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Introduction to the Wiccan Religion and Contemporary Paganism

by *Selena Fox*

The Wiccan religion, also known as "The Craft," "Wicca," "Benevolent Witchcraft," and "The Old Religion" is a diverse and decentralized religion that is part of contemporary Paganism. Today, there are thousands of individuals and groups practicing various forms of the Wiccan religion and other Pagan paths throughout the United States, Canada and around the world.

There are many forms of the Wiccan religion. Hereditary, Shamanic, Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Celtic, Traditionalist, Dianic, Faerie, and Eclectic are just some of the variety of Wiccan traditions, or paths. In addition to Wiccans, Contemporary Paganism includes Pantheists, Goddess spirituality folk, Druids, Animists, Gaians, Eco-feminists, and other Nature Spirituality practitioners. Within most Wiccan and other Pagan traditions, there are a variety of types of groups as well as individual practitioners. Groups differ widely in size, structure, purpose, orientation, symbology, ritual practices, and other ways. There is even more variation among those practicing Wiccan/Pagan spirituality on their own without being part of a group that meets regularly. Some Wiccan and Pagan traditions are initiatory; others are not. Initiatory practices vary from tradition to tradition and include initiations by deities and spiritual helpers through dreams and vigils/vision quests, self-initiations, and initiations by teachers and groups.

Although there are many differences, there are also some spiritual practices and philosophies that Wiccans and other Pagans tend to have in common. They love and respect Nature and seek to live in harmony with the rest of the ecosphere. Many have personal communication and friendships with various animals, plants and other lifeforms. They honor the cycles of Nature. Many do rituals at New and Full Moon times and also at the eight seasonal Festivals, called Sabbats, spaced six to seven weeks apart throughout the year and coinciding with the Solstices, Equinoxes and midpoints between, usually called the "Cross Quarters." Samhain, popularly known as Halloween, is the New Year in most Wiccan traditions.

The Wiccan religion and other forms of Paganism are pantheistic in that the Divine is seen as everywhere and in everything. They also are animistic in that every human, tree, animal, stream, rock, and other forms of Nature is seen to have a Divine Spirit within. Many traditions are monotheistic in that there is an honoring of Divine Unity. They also are polytheistic in that the Divine is honored in a variety of female and male deity forms - Goddesses and Gods - which are aspects of the Divine Female and Divine Male and their Unity.

Wiccans and other Pagans also honor the Elements of Nature -- Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Spirit -- and their associated directions -- North, East, South, West, Center -- in the sacred Circles where rituals are held. Rituals usually include a combination of meditation, invocations, movement, music, and the use of magical tools.

As part of their spiritual practice, many Wiccans and other Pagans develop their intuitive abilities and practice magic, directing psychic energy for particular healing and helping purposes. In working magic, Wiccans are to adhere to the Wiccan Rede, which is the central ethical law of the religion: "An it harm none, do what you will." Most Wiccans acknowledge that whatever magical force is sent out returns magnified to the sender. Wiccans do not perform evil magic and do not worship the devil or Satan, which is the anti-God of the Christians. The Wiccan religion is pre-Christian and post-Christian, not anti-Christian.

Although the Wiccan religion and other forms of Contemporary Paganism draw on ancient roots, especially from pre-Christian Europe, they also embody the new. Many practitioners are creating new chants, meditations and rituals, and are sharing them with others through publications, correspondence and face-to-face contact at ecumenical festivals.

To become more involved with Wiccan/Pagan spiritualities, we suggest:

- Become part of [Circle Network](#). Membership in Circle Network is open to Pagans and those on related paths of Nature Spirituality who practice forms of spirituality that incorporate a reverence and respect for Nature and have a code of ethics that promotes well-being for self, others, and the planet, and is consistent with the Wiccan Rede (An it harm none, do what you will). There is no fee to be affiliated with Circle Network. Donations are appreciated and are tax deductible in the USA. Your name and address will be kept confidential, unless you elect to have them published through one or more of our networking periodicals.
- Read Wiccan and other Pagan periodicals in order to learn about different viewpoints, practices and philosophies. Here are a few samples from the current issue of our quarterly newspaper, [Circle Magazine](#). It is the most widely circulated and read Wiccan/Pagan periodical today, and is available from us by subscription. Information about most other periodicals currently being published by various centers and groups in the world is included in our [Circle Guide to Pagan Groups](#).
- Read Wiccan and Pagan [books](#). The Spiral Dance by Starhawk; Drawing Down the Moon by Margot Adler; Paganism: An Introduction to Earth Centered Spirituality by River & Joyce Higginbotham; and Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner by Scott Cunningham. These are available from Circle and other Pagan resource centers.
- Listen to Pagan [music](#), especially ritual songs and chants. This will help you get a feeling for what Pagan ways are all about. We carry a variety of cassette tapes of Wiccan/Pagan music.
- Attend ecumenical Pagan festivals in order to meet a wide range of practitioners from different Wiccan/Pagan paths. One of the largest, oldest and most well known of these kinds of festivals is the International [Pagan Spirit Gathering](#) which we sponsor each year at [Summer Solstice](#) time in Wisconsin.
- Write others in your area, and if and when it seems right, make face-to-face contact. If you are not yet legally an adult and want to get involved with adult practitioners face-to-face, you should discuss this with your parents first and get their permission, or wait until you

reach the age of consent and focus on doing reading and personal practice until then. Most groups, teachers and festivals are not open to involvement with non-adults unless parental permission has been obtained.

- Visit Wiccan/Pagan centers and sacred sites. [Circle Sanctuary](#), where our center is headquartered, is open to visitors during our Sabbat celebrations and at other events. Other centers are listed in the Circle Guide to Pagan Groups.
- Take part in classes, seminars, retreats, and/or other learning experiences. Workshops and other training are offered at Circle Sanctuary as well as through other centers, groups, and traditions.
- Spend time [spiritually communing with Nature](#). When you feel ready, do some of the meditations and rituals published in our newspaper and in our recommended books. Keep a journal and record your experiences.

Blessed Be!

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