

are fully capable of performing all of the magic and miracles they are ever likely to need, through the use of natural psychic powers which everyone possesses.

- The importance of acknowledging and celebrating the solar, lunar and other cycles of our lives. This has led to the investigation and revival of many ancient customs and the creation of some new ones.
- A minimum of dogma and a maximum of eclecticism. That is to say, Pagans are reluctant to accept any new idea without personally investigating it, and are willing to adopt and use any concept they find useful, regardless of its origins.
- A strong faith in the ability of people to solve their own current problems on all levels, public and private. This leads to ...
- A strong commitment to personal and universal growth, evolution and balance. Pagans are expected to be continuously striving toward these goals.
- A belief that one can progress far towards achieving such growth, evolution and balance through the carefully planned alteration of one's consciousness, using both ancient and modern methods of aiding concentration, meditation, reprogramming and religious ecstasy.
- The knowledge that human interdependence implies community cooperation. Pagans are encouraged to use their talents to actively help each other as well as the larger community.
- An awareness that if they are to achieve any of their goals, rather than just talking about it, their lives must actively reflect what they believe and preach.

The group of people who may on occasion gather outdoors near your home, perhaps at a neighbor's place or a park, and the people who have given you this pamphlet are followers of this pre-Christian religious faith. There is no need to fear them or their religion. They don't recruit children or adults as converts or proselytize other faiths. They gather, often in robes, in serene natural outdoor surroundings to be in contact with Nature during their services; otherwise, you'd never know they were there.

Their own children are encouraged to examine many other religions and make an informed personal choice of which they wish to follow as they grow older. These people may call themselves Wiccans, Neo-Pagans, Asatru, or simply Pagans. They are neither evil nor weird. They are not performing animal sacrifices or black magic. They don't kill anything as a religious practice, not even symbolically. In fact, they hold life in all its forms as sacred, and many are vegetarians. Few, if any, hunt wild animals for sport. In fact, in recent years we have seen many Pagan ideals being adopted by mainstream faiths. The acceptance of the concept of a Mother-Father God and the duty to ecology are just two. Pagans are simple, gentle people just like you and your friends, only a bit different in that they hold to another view of spirituality than Christian, Jew or Islam — one you just aren't very familiar with yet.

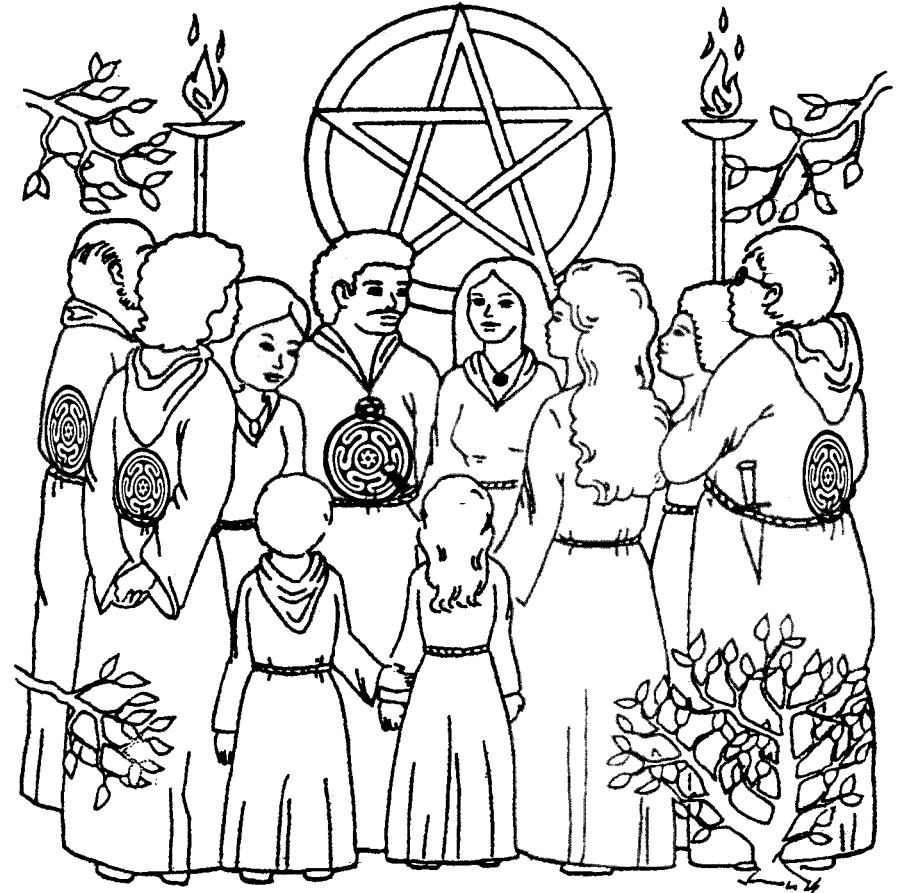
What does all this mean? It should be quite obvious that Pagans are nothing to be feared, ridiculed, or even singled out. Pagans are simply a little different in their approach to and acceptance of personal spirituality, of reverence towards the Earth as a living, breathing entity. They honor all living things, practice ecology and are tolerant of those who tread a different path from their own. These are things everyone could benefit from practicing.

