundance and connection to the Earth Mother

Cornmeal – abundance

Pepper – passion

Yeast – growth

Rice – luck and a plentiful harvest

Sage – wisdom, spiritual growth

Apple pie spice – love and household harmony

Catnip – happy, healthy pets (you can also add a pinch of your pet's hair)

Salt – grounding, protection, purity

Bread crumbs – prosperity, abundance, comfort

Dragon's blood – protection

Cocoa powder – happiness, love, harmony

Nettle or angelica – to banish negative energy

Tiny moonstones, seashells, or rose petals to represent the Goddess

Agates, sunstones, an acorn to represent the God

Recommended Reading and References

Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs by Scott Cunningham – an exhaustive look at the magical properties of herbs, trees, fruits, resins, et cetera. Cunningham has several works that are indispensable to the magical herbalist, including

The Complete Book of Incense, Oils, and Brews

Magical Aromatherapy

Magical Herbalism

Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Wicca in the Kitchen

For medicinal herbalism, read *The Herb Book* by John Lust or *The New Age Herbalist* by Richard Mabey.

The Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy by Valerie Ann Worwood is handy if you want to delve into the smelly arts.

Natural Beauty for all Seasons by Janice Cox has hundreds of recipes for homemade herbal beauty concoctions.



Ecospirituality and Green Ethics

by Amber Laine Fisher

People talk a lot about Wicca as an Earth-centered religion, and Wicca's obvious bias towards the vision of Deity as immanent rather than transcendent supports the concept of ecocentricism within Wicca. However, what we don't seem to talk about much are the direct implications of an ecocentric spirituality, and what that means for us as servants of the gods.

From a theological/philosophical standpoint, Wicca maintains that all of nature is infused with the sacred—that we have but to experience the world around us in order to have an experience of God. The otherwise confusing idea of “inherent value” with regard to humans, animals (and viruses . . .) is replaced somewhat by the concept of “inherent sacredness”—as an emanation of expression of a Divine beginning, each and every object in the world (whether living or inanimate, man-made or otherwise) is inherently sacred in its own right, without the need for human projections or interpretations. As such, everything has the “right” to exist as it is and to evolve as it will.

Western society, however, has been built upon a system of ethics that are fundamentally anthropocentric. The Cartesian notions of separation and hierarchy are so deeply ingrained within us that we sometimes fail to actually apply Wiccan theological concepts to our daily living. And it's not really any wonder why—our religion teaches holism and immanence, but our secular society teaches individualism and competition. And because the concepts of stratification and separation are instilled in us practically from birth, reconciling the necessity for both networks and hierarchies and competitions and cooperation can be mind bogglingly difficult. Likewise, reconciling self evolution and concentration on the self and human community with ecocentrism and ecological awareness can prove problematic. Nevertheless, if we intend to live our lives by the values and ethics that we have discerned from Wiccan theology, then we have to attempt to reconcile individualism with ecocentrism.

Wicca requires a certain reverence for nature, because by experiencing nature and communing with it we are granted a unique vision of God. Along with reverence comes a feeling of responsibility—a deep seated desire to protect

nature from what many of us perceive to be her natural enemy—us. Environmentalists can often be heard demanding protection for the environment, whether it is by putting pollution taxes on businesses or asking every household to recycle their aluminum, glass, and plastic. The outward message is simple enough—we're destroying the Earth, and we need to stop doing that. Yet as most geologists will tell us, the Earth is resilient. It can take care of itself. Therefore, what environmentalists and ecological activists really seem to be advocating is protecting the Earth for ourselves and our future generations. In other words, we are asked to preserve the Earth and her resources not because of some notion of inherent worth or value but because we *need* the Earth and her resources for our own basic survival.

Plenty of people have condemned this philosophy as being anthropocentric and therefore shortsighted. However, for our purposes this vision has merit. Most religions are inherently anthropocentric. With the exception of a few conservative strands of Abrahamic faith which assert that worship is done solely for the glory of God, most religions exist to serve human spiritual evolution. In other words, religion serves to make us better people, to serve and soothe our spirits. There may certainly be far reaching consequences of that which extend beyond the immediate purpose, but the essence of religion is still anthropocentric, even when it focuses on a relationship with Divinity. As Joseph Campbell writes, “The center is where sight is.” We are looking at the universe through human eyes and extrapolating from human experience what God and the universe might be like. As a result, the ethics that we derive from our theology will necessarily be anthropocentric as well.

This is definitely not a bad thing, and when we talk about anthropocentrism we are not talking about human chauvanism, which subverts all other forms of life in order to maintain that humanity is outside of nature and therefore has the right to dominate the natural world. Human chauvanism isn't going to find much approval within the Wiccan paradigm, which maintains that the totality of the universe lies within the body of the Divine and therefore is all, at least theoretically,

on equal footing. Nevertheless, if we are to apply our religious values and religiously derived ethics to the way we live and behave toward the Earth and our ecology, we're going to have to do it from a human point of view.

While it is true that humanity has caused the Earth a lot of damage and that the damage we cause is accelerating, we have to be careful not to inadvertently fall into the trappings of either misanthropy or the man/nature split. It is all too common even within Earth-centered religions to talk about man and nature as though they were separate. We talk about the “natural” world versus the “man-made” world, and condemn the latter as lacking of spirit. Yet we do not treat the rest of the animal kingdom with such contempt. We do not condemn the anthill or the beaver dam or the honeycomb as unnatural dwellings, and yet we despise cities and other human creations. This is inconsistent with the basic Wiccan premise that humanity is part of nature. If the creations of other animals is consistent with the natural world, then the creations of humanity—museums, jails, hospitals, castles—are also natural. We are products of the Earth—our bodies, our homes, our chemicals. The Earth provides us with the materials that we use to create “synthetic” materials like plastics and diamonds. In a sense, then, all of these things are natural—they all come from the same source.

Theoretically this is true, at least. But from an ethical standpoint we'd be hard pressed to compare a honeycomb to a sweatshop or a nuclear power plant. But if we approach the ecological problem with too much disdain for humanity, we run the risk of desacralizing ourselves, our bodies, our sexuality, etc—in essence, throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The Divine created us to be what we are, and while we should certainly seek to better ourselves and our communities, we should perhaps seek to evolve towards the pinnacle of human potential, rather than seeking to transcend what it means to be human. In fact, this is perhaps one of the basic philosophical precepts of Wicca. We are not seeking to escape our humanity but rather to find the sacred within ourselves as we are, and to celebrate the Divine as it is revealed to us now, rather than what it might appear to be in some kind of afterlife. So, while we would do well to take a critical look at our lives and how we relate to ecology, we should not forget that we are creatures of Earth, and are no less important (for all our villainy and arrogance!)

than the bunny rabbits and the oak trees we love so well.

Spiritual ecocentrism asks us, then, not to sacrifice our livelihoods and our human way of living in order to preserve some sort of idyllic “natural” state, but rather to balance our needs and our wants with the needs of the ecology as an organic being infused with Divine energy. Furthermore, spiritual ecocentrism asks us to make a fundamental paradigm shift—to let go of the mechanisms that require a ME and a NOT ME. In other words, we are asked to recognize fully and in practice, not merely philosophically or theoretically, that we are not merely our bodies, our thoughts, and emotions. We actually are the air we breathe, the trees we climb, the oceans and rivers we bathe in. We are asked to extend the sense of self to all the natural world, and to recognize the very deep connections each thing has to another. The idea is that once we recognize that we are not just individuals but deeply rooted in the ecology, we will seek to preserve ecology as a selfish endeavor—to preserve our own existence. We would no sooner destroy the rainforest that cut off our own hands. This is what we call *deep ecology*, and it is an important part of Earth centered spirituality. In fact, it gives an entirely new meaning to the concept of being “Earth centered”. Within the paradigm of deep ecology, Earth is not merely the ground or the ecology but humanity, society, community, and in essence, the God-process.

One of the interesting ideas put forth by a theology built on the concept of Divine immanence is the notion that God is not merely a *thing* that resides within other *things* but that God is in fact also a *process of becoming*. When we get down and dirty with the concept of immanence we are forced to ask, “Is God merely found within the tree and the soil and the sun, or is God *also* the relationship between these things and the process by which they interact and evolve?” Recognizing the Divine within the natural world is an important step toward manifesting deep ecology, but it is shortsighted to imagine that the Divine is only within that which we can see or feel. We have to recognize that there is a more subtle face of God that we cannot see but without which we truly would not be.

The study of ecology is, ultimately, a study of networks, synergy, and co-dependence. Once science made the discovery that the Earth did not behave as a machine with each part acting

independently of another, we were forced to ask ourselves, “In what ways do things work together, and how do we understand *anything* if nothing can be understood in a vacuum?”¹

We know that human activity changes the ecology, even if we can’t quantify or calculate such changes. We also know that the ecology changes us; our evolution is co-dependent. We initiate changes in the ecology that we have to in turn adapt to. The process is ongoing, and extends beyond our present environment. We change the universe, and it changes us. The actions that we take ultimately do create our futures and our reality in a very concrete way, and our ecosystems are just mirrored example of this macro/micro shift.

Spiritually speaking, tending to the ecology and taking on a personal role of stewardship toward the Earth is a manner of serving God. Seeking out a balance between human evolution and ecological preservation is a kind of theology in and of itself, since it explores the relationships between various manifestations of God—and most importantly for an Earth-based religion, manifestations that we can see and that we are intimately part of. Wicca does not require this of us, of course—yet a dialogue about ecological ethics within a Wiccan framework is necessary if we are going to both move our theology forward and if we are going to walk the talk of a holistic, Earth-centered tradition.

Recommended Reading:

The Web of Life, Fritjof Capra

The Greening of Ethics: From Anthropocentrism to Deep Green Theory, Richard Sylvan and David Bennett

¹ The latter question, the question of understanding, forced philosophers and scientists to make a huge epistemological shift. Philosophers and scientists alike had to admit that we could only approximate knowledge of any system—that exact knowledge was not possible, as every aspect of every system and network, be it the human body or the universe, relied on the cooperative functioning of its many parts.



The Chakra System

by Dianne Sylvan

The word “chakra” arises from the Sanskrit for “disk” or “wheel,” and describes an intersection of spirit and body. The chakras have been a part of Eastern mystical practice for many centuries, dating back at least to the Upanishads (a Hindu sacred text, one of the first places the chakras were mentioned). They are important tools for healing, meditation, and energy work, and people of diverse traditions all over the world have learned to use the system in a variety of beneficial ways.

Traditionally there are seven major chakras in the body; there are also minor chakras in the hands, feet, and other points. The seven principal energy centers are part of a greater column of energy running vertically through the body, also called the *sushumna*. Each chakra absorbs and transforms a certain type of energy, governing different parts of the self: instinct, emotion, psychism, spirituality, and so on. The sum total of energy transformed by the chakras creates a flow in both directions along the *sushumna*.

