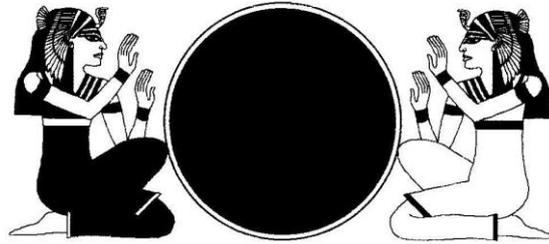


Temple of the Dark Moon



Introduction to Paganism

The following lecture has been adapted from the first lecture (provided free) of the Temple of the Dark Moon's correspondence course on "Magick, Wicca and Wytchcraft". It is provided here not only to give a general understanding on what Paganism is about, but also to provide possible future students an idea of what information is contained in each lecture provided in this correspondence course.

Over the last number of years, the popularity of Paganism, and Wicca in particular, have increased to the extent where it is one of the fastest growing religions in America, Britain and here in Australia. Never before have there been so many books written on the many aspects and traditions of Paganism, and people appearing publicly calling themselves Wiccans or Wytches, magicians and so forth.

Despite this popularity, the negativity surrounding some of the Pagan traditions still remains, and Wytchcraft is one particular tradition, which is still viewed in a very negative way. This belief is reinforced by the media when strange, and usually violent, instances occur which cannot be explained by modern science, or when Christian churches are attacked for no apparent reason - Wytches are evil and curse people. Practitioners of the occultic arts are evil. People calling themselves "Pagans" worship the devil ... But, if this is the case, why then, the increasing popularity of Pagan religions as opposed to mainstream religions?

Some term Wytchcraft as the "Old Religion" because it is a pre-Christian religion as many believe that its roots can be traced back in time to early man. Whether this belief is correct or not, there is evidence of the worship of a Great Mother Goddess and the practice of magick by man to aid his life dates back to the Palaeolithic Times (the Old Stone Age), about 30,000 years ago.

Many people new to Wicca, Wytchcraft or even magick do not understand that it is, in essence, a form of Paganism. The Macquarie Dictionary describes a Pagan as an "irreligious or heathenish person", and a heathen as an "irreligious or unenlightened person". Both these descriptions are misleading and incorrect. The word Pagan comes from the Latin word "pagani" or "pagus" meaning "countryside" and therefore literally means "dwellers in the country". There are a number of people within the Pagan community who are striving to reclaim the correct meanings of these words in the language of the general public. The Temple of the Dark Moon is one such group.

Just as Christians are divided into various different sects, so too is Paganism. There are a variety of different traditions under the Pagan "umbrella", such as Wytchcraft, Wicca, Druidism, Qabalah and Shamanism. Although each of these traditions are completely separate in their teachings, most have a similar belief of honouring nature, respecting and endeavouring to understand the needs of the planet and its ecology as a whole. This is an essence is what Paganism is.

It is the belief in the duality of the Divine, the God and the Goddess, representing the masculine and feminine energies, that is probably one of the most important beliefs of most traditions of Paganism. Psychologist Carl Jung stated that we are all made up of a masculine and feminine self, the anima and animus, and in Paganism where the aim is to balance these energies within ourselves, one does this through the belief of a Divine Force being of masculine and feminine qualities.

What is Wicca?

Wicca is a life-affirming, earth and nature oriented religion which sees all of life as sacred and interconnected, honours the natural world as the embodiment of divinity, immanent as well as transcendent, and experiences the divine as feminine and often as masculine as well. Like the spiritual world view and practices of Native Americans and Taoists, Wiccan spiritual practices are intended to attune humanity to the natural rhythms and cycles of the Universe as a means of personally experiencing Divinity.

All Wiccans agree on an ethical code known as the "Wiccan Rede", where the line an it harm none, do what ye will honours the freedom of each individual to do what they believe is right, but also recognises the profound responsibility that none may be harmed by one's actions. There is constantly debate among Wiccans, and indeed among other members of the Pagan community, as to what the "Rede" really means.

Differences between Wytch and Wiccan

There is a lot of debate as to whether being a Wiccan is similar to being a Wytch. The Temple of the Dark Moon holds the view that Wicca and Wytchcraft are essentially two different belief systems, despite a large number of similarities. What is practised and taught through this correspondence course is both Wicca (the religion) and Wytchcraft (the practical application of magick).

