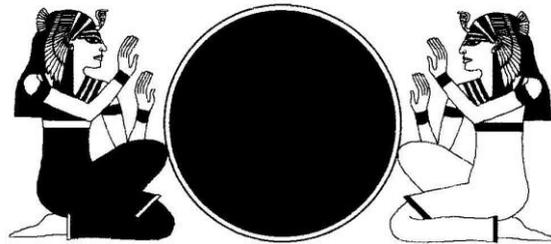


Temple of the Dark Moon



Respecting Other Pagan Traditions

By Frances Billingham © 1998

So what does Paganism mean to others? I think every now and then we need to reflect on why we are walking, or stumbling along this path. This could be likened to one of the aspects of Imbolc, being the time of the year many witches reaffirm their dedication to their belief. Are we here because it is a "coming home", or something else - a popular fad maybe, or to upset others. Are we enjoying what we are doing or do we, deep down, think it is all a load of rubbish?

The Pagan path is not an easy one. There are many differing traditions and beliefs, but it is this individuality which is important because Paganism is often very personal to each person walking this path. Those of us who have been brought up in strict environments before we come to Paganism, this choice in belief systems, the individuality of each tradition and the lack of dogma in general can be rather daunting. Because of what we believe, one of the hardest lessons we have to learn is to about ourselves. Being Pagan forces us to look long and hard at exactly who we are. We have issues facing us every day of our existence we need to deal with and a lot of these issues are personal one. I believe one important aspect of Paganism is being true to our self, another is being responsible for our actions, and a third is showing respect for others.

Walking the Pagan path often brings up issues we need to deal with and the issue of general respect for others came to light recently. It got me thinking just what Paganism actually means to me. I have been walking this path for many years now, and to me, Paganism means more than just religious worship of a dual deity, the Goddess and the God. It is more than just acknowledging the changing seasons through the festivals, or dressing up in beautiful velvet clothes.

Paganism is a way of life. I think it. I feel it. It is part of my being which encompasses everything I do. I pay reverence to the wonders of the Goddess and the God every day in my own small way, whether it is a full on ritual or simply recycling my rubbish. This is what I try to express to new seekers on this path, and that there are many forms of Paganism, all worthy of respect.

According to my Macquarie dictionary, "respect" means, among other things, "to treat with consideration". General respect for the differing traditions under the Pagan umbrella is important. Some of us may find a particular tradition almost naturally, others change from one tradition to another as they grow and find their way. Others still may refuse to follow any particular tradition at all and practise what they feel comfortable with which holds no particular label. All these traditions are just as important as the next.

Not all Pagans are religious and, no doubt, as you journey along the Pagan path, you will come across people practising things you would never dare do or have heard of. However, even if you do not understand what they practise, a basic respect should be shown. This is especially important if you are a newcomer to the whole Pagan way. A wise person once said: "It is far better to look like an ignorant fool than to open one's mouth and cast aside all doubt".

Should we be given the opportunity to have someone explain their tradition, especially if they have been practising it for a great many more years than us, and we are left confused or even unimpressed, it is considered far more polite just to thank them for sharing their tradition yet walk away. Sticking to what we are comfortable with, than voicing our way is right and theirs is wrong. There is, in fact, no right or wrong way to practise Paganism. This way of thinking belongs to monotheistic religions and not Paganism.

We may be walking different paths, but we are all heading to the same centre. There is little achieved from religious feuds and if we feel we have to justify our sense of self, our religion to others, maybe we need to take a good look at what we do. In needing to justify ourselves all the time, could mean that we are easily swayed by others impression, or we are maybe trying to convince ourself this is what we believe.

In essence, we should respect all religious beliefs or traditions, and this means those outside our Pagan umbrella. If it is impossible to show respect, then tolerance should be shown. Bad mouthing, making insulting or slanderous comments, especially when we actually know very little about that tradition or religious practise, does not say a lot for our own belief, our own spiritual growth (after all, is not that why many of us are Pagans?) and, more often than not, makes us look like a total pratt.

Of course, this is only my personal opinion and, as we all have the right of free will, you may or may not agree with it. But I hope this starts getting us thinking about the path we are walking and what it really means to us.

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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