Chakras can be open or closed, healthy or “diseased,” depending on the overall state of a person’s well-being and the habits and circumstances that person is involved in. For example, a person under a good deal of stress in the workplace might have problems with the third chakra, which governs personal power and the Will. Chakras are interdependent; if one is clogged or closed, the others will not function properly, as the flow of energy throughout the self is disrupted. Though many spiritual practitioners place more focus on the upper chakras (the mind and spirit as opposed to the lower, or physical body), all seven are of equal importance in the quest to become a whole, self-actualized person.

There are many ways to work with the chakras, to cleanse or repair those that are not in full health, and to strengthen the self as a whole through all seven. The chakras are often visualized as either spinning spheres of colored light, or as lotus flowers, with the petals open or closed depending on the state of the chakra. Each chakra has a color associated with it and a number of other associations much like the four Elements in Wiccan practice.

The Root Chakra - Survival

The Root chakra is located at the base of the spine, and it is the foundation upon which the entire column rests. The Root governs physical existence and survival. It is the chakra of Earth—manifestation, of health and material needs. The Root is a very dense and solid chakra, and its desires are difficult, if not impossible, to ignore; we cannot progress spiritually until our physical needs are met. It is hard to meditate if you are starving.

The Root is the chakra of grounding; it maintains our deep, instinctive connection to the Earth and to the whole of nature. It is connected also to sexuality, or rather to procreation; all our animal instincts are a part of the Root, from the fight-or-flight response to the eat-mate-kill impulse. The Root also governs our body image and how we perceive our physical selves. If that image is distorted, the energy of the Root can become cloudy, and our self-nurturing behavior (what we eat, how we treat ourselves) suffers. The sense of self-worth, of being worthy of material success and abundance, is deeply bound in the Root chakra.

The Sacral Chakra – Connection

The second chakra lies within the womb and genitals, and as expected, it governs sexuality and desire. It is the chakra of Water, and therefore is deeply connected to the Moon (especially in women); as Water, its essence is fluid and changeable. In the first chakra we are only aware of ourselves; in the second, we become aware of our connection to others and our need to be connected. The Sacral chakra is the home of most of our emotions, as emotion is primarily born out of our interaction with others.

The Sacral chakra governs pleasure, and as such is easy to knock out of balance in today’s world. People often live “stuck” in the second chakra, seeking sexual gratification and pleasure through food, alcohol, drugs, and risky behavior of all kinds.

The Solar Plexus Chakra – Will

The Solar Plexus is all about Fire—power, will, drive, energy. Its purpose is transformation and the achievement of our True Will, our sacred purpose on the Earth. It is the chakra that overcomes inertia and breaks through outmoded habits. It is also the chakra that, if not healthy and stable, is most easily threatened by others. The Solar Plexus is territorial; it is our sense of place and purpose, knowing who we are and where we belong, and feeling sure of ourselves. This is where we get “butterflies” when we feel nervous or uncertain.

Power is directed energy, and this is the essential function of the third chakra: it takes our personal energy and sends it outward toward our goals. A dysfunctional third chakra leaves us feeling useless, pointless, and indecisive, as if the universe is conspiring against us. We rely upon the Solar Plexus to “fire us up,” get us moving, and overcome obstacles between us and our chosen path.

The Heart Chakra – Love

This is the center point of the whole system, the “heart of the matter.” The Heart chakra naturally governs love, but not the codependent romantic “love” we are taught to want by popular music and media; the Heart chakra is the center of Divine love, and of compassion. Sacral-chakra love is the love of a person for a person or a thing; Heart-chakra love needs no object. It emanates from our Divine essence, without question, condition, or limit.

The Heart is the chakra of wholeness and acceptance; it balances the self-centeredness of the lower three chakras with the lofty spirituality of the upper three, and integrates all the various aspects of our being. The Heart chakra shows us our inherent connection to all that lives, and removes the boundaries between us and the rest of creation. It is the sense of being deeply spiritually connected. The Heart chakra is also the center of healing, as it receives healing energy and lets it flow to where it is most needed by the body, heart, or spirit.

The Throat Chakra – Communication

The fifth chakra governs the word, whether spoken or thought; moreover, it governs all forms of expression, how we represent ourselves to the

world and how we communicate with others. It is the chakra of creativity, music, and humor.

In addition, the Throat chakra reminds us of the importance of what we say and what we mean; it is in many ways a chakra of integrity, expressing the Will of the Solar Plexus with creativity and then living up to that expression. It is overall the chakra of truth, both personal and universal. The Throat is responsible for naming—putting a word or a symbol to a concept so that we can relate our thoughts and ideas to the rest of the world.

The Brow Chakra – Intuition

The sixth chakra gives us sight, both inner and outer. Also called the Third Eye chakra, its domain is perception and intuition: the things we know because we see them, and the things we know because we simply *know*. Its talents are primarily visual, such as clairvoyance, formed out of images rather than sounds or other sensation.

The Brow chakra’s world is the world of knowledge, taking in information through both kinds of sight. It also is the seat of our innate intelligence and the intelligence we have gathered from year to year, building upon the lessons we have already learned. All functions of the mind are part of the Brow chakra.

The Crown Chakra – Understanding

The Crown is actually located a few inches above the top of the head, within the etheric (or energy) body rather than the physical body. It is the doorway through which cosmic consciousness and Divine connection can occur. The Crown is the center of our spiritual growth, and of enlightenment.

The Crown takes the knowledge we have gained in the Brow chakra and applies Divine wisdom, giving us true understanding of a subject, person, or the universe itself. It gives us an appreciation of Divinity, both inside ourselves and all around, and shows us true beauty and peace.

Note: There are many different interpretations of the chakras, and none is necessarily the correct one. The best way to decide which chakra does what is to work with them yourself.

Chakra Correspondences

The Root

Sanskrit name: Muladhara
Meaning: Root Support
Color: Red
Location: Base of spine, perineum
Element: Earth
Stones: hematite, bloodstone
Key Words: survival, grounding, stability, security, health, manifestation

The Sacral

Sanskrit name: Swadhisthana
Meaning: Sweetness
Color: Orange
Location: Womb, genitals
Element: Water
Stones: carnelian, tiger eye
Key Words: Connection, sexuality, emotion, passion, desire, pleasure, sensuality

The Solar Plexus

Sanskrit name: Manipura
Meaning: Lustrous jewel
Color: Yellow
Location: directly below the sternum, above the stomach
Element: Fire
Stones: Amber, citrine
Key Words: Will, power, confidence, courage, ego, choice

The Heart

Sanskrit name: Anahata
Meaning: Unstruck
Color: Green
Location: Middle of the chest
Element: Air
Stones: Rose quartz
Key Words: Love, compassion, balance, wholeness, unity

The Throat

Sanskrit name: Vissudha
Meaning: Purification
Color: Bright blue
Location: Throat
Element: Sound

Stones: Turquoise, aquamarine
Key Words: Truth, communication, expression, creativity, voice, integrity

The Brow

Sanskrit name: Ajna
Meaning: Perceive
Color: Indigo
Location: Third eye—center of the forehead just above the eyes
Element: Thought
Stones: Lapis, sapphire
Key Words: Knowledge, vision, clarity, intelligence, thought, imagination

The Crown

Sanskrit name: Sahasrara
Meaning: Thousandfold
Color: Violet
Location: Top of the head
Element: Light, Deity
Stones: Amethyst, clear quartz
Key Words: Understanding, Divinity, enlightenment, grace

Recommended Reading

Wheels of Life: A User's Guide to the Chakra System by Anodea Judith
The Book of Chakras by Ambika Wauters
Using Your Chakras by Ruth White



The Hills Are Alive: Intro to Gaia Theory

by Dianne Sylvan

The most unforgettable image of the twentieth century is the view of Earth from space. Before that, we knew intellectually that the planet was round and had an idea of what She would look like from a distance, but seeing that picture—the lonely little blue ball in the vast sea of space—inspired many people to think about the world differently.

One of these people was James Lovelock, a scientist working on the first mission to Mars. He was part of a team designing instruments to detect life on the red planet, but the major question of the day was, how do we detect life? How is life on a planet measured?

Lovelock made himself unpopular by saying in no uncertain terms that there is no life on Mars to be detected, and therefore testing for life would be pointless. He stated that there may have been life on Mars once, but there wasn't now.

His reasoning had to do with atmospheric gases. Life depends on a fluid medium to carry nutrients and waste, and since Mars has no water, that medium would have to be the atmosphere. A biosphere is a chemical factory, a food web powered ultimately by a nearby star; organisms make gases that other organisms consume, and so forth. (On Earth for example organisms produce and use oxygen and methane, which in turn combine to form water and carbon dioxide.) These gases in the atmosphere constantly rise and fall in volume, so the atmosphere of a planet with life on it can never be at total equilibrium. The atmosphere of Mars is chemically stable; therefore, it indicates the planet has no life.

This realization got Lovelock to thinking: how has life on Earth survived all this time? Why are we still here and Mars is dead, though there's evidence it hasn't always been?

Lovelock decided that the sum total of life on a homeostatic (habitable) planet keeps the chemistry and climate liveable from eon to eon. The traditional scientific view was just the opposite—the environment causes organisms to adapt, causing natural selection. Lovelock's hypothesis

was that life is much more important to the welfare of the planet than originally thought, suggesting co-evolution: life alters the environment and then has to adapt to its own changes.

For instance, our sun is the type of star that gets hotter and hotter until it burns up all its fuel and dies. At the origin of life on Earth, the sun was 25% cooler than it is right now, and the average global temperature was low enough to freeze all the oceans and keep them frozen. They weren't frozen, according to fossil evidence. The theory is that, through time, the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere shifted to trap more solar heat and keep the oceans liquid. What caused the shift? Soil bacteria, plants, animals—life.

The Daisyworld Parable

Lovelock came up with a simplified model to help explain it all. Imagine a planet much like ours in chemical makeup and with a sun that is, like ours, gradually growing warmer. On this imaginary planet there are only two forms of life: black daisies and white daisies.

In the beginning, the black daisies have an advantage over the white, because they can trap more heat from the cooler atmosphere. The daisies produce water vapor during their lives, which helps raise the global temperature as they blanket the earth. Pretty soon it is too hot for comfort for the black daisies, so they begin to die back; the white daisies, which reflect heat, begin to multiply. Since the white do not absorb heat, they don't produce as much water vapor, so the planetary temperature lowers. Then the black daisies increase, and the cycle of black and white regulates the atmosphere—the species do not have to agree on quotas of growth, nor do they have to act outside their own interest; self-regulation is an emergent property of natural selection.