For more information and a library reading list on Paganism, please write to CNTR at the Woolston-Steen Theological Seminary. This pamphlet may be reproduced freely provided nothing whatsoever is changed, deleted, or edited in any way, and it is reproduced in its entirety without excerpting.

Copyright CNTR, 1989, 2000, 2001.

Provided by *The Aquarian Tabernacle Church, Index, WA.*

What in Heaven's Name is Going On Over There?



Some factual information about Neo-Pagan religion from the
Center for Non-Traditional Religion

at
The Woolston-Steen Theological Seminary

P. O. Box 409, Index, Washington 98256-0409
visit <www.WiccanSeminary.EDU> on the internet

What in Heaven's Name is Going On Over There?

Some factual information about Wicca and Neo-Pagan religions from the Center for Non-Traditional Religion.

It's a logical question, heard spoken often between neighbors. In this country, we are gifted with the constitutional right to do pretty much as we wish, on our own property, whether it's having a family reunion, a barbecue in the yard, or a private religious gathering in our own homes. Sometimes we may not fully understand what our neighbors may be doing "over there," and lack of understanding can easily bring unease and sometimes even fear. Things that we don't understand, are foreign to us, or just "different" can easily raise those sorts of emotional feelings. When we just don't understand something or someone, it is unsettling. Such unconscious fears can motivate us to unconscious, often prejudicial behavior.

Since before the dawn of written history, people have instinctively gathered together in groups for the feelings of comfort and security that come with socialization and fellowship. One of these basic drives is that of spirituality — the need for the comfort and security of group worship of the Almighty. One of the oldest religious artifacts ever found was a small limestone carving, a figurine of a plump female, an object of veneration found near Willendorf, Austria. Named the Venus of Willendorf by archaeologists, it has been scientifically dated to 28,000 bce, the neolithic period! Throughout northern Europe there are many archaeological evidences of early peoples' veneration of an Earth Mother figure, a Mother Goddess from whom all things come, including the miracle of birth, death and rebirth. The forces of nature were full of this dual polarity of male and female which produced all Life. It is no wonder that early humankind envisioned the Almighty as a female, a mother figure.

The basic neolithic concept of deity being represented by an immanent or internal dual polarity, a Goddess and a God force contained within every living thing, was commonplace throughout neolithic northern Europe. Historically, this concept held firm throughout most of the world for thousands of years until the rise of the Judeo-Christian philosophy which introduced the concept of a single, all-powerful and external, or transcendent, male God. In early biblical translations from the earliest Greek texts, Genesis (1:26) first refers to deity as *Elohim*, which is the plural form of *eloah*, a Hebrew word for deity which includes both male and female genders. Later in Genesis (2:7) the single god form Yahweh appears, to dominate the Old Testament and Judaism thence forth. But in Gen. 1:26 we read that Elohim declaims the creation of all of humanity — a population of people, not just two. Later, in Gen. 2:7-9 Adam and Eve are created as a special, chosen people, special to Yahweh alone. Many people often overlook this small but persistent and telling detail. There *were* "other people," those who were not the chosen people of Yahweh in the Bible — the people of the land of Nod, east of Eden, from whence came Cain's wife, for example. These were *not* the chosen people, these were the *Pagans*.

