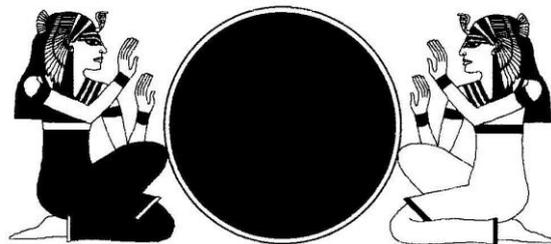


Temple of the Dark Moon



The Ethics of Magick

By Frances Billingham © 2004

Some people are of the belief that when it comes to the practice of magick that anything goes. Magick is after all, simply that - magick. It is not caught up in ethics or morals. While this is correct, magick is actually shaped by the inner beliefs, ethics and morals of the person who uses it.

In all orthodox religions there are certain laws and regulations of how a follower of that faith should conduct themselves - in Christianity, for example, there are the 10 commandments. In many Pagan traditions, however, there is believed that there is actually little need for such dogma as each person is ultimately responsible for their actions. Such responsibility can be overwhelming for someone new to Paganism, especially if they come from a more orthodox background, so they find the need to create boundaries in the form of guidelines. Within the Wiccan belief there are a number of guidelines such as the *Wiccan Rede* and the *Threefold Law of Return* which are designed to help the newcomer understand the essence of that belief.

The Wiccan Rede is a beautiful piece of poetry whose author is believed to have been the late Doreen Valiente¹. Within this poem many aspects of Wiccan beliefs and practices are outlined, such as seasonal wheel of the year, honouring the Goddess and the God, and sacred trees to name a few. The poem ends with eight specific words that many Wiccans consider to be the main guideline as to how they are to live their lives - "If it harms none, do what you will". To some critics of Wicca they see this as an indication for followers to do anything they wish. However, when the statement is given due thought, its true meaning is understood - that as long as your actions do not harm anyone, then you are free to live your life as you please. Some Wiccans take this statement further relating the "none" to animals and the environment as well.

¹ Since writing this article it has been brought to my attention that Gwen Thompson published a 26 lined poem entitled "Rede of the Wicca" in 1975 which is often referred to these days as "the long Rede". Doreen Valiente however was responsible for the adaptation of Aleister Crowley's Thelemic Oath "An harm none, do as thy wilt" which is often referred to simply as "the Rede".

The Wiccan Rede is a version of the **Golden Rule** which can be found in most other religions, the earliest dating back to Confucianism where a 6th century BCE statement mentions "*What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others*" can be found. Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and even Sikhism also have variations of the "Golden Rule".

The second ethical guideline many Wiccans follow is that of the Threefold Law of Return, where it is believed that every deed done will return to the doer three times greater. This means that a good deed will return three times stronger, but so will any bad deed that is performed.

Many Wiccans also hold either a belief in the Eastern philosophy of *Karma*, or the Universal *Law of Cause and Effect* where every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Karma is often viewed on a more personal level as to the deeds of one's life are counteracted in the next life, while the Law of Cause and Effect can be viewed on a more global scale. For example, a good example of the latter is seen in our environment. People in the past have done what they like without concern or respect for the environment or the creatures that live in it. The effect of this lack of regard and respect is the depletion of the ozone layer, rising salt levels due to large scale land clearing, droughts and floods brought on by erratic temperature fluctuations, and so on that is witnessed today.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR ACTIONS

As not every person however who uses magick follows a Wiccan path and therefore is not necessarily guided by the Wiccan Rede, magick itself does tend to have its own guidelines. What some people do not realise when they first desire to perform magick is that magick is based on energy. When you cast a spell, you are sending out energy. The Universe magnifies this energy and returns it to you. Therefore it is vitally important that before a person performs any form of magickal act, that they are fully aware of the energy exchange and are prepared to take full responsibility for their actions. In magick there is no such thing as coincidences - everything happens for a reason, and when you perform a spell you are creating the reason.

Taking responsibility means being honest with yourself about what you are doing and why. You also need to be able to acknowledge your mistakes and their consequences. Mistakes are often the greatest lessons we can learn in life. To learn from your mistakes, you must closely examine what went wrong and to find a way of how to rectify the error. However, mistakes when performing magick can have dire consequences, especially if your energy is directed at a particular person.

Magick should never be done on a whim. Before you perform any form of magickal rite you need to look careful at the reasons why you want to use magick to obtain something. You also need to be very clear about what you want to achieve. Some people find it useful to consult one form or divination or another, such as runes or the tarot, prior to casting a spell or magickal rite to determine all possible outcomes. Only when you are sure about what you are doing, should you perform magick.

Due to the number of "spell books" around it is understandable to see why some people are of the view that magick is an easy and safe means to get whatever they want. However this is a misconception for magick is not all that safe if you do not know what you are doing. Things can happen that you did not intend.

Those readers who have seen the movie *The Craft* will be able to relate to the dangers of casting love spells - as in the movie, the victim of such a spell, became obsessive with the caster of the spell to the stage where he was staking her. There are also numerous stories about people who have cast money spells and while they did end up with a monetary sum, this was obtained through some kind of personal disaster or upheaval, such as an insurance claim or even a death. Therefore it is vitally important to be very careful about what you ask for, because, as the saying goes, you could very well receive it, but not necessarily through the means you had anticipated.

Magick is serious business and should never be taken lightly. It can be dangerous for those who are unprepared and there are consequences if it is used carelessly or with malicious intent. However, if you abide by a few simple guidelines (such as the Wiccan Rede) take the time to properly understand what you are doing and use it responsibly, magick can help you can achieve positive and rewarding changes in your life.

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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Frances can be contacted through the Temple of the Dark Moon.

Temple of the Dark Moon
PO Box 2451
SALISBURY DOWNS SA 5108
Australia

(Email: frances@templdarkmoon.com)
Web site: www.templdarkmoon.com