Take this parable and make it a thousand times more complex, with species after species contributing to the overall regulation of the environment. This is the Gaia theory—that the Earth operates as a single gigantic “organism,”

self-regulating and self-sustaining (with the help of the Sun, of course).

The concept of Daisyworld has real-life parallels that have drawn the attention of scientists. One of the most studied is the salinity of the Earth's oceans. The oceans have maintained about the same level of salt concentration since life began; in fact, if it rose half a percent nothing could live in the oceans. Meanwhile the weathering of rocks constantly deposits more salt in the water. How, then, has salinity remained near constant over eons? The organisms in the water maintain the salt balance. Bacteria play an especially important role in pumping out salt. The traditional division between living and non-living systems no longer applies according to Gaia Theory.

Breaths of Gaia

The level of atmospheric CO₂ rises and falls with the seasons, peaking in Summer. Why? Plants produce oxygen, which animals consume; animals produce CO₂, which plants consume. Though the level of photosynthesis varies from region to region, globally the plant kingdom inhales as the animal kingdom exhales, and vice versa. The planet breathes.

In your lifetime, the full complement of CO₂ in the atmosphere will be taken up by photosynthesizers and replenished by respirers at least ten times. Our lives can be measured, then, in breaths of Gaia.

As humans create more CO₂ through their industry and increasing population, life on the planet increases, thereby raising the temperature. The Earth has to take deeper breaths because of the greenhouse effect.

Humans and the Meaning of it All

The Gaia Theory is much more complex than this brief overview; needless to say most scientists don't think of Gaia as "alive" in the traditional sense, though she is easily as complicated as any other organism. By the Gaia Theory, we don't live merely "on" the Earth; we live "in" Gaia.

Is Gaia conscious? The jury is still out on that one, but one hypothesis put forth is that Gaia is evolving toward self-awareness. This is happening in part because of the human race; if living things function as Gaia's organs, then humans are her consciousness. Organs are made

up of cells that, early in evolution, acted individually; the only thing standing in the way of Gaia's self-awareness is the refusal of the human race to come together as an "organ." Again, this is one theory, but it does give humanity an integral place in the body of Gaia.

In fact, one of the most important implications of the Gaia Theory is that it shows that life itself has an intrinsic value, and that though we cannot say definitively that the planet is alive as we use the term, the fact remains that we are all part of something greater than ourselves, part of a whole. Just by breathing we become one of many species contributing to the evolution of our Earth Mother. Evolution, then, isn't some meaningless process of chance movement from point A to point B, where species evolve purely for their own advantage; we're all in this together.

As long as humans think of themselves as separate from the Earth, conserving biological diversity and natural resources feels like a duty, something we *have* to do out of conscience or self-preservation. If we see ourselves as part of a greater whole, connected to all other life, taking care of Gaia is in turn taking care of ourselves, and walking gently is our only viable option.

Recommended Reading

The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth and other books by James Lovelock
Green Space, Green Time: The Way of Science by Connie Barlow
Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution by Lynn Margulis
Gaia's Body: Toward a Physiology of Earth by Tyler Volk

Recommended Websites:

Another Intro to the Theory:
<http://www.gaianet.fsbusiness.co.uk/gaiatheory.html>
 Lovelock's lecture "The Evolving Gaia Theory"
<http://www.unu.edu/unupress/lecture1.html>
 "What is Gaia?" by James Lovelock
<http://www.ozl.com/ourplanet/lovelock2.html>



Introduction to Air

By Dianne Sylvan

I am Air
I am inspiration
I am your voice, your laughter
I am your first breath and your last gasp
I am the cool blue of morning
I am the raging hurricane
I am an arc of geese in the winter sky
I am music and harmony
I am invisible but ever-present
I am the drift of incense smoke
I am the scent of daybreak
I am ideas
I am your mind
I am Air.

Air is the hardest Element to grasp, as it has no shape, no color (except perhaps in Pasadena). It is the Element most directly connected to keeping us alive; we could survive weeks without food, days without Water, but only minutes without Air. That which is alive, has breath. The cycle of Air from our lungs to the atmosphere connects us with every other being on Earth, from humans to pets to plants. Song, speech, scent, laughter...anything involving an indrawn breath falls within the sphere of Air.

Air is the Element of beginnings, of dawn and Spring; its realm is also that of the mind. All pursuits involving thought—whether the focused effort of study or the far reaches of an astral journey—are a part of Air's domain. The human mind has vast untapped potential, some of which Wiccans and other magical practitioners have found ways to work with. Air is also the Element of truth, for the voice is its instrument, and integrity gives it power.

Like the mind, Air energy is in constant motion, waltzing between the worlds as lightly as a feather on the wind. It can drift, or it can fly as straight as an arrow loosed from a bow; the energy of Air is variable, but when used with intent can move faster and more directly than that of any other Element (unless it's kidnapped by faeries).

Air is the Element of the Fool, he who steps off into the unknown looking for adventure and transformation. It is the leap that won't be denied, the fall that ends in flight, the brand-new morning full of promise and hope. Open your mind to infinite possibility, close your eyes...and breathe.

Associations:

Archangel: Raphael
Direction: East
Elemental: Sylph
Sun Signs: Gemini, Libra, Aquarius
Colors: yellow, sky blue



Imagination and Faith

by Amber Laine Fisher

We are a religion with very little dogma, no authoritative sacred texts, and precious little published liturgy. Each Wiccan is responsible for his or her own “faith”—each individual will come to form a unique way of internalizing and interpreting the universe at large, and a way of communicating with, worshipping, and honoring Deity.

The individuality and the freedom that we are granted within our religion is exhilarating, but it does not come without a price. We are rarely given any explicit depictions of the gods that we interact with unless they come from an established pantheon with an established history, culture, and mythology. Yet one of the goals of the Blessedways Temple is to encourage each individual to seek out the nature of the gods for him- or herself, and to form an image of God not necessarily based on the images and experiences of others, but rather based on our own revelations, and nestled within our own culture and practices.

In order to avail ourselves to an image of the gods, or to allow ourselves to craft out a faith borne of our culture, heritage, and personal gnosis, we have to be able to draw upon one of our richest, most precious resources—our imagination. Without a sacred mythology, without an authoritative text base, we are essentially forming our faith as we live. We do not have to rely upon the wisdom of sages, yet at the same time we cannot merely sit and wait for the gods to reveal themselves to us. While mystical experiences certainly can and do happen, for the average person, faith is heavily co-creative. We reach into the depths of ourselves, into the fountain of our imaginations and fantasies, and from there we begin to image what our gods *should* be. Once we establish in our own minds what our gods should be, then we are more receptive to the revelations of the Divine, and Deity can reach into us and open our hearts and minds to its influence.

The faith building process begins with experience. We are born into a world that is seemingly inconsistent, meaningless and haphazard. But within that larger world, we are born into communities, and from those communities we inherit certain values and mythologies. Not all of these myths are religious in nature. But what those

mythologies allow us to do us form a method of looking at the world. Secular mythology and worldview are often the same thing. But as religious people, the next step we must take is to extrapolate from our immediate worldview and determine what the universe is like, what the gods are like, and what they would have us do. We are required to *imagine* for ourselves a proper model for life—a model for faith.

But the formation of faith is not always an easy process. Most of us do not sit down one morning and decide to build a model of faith. We do not merely “decide” to have faith in an ultimate environment—we have to be *inspired* to make connections in our minds, to extrapolate ideas from experiences we have had. And those experiences are not always external. Sometimes the experiences that we have are decidedly internal, formed from the most primal, most unrefined parts of ourselves—our rich imagination.

Inspiration and imagination go hand in hand. All of us have experienced the daydream, the moment when we disconnect ourselves from the moment to explore some inner world that for us has great meaning or value. Perhaps the daydream is brought out by boredom, but also it can be brought about by a moving piece of music, a particular scent, an interesting piece of artwork. Engrossed in any of our favorite artistic ventures, our imaginations take hold and lead us to places deep inside ourselves that are not curbed by the mundane world. In our imaginations we are free to explore that which is otherwise impossible. And because we are not restricted to convention and logic, we are able to create for ourselves meaningful, touching images with which we relate to the sacred.

One of the primary ways in which we are able to explore the inner and outer worlds and find ways in which they relate is through mythology. Mythic imagery, whether classically portrayed or cloaked in modern symbolism and language, is borne not only from the imagination of the individual but from the collective imaginations of entire communities. Carl Jung asserted that myths and mythic imagery were inherited at birth—that the symbols and themes of mythology were not merely creations of the individual but actually integral parts of the human subconscious (what Jung called the “unconscious”) that we glean from each other

and from the communities that we are born into. All of humanity is linked via the “collective unconscious”, and all of our memories, dreams, and deep seated images are stored somehow within that unconscious. This was how Jung accounted for the similarities of mythologies all over the world. The basic themes of death and rebirth, victory through adversity, familial love and tragedy are all fundamental human themes explored through mythology, and they speak to us because they are already pieces of who we are.

Established mythologies provide us with a concrete structure within which to organize our own ideas and experiences. They also allow us to relate our experiences with those of others, for the motifs and symbols of mythology are universal—they speak to us in a primordial language that we seldom need to translate. Myth allows us to *feel* that which we already *know*. This is in part why myth does not have to be logical—the intention of the myth is to convey feeling and experience, not logic or form. What myth must do is awaken the imagination, that singing part of us that is eternally youthful and easily awed. When we open ourselves to myth, we are awakened to the splendor of the outer world, and our inner worlds, the deepest parts of ourselves, are enriched because of it.

Getting in touch with our deepest selves and relating what we find there with the outer world that we share with all humanity is part of the faith building process. Having faith means having an intimate relationship with the world, the gods, the community. Having faith means imaging a working model of the universe that determines how we live. Without imagery, without imagination, without inspiration, our view of the universe and the gods is necessarily limited. There are aspects of life that we cannot understand or explain logically—but we can *imagine* them. Perhaps we cannot explain concepts like omnipotence, or the collective unconscious, or karma, or reincarnation. We haven’t the logical or scientific tools to examine these concepts, but our imaginations allow us to deal with these ideas in highly detailed and thought-provoking ways. And through imaginative exegesis of concepts that have no logical roots, we allow ourselves to build faith.



Meditations and Journeys

The Cloak Meditation: A meditation of personal empowerment
by Dianne Sylvan

We are, each of us, priests and priestesses of the gods. We carry within us a spark of divine wisdom and strength that reaches back through the ages, connecting us to everyone who has ever stood beneath the Moon and felt Her magic. At heart we are all powerful, beautiful, and capable of transforming worlds with our bare hands. We, and all creation, are divine love and nurture made manifest.

Sometimes, though, we forget who we are and all that it means. Sometimes the world of dollar signs and willful ignorance batters us from all sides like a storm at sea, and we slowly wear down until we lose touch with our power. Sometimes we need to be reminded.