So, what is the difference between a "Wytch" and a "Wiccan"? The differences between the two traditions are becoming harder to understand with more Traditional Wytchcraft beliefs becoming known, resulting in an increasing number of Wiccans practising these traditional beliefs. Wicca, in general, is the term used to refer to the belief system which Englishman, by the name of Gerald Gardner, brought to public attention in 1954 after the English Wytchcraft Laws were repelled in 1951. Originally, it was believed that Gardner had been initiated into a coven of Wytches in the New Forest area in England, and what he published in his books *Witchcraft Today* in 1954 and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* in 1959 was original Craft teachings. It is a common knowledge within Paganism that Gardner had an extensive knowledge of folklore and was acquainted with the infamous magician Aleister Crowley, believed to have contributed to some of the Wiccan rituals. Today people still hold a number of debates as to the validity of Gardner's work.

"Wytchcraft" today is an emotive word and can mean many things, from a local village wise person who heals the sick, to someone who curses their neighbours. Traditional Craft is usually a tradition that was kept within the family and passed down from one generation to another or to someone who may not be of blood, but is of spirit. Some families act as "natural guardians" to ancient wells and sites, which is still common today in Britain.

The origin of the word "Wytch" is an Indo-European word *weik* which has four families of derivatives, all relating to do something with magick and religion. The most relevant is *wikk* which simply means magic or sorcery. From this particular source came the Middle German word *widden*, which means "to predict". From the Old English came the word *wicca* which is

actually pronounced "witcha", referring to a male witch, and the word wicce, pronounced "witche", referring to a female witch. From these words came the Middle English term witche, and this word eventually became the modern English equivalent "wytch". Therefore, the original meaning of a Wytch, through its various forms, means simply that, a Wytch. It was Gardner, when writing down his ideas on Wytchcraft, who chose to pronounce "wicca" as "wikka", instead of "witcha", and from then this has been the general pronunciation.

Some Pagan Beliefs

The majority of Pagans, in general, believe in the "Law of Karma" (what you give out will come back) or the "Threefold Law of Return" (what you give out will come back to you three fold) as well as the previously mentioned "Wiccan Rede". The aspects of the "Law of Karma" will be explained in more detail in other lectures provided within the correspondence course by the Temple of the Dark Moon.

Because of these beliefs, Pagans often pay close attention to the energies they send out as they do not want to negatively impact anyone, even indirectly. If anything, Pagans want to unite their positive energies, love and light with the Earth and each other. Many Pagans desire to live amongst others, regardless of race, religion, philosophy or gender, as well as being accepted and loved for who they are.

Pagans, in general, believe all life is sacred and that includes other life forces beyond human. Therefore, many Pagans belong to environmental and animal welfare groups, as well as other worthy organisations. The Earth is reserved as our Mother (often referred to as "Gaea" after the ancient Greek Earth Goddess), and therefore Pagans in general are very concerned about the environment and quality of life for those less fortunate than ourselves.

Most Pagans acknowledge that there is "light" and "dark" to the Universe. This polarity is a natural part of the natural order of things and is not necessarily "evil" or "bad". What is considered to be "light" are those events or processes which are beneficial, such as the birth of a healthy baby, a job promotion, and general good health. Whereas, things that are "dark" are events that might be harmful, but from which a valuable lesson can be learnt. As an example, death is "dark" but it is part of the natural process of life, and is not feared by Pagans, but is accepted. Many Pagans believe in some form of reincarnation or progression of the soul upon death. Again, death is perceived as part of an ongoing journey of the very essence of our being.

Given all of the above points, it is a general consensus that most Pagans are generally opposed to the abuse of any individual and of nature, including animals and birds, plants and Earth itself. This also includes physical abuse, violence and mental cruelty, psychological manipulation and power trips, sexual abuse, any abuse through others for commercial gain, financial abuse by any dishonest or illegal activity, religious intolerance or political abuse, the abuse of any living thing on Earth or damaging the environment.

Pagans, in general, should harm no one - neither should Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus or followers of any religion based upon good human values.

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*.

This article is provided free of charge and should remain so. Should anyone wish to duplicate this article on another web site, appropriate acknowledgement of the author should be given.

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@templedarkmoon.com)
Web site: www.templedarkmoon.com

