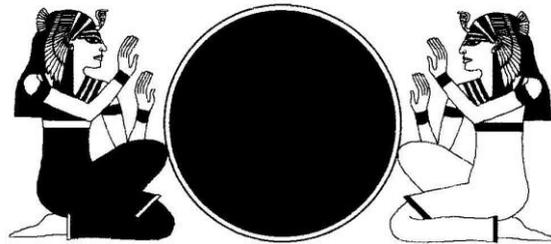


Temple of the Dark Moon



Paganism - Different Religion, Similar Belief

*By Frances Billingham © 2000, 2003
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Although the New Age movement has brought into current awareness a wide selection of ancient arts, it is evident that religions, which are not recognised as one of the major world-wide beliefs (that is Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam) are still considered to have little or no credibility, with their practitioners viewed with suspicion. It is also disappointing that as we, the human race, have stepped into another millennium, this superstition and fear of the unknown (the occult) continues, based on what can only be perceived as narrow mindedness.

Strong words? Maybe, but is it not time for people to try opening their minds in order to respect other people's beliefs, even if we do not fully understand them ourselves?

When we open our minds to listen to what another person believes in we are often be surprised. Putting aside the fact that different names, and even sexes in some cases, are used when talking about divinity, it appears that most spiritually-minded people believe that one day they will meet their ultimate source - their God or Goddess, Universal Spirit, Divine Light, Holy Guardian Angel - all different names referring to the same thing. It can therefore be said that we are all heading in the same direction, only on different paths.

The main reason I have decided to write this article is in hope of dismissing the prejudice which surrounds what is my spiritual path, that of "Paganism". This prejudice, based on centuries old misinformation, does not seem appropriate for this age of spiritual progress. Despite the recognition of Paganism as a religion in many countries, including Australia, it still saddens me to see and hear the constant prejudice towards this belief system.

WHAT IS PAGANISM

Paganism is the world's oldest known religion. Its origins, though obscure, are believed to date back to Palaeolithic times and arose from man's desire to explore the unknown and to seek unity with the Divine Force. This is evident in ancient cave paintings and statues like

the Venus of Willendorf. These early beginnings were based on a form of ancestor worship and were shamanic in nature.

The word "Pagan" itself is derived from the Latin word "paganus", meaning "a civilian", people who were country-dwellers as opposed to the Roman military. When Christianity was certified as the official religion in Rome, "Pagan" was the title given to people who clung to the pre-Christian beliefs of their ancestors. The term today describes various spiritual paths that have in common an affinity with nature. Concepts that were once vital to sustaining life are still revered today, and their principles retained, albeit adapted to suit life in the modern world.

Describing what Pagans believe is difficult as there are a variety of differing belief systems, just as there are a number of Christian denominations. Each has its own way of worship, perception of the Divine, and philosophy about the afterlife. One thing in common is that Pagan beliefs are not bound by dogma, being strict guidelines by which all must follow. This does not mean however that Pagans have no morals or ethics. Pagans tend to live their lives probably more closely to the Universal Laws as opposed to the man-made laws. We believe that each of us has the right of free will to walk our chosen path, that is to worship in the way we wish, as long as that path does not infringe upon the free will of another. Most religions in fact have a guideline along these lines - "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you", "An it harm none, do what thou wilt". How many of us actually abide by such guidelines though?

In contrast to monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Paganism is polytheistic in its worship and Gods. Many Pagans consider that all of their gods are manifestations of a single Divine Force. This Divine Force does not reside "out there", detached and separate from nature and the material world, but is immanent in the world and permeates nature. In this sense, Paganism is pantheistic, fusing the Divine with nature and rejecting dualistic notions of matter and spirit as separate and distinct. To Pagans, the Earth (the Great Mother or Gaea) contains the vital creative energy that gives life to and makes sacred all creation.

Within Paganism divinity is often perceived as both male and female, masculine and feminine. This is similar to the view held by psychologist Carl Jung who believed we all have a masculine and a feminine self within us. This divinity is seen in many ways and expressed in the worship of the male principle as the God, and the female principle as the Goddess. This bitheistic viewpoint of complimentary opposites extends to the general belief that all things exist in their own place - we cannot therefore have light without darkness, or good without bad. In essence, Pagans strive for balance and harmony both within ourselves and within the environment in which we live.

Paganism is not about "Devil/Satan worship" (as perceived by the Christian faith) as we believe there is no such being. Therefore it would be ludicrous to expect people to worship something that does not exist. There are, however, what can best be described as, the "darker" Gods which are revered, if not actively worshipped; but as everything happens for a reason, sometimes upheavals are necessary to break stagnation and create growth.

Paganism is not about sacrificing children, brainwashing its members and the like. Many Pagans believe in the Universal Law of Cause and Effect, or karma - what you give out comes back - as well as endeavouring to raise the consciousness of humanity. Not all Pagan traditions follow the New Age "white light" belief - but again, with every action having a reaction, Pagans need to be sure that they are prepared to handle the responsibility of their actions, whether perceived as "good" or "evil".

Today people who have become aware of the spiritual void in their lives, have discovered that Paganism is a religion of joy and love, which allows self-expression and encourages social and environmental responsibility. The Pagan path is often viewed as a spiritual journey which is, in itself, similar to many other religions which focus on the journey of the soul, the evolution

of the human race, the coming together of different identities to form one powerful mind-set for the good of all.

Slowly the tide is beginning to turn with people opening their minds and listening without prejudice to what Pagans really believe. We cannot deny the fact that sometimes unstable or completely self-centred people are attracted to this path for the empowerment they can gain, but we ask that you do not judge all of us by the actions of a few. After all the whole of Christianity cannot be judged upon actions those like David Koresh.

The majority of us who follow the Pagan beliefs do so because we want to, and like all others following other spiritual paths. After all, we are working together for the greater good, which is the evolution of humanity and the preservation of the planet which we all share.

About the Author:

Frances has been a student of metaphysics and the occult for most of her life, with her formal training having commenced in 1993. She has been initiated into the Alexandrian Wicca tradition, with interests also in ceremonial magick, the Qabalah and traditional Wytchcraft.

After founding the Temple of the Dark Moon in 1999, Frances spent some six years as secretary for the Pagan Alliance Inc (SA) where she worked closely with both the Police and Attorney General with respect to changes in legislation. She has led rituals with Chief Druid, Philip Carr-Gomm, and occult philosophy Ramsay Dukes, as well as presented lectures at various national and international events.

Frances regularly writes for *Insight*, Australia's number one spiritual lifestyle magazine, with her articles also appearing in over 10 separate publications, including *Spellcraft*, *The Cauldron*, *Circle* and the Llewellyn's *Witch's Calendar*. She has further essays in a number of anthologies including *The Faerie Queens*, *Unto Herself: A Devotional Anthology for Independent Goddesses*, and *Memento Mori*.

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