Think of a time when you felt truly strong, when you knew you were able to face whatever came your way. Think of a moment, however brief, when you could say with surety, "This is who I am." Think of a day when everything seemed perfect, when your thoughts and your words and your actions were aligned, and you felt your essential unity with all that is. If you have never experienced these things, think then of how it might feel in your body and in your heart to be completely yourself and proud of it, to say, "Thou art God/dess" and mean every word.

(pause)

Now imagine that that feeling, that power and strength, are gathering in your hands. This energy begins to weave itself into a kind of shimmering cloth. Each thread is a moment in your life, in the past or yet to come, in which you act upon your true will and with your true heart. It shapes itself in your hands into a hooded cloak.

Take a moment to hold the cloak up before your mind's eye. What does it look like? Is it heavy? What is the texture, scent, and color of your power? Get to know this sacred garment, this part of you that is awake and aware and ready for anything.

(pause)

When you are ready, wrap the cloak around your shoulders. Rather than sitting on top of your clothes, the fabric dissolves into your skin, soaking in, infusing every cell of your body with the energy and strength you have held in your hands. This cloak has always been a part of you, but now you can feel and see it. It is the mantle of the God, the wings of the Goddess, and you are its chosen wearer.

If you look closely you can see the energy shimmering on your skin, a soft radiance like that of the Moon. Know that this light is your own, that you brought it forth from the shining spirit within you. The confidence and assurance it inspires in you brings your real, unhidden self out of the shadows and into your body.

Do you feel like a priestess, a warrior, a king? What person does the cloak allow you to show the world? This person, who may yet be a familiar stranger, is the core of your being. Take a moment to etch this feeling on your memory so that, from this moment, you will always recognize yourself.

(pause)

When you are ready, come back to the waking world, still wearing the cloak of your power. You need never take it off, but you can put it back on any time it slips from your shoulders. Any time you feel the cold wind of self-doubt and uncertainty, you can call it forth, and it will warm you in the nurturing folds of your own divine self.



A Meditation on the Wheel of the Year

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This meditation begins in September, but can be adapted to begin at any season.

Read this meditation outside, to get in touch with the changing land where you live. Sit down and stretch out with your senses, experiencing the feel of Earth below and Sky above, listening to the whispered tales of the wind. Forget what you know about the Wheel of the Year—the rituals, the correspondences, the myths—and go out among the wilds to do as our ancestors did, and learn the seasons from the seasons themselves.

This is autumn, the season of Water, the season of letting go.

The leaves are tired, heavy on the branches from a long summer of heat and growth. Fruit hangs ready and swollen on the vine. There is a quiet to the world, a waiting, a listening for the first chill winds to bluster down from the North.

In the woods around you, the animals can sense the coming of colder weather. The squirrels gather in all the food they can, knowing that this is their own time of harvest. The deer test the wind more carefully now, as hunting season is coming, just as it did last year and the year before. Some of them will fall; they always do. They spent the summer learning to be quick, to blend in; now all their knowledge will protect them as the humans enter the forest.

Autumn is the evening of the year, the sunset. The light is waning but not gone; the heat is lessening but not absent. The time of harvest can mean many things. What has been sown must now be reaped, for better or worse. It is the time of elderhood, of Mother giving way to Crone, of staring down into the darkness of death and waiting, waiting for the moment to jump. As such it is the season of Water-of emotion, of release, of the tears of letting go our mistakes and successes before the year has ended and it is time to start anew.

Autumn is the time to take stock, to bring in the harvest for the cold to come. The trees conserve their strength, withdrawing support from their leaves to keep the trunk alive through winter. The leaves let go of the branches and drift to the ground with a sigh, a final breath before rejoining the Earth. Autumn is that last breath.

Soon the days grow cooler, the air a little lighter. Fewer and fewer animals venture out. Around you, many trees stand stripped bare, skeletal, their true shape showing through. Some, the evergreens, brace themselves for the change in temperature, whatever it may be. The plants and animals in this wood already know how cold it will get. They are blessed with an instinct that we have forgotten, to know in advance what kind of winter to plan for. Their fur has grown shaggy, their bark has thickened, all in accordance with their knowledge of the earth. New birds appear from the upper climates, in search of the milder cold this land can offer.

The rains come again, as they did at autumn's onset, but now they are chilly. Your breath begins to catch in the air, smoking like a dragon's. For some creatures it is a time to burrow deep and sleep; for others, the cold is energizing, and they run through the trees leaving tracks in the mud. Predators stay low to the ground, waiting in the underbrush for one who has grown careless with relief from summer's oppressive heat.

This is winter, the season of Earth, the season of survival and death. The Earth itself is naked, Her skin bare to the cold winds as the plants die back and the trees give up their last few leaves. Everything is exposed, vulnerable, and the focus of life becomes getting through one day at a time. Questions hang in the air:

*"Did anyone hear that?"
"Is it safe?"*

"Is there enough?"

In winter time seems to slow down, and the days-though shorter-are a struggle in the wild. Every day a hundred battles are waged between predator and prey, and in winter the predator often wins. We hide, hunker down in the long shadows, and rub our hands together for warmth.

The nights are a crystalline wonder of stars and endless black skies; outlines are sharper, our senses heightened. Death extends a hand, inviting us to step out of the battered body of the old year and walk toward the new. We shed our skins, leaving ourselves as open as the Earth, and rely on the strength and knowledge we gained during the past turning to help us stay on our feet.

The winter, though, cannot last. Death can never keep a hold on life for more than a little while; Death is a gateway, not an end. It nudges us gently forward, reluctant but understanding, and we step through the gate into air that is ever so slightly warmer, a little heavier, with the scent of flowers almost like a distant memory.

Around you, a few tentative green shoots have pushed up through the hard soil. A deer pokes her head out of the underbrush, hopeful. Tiny buds have appeared on the tips of branches overhead. The wind still blows with a chill, but something has altered, something subtle and promising.

This is spring, the season of Air, the season of renewal. Each dawn brings a warmer morning, and the air itself whispers of rebirth. Blossoms, babies, ideas-it is all one to the Air. A beginning is a beginning. The Earth takes a great breath in, lets it out slowly, and stretches stiff limbs before rising.

We feel a sudden need to slough off what remains of the past, to cleanse ourselves and our surroundings. It's time to make way for what will grow in the new year, to till the fertile ground of our lives and sow our dreams. The seeds that have waited, dormant, throughout the winter are now pushing down and up, roots and shoots, bursting through the ground and heralding their arrival with a fanfare of green and gold.

The bare ground is now alive with a riot of pastels. The urge to leap, run, and play infects all the young of all the creatures, and overhead baby squirrels chatter while their parents streak from branch to branch in noisy celebration that spring is here at last. As the days lengthen, new animals rise from the thicket on wobbly legs and totter around, getting a first taste of the warm air and endless beauty of the Earth.

The season of Air is one of inspiration, of new plans and the energy of a deep breath. Air carries the music of creation, of renewal; it carries the song of birds and the laughter of children. The young begin to learn, their minds reaching out along with their oversized puppy paws. Spring is the morning of the year, a time to yawn, look around, and get ready.

Gradually, slowly, one day at a time, the air grows hotter. The Sun's radiant eye opens wider and wider, and the freshness becomes heaviness. Blossom turns to bud turns to fruit, and the fruit swells on the branches. Plan turns to action, and the pastels deepen into wild shades of green and gold.

This is summer, the season of Fire, the season of motion and energy. Life breaks free, will not be denied; eating and mating and playing in the fields are all that matters under the Sun. The trees show off their finery, leaves fluttering in the wind and taking in the light. The world around you reaches a fever pitch, and the Earth almost seems to turn faster. One pair of eyes meets another across a forest glade, and Fire builds between them.

The wind is singing love ballads, with the birds in accompaniment, as relationships form and strengthen. Mother to child, brother to sister, lover to lover-Fire binds them all.

The afternoons stretch out lazily, satisfied, as the animals sun themselves with full bellies and contented minds. There is plenty for all in the summer, no need to fight or scramble; abundance grows all around. The air is hot, but the trees give welcome shade, and for a moment there is nothing wanting, no reason to worry. One day blends gently into another, and the sun rises higher.

The days, though, will not be comfortable for long. The heat begins to build, unrelenting, as late summer beckons. The heaviness of previous days is oppressive now, the air thick, blanketing the woods with silence and

stillness. The animals seek shelter from the sun, and the frenetic pace of life comes almost to a halt, tired from its exertions. Fire begins to yield once more to water, as the consequences of our actions bring forth sweat and sometimes tears.

Now is the gathering-in of strength, the watchful eye on the fields. Harvest is coming, and the plants have grown to their fullest.

A silence, the pause between breaths. Then the first cool winds start to blow, and the Wheel turns round again.

Seeking a Totem

What is a Totem?

In many cultures those who follow a shamanic path work with the spirits of the land—its plants, its stones, its animals. When people speak of “totems,” they speak of special animal spirits that have chosen to act as their guides (or, less often, animals the shaman has chosen himself).

These sacred animals can be helpful to Wiccan practitioners as well; many of us have particular animals we are drawn to, whose attributes we wish to bring into our lives. Though most of us are not Native American, the spirits of the land and environment where we live will communicate with us willingly if we are respectful and open to new, and sometimes challenging, experiences.

You may already have an animal in your life that acts as your totem, a “favorite” dating back to childhood or simply one that has appeared to you frequently in dreams or meditation. This journey is a more directed way to seek out a guide from the animal kingdom.

As you journey, watch for an animal that appears to you three times or more; an animal that appears in a herd; or simply one that comes up and starts talking to you. Do not limit yourself to visual cues only—the sound of rushing wings or the sensation of presence may be all you need. You may also meet other animals that are not your totems specifically, but that wish to offer help or encouragement.

Most people only have one totem at a time; that totem may guide them for life, or may leave after her lessons are imparted to you. Also, once you have met your totem be sure to visit it often, as animal spirits will tend to leave you if neglected.

Usually totems are not reptilian or insect, but there is no hard and fast rule. Avoid anything that behaves defensively or seems overtly dangerous (ie, a snake is one thing, a snake poised to strike is quite another) When you meet your totem ask their name, what kind of animal they are, what they name they call you by, and if there are others you should meet. Never share a totem’s name or the name by which they call you with others. A name is power, and it guides others to you. Totems are rarely talked about outside of sacred space or circle. Always ask if you may speak about them or your journey. Your journeys are not always something you can share even with the closest lover or friend.

Trust your totem to guide you where you need to go and to talk beside you not only as a companion, but also as a teacher, a guide, a watcher, and a powerful guardian.

The work we will perform in class will be more detailed than what follows, but this is the essence of a totem retrieval journey, which you can use yourself when you want to visit your guide again.