Prior to the rise of Judaism and Christianity, this nature based form of worship we now call Paganism was almost universal throughout the world, archaeologists tell us. Although each locale and people had their own names for their deities, they had no name for their religion because it was looked upon as universal and did not need differentiation from any other. Later, differentiation became necessary to distinguish the "old religion" from the multiplying newer religions of the day.

During the spread of the Roman church across the urban population centers of early Europe, the country people, who still practiced the old ways and worshiped the old gods, were called *pagani* by the conquering Romans, which simply meant "country dweller." In the British Isles, a stronghold of Paganism, the term *heathen* similarly meant the simple country folk who lived out on the meadowlands, or *heath*. Neither of these terms was originally intended as a denigration or slur. When describing the reli-

gious movements known collectively as Paganism, the word should always be capitalized, as with Baptist, Jew, or any other proper noun.

Let's take a look at the common Pagan religious philosophy. Since much of Paganism doesn't have a formal structure and hierarchy such as we are accustomed to in more familiar Western religions, there are many relatively small groups. There is a growing number of national and international federations of smaller groups, such as the Pagan Federation (UK), Covenant of the Goddess (USA), the Fellowship of Isis (Ireland), and a growing number of larger, international church traditions, such as the Aquarian Tabernacle Church (Wiccan), American Vinland Assn. (Asatru) and the Church of All Worlds (Pagan), and while these latter may possess some hierarchy and structure, they are not based on the authoritarian and dogmatic models we may be most familiar with today.

There are many other loosely organized regional federations which annually sponsor several hundred open and semi-open festivals and gatherings throughout the U.S.A. Because of this small group autonomy, we can best define Pagan church groups by their similarities rather than by their differences. Remember, when Paganism was the only religion in early Europe, everyone had their own ideas about the details of their religion, yet they were bonded together by their similarities. So it is even now.

Today, most people who define themselves as Pagans use the word as a general term for "native and natural religions, usually polytheistic, and their members." In simple terms, it is positive, nature based religion preaching brotherly love and harmony with and respect for all life forms. It is very similar to Native American spirituality, as the origins of both are found in the early human development of religion: animistic deities gradually becoming redefined to become a main God or Goddess of All Nature. This God or Goddess — bearing different names at different times and in different places — can be found in nearly all of the world's historic religious systems. Paganism does not oppose nor deny any other religion. It is simply a *pre-Christian* faith. Most Pagans seem to agree on many of these commonly held beliefs:

- Divinity is immanent or internal, as well as transcendent or external. This is often expressed by the phrases "Thou art God" and "Thou art Goddess" in liturgy.
- Divinity is just as likely to be manifest female as male. This has resulted in a large number of women being attracted to the faith and joining the clergy.
- A multiplicity of gods and goddesses, whether as individual deities or as facets of one or a few archetypes. This leads to multi-valued logic systems and increased tolerance toward other religions.
- Respect and love of Nature as divine in Her own right, making ecological awareness and activity a religious duty.
- Dissatisfaction with monolithic and rigid religious organizations, and a distrust of would-be messiahs and gurus. This makes Pagans harder to organize, even "for their own good," and often leads to mutation and growth within the movement.
- The conviction that all human beings were meant to live lives filled with joy, love, pleasure and humor. The traditional Western concepts of sin, guilt and divine retribution are seen as misunderstandings of natural growth and learning experiences.
- A simple set of ethics and morality based on the avoidance of harm to others. Some extend this to some or all living beings and the planet as a whole.
- The knowledge that, with proper training and intent, human minds and hearts