The Journey

- Relax.
- If you are fortunate enough to have someone drum for you or a tape of drumming use it to relax and focus you. The beat should be steady and strong, like that of a heartbeat. It is your path down and your path back.
- Envision yourself walking down a path in the forest. Upon the path or near it will be some kind of opening in the ground. Go to it.
- Journey down the opening, taking your time as it too has something to teach. Notice the way the tunnel is built. Is it rough or smooth, short or long, light or dark?
- As you descend remind yourself of your purpose and repeat it to yourself. “My intent is to

journey to find my totem animal.”

- At the end of the tunnel there is a light, which leads to an entrance to the lower plane. Go through it without hesitation.
- On the other side is a “perfect earth”. This is the first of the lower realms. It is a place before man, without man-made cities or dwellings. Take note of this terrain.
- Begin to “look” for animals and spirit people. Go to those animals that appear to you three times and ask them if they are your totem or can guide you to your totem.
- Once you have found your totem spend time some time getting familiar with them. Enjoy a walk beside them. Ask if there is anything that you should see or that they need to tell you at this time. Let them guide the way and follow willingly.
- Sometimes your totem may let you share their form while you are on the spirit plane.
- Once you are finished or your totem tells you it is time to return go to the tunnel and return to this plane.
- When your Journey is over begin to feel your body again. Slowly come back, feeling your body become more and more solid. Take your time and then sit up slowly.
- Record your experience

Further Reading and Resources

This journey was based on the works of Michael Harner, and taken from materials by the Sibylline Order. For more information on totem retrieval and sacred animals:

The Way of the Shaman by Michael Harner

Animal Speak by Ted Andrews

Totems by Brad Steiger



Introduction to Fire

by Dianne Sylvan

I am Fire.
I am your passion
I am the drumbeat that calls your wild spirit
I am the flame that curls up your spine
I am the scorching heat of August
I am the phoenix who dies and is reborn
I am the flash of anger in your eyes
I am a quiet evening by the hearth
I am a gaze across a crowded room
I am the sweat of skin on skin
I am endless transformation
I am desire
I am power
I am Fire.

Candle flame, hearth, funeral pyre... Fire can warm us, ignite our deepest passions, or destroy everything we hold dear. It is the element of transformation, of the phoenix, who falls to ash yet lives again and again. Fire is the element of the true Will—that visceral knowledge of who we are, what we want, and what we must do to attain it. Just wanting something isn't enough for Fire; Fire calls us to need, to consume, and in consuming become someone new.

Fire is power. Fire is anger, and the drive to succeed. It is also the flickering light of Divinity that fuels our spiritual pursuits, from dedication to initiation and all Circles beyond. Without the impetus of Fire, all our plans would come to nothing, for Fire's watchwords are *action* and *passion*.

Magic done with the energy of Fire is among the most powerful, but also the most dangerous, as it is fueled by volatile emotions and can end up scorching us before it is finished. Fire magic requires the most personal investment to keep working, and can fizzle out quickly if unattended...or reduce our lives to smoldering rubble.

Fire is the flash of a blade in a darkened room, a reminder that with our power comes responsibility. Dance with it, let its welcoming heat inspire you on your quest...but never forget that Fire is essentially wild, a force beyond human reckoning, that has a Will of its own.

Associations:

Archangel: Gabriel
Direction: South
Elemental: Salamander
Sun Signs: Sagittarius, Aries, Leo
Scents: Cinnamon, clove, saffron
Colors: Red, Orange



Anything That Moves: Pagans, Ecstasy, and Sexuality

by Dianne Sylvan

*Ecstasy – a state of emotion so intense that one is carried beyond rational thought and self-control; the trance, frenzy, or rapture associated with mystic or prophetic exaltation.**

Wicca is at heart an ecstatic religion. We seek personal union with the Divine through methods of leaving ordinary consciousness (ritual, dance, chant, drumming, prayer, sex, et cetera). We also need no intermediary between ourselves and the divine, preferring to communicate with the gods ourselves, directly.

This leaves most Western religious leaders feeling a bit...nervous. Westerners, and in particular members of Western religions, on the whole have a fear of ecstasy. Why?

Ecstasy, whether spiritual or sexual, cannot be completely controlled by an external authority. If someone can achieve Divine union on her own, she won't need a priest or a Bible to tell her about God—she'll ask Him herself.

In modern thought, the sacred exists outside of nature and therefore outside the body. To honor the body and its drives means that the physical world deserves respect and therefore cannot be ethically exploited, marketed, or wantonly destroyed.

The Wiccan worldview places the physical on even footing with the spiritual—or, rather, the two are inseparable. We consider the body and our desires natural and holy, and therefore we have room in our Circles for all permutations of positive sexual expression. In fact, sexuality and sensuality are vital to our view of Deity and the universe. The Goddess Herself says, “All acts of love and pleasure are My rituals.” Seen in this positive light, sexuality is healthy, empowering, giving, and celebratory of both the lovers and Deity.

Atrocities such as pedophilia and rape are the outgrowth of a world in which sexuality and the body are denigrated into mere commerce with overtones of shame and fear. These acts (along with many other negative expressions of sexuality) are most likely in a system in which sex is a weapon, used to gain or exert power over others.

Gender and Polarity

All dynamic movement in the universe, all life, is based on the attraction/repulsion of opposites. What is gravity but the desire of one body for another? Most Wiccan creation myths involve the ecstatic union of the Goddess with Her “other,” the complementary opposite that She brings forth from Herself.

In the Gardnerian tradition, creation is seen as a strictly male/female endeavor, reflected in the Great Rite, the symbolic (and occasionally literal) joining of the masculine and feminine in ritual. In Gardner's covens this meant a strict balance of male and female members, and a strict emphasis on heterosexuality as the only way the God and Goddess could relate.

It is a mistake to think that male/female is the only kind of polarity. Eclectic Wicca and most other American traditions (and some more recent Gardnerians) take a broader view: complementary opposites can occur in any kind of pairing. It isn't the bodies and their equipment that matter, it's the forces of attraction that cause creation, which encompasses much more than mere procreation. There are in fact all kinds of fertility.

Each individual contains within him or her the seed of the opposite gender. Nurturing these seeds is essential to becoming complete individuals; thus, Wiccans revere both Goddess and God, regardless of our own individual gender. The faces of that Goddess and God, however, do not have to be limited to a Sweet Mommy Goddess and a Manly Warrior God. There are gods of every conceivable sexuality, and it is up to the individual to find the appropriate balance in his or her worship.

Sex and the Pagan Community

With our reverence of sexuality we have enormous freedom; the stigmas against homosexuality, polyamory, and various forms of “kink” are removed, and any sexual act done consensually and with love is a sacrament. This reverence does, however, have its drawbacks, as it confers

responsibility that more mainstream people don't have to assume in a society of vanilla hetero marital sex.

Unfortunately, as a backlash against the restrictive patriarchal attitudes most of us were raised with, a large portion of the Pagan Community views every get-together as a chance to cruise and ogle "naked chicks." As a result, larger festivals are becoming less spiritual and more of a party atmosphere where anything goes. Within reason, a good time is perfectly in keeping with our values, but at times it goes too far, as people assume that "Pagan" means "screws anything and everything."

There are also prejudices in the Community against straight, monogamous people who don't walk around naked. Never let anyone tell you you have to be bisexual, polyamorous, or a nudist to be Pagan. Never let anyone tell you you are "repressed" if you only mate with one gender or one person at a time.

No one—not a coven, not a priest, not some guy at the revel fire—has the right to dictate your sexual life as long as it's safe, sane, and between consenting adults.

A large percentage of Pagans are survivors of some kind of abuse; they find refuge in a spirituality that helps return the sanctity to their bodies, but often the Community itself has the opposite effect.

"No means no" is doubly important when the rules are so blurry, which means you must be clear about your intentions from the beginning to make sure no one gets hurt. Being polite and "going along with it" because everyone else is isn't worth your physical or mental health. Anyone immature enough to give you grief for setting boundaries or demanding condoms doesn't deserve to have your cookies.

This does not just apply to men. The unaccustomed sexual power accorded to women in the Community can sometimes encourage them to be manipulative. If we view our own bodies as sacred we must extend that belief to our lovers (and everyone else really). If we are children of the Divine we have to treat ourselves and each other as we would our gods, leaving no room for mind-games, control, or dishonesty.

All of this may seem somewhat alarmist, and may lead you to think the Pagan Community is a bunch of horny 12 year olds with no morals, just as the

Fundamentalists would like people to believe. Nothing could be further from the truth. The vast majority of people you will meet are adults and act that way. It only takes one incident, however, to destroy someone's trust in people and make them afraid to have a public life. As a healing presence in the world, Wiccans have a responsibility to watch out for each other, to take care of ourselves, and make sure our freedom stays free.

Further Reading

Crafting the Body Divine and Sexual Ecstasy and the Divine by Yasmine Galenorn
The Art of Sexual Ecstasy by Margo Anand

* - the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000 edition



Personal Transformation and Sacrifice

by Amber Laine Fisher

One of the most obvious and most challenging aspects of fire is the notion of transformation. Fire has the power to change everything it touches. It can burn wood, melt metal and rock, transform liquid into gas. When we invoke fire into our circles and into our lives, we are invoking the power of transformation—the ability to burn away that which we no longer need, as well as the ability to mold those aspects of ourselves that are beneficial, but perhaps raw and unrefined. When we invite power to have its way over us, we allow ourselves to melt, to bend, to change. We shed that which is an unneeded or detrimental part of our history, and from our ashes we are reborn, just like the phoenix of myth, a creature of fire.

Transformation, however, does not come without a price. Though we may recognize that certain characteristics are undesirable, and though we may truly be ready to change who we are or how we behave, we may not always understand the complete ramifications of what that means. Transformation is change that requires sacrifice. It is change that requires us to dig into ourselves and recognize everything we are willing to part with, because only through parting with certain aspects of ourselves will we ever be able to truly be transformed. This is the story that Inanna tells us, as she travels into the underworld. She must shed herself and stand naked before her shadow self, the queen of the underworld, before she is allowed to be reborn.

A friend and I were having a quiet conversation over a cup of tea. The weather was getting cool, the leaves were falling off the trees, and the excitement that accompanies the onset of fall was settling in my stomach. Thoughts of my upcoming Samhain ritual scurried through my head—what would I wear, what would I ask for, what would I uncover. I turned to my girlfriend and asked her, "What sacrifices are you making this year?"

She snorted and shook her head. "I don't do that anymore," she said, matter-of-factly. "I don't see the point in giving up anything. I can have what I want without making any kind of concessions."

I took a moment to think about what she said, and though I was struck by the naïveté of the statement, it occurred to me that I probably shouldn't be so surprised at the sentiment. Many pagans operate under similar false notions—that acquiring anything worth having comes freely, without any kind of obligation to nurture or make room for it. Many of us are willing to accept that sometimes we have give up one thing to gain something we want more—not giving in to a momentary pleasure in order to keep on track of our greater desire is a common occurrence. But what we fail to realize many times, is that even the things we wish to expunge from our lives require some sort of sacrifice if we're really willing to dig it out and toss it aside.

Every part of ourselves—even the parts we don't necessarily like—rely upon another piece of ourselves to remain in tact. Our kindness relies on our ability to love. Our strength relies on our ability to be patient. Our devotion relies on an ability to commit. The good things we carry about, the positive attributes that make us who we are, act in a complex network with every other aspect of ourselves, such that when we want to rid ourselves of something or change something, we cannot merely reach inside ourselves, dig out the dirty, and cast it aside. Webs must be broken—threads must be untangled. Doing these things, changing and discarding, require that we make sacrifices—that we "give something up" to gain (or lose) that which we need.

We are plagued with many demons that we wish to be rid of. All of us have experienced some aspects of ourselves that we may wish to be rid of. Yet simply praying to be freed from that demon isn't good enough. Someone once told me, "How do you build a muscle but to use it?" When we recognize that we are overly prideful and ask the gods to become humble, we do not merely wake up humble one more morning. That muscle has never been used, and now must be exercised. One way in which that might happen is we may find ourselves in situations suddenly where we make embarrassing choices, or we might come face to face with many people who awe us. Perhaps someone points out

our flaws and our mistakes. Perhaps we find ourselves with one foot wedged nicely in the mouth on too many occasions. If we ask for humility, we will probably find ourselves in humiliating circumstances until we get the hint—we are not superior. We are not almighty. We are human and we make mistakes. We are fallible. And eventually it sinks in and we become humble.

Every request to be transformed requires a commitment, a willingness to sacrifice and in turn be sacrificed. We cannot merely ask to be unselfish, for example, and expect for the change to come about without any kind of struggle or turmoil. We must be willing to make certain sacrifices. In selfishness, we don't have to put others' needs first. We don't have to look outside my own comfort zone. We don't have to worry about anyone else but myself. When we rid ourselves of selfishness, we give up the comfort of being committed only to ourselves. We give up a piece of our independence. We give up a certain solace that comes from living life with blinders on. Being open to others' pain, others' needs, infringes on our own sense of peace and freedom, because suddenly, our world is affected by much more than our own immediate concerns. Yet when we decide to rid ourselves of selfishness, we must be willing to give up the little things that in essence allow us to be selfish. It is not enough to ask the gods for change if we are not willing to make the sacrifices necessary to accompany that change.

When we make our sacrifices required for our transformation into the people that we want to be, that's a grace¹. That's a sacrifice that we make for our gods. Our willingness to dig deep and reach outside of our comfort zones in order to become better people and live more positive lives is a willingness to manifest Divinity in our communities, and everywhere Deity manifests, great changes occur. We sing the truth of this in our circles, especially during initiations and dedications. "She changes everything she touches, and everything she touches changes." And while this is true, every great change must begin with one small step. Every great change must begin with an individual. Each of us is gifted with the capacity to make our communities and the world a more beautiful, more sacred place. But we have to be willing and able to find the sanctity within ourselves first, even if it means unburying a lot of unsettling garbage.

It all sounds so simple and so obvious. Even as I write this, I think, "Of course. How could I not have recognized this sooner?" But the truth is, in this day and age, it isn't obvious. It doesn't appear natural that we have to sacrifice something comfortable to get rid of something undesirable. Yet even in practical applications, we know this is true. If we want to lose weight, we have to give up laziness and junk food and excess. If we want to rid ourselves of an abusive lover, we have to give up the comfort of familiarity and stagnation. Doing something, or moving out of a destructive situation, isn't always easy because whether or not we realize it, it takes some sort of sacrifice. Our society doesn't like to talk about sacrifice. Self-help books and crash diet programs wouldn't do nearly so well if they were honest and up front about the sacrifices that go into changing our worlds, paradigms and selves. Yet sacrifice is a frightening concept, perhaps even more so for pagans. For many of us, the notion of sacrifice carries with it the Christ on the cross, or the self-abnegation of Lent. Yet the sacrifice that is required to change one's life isn't sacrifice for the sake of the common good, or for the pleasure of an absent, transcendent God. It is simply understanding that in our networked lives, something has to go when we decide to effect a change. The popular saying is true—There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch. If you want it, you have to give something up for it. What are you willing to give up for it?

Samhain is a perfect time for considering such questions, but in truth, the question should be one that we ask ourselves with some regularity. Everything we strive toward, everything we aim for carries with it some kind of price. Fame destroys anonymity. Wealth destroys an unadulterated appreciation of simplicity. Every time we seek to bring something into our lives, or expunge something from ourselves, we need to ask ourselves, "What am I willing to give up for it?" The recognition of a need for sacrifice will help us more swiftly realize our goals, as well as make us more aware of the interconnections of all things—our faults and flaws included.

The notion of transformation is deeply rooted in an initiatory tradition such as ours. Initiation, however, is more than merely a rite performed to embrace an individual into a group (More on this later). An initiation is a beginning, and an initiatory path is a tradition in which the many "little beginnings" that make up life are given a spiritual context. Life is about the journey, and along the way, small (or

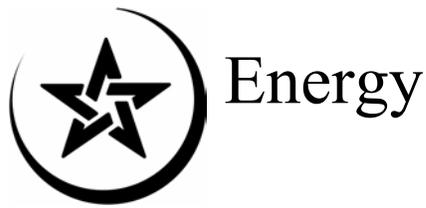
major) things happen which forever change the course of one's life, marking the beginning of a new segment of the journey. Getting married, having a child, fulfilling a dream, choosing a Deity—all of these things can be profound initiatory experiences, and in most spiritual paths, those initiations are very important. Wicca, as a proclaimed initiatory tradition, recognizes these markings as opportune times to recognize Deity in the moment, to envision oneself in relationship to major mythologic themes, and thus better relate to God and the community.

When one is initiated into Wicca, whether by a coven, Temple, or the Gods (and ultimately, all spiritual initiations must come from the Gods. The question is really whether there will be any other attendants at the event) he/she takes on the commitment of a life of change and unfamiliarity. An initiatory tradition requires us to look at the self, see what needs changing, and to make those changes. It also means, however, that if we don't do that for ourselves, the Gods will happily do it for us. Stagnation will kill us—we have to be dynamic and evolving. The initiation rite jump starts this process, but a daily communion with the Gods almost ensures that the changes will continue. This is true of any communion with the Gods, not merely interaction that occurs within an initiatory construct. However, in such a construct there are usually rites of passage that coincide with the changes that we make in our lives which mark that we are indeed making a “new beginning”. In a way, these rites and rituals are part of the co-creative process—they not only mark the change that we are undergoing but to contribute to it, turning our spiritual eyes toward our mundane life and vice versa. The ritual becomes yet another pact with Deity to live a certain way and to continue to grow and change.

Fire changes us. Fire charges us. Fire allows us the passion and determination to enact change, to conquer the dark, to manifest the sacred and act in grace. When we give ourselves over to the flame, we allow ourselves to glow bright and strong, and leave behind sacred footprints on sacred soil. The transformation brought by fire is life-changing if we do not allow ourselves to be consumed by it. But we must remember the sacrifice required for the change, and be willing to walk through the flames.

¹ The idea of the Wiccan graces comes from Dianne Sylvan's book, *The Circle Within*. I am using the term in a slightly different manner, yet I think it is

still appropriate. In Christianity, a rite linked with a spiritual truth is a *sacrament*. In Judaism, a spiritually good deed is a *mitzvah*. As we have no similar term in Wicca, I propose to use this one. A grace as I choose to use the term is an act performed out of a spiritual conviction to manifest the virtues of the Divine.



Everything worth gaining in life requires serious effort, and that includes those things that don't immediately happen in the "real world"—magic, ritual transformation, and spiritual growth. Before the spell you cast can bring you a new job, something has to happen on the nonmaterial planes to help shift probability in your favor. Before you can become a new person, you have to focus your intent and your Will on change...inside first, then outside.

In Wicca, we tend to call the "thing that changes" energy. It is the power of Deity that resides in every living thing—called in other systems the Tao, chi, the Force, the Holy Spirit, et cetera. Energy is what moves you, and what moves the universe. It creates circles, it fuels magic, and it changes our consciousness.

There are essentially two "forms" of energy used in Wiccan practice (there is really only one kind of energy, but its use and intent can vary widely). The two taken together are the Yin/Yang of the Divine, the two halves of the self acting as one to create the universe and the individual.

The first form, known as Grail or Chalice energy, is receptive in nature and often considered feminine. It is the energy used when a Wiccan opens himself to the Divine, as in Drawing Down the Moon or in prayer. Usually this energy remains with us and changes us gently from the inside. The life force is poured into the individual, and there it infuses her with sanctity. This kind of energy is utilized by those who meditate, especially by Buddhists, who seek a place of compassion for others. It is the energy of the heart chakra, of healing and love, often associated with Water and Earth. Chalice energy is also called Theurgy—spiritual magic.

The second form, known as Wand or Blade energy, is projective. It is what most people think of when they think of spellwork, for it is the energy we raise and then send out into the universe to affect change on the temporal world. This energy is masculine in nature, and relies on focused intention to do its work. Wand energy is associated most often with Fire and Air, and with the Sacral chakra, the power center. It is also known as Thaumaturgy in more ceremonial systems—practical magic.

by Dianne Sylvan

Raising Energy

Usually in a group setting, the group raises energy together, and a single person is responsible for monitoring the energy and deciding when there is enough; that person gives a signal (such as yelling "now!") and the group releases the energy toward its goal. The traditional way of working with energy is to visualize it as a spinning cone that rises in the center; the cone may be a color, a kind of light, or simply a change in temperature. No two people sense energy in exactly the same way. Some people have a knack for sensing a cone of power, but for most it takes a lot of practice.

There are a variety of ways to raise energy in ritual:

Vocalization

Chanting, singing, and toning are three of the most widely used methods of energy-raising. A simple chant is best, needing no more than a few words that express the goal, repeated over and over. Complicated songs can distract from the ritual's purpose. Toning, or making a single vowel sound, can be very effective, especially when working with the chakras—for example, toning a low note while visualizing energy rising from the lower chakras upward. Vocal vibration is used among many ceremonial magicians.

Dancing and Running

The Spiral Dance, which is only useful for groups, is an excellent way to raise energy; structured movement, however, is not necessary to build a good deal of power. Dance has been used for centuries to create ecstatic states, and a body in motion can channel a greater degree of energy than one sitting still. It helps to have music playing in the background or at least a drummer, as the "feeling silly" factor can keep many people from getting into the dance enough to achieve any sort of trance state.

After a period of dancing groups will sometimes fall into simply running in a circle, then falling to the ground as the signal is given to release. This is, of course, only suitable for those who are

physically able to stand both the movement and the energy it will raise (and it raises a lot).

Percussion

For those who do not enjoy dance, drumming is another ancient practice to raise energy, and can be used effectively by solitaires as well as groups. A steady rhythm calls up energy from the Earth, from our very bones.

Music

In larger rituals, dancing and percussion are often combined, as are chant and other instruments. The effect can be incredibly powerful; again, this is best done in a group, but it is possible to use music in a solitary setting either by playing an instrument or visualizing energy moving with a prerecorded song that builds to a crescendo.

Breathing

One of the simplest methods of raising energy is through the breath. As in grounding and centering, draw up energy on the inhale, and either gather it in your center or channel it into an object on the exhale. If you choose the former, you can fill yourself with energy and then release it with a single long exhalation, or by speaking a single word or phrase aloud.

Sex

The Tantric tradition is the best-known path that utilizes sexual energy for magical and spiritual work. Usually combined with breathing techniques and muscular contraction, the energy of orgasm is allowed to build and build and then is sent out toward a goal (other than one's own gratification). This practice takes discipline, and laserlike focus. It is very easy to get distracted when working with sexual energy, but the results can be very powerful.

Solitary vs Group Energy

Those who work alone are at a decided disadvantage when it comes to raising energy; having others around can help build more power, and it is easier to remain focused when there is a group mind. Some techniques are much more difficult to use in a solo setting (sexual ecstasy being one of them) but all are possible given

practice. Chanting and dancing are two of the easiest to adapt to solitary work.

All energy raising techniques have to be combined with strong visualization skills and equally strong focus on the goal at hand, or the energy you raise will spin off into the universe with no direction and will accomplish nothing.

The techniques here are primarily used for Wand energy, but many can also be used to open us up to Grail energy as well. Any activity that induces ecstasy can be a form of invocation of the Divine.

Further Reading

The concept of Wand and Grail energy was described in Phyllis Curott's book *Witch Crafting*.



Introduction to Water

by Amber Laine Fisher

I am Water
I am your heart
I am the ebb and the flow of love
I am the river of your blood
I am dragonflies skimming a still garden pond
I am the crashing surf
I am slow and unceasing change
I am the track of the Moon across a lake
I am the salt of tears and the pain of letting go
I am a dolphin leaping in the sun
I am the joy of lovers reunited
I am cleansing
I am healing
I am Water.¹

The womb of the Mother. The blood that flows through our veins. The rivers, the seas, the mighty oceans. These are physical representations of the alchemical element of water. Our bodies are largely made up of water, and most of our Earth's surface is covered in water. But it remains a mystery to us, because we cannot live within it. It sustains us, yet should it fill our lungs we would suffocate and die. We are drawn to it, to the undulating waves that support and cleanse us, nurturing our souls not unlike the amniotic fluid of a mother's womb nourished us before we were born. Yet like any of the other elements, just as water sustains and nourishes, so can it destroy. Still, deep waters can erode solid stone—so too can the stillness of the heart erode the soul.

We associate water with the moon, and with the feminine/yin principles of darkness, receptivity, quiet, emotion, and that which is hidden. Water is the element of emotion—it gives us tears of joy, rage, and sorrow. It allows us to feel, to love, to be merciful and kind. The element of water binds us together in a circle of camaraderie and friendship, for there is no one among us who has not been touched by a depth of emotion, who has not been moved to tears at some point in his/her life.

Water is representational of the deep psyche—the “Deep Self” of Feri Witchcraft. It is the deep subconscious, the place where myth and dream are born. It is the soul of the imagination, the raw force behind the symbols that allow us to create and invent. It is the mirror that we can look into to see our true selves.

Within Wicca, water is associated with the west and the setting sun. It's colors are blue, aqua, and purple. The water elements are called undines, and its Archangel is named Michael. It's sun signs are Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces.

To know water, swim in a pool—natural or otherwise. Stand in the rain. Dance in puddles. Allow yourself to be expressive and emotional. Let your intuition guide you. And love like your life depended on it. Because in so many ways, it does.

¹ From “Call of the Elements” by Dianne Sylvan, originally published in *Philosophy of Wicca*.



Healing and Cleansing

by Dianne Sylvan

Cleansing

Anyone living a magical life learns quickly how toxic our mundane, hectic society can be. Every day we are bombarded with the negative energy of other people, of our cities, of the media. Messages of violence, fear, and hatred compete with commercialism to overwhelm even the most spiritual person, and often after a week of work we feel like the world is grinding us under its overpriced, warmongering heel.

It is vitally important, therefore, to take time to periodically cleanse and renew ourselves. In the previous chapter we discussed shamanic healing, one of the most effective tools for this sort of cleansing. There are, however, many other ways to purify the mind, body, and spirit so that we may walk with grace even in the valley of the shadow.

Minding the Self

The environmental and mental toxins we encounter daily can build up in our bodies, leaving us feeling generally run-down even when we have no discernible medical illnesses. Energy remnants from old injuries and illnesses can often stay in the body and impair its overall function.

Many mystics throughout history have engaged in periodic fasting for various lengths of time in order to cleanse the body of these poisons. Fasting and other forms of physical abstinence can be great tools of purification, but should not be undertaken lightly or without supervision by a qualified authority (practitioners of holistic medicine and Eastern herbalists are often good sources of information on fasting, and there are some reputable books in print on the subject; however, always approach with caution so that you do not do more harm to yourself than good).

A gentler approach is to eliminate or minimize foods, beverages, and activities that have a negative effect on the body and your energy. Animal products are notorious for their buildup of hormones, drugs, and other toxins from processing,

as well as the residual energy of an animal kept in substandard conditions and ending its life in pain. Switching to organic foods or cutting back on animal products is often advised by doctors of “alternative” medicine.

Other substances we consume too much of, such as sugar, caffeine, fast food, drugs, and alcohol, can also cause energy blockage and sluggishness. What would make better fuel for your body—fresh foods prepared with care and attention and with minimal harm to the environment, or McDonald’s cheeseburgers?

The easiest way to cleanse the body’s systems is simply by drinking more water. This Element is vital to our survival, but moreover, our bodies cannot function at peak efficiency if we are dehydrated. Water will wash out toxins and all manner of negative buildup without leaving behind any of its own.

The healing, soothing qualities of Water are also well suited for a more spiritual form of cleansing. You can purify both body and energy during a bath or shower, through visualization. As you wash yourself visualize the negative energy of the day being washed away with the rest of the dirt, down the drain, leaving you refreshed and relaxed.

In addition, work with the chakras is an excellent way to keep both body and spirit in good working order. Daily chakra cleansing, as we learned in a previous class, will help in all areas of life.

Minding the Environment

Equally important to keeping the self cleansed is keeping our home environment free of negative energy. Regular house cleansing is an absolute imperative for those who do ritual and magic in the home on any kind of regular basis. Also, after coming home from a day at the rat races, the environment we create can be a haven and a place to renew ourselves.

Aside from mundane housekeeping, magical cleansing is recommended; this does not have to be complicated or formal. Smudging the home with incense, using protective charms or other spell crafts, and setting up a permanent home Circle are

all ways to help keep the home cleansed and purified.

An Elemental Cleansing Meditation

Use this or a similar method once a week or so, or more often if needed. Alternately, do a chakra balancing meditation. You may also want to use one of the two before doing a ritual or other magical work, to help shift your consciousness to the proper frame of mind for spiritual pursuits.

Find a place where you will be undisturbed. Get into whatever position is comfortable, preferably on your back. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Follow your breath in, and out; don't try to control it, simply watch it, listen to it, be aware of its motion.

Feel the vast curve of the Earth beneath you. Feel the ground pressing into your back; if you are not lying down, imagine that you are. You can feel the soil, the bedrock, the ageless stone far below...and, as you breathe, you feel all the worry and negative thoughts, all the concerns and distractions, moving out of your body and into the soil.

You are becoming a part of the soil...not sinking, not rising, simply part of the Earth...grass grows through you, the distant footsteps of deer vibrate gently through you...you are Earth, and the Earth carries away the past...leaving only strength, and certainty.

(pause)

Now, follow the circle of your breath as it flows in, then out...in, then out...round and round again, in its endless motion, into your body and out into the atmosphere.

Imagine that as you breathe in, you are breathing in the wind itself, the Element of Air in its purest, cleanest form. Breathe in, feeling it blow through you, catching the stress of the day like a tumble of autumn leaves. Breathe out, and that stress flies away, scattering on the wind. Breathe in, letting the wind blow through you...breathe out, letting it fly away.

(pause)

Now call to mind the image of the Sun, if it is not overhead at the moment. See the Sun in your mind's eye, full and round and shining. The heat of

the Sun falls on your skin, warming you, and its warmth is absorbed, slowly, sinking in...it warms your skin, your blood, your bones...it seeks out worry, pain, and stress, and burns them gently away like the morning dew...the heat of the Sun, the celestial Fire, burns away everything that can hurt you, leaving only warmth and comfort in its wake...breathe in, and out, letting the Sun move through you.

(pause)

A cloud passes over the Sun, and its light and heat fade...coolness surrounds you, and a drop of Water falls on your face...and another...and another...soon it is raining, a cool and soft rain, the rain of evening, of rest. The Water hits you in its steady rhythm, and you feel it washing over you, head to foot, washing away negative energy. It washes away fear...it washes away doubt...it washes away anxiety...it runs over you, through you, around you.

The shower gradually slows, fewer and fewer drops falling...until at last it stops, and you are once again in your body, but now cleansed and renewed. Feel your skin, your muscles moving past each other as you wiggle your toes...feel your breath, still in its perfect rhythm...feel the room around you...and open your eyes.

Shamanic Healing

Western medicine has saved millions of lives and improved the way of life of countless more; yet, for all its advantages, in many ways it can be likened to shooting flies with an elephant gun. Western methods of healing—essentially placing all of your trust in a doctor, who dispenses either pills or surgery—treat symptoms and disease, but not the underlying ailments of the spirit that leave the body vulnerable to illness. The healing we are accustomed to in America is violent, invasive, and can throw the body’s energy system off balance sometimes to a catastrophic degree, leaving physical, spiritual, and emotional chaos in its wake.

Throughout history there have been other, gentler ways to heal, particularly from chronic and body-wide problems with no discernible medical cause. Eastern medicine, which often works with the energy and spirit of the patient in addition to the body, has evolved over thousands of years; so, too, have more shamanic methods in both the Americas and indigenous cultures of other continents.

The best policy seems to be a middle ground, combining Western drug and surgical methods with herbal, energy, and other therapies. One such therapy is commonly termed “shamanic healing,” as it is based (loosely) on the practices of Native American healers who work with the body’s metaphysical system to clear out negative energy, blockages, and the occasional “vampiric” entity.

In shamanic healing, the practitioner (or several practitioners) sensitizes his hands and then sweeps them over the body of the patient, seeking “hot spots” or other places where the person’s energy feels somehow off. The healer then pulls the unwanted energy or entity away from the patient’s body and disposes of it, most often using fire. Modern healers often also incorporate the chakras in the work, making sure each of the seven (and the minor energy centers in the hands and feet) are open, cleansed, and spinning properly.

Once the patient’s energy field seems clear, the practitioner(s) run pure, healing energy through the patient from head to foot to recharge the aura.

The procedure for shamanic healing is essentially as follows:

1. A shamanic circle is cast using sage smoke and the drum

2. The patient lays flat on his or her stomach with the healer or healers sitting on either side (this can also be done standing, with the patient on a massage table)
3. The healer drums over the patient to stir up the negative energy and inform any malignant spirits it’s time to leave; the patient is smudged
4. The healer energizes his hands, then anoints them with oil
5. The healer removes negative “ick” and burns it in the flame of a candle or other fire; the healer also cleanses and energizes the chakras where needed
6. The patient turns over onto her back so the healer can work on the front side
7. When all ick is removed, the healer “zaps” the patient with healing energy from head and/or foot throughout the body
8. The healer smudges the patient again to seal the work

Shamanic Circle Casting

“Casting” a shamanic circle is in no way a traditional Native American practice, though it borrows heavily from those traditions. A shamanic circle is suitable for healing or meditative work, but is not generally strong enough for heavy magical operations.

When casting the shamanic circle, the first step is to smudge the ritual area with sage, sweetgrass, cedar, or a combination of other traditional herbs; each person involved in the ritual is also smudged from head to toe to purify his or her energies.

Next, the priestess drums to each direction, pausing at the Quarter to silently invoke the Element and whatever animal and/or ancestor spirits wish to aid in the working. There is absolutely no command used, only an invitation. The priestess then drums to Earth and Sky, completing a sphere of spiritual energy. Any personal totem animals and ancestors can be called as well to protect and guide those within the circle.

A shamanic circle does not need to be reversed, as the spirits you have called will leave when they choose to; a farewell might be appropriate, to signal to any who remain that their presence is no longer asked but that they are not being shoved out the door. You might wish to make a ceremonial offering of food or cornmeal to the spirits of the

land on which you perform the ritual, even if you work indoors.

The Effects of Shamanic Healing

The person who undergoes a shamanic or any other type of energy healing may find that little in her life changes, and she may find just the opposite. For most people a healing of this sort can open up blocked emotional and spiritual channels, leaving them better able to work with energy and better able to use their psychic skills. For some, mucking about in the energy field can reopen old wounds or force the patient to confront baggage long forgotten (or deliberately shoved aside). Generally, however, if such healing is a regular practice those issues will be gently cleansed away over time.

A shamanic healing is something like an energy tune-up for your spiritual “engine.” It is not in any way a substitute for prescription drugs or other doctor-indicated therapies; energy healing is not a replacement for other medical care, but a complement to it. These techniques can help make Western medicine more effective and less taxing on the patient, and are an important part of healing the whole person rather than just a disease.



Drawing Down the Moon

Traditional

In this ritual the Goddess becomes incarnate in the High Priestess. The High Priestess stands in front of the altar with her back to it. She holds the wand in her right hand and the scrounge in her left. She crosses her wrists and crosses the wand and scrounge above them while holding them close to her breast. The High Priest stands in front of her and says:

*"Diana, queen of night
In all your beauty bright,
Shine on us here,
And with your silver beam
Unlock the gates of dream;
Rise bright and clear.
On Earth and sky and sea,
Your magic mystery
Its spell shall cast,
Wherever leaf may grow,
Wherever tide may flow,
Till all be past.
O secret queen of power,
At this enchanted hour
We ask your boon.
May fortune's favor fall
Upon true witches all,
O Lady Moon!"*

The High Priest kneels before the High Priestess and gives her the Five Fold Kiss; that is, he kisses her on both feet, both knees, womb, both breasts, and the lips, starting with the right of each pair. He says, as he does this:

*"Blessed be thy feet, that have brought thee in these ways.
Blessed be thy knees, that shall kneel at the sacred altar.
Blessed be thy womb, without which we would not be.
Blessed be thy breasts, formed in beauty.
Blessed be thy lips, that shall utter the Sacred Names."*

For the kiss on the lips, they embrace, length to length, with their feet touching each others. When he reaches the womb, she spreads her arms wide, and the same after the kiss on the lips. The High Priest kneels again and invokes:

*"I invoke thee and call upon thee, Mighty Mother of us all,
bringer of all fruitfulness; by seed and root,*

*by bud and stem, by leaf and flower and fruit,
by life and love do I invoke thee to descend upon the body of this,
thy servant and priestess."*

During this invocation he touches her with his right forefinger on her right breast, left breast, and womb, repeats the set and finally the right breast. Still kneeling, he spreads his arms out and down, with the palms forward and says:

*"Hail Aradia! From the Amalthean Horn
Pour forth thy store of love; I lowly bend
Before thee, I adore thee to the end,
With loving sacrifice thy shrine adore.
Thy foot is to my lip
(he kisses her right foot)
my prayer up borne
Upon the rising incense smoke; then spend
Thine ancient love, O Mighty One, descend
To aid me, who without thee am forlorn."*

The High Priest stands up and steps backwards. The High Priestess draws the Invoking Pentagram of Earth in the air with the wand and says:

*"Of the Mother darksome and divine
Mine the scrounge, and mine the kiss;
The five point star of love and bliss
Here I charge you in this sign."*

The High Priestess should be in a trance now. This is a good time to do the Charge or the Witches' Creed. When the Charge or Creed is finished, the Goddess must be released. It is considered bad form not to do so.

The High Priest faces the Priestess and says:

*"We thank you Our Lady for attending our rites. We bid you farewell till next we call you.
Blessed Be."*



The Great Rite

Traditional, adapted from the writings of Janet and Stewart Farrar

Note: This rendition of the Great Rite is symbolic—it does not include any manner of sexual intercourse, as that particular ritual is not used at all within the Blessedways Temple.

Preparation: the chalice should be filled with wine. A veil of at least a yard square is needed preferably of a Goddess color such as blue, green, silver, or white.

The Coven, except for the High Priestess and High Priest, arrange themselves around the perimeter of the circle, man and woman alternately as far as possible, facing the center.

The High Priestess and High Priest stand facing each other in the center of the circle, she with her back to the altar, he with his back to the South.

The High Priest kneels before the High Priestess and gives her the Five Fold Kiss; that is, he kisses her on both feet, both knees, womb, both breasts, and the lips, starting with the right of each pair. he says, as he does this:

"Blessed be thy feet, that have brought thee in these ways.
Blessed be thy knees, that shall kneel at the sacred altar.
Blessed be thy womb, without which we would not be.
Blessed be thy breasts, formed in beauty.
Blessed be thy lips, that shall utter the Sacred Names."

For the kiss on the lips, they embrace, length to length, with their feet touching each others. When he reaches the womb, she spreads her arms wide, and the same after the kiss on the lips.

The High Priestess then lays herself down, face upwards, with her arms and legs outstretched to form the Pentagram.

The High Priest fetches the veil and spreads it over the High Priestess's body, covering her from breasts to knees. He then kneels facing her, with his knees between her feet.

The High Priest calls a woman witch by name, to bring his athame from the altar. The woman does so and stands with the athame in her hands, about a yard to the West of the High Priestess's hips and facing her.

The High Priest calls a male witch by name, to bring the chalice of wine from the altar. He does so and stands with the chalice in his hands, about a yard to the East of the High Priestess's hips and facing her.

The High Priest delivers the invocation:

"Assist me to erect the ancient altar, at which in days past all worshipped;
The altar of all things.
For in old time, Woman was the altar.
Thus was the altar made and placed,
And the sacred place was the point within the center of the Circle.
As we have of old been taught that the point within the center is the origin of all things,
Therefore should we adore it;
Therefore whom we adore we also invoke.
O Circle of Stars,
Whereof our father is but the younger brother,
Marvel beyond imagination, soul of infinite space,
Before whom time is ashamed, the mind bewildered, and the understanding dark,
Not unto thee may we attain unless thine image be love.
Therefore by seed and stem, root and bud,
And leaf and flower and fruit do we invoke thee,
O Queen of Space, O Jewel of Light,
Continuous on of the heavens;
Let it be ever thus
That men speak not of thee as One, but as None;
And let them not speak of thee at all, since thou art continuous.
For thou art the point within the Circle, which we adore;
The point of life, without which we would not be.
And in this way truly are erected the holy twin pillars;
In beauty and strength were they erected
To the wonder and glory of all men."

The High Priest removes the veil from the High Priestess's body, and hands it to the woman witch, from whom he takes his athame.

The High Priestess rises and kneels facing the High Priest, and takes the chalice from the man witch. (Note that both of these handings-over are done without the customary ritual kiss. The High Priest continues the invocation:

"Altar of mysteries manifold,
The sacred Circle's secret point
Thus do I sign thee as of old,
With kisses of my lips anoint."

The High Priest kisses the High Priestess on the lips, and continues:

"Open for me the secret way,
The pathway of intelligence,
Beyond the gates of night and day,
Beyond the bounds of time and sense.
Behold the mystery aright
The five true points of fellowship"

The High Priestess holds up the chalice, and the High Priest lowers the point of his athame into the wine. Both use both of their hands for this. The High Priest continues:

"Here where Lance and Grail unite,
And feet, and knees, and breast, and lip."

The High Priest hands his athame to the woman witch and then places both his hands round those of the High Priestess as she holds the chalice. He kisses her, and she sips the wine; she kisses him, and he sips the wine. Both of them keep their hands around the chalice while they do this.

The High Priest then takes the chalice from the High Priestess, and they both rise to their feet.

The High Priest hands the chalice to a woman witch with a kiss, and she sips. She gives it to a man with a kiss. The chalice is passed around the Coven, man to woman, with a kiss each time, until the entire Coven has sipped the wine. The chalice can be refilled and any one can drink from it without repeating the ritual once the chalice has gone around once.

To consecrate the cakes, the woman picks up her athame, and the man, kneeling before her, holds up the dish. the woman draws the Invoking Pentacle of Earth in the air above the plate while the man says:

"O Queen most secret, bless this food into our bodies;
bestowing health, wealth, strength, joy and peace,
and that fulfillment of love that is perfect happiness."

The woman lays down her athame and passes the cakes to the man with a kiss, he passes them back with a kiss and they are passed around the Coven the same way the wine was. Be sure to save some of the wine and some cake for an offering to the Earth and the Little Folk. After the meeting, leave the offering outside of the house if working indoors, or behind in the woods or field, when you leave if you are working outdoors.